



**Labour**



**Standing Up**

**for Ireland's Future**

**LABOUR MANIFESTO 2016**

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# Foreword

Later this month, we'll journey to the polls in our millions, to chart the way forward for our country. We'll start from different places and with different emotions. But we'll share the same objectives, concerns and desires: that our families are healthy and happy; that our communities are safe and prosperous; and that there is love, tolerance and acceptance for all our citizens. These are the building blocks of Ireland's future.

In 2011, Labour entered government to stand up for the men and women who lost their jobs and way of life as a result of the crash. We entered government to stand up for older people fearful about their pension and peace of mind. We entered government to end the worst economic crisis we've ever known.

The true test of any government is whether it leaves the country in better shape than which it found it. Ireland is now unquestionably in a much better place than five years ago. Working together, we've driven a strong recovery, and the benefits are coming through. But there is more work to do, further progress to make. Labour will sustain and spread the recovery for the benefit of all.

I joined the Labour Party because it believes in the importance of opportunity – for all, and not just a few. We believe everyone should have the opportunity of a good education, a good job, and a good quality of life. Ireland now faces a decade of great opportunity, provided we take the right course.

Labour in government has ended the long winter of economic crisis – which limited opportunity for so many – and the recovery is in full bloom. The next step is to ensure we avail of the opportunities the recovery presents.

We can build a strong economy for a decent society – to make sure Ireland is a better country in which to live, work and raise a family. We can



invest in and reform the services that will make this a reality. So that every child has the best possible start in life, so that everyone who wants a job can get a secure and fairly paid job, so that families thrive in prosperous communities, and so that older people are safe and secure in retirement.

Our people deserve nothing less, having given so much to get Ireland back on its feet. But we cannot take this opportunity for granted. There are parties who have been reckless with the country's finances in the past and parties who would be reckless with them if in government. Those parties would return us to crisis. Labour will not allow that happen. We need a strong economy to invest adequately in a decent society. That means ensuring the public finances continue to be responsibly managed, and using our available resources wisely to invest in our people and communities.

Labour will stand up for Ireland's future. We will stand up for more jobs, improved living standards, and better schools, homes and communities. We will stand up for a modern and progressive Ireland. And we will realise and fulfill Ireland's decade of opportunity – because we know how truly important it is for our people.

**Joan Burton T.D., Tánaiste and Leader of the Labour Party**



**Our Plan For**

**Ireland's Future**

# Our plan for Ireland's future

Labour in government will sustain and spread the economic recovery and use it to build a decent society which provides the opportunities and services our people deserve. We will use renewed prosperity to invest in communities, raise living standards, improve quality-of-life and create opportunity for our people who gave so much to get Ireland back on its feet.

We will do this through the series of steps set out in this document to enhance the lives of our people at every stage - from birth to retirement.

We now have the resources to continue to build a decent society by managing our public finances responsibly, reducing our national debt, and ensuring Ireland never again returns to financial crisis.

## Labour is standing up for jobs and opportunity

### **Labour will deliver a strong economy for a decent society**

- Labour is managing the recovery responsibly and fairly and will continue to do so
- Labour is creating 1,100 jobs a week and will keep employment and opportunities at the centre of our work
- Labour is increasing the number of people at work and will deliver a job for everyone who wants one by 2018

## Labour is standing up for working people

### **Labour will ensure that low and middle income earners benefit most from the recovery**

- Labour is reducing the USC and will abolish it for people earning up to €72,000
- Labour is increasing the Minimum Wage and will raise it to a living wage of €11.30
- Labour is raising the pension and will increase it to €260 per week

## Labour is standing up for families and communities

Labour will deliver a balanced recovery by investing in the services that families and communities need

- Labour is ensuring that no one will have to pay to see their GP
- Labour is reducing class sizes to the smallest levels in the history of the State
- Labour is capping childcare costs, increasing child benefit, and extending parental leave

## Labour is standing up for a modern Ireland

We will change our laws to reflect a modern Ireland

- Labour is improving healthcare for women and will hold a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment
- Labour is doubling the number of multi-denominational schools and will make sure that local schools prioritise local children





1.

# A Strong Economy for a Decent Society



## A Strong Economy for a Decent Society

Labour believes that a strong economy is not an end in itself, but must be the foundation on which we build a decent society. Over the past five years we have regained our economic sovereignty and we will implement the right policies to ensure we don't ever lose it again. And we will use our economic strength to continue to build a fair and decent society in Ireland.

### Labour will:

- Balance the budget and reduce our national debt to 75% of GDP by 2021
- Invest €3 in the services families and communities need for every €1 reduction in USC
- Deliver a job for everyone who wants one by 2018 through the creation of at least 150,000 jobs over the next three years
- Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income and target additional relief to the lowest paid through reductions in PRSI
- Increase the minimum wage and raise it to a living wage of €11.30 per hour
- Increase the pension to €260
- Reduce class sizes to the smallest levels in the history of the State
- Provide access to free GP care for all
- Cap and reduce childcare costs, increase child benefit, and extend parental leave

### A strong economy and better living standards for all

Over five years in government Labour has transformed an economy on the brink of collapse to the fastest growing one in Europe. We have brought the public finances from a ruinous deficit of almost one-third of national income to close to balance. Our national debt is now at the European average and reducing apace.

Five years ago jobs were disappearing at a rate of 1,000 per week. Now they are being created at a rate of over 1,100 each week. Unemployment was at 15%. Now it is 8.6%. There are now over two million people at work.

Over the next five years, Labour's mission is to sustain and spread the benefits of the recovery. A strong economy is not a final destination in itself: our economy and society must work for working people. Our vision is of a shared recovery whose benefits support workers, their families and those left behind by the crash.

### We have built a strong economy

In 2011 when we took office Ireland was in the middle of the worst economic crisis in the history of the State. 15% of our people were unemployed. Businesses had been collapsing one

**LABOUR  
WILL CONTINUE TO  
IMPLEMENT POLICIES  
THAT UNDERPIN  
ECONOMIC STABILITY  
AND DRIVE GROWTH**

after another. International financial markets simply would not lend money to us because the economy had been so recklessly managed. Ireland's reputation was on the floor. The previous Government had borrowed vast sums of money from the Troika under conditions dictated by them.

We said to the people that we would put the public finances back in order, renegotiate the Troika programme, regain our sovereignty and most importantly get Ireland back to work.

We said we would go into government to do this only if at the same time we could protect the social welfare system to support the most vulnerable. We worked to maintain industrial and social cohesion across the economy and society.

We have built a strong economy on solid foundations across all sectors, rather than on the construction sector alone as Fianna Fáil did with such disastrous consequences. It is an economy built to last. Over the next five years we will ensure that its benefits are felt by all.

#### **We will continue to build a decent society**

We have ended the worst economic crisis in the history of the State. At the same time we have reversed the previous Government's cut in the minimum wage, and protected social welfare rates and core public services.

The strong economy we have built now enables us to do much more. We can deliver real and sustained improvements in the living standards of working people, their families and those who depend on the State. For Labour, the purpose of economic success is to raise living standards, to use resources generated by the economy to invest in the services that families and communities need like health, education and early childhood years and to continue to reduce the tax burden on low and middle income households.

#### **A strong green economy**

Climate change is the biggest single challenge facing humanity. The Labour Party ensured that we were the first Irish Government to

pass legislation that commits us – in law – to meeting EU targets for reducing carbon emissions and adopting renewable energy. We published the Energy White Paper and became the first Irish Government to commit to a zero-carbon energy future for our country, placing citizens and communities at the heart of energy policy, promoting and enabling deep public engagement on the challenges – and the opportunities – that arise from our climate commitments.

We will establish a Green Infrastructure Fund worth €1 billion. Half of this - €500m will come from the disposal of the planned sale of 25% of the State's shares in AIB. This will be matched by €500m of private funding.

Labour will continue to act to combat climate change – and we will act to ensure that our people, businesses and communities are positioned to reap the employment and economic benefits that arise from this, the greatest project facing humanity in the 21st century.

**WE WILL  
ESTABLISH A GREEN  
INFRASTRUCTURE FUND  
WORTH €1 BILLION**

#### **A modern Ireland**

Labour has always been the party of social change, bringing about an ever more inclusive and vibrant society which celebrates difference and promotes equality.

This year marks the centenary of the Easter Rising. Now more than ever it is incumbent on all of us to ensure, in the words of the Proclamation, that "the Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens".

Labour will continue to lead on making Ireland a better place to live for all. We will strengthen the

rights of women, children and the most vulnerable. We will work to ensure a tolerant, welcoming society for new citizens and minorities.

**A balanced budget and lower debt**

Over the next five years Labour will keep the budget close to balance. We are setting a target of reducing national debt to 75% of GDP by 2021, and this should go down to 60% by the end of the next decade.

Labour's public spending and tax reform proposals for the next five years are based on these targets.

**Better public services**

Labour in Government has driven the reform of public services. We secured greater productivity from public servants to allow us maintain front line services. These changes only happened because we negotiated two public service agreements.

In the next phase of public sector reform, Labour will make it easy for all citizens to use public services. We will introduce a single

digital portal, giving each citizen a single and secure point of communication with all Government Departments and public bodies. Citizens will be able to see and conduct all their interactions with the State through a single channel.

**Labour will prioritise the public services families and communities need**

Labour will use the majority of the funds that will be available to government over the next five years to invest in improving the quality and scope of our public services.

The cost of Labour's tax plan will be €2.866 billion over five years. This will leave €8.368 billion to invest in improvements in the quality and scope of public services. In other words, for every €1 invested in tax reductions, we will invest almost €3 in public services.

The most effective way to tackle inequality is to invest in public services that are available to all. We will transform the availability and delivery of key services like health, education, childcare and housing.



We will ensure that no family has to worry about the cost of accessing healthcare; that childcare costs do not deter women from working; that children are getting the best possible start in life; and that our older people can grow old with dignity and with the best of care.

**USC will be phased out on the first €72,000 of income**

Labour will abolish the Universal Social Charge (USC) on the first €72,000 of individual income by 2021. This will be done in stages, starting from the next Budget. In the last two budgets, we removed 700,000 low paid workers entirely from the USC net. Now we will end the USC burden on low and middle income earners completely. We will also reduce the burden of PRSI on those households.

This means that a single person earning up to €72,000 will pay no USC. But by making changes to tax credits for higher earners we will ensure those earning over €120,000 will not gain from this change.

**We will increase investment in infrastructure**

Labour's investment in schools, third-level education, training and upskilling will help all out citizens reach their potential and ensure a highly-skilled workforce. Our investment in better roads, more public transport, high speed broadband and other key infrastructure will boost enterprise, generate growth and raise incomes.

Labour will therefore invest an additional €8.368 billion in in current and capital spending over the next five years. In addition, Labour will create a €1bn dedicated Green Infrastructure Fund, with €500m of the proceeds from the sale of bank shares combined with private sector funding to increase investment in clean public transport and renewable energy research.

**“LABOUR WILL ABOLISH THE UNIVERSAL SOCIAL CHARGE (USC) ON THE FIRST €72,000 OF INDIVIDUAL INCOME BY 2021”**



# Standing Up for Working People

## Standing Up for Working People

Labour will deliver a new deal on tax and living standards for working people by abolishing USC for low and middle income earners, making work pay, making homes affordable, investing in communities and providing security in retirement.

### Labour will:

- Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of individual income
- Change how PRSI operates to reduce the burden in particular on workers earning between €18,305 and €36,608
- Change the tax credit system to ensure those on low to middle incomes benefit most from these changes, while those earning €120,000 and above do not benefit
- Make homes affordable by supporting those who want to save to buy their own home, building good quality social and affordable housing and continuing to protect renters
- Provide security in retirement by increasing the State pension and introducing a new workplace pension scheme

**“WHEN WORKING PEOPLE HAVE MORE MONEY IN THEIR POCKETS TO SAVE, INVEST, AND GROW THE ECONOMY, WE ALL BENEFIT”**



## 2.1. A NEW DEAL ON INCOME TAX

As the economy continues to recover, we must phase out the punitive elements of the income tax system. We will reduce the burden for those on low and middle incomes, and create a tax system that treats employees and the self-employed equally.

### Labour will:

- Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income
- Change how PRSI operates to reduce the burden on workers earning between €18,305 and €36,608
- Change the tax credit system to ensure those on low to middle incomes benefit most from these changes, while those earning €120,000 and above do not benefit
- Provide for equal tax treatment of the self-employed

The result of Labour's tax changes will be to significantly reduce tax for people earning less than €72,000.

**“WE WILL REDUCE  
THE TAX BURDEN FOR  
THOSE ON LOW AND  
MIDDLE INCOMES”**

# governance



## Income tax and USC

In response to the economic crisis Fianna Fáil introduced the Universal Social Charge. The USC applied to all income provided the individual taxpayer earned more than €4,000 a year.

Labour in Government increased this threshold to €13,000 and removed 700,000 taxpayers from the USC net. We have also reduced the rate of USC payable on the first €70,000 of income. Now we intend to go much further.

The economy is now growing more quickly than that of any country in Europe. The annual budget deficit has been virtually eliminated and the national debt continues to fall when measured against GDP.

We will continue to reduce the current burden of income taxes to help low and middle income families still under pressure as a result of the years of crisis. Labour will abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income. This will be done progressively over the five-year term of the next Government.

Pat earns €25,000. Under Labour's plan he will be €1,132 better off



**€668**  
 LESS USC

+

**€464**  
 LESS PRSI

=

**€1,132**  
 MORE TAKE HOME PAY

Barry and Cliodhna earn €80,000 and €35,000. Under Labour's plan, together they will be €4,584 better off



**€3,302**  
 LESS USC (BARRY)

+

**€64**  
 LESS PRSI (CLIODHNA)

=

**€4,584**  
 MORE TAKE HOME PAY

**€1,218**  
 LESS USC (CLIODHNA)

Sinéad earns €120,000. Under Labour's plan her take home pay does not change <sup>1</sup>



**€3,302**  
 LESS USC

-

**€3,300**  
 LESS TAX CREDITS

=

**NO CHANGE IN TAKE HOME PAY**

<sup>1</sup> €2 more per annum

## Tax Credits

We will change the system of tax credits to ensure that those earning up to €100,000 receive the full benefit of this change in USC, those earning €100,000-€120,000 receive some benefit, but those earning over €120,000 do not see an increase in take-home pay from this change.

## PRSI threshold

The third part of our tax plan is to target additional relief at low and middle income working people, earning between €18,305 and €36,608.

In the last Budget, we reduced the burden on low and middle income workers by introducing PRSI relief. We will continue this approach, extending PRSI relief of up to €14 per week for those on incomes under €704 per week or €36,608 per year.

The effect will be that the payment of PRSI kicks in gradually, ensuring more take-home pay for low income workers.

## Equal treatment for the self-employed

We believe that people should pay the same amount of tax whether they are employees or self-employed.

We introduced a tax credit on income earned from work of €550 for the self-employed in the last budget to bring them closer into line with PAYE workers, and we will continue to equalise the tax treatment of self-employed workers and employees.

The earned income tax credit will be increased from €550 to €1,100 in 2017 and €1,650 in 2018 to bring tax on self-employed trading and professional income into line with PAYE earnings. We will also abolish the USC surcharge of 3% on income over €100,000 for the self-employed to bring the USC top rate to 8% for everyone in this income bracket.

## 2.2 IMPROVING LIVING STANDARDS FOR WORKING PEOPLE

A good job requires a fair wage which allows a decent standard of living without having to depend on State supports.

### Labour will:

- Ensure Government leads by example. We will make the State a living wage employer by 2018.
- Ensure that the living wage is progressively extended to State procured services in onsite areas such as security, cleaning and catering.
- Direct the Low Pay Commission to target a minimum wage of 60% of median earnings by 2021. This would be €11.30 per hour in today's value.
- Negotiate a new public sector pay deal in advance of the end of the existing Lansdowne Road Agreement.

Labour has made work pay by reversing Fianna Fáil's cut to the Minimum Wage and delivering a further increase in 2016. We reinstated Joint Labour Committees, Registered Employment Agreements and the new concept of Sectoral Employment Orders, crucial mechanisms which help workers secure better pay and conditions and which will potentially benefit more than 200,000 people. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement we are unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay cuts, and doing so in a progressive fashion by focusing on the lowest-paid public servants first.



## A living wage or all in work

Work must always pay. Those in full-time work should be able to provide their families with a decent standard of living. Labour is committed to raising the threshold of decency in Ireland and has increased the Minimum Wage by €1.50 an hour, or €3,000 a year, for those who need it most.

We will direct the Low Pay Commission to target a minimum wage of 60% of median earnings by 2021. This would be €11.30 per hour in today's value.

Our plan to ensure that the Government becomes a living wage employer. We will also extend the Living Wage to those who provide services to the Government in onsite services such as security, cleaning and catering, will ensure that work pays, even for those on modest incomes.

## Dignity at Work

Our employment policy must strike the right balance between the needs of business and a worker's right to basic job security and a decent rate of pay.

Labour is the party of workers' rights. While other governments across the EU have restricted workers' rights, we broke new ground with collective bargaining legislation, which strengthens workers' legal rights to negotiate with employers. We also boosted protection for workers by reinstating the system of Registered Employment Agreements (REAs) and introduced the concept of Sectoral Employment Orders on a constitutionally sound basis. Already, 55,000 low paid security and contract cleaning staff have received a pay rise after binding wage agreements for both sectors were agreed under legislation enacted by Labour.

- We will end abusive terms and conditions of employment including "if and when" and insecure contracts, low pay, casualisation, and enforced and bogus self-employment.
- We will ensure that anyone who works regular hours for a minimum period of 12 hours per week will be legally entitled to a written contract, and create better protection for workers who provide contracted services.
- We will confront the scourge of workplace bullying, and will put an end to arbitrary deductions from wages, contrary to the Payment of Wages Act. We will also safeguard the rights of workers in firms that collapse in an informal insolvency, and allow freelance workers to collectively bargain.

## Pathways to Work

The Pathways to Work strategy has transformed social welfare from being just a provider of benefits to a public employment service that helps jobseekers find work, training and education. Some 140,000 jobs have been added in the economy since the peak of the crisis. Unemployment has fallen by more than one third, from over 15% to 8.6% now.

The next phase of our strategy will focus on jobless families and women who find it hard to even get into the labour market. We will ensure the social welfare system gives them the right support and incentives to re-enter the world of work so that they can build a better standard of living.

At a minimum we will increase welfare payments in line with the cost of living. We will move towards welfare individualisation – meaning spouses and partners of jobseekers are seen as welfare clients in their own right. So all working-age adults – including women and primary carers - will be given the same entitlements and opportunities.

We will ensure that in households dependent on one partner's jobseeker's payment, the right to work, training and education supports can be accessed by either partner. This will give more options to qualified adults currently frozen out of accessing labour supports.

We will expand the Youth Guarantee scheme to offer more training, education and employment opportunities to those under 26. For those participating in the Youth Guarantee, we will pay the full rate Jobseeker's payment.

We will also create 10,000 new places on JobsPlus – our highly successful programme which assists employers with wage costs when they hire a long-term unemployed person.

**“LABOUR WILL  
MAKE THE STATE A  
LIVING WAGE EMPLOYER**”

## Supporting working families

The Family Income Supplement has continued to support many low-paid families to remain in work during the crisis, and has been a critical part of making sure that work always pays. However, this scheme is underused by families, and overly complex.

We will create a new, simpler, more supportive Working Family Benefit so that all parents working full time will earn at least €12 per hour. This will better support working families and remove disincentives to taking on additional work. We will reduce the minimum hours of work (currently 19 hours) required to receive Family Income Supplement. Instead we will ensure people qualify based on their income. Assessment for the Working Family Benefit will exempt some additional forms of income for single-parent families to better support their unique needs.

## A new public sector pay deal

In Government, we have protected the principle of managing the public sector pay bill through negotiation, and the Lansdowne Road Agreement has begun the process of unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay cuts.

We will negotiate a new public sector pay deal in 2018, in advance of the conclusion of the Lansdowne Road Agreement to deal with remaining unresolved issues arising from the FEMPI acts. We are committed to ensuring that the principle of equal pay scales for equal work in the public sector is an established one.

## Supporting those who contribute

For a stronger welfare system that combines security with opportunity, we will take steps towards an income-linked system of jobseekers payments to empower workers to move between jobs and bounce back from short-term unemployment secure in the knowledge that the social welfare system will adequately support them and their families as they transition.

This income-linked jobseekers' payment will amount to up to €30 a week extra above existing benefit levels for the first six months of unemployment, as a first step towards creating a system of contributory welfare that recognises that those who contribute to our social insurance fund should benefit when they need it most.



### 2.3 MAKING HOMES AFFORDABLE

Labour is committed to the delivery of affordable homes for families, ending long-term homelessness and investing in social housing.

**Labour will:**

- Make buying a home a realistic ambition for families
- Introduce a long-term strategy for the private rental sector
- Protect those who are renting
- Build more social and affordable homes
- Tackle homelessness through a housing-led approach

Labour in government put in place a massive social housing plan worth €4bn. This is intended to meet social housing need and combat homelessness, and implementation is already under way. Our social housing strategy will deliver 110,000 social housing units by 2020.

However, there is a group of people who find it hard to either buy or rent their own home and who are not eligible for social housing. These are people and families who are working, but either because of where they live, or because they are not paid enough, pay too much of their income on housing costs.

The rent stability package Labour introduced in Government addresses several of these problems but we must go further.

## A right to secure and affordable housing

Every person should have access to quality, secure, affordable housing, appropriate to their needs. We know that about 25,000 homes need to be built each year to meet demand.

The single greatest lesson from the building boom and subsequent crash is that the Government must intervene smartly to ensure a sustainable housing supply. We cannot return to the tax-led intervention of the past where lavish incentives, loose credit and bad planning created a perfect storm from which we are still recovering.

In government, Labour has already begun the work of fixing our broken social housing system with the launch of the largest social housing programme in the history of the State, backed by €4bn in funding, to deliver 110,000 social housing units by 2020. We have begun the work of creating a regulator for voluntary housing bodies.

We will provide €500m for the development of affordable rental housing (with rents 20% or more below market levels). This will help families who don't qualify for social housing, but struggle to pay the rental cost in the open market. Labour will professionalise the landlord business and encourage institutional investors into long term rental provision. We will provide standard business tax reliefs to landlords conditional on housing units meeting required building energy standards. We will also seek to create the regulated, stable rental market that institutional investors, such as pension funds, require to provide significant rental units.

Access to equity and loan finance and the cost of construction remain the single largest obstacles to house-building at present. Until the market improves, it will be necessary to continue supporting construction activity.

As a start, local authorities will be supported to frontload the Part V contribution to part finance housing projects. We will examine the potential impact and cost of a Build to Rent Fund supported by the Housing Finance Agency to provide upfront finance to builders. We will also better support cooperative housing initiatives.

We also plan to extend the "Empty Nester" scheme that is available in parts of Dublin city and county. This scheme facilitates older people who wish to downsize due to children leaving the home or similar changes in lifestyle. It will allow for the homeowners to sell their property directly to the council, which then ensures they are re-housed in suitable property that guarantees a similar standard of living. The sold property can then be added to the council's supply of housing stock.

The number of empty local authority houses is evidence of poor estates management and careless tenancing policy. Too many people turn down offers of housing because of perceived difficulties with how certain estates are managed. Labour will make sure that local communities can take part in decisions on the upkeep, management and tenancing policy of such estates. We will also establish a nationally integrated asset management system in conjunction with the local authorities in order to ensure more efficient management of social housing stock.



## Homes in thriving communities

All homes should be part of thriving communities. Labour is committed to building mixed communities comprising different types of housing and where young and old, owner-occupiers and social renters live together. We will not return to the mistakes of the past with social housing concentrated in one area while gated communities define the new private estates.

Labour will provide improved tax incentives to bring heritage buildings back into full use in our historical cities and town centres. Residential development will be particularly encouraged in Dublin along public transport lines, either in existing brownfield sites such as Dublin's Docklands, or new greenfield developments such as Cherrywood and Adamstown.

We will establish a new Land Development Agency to ensure long-term housing demand is matched by available land. This agency will have the power to tackle land hoarding, and counteract land speculation. Land laws will also be reformed to reduce the period in which local authorities can take estates in charge, the compulsory acquisition of private lands will be provided for and a method to determine fair compensation will be set out. As NAMA winds down its current operations, we propose that the agency take up a new remit as the Land Development Agency.

We will introduce a new land development tax to further incentivise productive land use and tackle land hoarding. The expansion of the Vacant Site Levy into a land development tax will apply to residential and commercially zoned land whose owners are not actively and demonstrably seeking to develop it.

## Making home ownership affordable

Ireland needs a growing construction sector to provide families with affordable homes. The revised Central Bank rules on mortgage lending will prevent the housing market from overheating in the way that led to the crash. But they also make it hard for young families to get onto the property ladder.

We will establish a 'Save to Buy' scheme for aspiring home owners.

For every €4 a first-time buyer saves, we will provide a top-up of €1, subject to a maximum cap of €1,200 a year over five years. A first-time buyer would therefore receive a maximum of €1,200 in assistance if saving for a deposit for a year, rising to a maximum of €6,000 of saving over five years.

## Protecting renters

More families are renting their home than ever before. It's time that renting ceased being viewed as a stop gap measure. We will further reform the law to ensure a stable, sustainable rental market for both tenants and landlords.

In government, we have introduced a rent freeze on all rented properties until 2017. We also strengthened security of tenure for tenants. We have begun the roll-out of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), in 18 local authorities, allowing families to work without losing their entitlement to housing support.

Labour introduced a deposit protection scheme. This scheme will ensure that an independent third party will hold and release deposits, rather than landlords having this responsibility. We will establish a Commission on the Private Rented Sector and to make recommendations for the sector post 2019, when existing measures time out.

At present the maximum specified duration of a lease for a property is four years. We will extend that period, giving certainty to tenants, many of whom have strong links to an area through family, schools and other community activities. Labour will also protect tenants in cases where a financial institution gains control of a rental property due to mortgage arrears. We will ensure that the financial institution takes on the responsibilities of the landlord. We will also work with third level institutions to identify ways to increase the supply of third level accommodation.

## Homes for the most vulnerable

Labour has doubled the budget to support people who are homeless. We have directed large urban local authorities to give priority to families who are homeless. We have introduced additional supports to keep families in the private rented sector in their homes. In Dublin, we have invested €20m to fund an action plan to address homelessness.

We will do more. Working closely with the voluntary housing associations, we will eliminate long-term homelessness. We will continue to ensure that enough short-term places are available so that no one has ever to sleep rough. We will provide houses as quickly as possible, including fast-build homes, to take families out of emergency accommodation. We will implement a housing-led approach to homelessness that eradicates the need for stop-gap accommodation except in emergency situations.

“**LABOUR WILL MAKE SURE  
THAT BUYING A HOME IS A REALISTIC  
AMBITION FOR FAMILIES**”

## 2.4 PROVIDING SECURITY IN RETIREMENT

Labour will ensure that older people have secure incomes to support them in their retirement.

### Labour will:

- Increase social welfare payments for older people by at least €5 each year to bring the State pension to €260 by 2021
- Introduce a new workplace pension scheme
- Provide flexible retirement options for those who want to stay at work beyond traditional retirement age

Labour in government brought the Social Insurance Fund back into balance, putting an end to the enormous deficit that had been allowed to accumulate. In the face of huge pressure we demanded and secured the protection of vital supports for older people including the State Pension, Free Travel Pass, Living Alone Allowance and free TV licence. In the last Budget, we increased the State Pension and paid a 75% Christmas Bonus to benefit pensioners. We also increased spending on the Free Travel scheme by €3 million to ensure every older person who is eligible to use the scheme can do so in practice.

With a strong and growing economy, we now have a chance to make further changes that will provide security to all older people in retirement.



## Pensions that keep with the cost of living

Many older people are reliant on the State pension as their only source of income.

In government, Labour protected the value of the State pension, and provided an increase of €3 per week in the most recent Budget. We will increase the State pension by at least €5 per week each year, so that the cost of living does not reduce the value of pension payments.

We will annually increase all social welfare supports for older people at least in line with inflation.

## Secure pensions for all in work

Three in five workers do not have an occupational pension and, according to the Pensions Authority, will not have an adequate income in retirement. In addition, fewer women have occupational pensions than men and of those that do, the savings rate is lower and the total duration shorter.

Labour is committed to introducing a new workplace pension system to ensure pension provision for every worker. Such a system will see an occupational pension scheme created for each worker when they take up employment, beginning with those working for large companies. The scheme will follow them through their working life if and when they change jobs or careers. By retirement, they will therefore have built up their own private pension pot to complement the State pension. This will have a transformative effect on pension coverage over time, not alone driving up pension coverage, but driving down costly administration charges associated with individual pension plans currently.

## Retirement

Labour believes strongly in the right to a comfortable retirement. But we also recognise that some older people do not wish to leave their jobs immediately upon reaching retirement age. New forms of contracts will be put in place to accommodate persons transitioning from full time to part time work to retirement and other such options. These contracts will be secure, fair for the worker and strictly optional.

We will establish a review of absences from the workforce and the impact of these on state pension entitlements. Absences from the workforce can happen for a range of reasons, including the historic marriage bar; caring for families; periods spent working abroad and other reasons, affecting income in retirement. The present system, which is based on yearly averages, only recognises homemaker's absences from 1994. This review will address these issues.

**“WE WILL INCREASE THE STATE  
PENSION TO €260 BY 2021”**

**3.**

**Standing Up for**

**Jobs & Opportunity**

## Standing Up for Jobs & Opportunit

Labour will continue to prioritise the creation of good jobs and opportunities across the country by investing in skills and infrastructure, supporting small business and strengthening workers' rights.

### Labour will:

- Make sure there is a job for everyone that wants one by 2018, with at least 150,000 jobs created over the next three years
- Invest in 21st century skills, including the creation of 50,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships
- Help innovators and small business to succeed
- Invest in infrastructure to create employment while improving quality of life

When Labour took office in 2011, jobs were disappearing at a rate of 1,000 per week. Now, 1,100 new jobs are being created every week, with 140,000 added over the last two years. There are now over 2 million people in the Irish workforce. But we need to do more.

We will make sure that there is a job for everyone who wants one by 2018, and in the process we will increase the proportion of women at work, particularly those with children. We will continue to implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities. This will ensure that people living with disabilities who are able to work receive the support and opportunities they need to do so.

**“BY 2018, THERE  
WILL A JOB FOR EVERYONE  
WHO WANTS ONE”**



### 3.1. A JOB FOR EVERYONE WHO WANTS ONE BY 2018

Job creation will continue to be the first priority of Labour in government. We will ensure there is an innovative and competitive enterprise base providing quality, lasting jobs which will bring a higher standard of living for all of our people.

#### Labour will:

- Support strategic sectors of the economy and enable indigenous companies to expand and compete abroad
- Work to ensure that the digital economy is thriving across all sectors and workplaces
- Help transform workplaces by investing in management development and workplace learning

When Labour took office in 2011, jobs were disappearing at a rate of 1,000 per week. Now, 1,100 new jobs are being created every week, with 140,000 added over the last two years. There are now over 2 million people in the Irish workforce. But we need to do more.

We will make sure that there is a job for everyone who wants one by 2018. We will also increase the proportion of women at work, particularly those with children.

### 3.2 LAUNCHING A SKILLS REVOLUTION

The key to reaching full employment and maintaining it is to invest in people. This means investing in those currently at work and in those who will be the workers of the future, including those who don't go to third level and those who leave school early.

**Labour will:**

- Create 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places over the next five years
- Extend free part-time 3rd level education to those at work, and ensure that 100,000 places are available over the lifetime of the next Government.

In government, Labour radically reformed further education and training through the establishment of SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards. We established the Apprenticeship Council to expand apprenticeships into new sectors of the economy and create 21st century apprenticeships. We also pioneered the Skills to Work initiative which brought together key programmes and gave jobseekers access to training, work experience and job opportunities.



**“ INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND GIVING THEM THE RIGHT OPPORTUNITIES IS CRITICAL TO REDUCING INEQUALITY ”**



## 50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships

Over recent decades, the number of people going straight to college from school has continued to rise – we have one of the best educated populations in the developed world. But college isn't the right fit for every young person, and doesn't prepare people for every type of job. Across the developed world, apprenticeships and traineeships provide a valid and valued alternative to college. They allow people to prepare for stable and sustainable careers.

In government, we expanded apprenticeships beyond a focus solely on construction-related trades. We have developed 21st century apprenticeships in 25 new areas, including catering, financial services and ICT – meaning over 4,000 people will begin apprenticeships in 2016, compared to just 1,200 in 2012.

Over the next five years, we will develop 60 new types of apprenticeships and create 50,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships. We will ensure that apprenticeships are available to young jobseekers, and to those who want to reach the top of their professions. We will make sure that people can progress from apprenticeships to higher education, and vice versa, and make work placements a central element of all college courses.

We will phase out the JobBridge and Gateway schemes to reflect the needs of the post-crisis labour market. Both schemes were highly successful in keeping people close to the labour market during the crisis, but they are not needed as permanent features of our economy. We will increase the number of places on JobsPlus by 10,000 to meet the needs of the long-term unemployed, and set up a one stop shop for education and training advice centres attached to the INTREO offices so that access to guidance on careers and courses is not confined to the unemployed.

## Free part-time 3rd level education for those at work

Many people who are working have ambitions to build their careers, or to work in different sectors. Giving people the opportunity to reskill while in employment will reduce the numbers of people who currently must leave their jobs in order to retrain.

Labour in Government has provided over 40,000 opportunities through Momentum and Springboard, giving people free access to courses that will help them find employment in growing sectors.

We will now refocus these programmes, and make a total of 100,000 free part-time places available through Momentum, Springboard and eCollege by 2021.

## Access to higher education

College provides young people with incredible opportunities. No young person should miss out on those opportunities because of an inability to pay.

In government, we have protected and enhanced the student hardship fund. We remain committed to ensuring that cost is not a barrier for entry to third-level education. We established an expert group to advise on future funding of higher education.

We will take four immediate actions to begin to address higher education funding. We recognise that it must be made more affordable, and that we need to invest in a system that can give the quality opportunities our young people deserve.

Our spending plans for the next five years include increased demographic funding of €15m each year so that the rising numbers of students don't lead to a reduction in quality. In 2017, we will reduce the student contribution by €500, replacing this element of the student contribution with state funding. We will provide an initial €25m to third-level institutions to improve staff-student ratios. These actions will be taken pending the publication of the options to be presented by the Expert Group on Higher Education Funding, which will require a national discussion to find a solution that provides the necessary funding to the sector without reducing accessibility or leaving the next generation of students with an enormous debt burden to shoulder.

We will provide an additional €10m per year to provide emergency funding to students in need, and to better support students with disabilities. Eligibility for student grants will be assessed using the same means test that applies for social welfare payments. All colleges will be required to allow students to pay their student contribution by monthly direct debit, with no charge levied on this option. Income thresholds for student grants will be index-linked so that the value of these grants is not eroded by inflation. We will provide a new €60m fund to support postgraduate students.

## Innovation supports

Today's start-up businesses will provide tomorrow's jobs. We therefore want to create a step-change in the performance of our new enterprises. The Government shapes the economy every day through decisions on how it spends, invests and allocates taxpayers' money. The State also plays a major role coordinating R&D between enterprises and researchers. But we can and must do more.

We will scale up the 15 existing Technology Centres as the next step in building a quality research and advisory infrastructure around businesses in these sectors.

### 3.3 SUPPORT FOR START-UPS AND SMALL BUSINESS

We must never again become reliant on just one sector to support our economy, as Fianna Fáil allowed happen with the construction industry to ruinous effect. We need an innovative and competitive enterprise base creating quality and lasting jobs in all sectors, bringing a higher standard of living for all of our people.

In government, we published annual Action Plans for Jobs which provided significant supports to different sectors of the economy to grow and expand jobs. In the tourism sector, initiatives like The Gathering or the targeted VAT reduction on the tourism sector have helped to sustain many businesses.

#### Labour will:

- Build on the success of Irish Year of Design 2015 and continue to develop Ireland's design sector across a range of disciplines, recognising its impact on innovation and competitiveness in many sectors.
- Recognise the key role of certain sectors in future job creation and generation of lasting growth.
- Establish a new national innovation hub for international sales and for health research.
- Make 2017 the Year of Social Enterprise, to focus on the economic and community benefits that social enterprises working for social, environmental and community benefit can provide, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas.

We will increase direct and matching funding available for RDI (research, development and innovation) activities to small companies, recognising cash-flow and financing constraints of young and small firms. We will work with local authorities to explore the potential of creating spaces for small craft, design and manufacturing enterprises in unused buildings, as part of creative place-based policies with wider social and economic benefits.

**“MAKE 2017 THE YEAR OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE, TO FOCUS ON THE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS THAT SOCIAL ENTERPRISES WORKING FOR SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT CAN PROVIDE, PARTICULARLY IN RURAL AND DISADVANTAGED AREAS”**

## Digital economy and society

The digital economy is dramatically changing the way we communicate, work, learn and live. Digital activity currently represents more than 5% of the economy and supports around 100,000 jobs. Labour has supported the development of Ireland as a digital society through the National Digital Strategy and funded digital entrepreneurship and R&D through the National Digital Research Centre, the Digital Hub and other initiatives.

We also pioneered the Trading Online Voucher Scheme, which offers grants, training and mentoring to help small businesses develop their online trading presence. We will roll out 1,000 new Trading Online Vouchers through Local Enterprise Offices, so that every company has the chance to establish an online presence. We have delivered community-based training in basic internet skills to over 135,000 people through the Benefit programme. We also contributed to the EU agreement to abolish mobile roaming charges from June 2017.

We will promote the development of Ireland as a digital society through a renewed National Digital Strategy, maximising our potential, encouraging digital economic and social networks, and helping citizens and businesses to develop and enhance their digital skills.

We will explore the scope for supporting employers who want to retrain employees to boost opportunities by expanding digital business.

It is important to recognise that all sectors, not just "high-tech", can benefit from and contribute to Ireland's digital agenda. Labour will accelerate direct capital investment in digital innovation in health, education, transport, energy, agriculture, tourism and other sectors. We will promote Ireland as the location of choice for ICT businesses, including start-ups, through the IDA and initiatives like the Digital Hub and Ludgate@Skibbereen. We will implement the National Broadband Plan, eGovernment and eHealth strategies.

## Finance for business

An effective banking system is the backbone of a strong economy. We need competition between banks and we need available credit, balanced by strong regulation. We established Micro Finance Ireland and the Strategic Banking Corporation, which have supported the investment of hundreds of millions of euro in the economy.

The State currently owns 15% of Bank of Ireland, 99% of AIB, and all of Permanent TSB. We will proceed as planned with the planned disposal of 25% of AIB shares this year and will also initiate a strategic review of the Irish banking system. This will explore key issues such as the future ownership of AIB and PTSB, and the range of competition in the retail banking sector.

We will also work to implement a number of key recommendations contained in the Banking Inquiry's report. As a start we will make increased provision for risk assessment oversight by the Central Bank of Ireland and establish a new commercial property price register.

Within the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund we will create a €1bn dedicated Green Infrastructure Fund to invest in clean public transport and energy efficiency projects. This will be funded by €500m from the proceeds from the sale of bank shares, combined with private sector leveraging. The rest of the proceeds of the sale of bank shares will go to reduce the national debt.

At present, banks can write off loan losses against profits, thereby reducing the tax they have to pay. We will increase the bank levy to recoup this tax foregone.

Companies with fewer than 50 workers have an average turnover of €4m, but struggle to access the financing they need. They require access to finance to increase their survival rates and to enable them to grow. Labour recognises that traditional lenders are not providing the necessary finance, in particular for companies with a turnover of more than €2m.

We will explore new mechanisms to meet this gap through the Strategic Banking Corporation. We will also restructure the Irish Stock Exchange to encourage a greater number of IPOs to overcome limits to expansion. Labour's goal is to ensure greater opportunities for Irish companies to reach significant scale.

In order to maintain a sustainable trading environment, Labour recognises that non-banking peer to peer seed investment is a vital part of the support jigsaw for new and early stage firms. We will reduce the CGT entrepreneur relief to 15% and increase the lifetime limit to €10m.

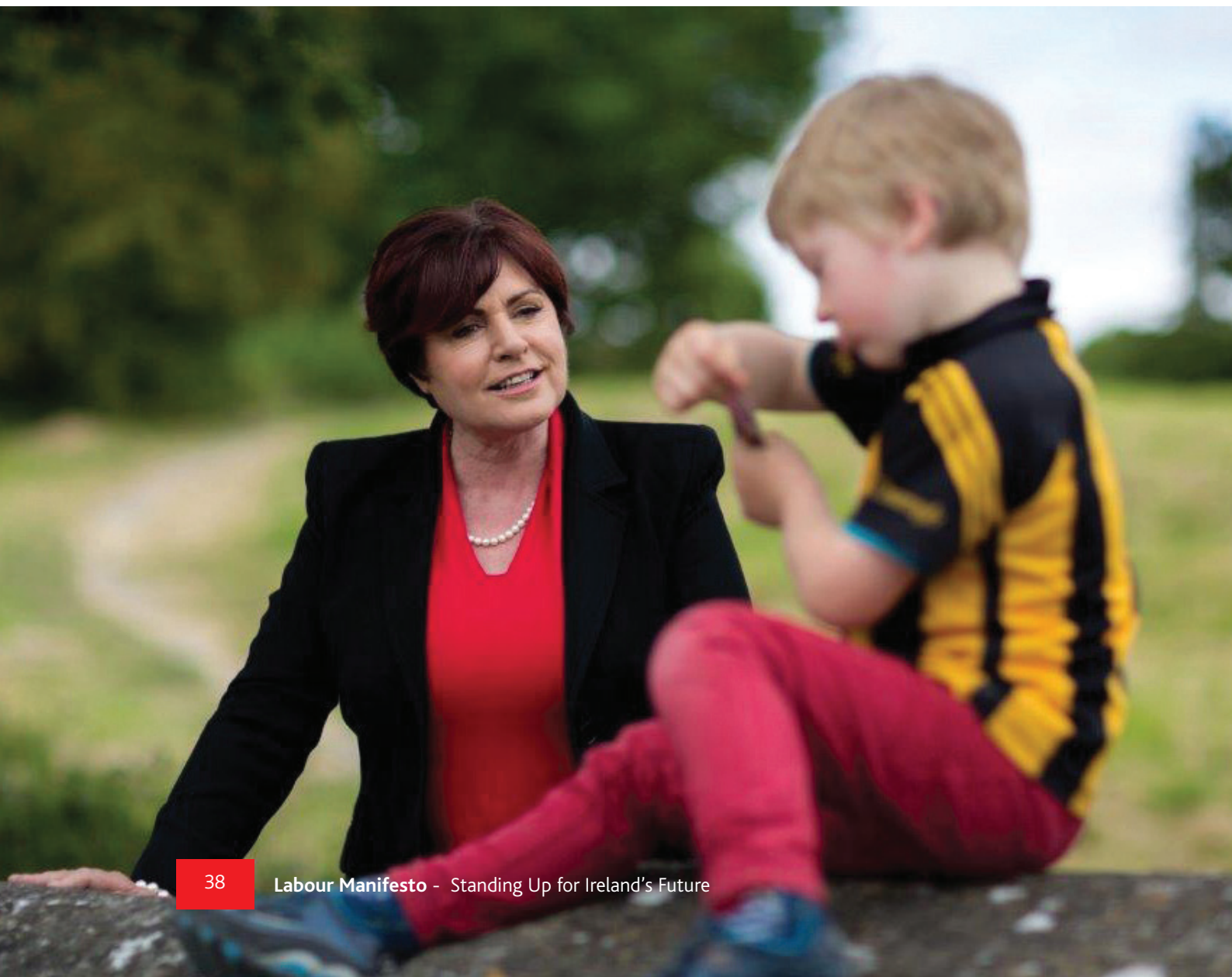
## Protecting our productivity and competitiveness

We will replace the existing National Competitiveness Council with a National Productivity Council. This will continue the work of monitoring and advising on competitiveness issues, but will also extend to advising and reviewing best practice in enhancing the productivity of our economy.

## Supports for indigenous sectors to grow and compete abroad

The Government must lead by example. The State spends over 90% of the €8.3 billion annual public procurement budget on purchasing goods and services from indigenous companies.

To increase indigenous companies' capacity to export, we will work to increase their exposure to multi-national corporations located here. This will assist not only in terms of building supply chains, but by providing greater business-to-business mentoring in the areas of research and development, sales and quality assurance.



### 3.4 BRINGING THE RECOVERY TO EVERY CORNER OF IRELAND

Creating full employment means bringing employment opportunities to every corner of Ireland. We believe that every person should have the chance to work, which means investing in and supporting the development of regional and rural economies. By building up all our regions, we can reverse the cycle of emigration and provide sustainable opportunities in rural communities.

**Labour will:**

- Set out a new Regional Growth Strategy that will bring prosperity to all parts of the country
- Focus on creating a stronger rural economy by building up vital sectors such as food, tourism, agriculture and retail
- Support small farmers to keep their farms viable
- Labour is committed to recovery that is felt throughout Ireland. That requires building thriving corridors of economic activity in every region.

In government, Labour rolled out regional Action Plans for Jobs to support job creation in every region. We piloted new Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ), injecting nearly €4 million into building up our rural economy. We published and took the lead on the implementation of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) report.

Our plan will make sure that every person who wants to work can do so, no matter where in the country they live.

**“OUR PLAN WILL MAKE SURE THAT EVERY PERSON WHO WANTS TO WORK CAN DO SO, NO MATTER WHERE IN THE COUNTRY THEY LIVE.”**

## Bringing the recovery to every corner of Ireland

Labour in government has prioritised balanced regional development and the rural economy. Our leadership on the implementation of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) report and the Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ), injected nearly €4 million into our rural economy. The Regional Action Plans for Jobs have been rolled out and we have delivered funding of €250 million for LEADER programmes in rural communities between 2014 and 2020. Our National Broadband Plan will deliver universal high-speed broadband access by 2020. We have delivered a thriving tourism sector through the introduction of the 9% VAT rate and scrapping the Air Travel Tax, The Gathering initiative, the development of the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and more cycling greenways.

Building on the progress made to date, we will deliver a new regional strategy with over €200 million to be allocated to key growth centres over the next five years – these will be areas of major employment and population growth potential. The strategy must also be about linking these growth centres and their large rural hinterlands and developing corridors of economic and social activity across the island. In order to get buy-in for these corridors of activity, we will first engage in a consultative process across the regions. We will also double funding of REDZ to €10 million and spend €30 million on supporting the regeneration of towns and villages over the next five years.

Strong local democratic structures built around both urban and large rural areas are also critical to proper regional development. In Dublin, we are committed to holding a plebiscite on the establishment of a directly elected Mayor. This is necessary to provide Dublin city and county with the focused leadership to compete as a modern, dynamic capital. Outside of Dublin, we are committed to rebuilding urban government by establishing directly elected councils in all medium sized towns, with dedicated budgets and mayors.

We will invest €10m in the development of regional skills forums which bring together employers and education providers, to make sure we are giving people the skills they need to get local employment. The development of Technological Universities in the South-East, South-West, Dublin and the North-West will bring university-level, industry-relevant education opportunities to each of these regions.





## A stronger rural economy

We will provide a job for everyone who wants one by 2018, and many new jobs will be in high value sectors of the economy. But not every job must be in a large multi-national company. In rural Ireland, self-employment, farming, tourism and small and medium sized companies will continue to be the biggest sources of employment.

## Sports tourism

Ireland has succeeded in attracting major international sporting events such as the Giro D'Italia and the Women's Rugby World Cup. We will continue to support other bids, including the 2023 Men's Rugby World Cup. We will also establish a specific sports bidding entity to facilitate bidding for events across all sporting organisations in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland. We will put a comprehensive sports tourism policy at the heart of the new national sports policy.

## Doing better for small farmers

Smaller-scale producers will be supported to develop niche markets through innovative use of Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs). We will encourage greater emphasis on quality and uniqueness in Irish produce.

Labour will better equip young farmers with agri-business management skills and will work with TEAGASC to roll out training courses as an additional element of farmer training.

We will extend the focus of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme to young farmers with average net profit below €30,000. We will also increase the number of places on the Rural Social Scheme by 10% and include an upskilling element.

As a move to help both farmers and the environment, we will expand the Forestry Programme to support the planting of over 43,000 hectares of new forests. This will involve providing afforestation grants for new planting and annual payments to farmers who convert areas of their land to forestry.

## A better future for the Irish food industry

Ireland has tremendous potential as a producer of high-quality and artisan food and drink products. We must begin to fulfil our potential for an ambitious, sustainable and innovative agri-food sector. Labour will ensure food production, processing and sales are an integral part of a renewed rural economy for the 21st century.

We will introduce a new Graduate Development Programme for the food SME sector to improve the financial and technical capability of this vital sector. We will also continue the highly successful Food Academy initiative which provides assistance to grow start-up food businesses throughout the country. We will provide funding of €2m for regional food hub start-ups to better connect producers to the buying public.

Labour is committed to increasing the opportunities and supports for farmers to produce, process and market together and to sell directly to the public. We will better support the establishment of new Producer Groups across the country.

These groups will be vital to increasing the number of agricultural products designated as protected foods.

We will also support the development of new federated cooperatives so that farmers can access appropriate marketing and financing.

We will continue to fund and grow the Seafood Development Programme to improve the potential of commercial fishing in Irish waters. We will continue to develop the existing Fisheries Harbour Centres, as a significant benefit to our fishing industry and to the local economies in Galway, Cork and other fishing areas.

## A stronger tourism sector in rural Ireland

Tourism is a key employer in rural Ireland. Labour will support the tourism industry to create successful and sustainable careers and to provide visitors to Ireland with service of the highest quality. We recognise the significant skills and training needs of the industry.

We will establish a national advisory group to oversee skills development within the industry. We will professionalise the sector by introducing national occupational standards, establish a new certified training scheme for the hotel, catering and tourism industry and build on the number of new apprenticeships coming on stream in catering and hospitality.

We will revitalise dormant hotel facilities in rural areas as Tourism Training Centres during the off-season. We will replicate the excellent model developed in the Limerick Hospitality and Training Centre which sees the local ETB and local hospitality employers working together to train unemployed persons.

We will support the development of more community-led partnerships to create farm-walk landscapes. We are also committed to increasing the number of EU LIFE projects for heritage led regeneration and preservation of farmland, forestry and waterways across rural Ireland.



## Stronger towns and villages

Labour recognises that thriving towns and villages are key to maintaining a vibrant rural Ireland. This depends on the availability of key services ranging from local GP services, financial services with the Post office or local credit union and a strong locally supported retail sector.

Already, we have established REDZ funding to support rural areas and small towns and we will increase this funding over the lifetime of the next Government.

We will also introduce a social enterprise scheme, funded from Local Property Tax and granted via competitive tendering, to facilitate the reopening of key local town and village high street facilities such as pubs, shops and post offices that were formerly at the heart of communities.

A new GP rural scheme will be established to ensure appropriate coverage for patients in rural areas. For GPs this will involve a system of increased rural location payments in addition to taking on a number of GPs in direct employment of the HSE.

Labour supports the concept of heritage led regeneration in our towns and villages and we recognise the significant benefit cultural events bring to rural and urban areas. Added to that, we recognise the need to reinvigorate our town centres. To this end, we will support and fund Town Revival plans to be operated across all local authorities to allow towns to devise their own local development plans and directly improve local infrastructure and amenities. It will also assist in preserving and restoring local heritage sites and developing a vision for the future of rural and urban areas.

**“LABOUR RECOGNISES THAT  
THRIVING TOWNS AND VILLAGES  
ARE KEY TO MAINTAINING A  
VIBRANT RURAL IRELAND”**

## Viable post offices and strong credit unions

Our post office network is the lifeblood of small rural communities. We are committed to a strong post office network throughout the State and to its continued growth into new areas of activity.

Labour in government commissioned the Post Office Network Business Development Group and will act on its recommendations. For rural post offices to survive, the post office network must become a provider of choice for the provision of relevant government services and information, subject to procurement and state aid rules. We will also support the introduction and rollout by An Post in 2016 of a basic payment account.

Together with the credit union movement, we are committed to ensuring a dynamic, sustainable future for community based financial services across the country. We will encourage credit unions and post offices to engage and develop strong linkages.

## Stronger, more flexible Credit Unions

Credit unions have a unique role as a grass -roots, not for profit, voluntary based movement in our communities. Our vision is to broaden the reach and the depth of the contribution credit unions can make to supporting individuals, families and small businesses in local communities. Labour in Government has spearheaded a micro loan initiative in conjunction with credit unions to provide credit to the most vulnerable.

Labour recognises that the regulatory framework for credit unions must reflect the movement's voluntary ethos, its need for flexibility and its distinctiveness from the rest of the banking system. Labour in government successfully pushed for a review of appropriate lending levels and the lending limit approval process and we support the raising of lending limits so that credit unions can better meet members' needs while ensuring that the loans are viable and prudent.

We recognise the need for credit unions to develop new products and services in order to grow their income and we are committed to working with credit unions to diversify their business and grow sustainably. Some consolidation of credit unions is inevitable and we will continue to support mergers, where necessary.



### 3.5 INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Labour in government launched a capital investment plan worth €17 billion in 2012, and in 2015, we launched a follow-up, six-year plan worth €42 billion. That plan represents over 3.5 percent of GNP each year between 2016 and 2021, and it will support more than 45,000 construction-related jobs.

We increased investment in schools throughout the crisis, completing 84 new schools and 55 major extensions to schools up to 2015. In the area of health, a total of 80 new primary care centres have opened or are completing construction with a further 73 planned. We started the largest social housing programme in the history of the State and we ensured high speed broadband to more than 700,000 homes so that Ireland is on course for 100% coverage by 2020.

**Labour will:**

- Create a €1bn Green Infrastructure Fund
- Review the existing capital plan by the end of 2016 to prioritise investment in infrastructure

## A new €1bn Green Infrastructure Fund

The State is already set to dispose of 25% of its shares in AIB. We propose to use €500 million of the proceeds from this sale to fund the green energy and infrastructure projects our country needs now.

This money will be matched by private funding, to create a new Green Infrastructure Fund worth €1 billion. This will operate under the Irish Strategic Investment Fund and will provide support clean public transport and energy efficiency projects over the coming years.

## Implementing the capital plan

Last November, we launched a €42bn capital plan – *Building on Recovery*. Under this plan we will end the use of prefabs in schools; build 20,000 social housing units each year; complete the long-overdue National Children’s Hospital; progress the construction of Metro North; and further develop the DIT campus at Grangegorman to accommodate at least 10,000 students.

Over the six years of the Capital Plan, it is estimated that around 45,000 construction jobs will be sustained through exchequer investment in physical infrastructure alone. By bringing forward the review of the capital plan to the end of 2016, we will seek to increase this potential employment further.

## We will scale up investment in infrastructure

Labour will prioritise even greater funding for infrastructural projects if economic growth continues to exceed expectations. The latest capital plan will be reviewed in 2016. Subject to the continued strong performance of the public finances, we will bring forward a number of additional key projects to expand the plan.

### If finances permit, we will:

- Complete the national motorway network by better connecting Dublin to the North-West and further developing the Atlantic Corridor to improve connectivity between Cork, Limerick and Galway.
- Seek to bring forward commencement of construction works on Metro North in Dublin.
- Make sure that the roll out of high speed broadband is adequately funded.
- Carry out the flood defence works which have been planned by the OPW
- Provide funding for further and higher education facilities that will ensure universal access to the skills needed to benefit from our recovery.

## Water and flooding

Labour has spent €225 million on flood risk management and construction of flood defences across the country and provided for an additional €430 million over the next five years. This investment will fund the largest-ever flood defence scheme undertaken, while our new Flood Risk Management Programme will engage in long-term planning to identify and reduce threats throughout the country.

We have also made provision for climate change teams in each local authority to better assess the risks and needs around the effects of climate change in each community. New flood forecasting services in Met Éireann have been introduced and will provide clear, easily-accessible warnings of potential flooding risks.

Constructing extra flood defences, while vital, cannot entirely solve the problem of flooding. Labour will therefore continue to strongly promote a green agenda that aims to tackle the root causes of climate change as well as its effects.

When Labour entered government, Ireland's public water services had suffered from decades of neglect and underinvestment. 23,000 people were living on boil water notices, 940,000 people were dependent on water supplies that needed remedial action, and the average age of our water infrastructure was twice the European average.

Under Labour, investment in water has risen significantly, from €300 million in 2013 to €533 million this year. This has had a significant effect: last year alone we saw more than 17,300 people taken off boil water notices. A further 27,000 households have been warned of newly-identified lead risks to their drinking water and a strategy is being developed to eliminate this threat. Over 27 million litres of water per day have been saved thanks to the 'First Fix Free' scheme available to households with on-site leaks.

Over €4 billion will be invested in water infrastructure by 2021. This investment will address the major deficits in drinking water quality and capacity, wastewater and will facilitate the removal of lead piping from the public network. €150 million will be spent to reduce leakage from the water network, with the long-term objective of halving public and customer side leakage.

The major projects that will be progressed include: Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage Project; Eastern and Midlands Water Supply; and Greater Dublin Drainage, as well as a large number of smaller projects.

## Fiscal Rules

Labour supported the ratification of the Fiscal Treaty in 2012. We believe that fiscal rules are a necessary part of currency Union.

Heretofore, the rules have been interpreted and implemented by the Commission in an overly restrictive way. We will work with Labour and Social Democratic parties from across Europe to support reform of the fiscal rules for expenditure on capital and infrastructure.





### 3.6 GROWING THE GREEN ECONOMY

Economic development and environmental sustainability are not conflicting objectives. Climate change means that a strong economy will only be sustainable if it is a green economy. Labour is fully committed to decarbonising Irish society and taking on ambitious goals to make this happen.

The challenge of decarbonisation also brings enormous opportunities. We are on the brink of transformational change in how we travel and how we power and heat our homes, and these new ways of living bring enormous opportunities to develop innovative businesses and to create jobs.

Labour doesn't believe we have to choose between what's best for the environment and what's best for people in their day to day lives. They are the same thing. That's why our green agenda is squarely aimed at lifting living standards for ordinary people.

Working in government, Labour will make sure that the huge changes on the horizon are managed in a way that benefits families and improves quality of life in every household.

**Labour will:**

- Invest ambitiously in the green economy to provide the sustainable employment opportunities we need
- Provide more funding to attract a major increase in investment for energy efficiency, renewables and network infrastructure.
- Accelerate the decarbonisation of the energy system by encouraging the development of our viable renewable capacity.
- Put communities at the centre of decisions about energy infrastructure

## Growing the Green Economy

Ireland's transition to a low-carbon society will create thousands of jobs which will require a wide range of skills. Labour will work to position Ireland as a leading player in this sector.

The transition requires stable, long-term financial incentives and a market framework that promotes investment in low and zero carbon technologies. We will explore new sources of funding to attract a major increase in investment in energy efficiency, renewables and network infrastructure.

Labour will support public investment and leadership in research, development and demonstration of green technologies like wave and tidal energy, energy storage, and grid and smart technologies, which can enhance Ireland's promising position as a leading European hub for energy.

We will develop a world-leading renewable energy research centre which will bring together all the renewable energy research institutes (marine, bioenergy, electricity) currently in operation.

## White Paper on Energy and Climate Change

Labour in government enacted the State's first climate change legislation and we have published a White Paper with ambitious proposals on the future of energy security and supply. We created a national mitigation plan to reduce emissions and a national adaptation plan to address the symptoms of climate change.

The 2015 Energy White Paper sets out a path to transform Ireland's energy system. Our vision places citizen engagement at the heart of our energy future and its implementation. Over the next five years we will take the steps needed to make that transformation happen. In particular, we will encourage an increasing role for smaller, community-level renewable energy projects. As part of this, we will facilitate grid access for small-scale renewable energy projects.

Labour supports a range of householder and community information initiatives. We will strengthen building regulations for the residential sector, with a focus on energy efficiency, heating and lighting, and provide grant schemes to help families to identify cost saving energy efficiency. We will increase support programmes for community energy efficiency projects and facilitate the development of community networks.



## Diversifying our Renewable Energy Sources

Onshore wind currently represents the most developed renewable electricity source in Ireland, and is the predominant contributor to meeting Ireland's 2020 binding renewable energy targets. However, wind technology is not suitable in every location and we support diversification of the renewable electricity portfolio.

We will incentivise the development of other viable renewables for electricity, heat and transport, including bioenergy, solar thermal and photovoltaic (PV) and offshore wind, with a view to adding them to the mix of low-carbon options as costs become cheaper. We oppose the introduction of fracking. We believe that fracking is not compatible with a low-carbon energy system in which oil and gas are gradually curtailed and, in the longer term, eliminated.

We will also support the development of affordable energy storage systems to maximise the cost-efficient use of renewables.

## Ireland's energy future

We will retain Ireland's electricity and natural gas networks in public ownership on a permanent basis.

The continued operation of the Whitegate refinery, on a commercial basis, as the only refinery operating in the country is also highly desirable from a strategic energy security perspective.

Moneypoint, Ireland's only coal burning electricity generating station is a critical contributor to energy supply in this country. Consistent with our climate change commitments we will seek to replace high-carbon emitting coal with the most suitable replacement low-carbon technology as the plant comes to the end of its operational life in its current configuration in 2025.

We will commence implementation of a North-South transmission line to improve energy security on an all-island basis and make significant savings on transmission costs.

We will also ensure that our capital city leads the way in the transition to a low-carbon society. Labour will set a target of making our cities carbon neutral through an ambitious 20-year plan.



4.

Standing Up for

Families & Communities

## Standing Up for Families & Communities

Labour will invest in and improve the services that families and communities need such as childcare, education and healthcare.

### Labour will:

- Deliver the smallest class sizes in the history of the State
- Make all schools fit for the digital age
- Make quality childcare affordable for everyone
- Introduce a new national community health service
- Build an age-friendly society where our people can grow old with dignity

Strong families are the cornerstone of thriving communities. Our country must be a place where children can be raised healthy and happy, where our older people grow old with dignity, and where parents and carers have the peace of mind they need to support those who rely on them.

Labour in government protected vital supports for older people such as the State pension, the Free Travel Pass, Living Alone Allowance and free TV licence. We raised the State pension, restored the Christmas Bonus, and increased Child Benefit by €10 per month over two budgets. We made prohibitive GP fees a thing of the past for young children and older people.

We will deliver a shared recovery that provides economic security for every family in Ireland.

**“ WE WILL DELIVER  
THE SMALLEST CLASS  
SIZES IN THE HISTORY  
OF THE STATE ”**



#### 4.1 MAKING ALL SCHOOLS FIT FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Education is a great liberating force in society. Investment in and reform of education will help us build a more equal Ireland. Making every school fit for the digital age is our priority.

**Labour will:**

- Deliver the smallest class sizes in the history of the State
- End the use of prefabs in our schools
- Reduce school costs for parents
- Make 21st century skills and subjects part of the education of every child

Labour in government has ensured that ensure all teachers working in our schools are qualified. We have reduced the rental bill for prefabs in schools by 40% and provided high-speed broadband free of charge to every second-level school. We will now ensure that all primary schools are similarly equipped.

We delivered the first improvements to literacy and numeracy results for a generation, reformed the Junior Cert to give all of our students the skills they need for the modern world, and introduced new subjects like coding, philosophy and Chinese.

A strong economy and a decent society requires that every child has the opportunity to access a top quality education fit for the digital age.

**Only Labour will deliver that.**

## Delivering the smallest class sizes in the history of the State

Irish class sizes are significantly higher than international norms. Smaller class sizes provide more time for a teacher to spend with each child, and have been shown to have a particularly positive impact on young children and those in disadvantaged communities.

In the last budget, we reduced class sizes in primary schools back to their smallest ever level. We also improved the guidance counselling staffing and leadership of second-level schools.

We will continue to cut class sizes to an historic low, reaching an average class size of 20, and putting an end to any classes with over 30 pupils. We will improve the staffing of second-level schools, to provide guidance and counselling to all students, and to increase subject choice. We will reform the model of leadership in schools.

## A new National Convention

In the 1990s, Labour convened a National Convention on Education, to get the views of everyone involved in education and set out an agreed agenda for reform and investment. That Convention led to the drafting of the Education Act which has governed our school sector since 1998.

We believe that now is the right time to repeat that exercise. Within 100 days of taking office, we will establish a new National Convention on Education, to report within 12 months on the long-term priorities for reform and investment in the education sector.

## 21st century school buildings

Every child should have the right to be safe and warm in school.

Labour in government has cut in half the amount spent on renting prefabs in schools. We have provided €2.2bn for new school buildings in every county across Ireland. And we have funded small devolved projects to protect the quality of our school buildings.

We will end the use of prefabs in our schools by 2021. Our Digital Strategy for Schools will see investment of €210m in broadband and technology. Every school will have access to technical support and continuous professional development for teachers so that investment in technology is about more than replacing a blackboard with a tablet. We will substantially increase the amount spent on school buildings, with a budget of €3.8bn between 2016 and 2021. Using Sports Capital Grants, we will prioritise joint applications from schools and local sports clubs, so that facilities used by schools during the day remain at the centre of community activity outside school hours.



## 21st century teaching in primary schools

Labour in government made literacy and numeracy a national cause, and delivered the first improvements to literacy and numeracy results for a generation. We have begun reform of the primary curriculum to improve the quality of English and Irish teaching. We put an end to unqualified teachers working in our schools. We have introduced coding and Chinese as courses for the new junior cycle.

We will set new targets for literacy and numeracy improvement, with a particular focus on improving reading and maths levels in disadvantaged schools. Our aim will be to keep Ireland in the top 5 countries in the OECD for reading, and to make sure we are in the top 10 countries for maths and science by 2020. We will rebalance the primary curriculum, with every child getting at least 90 minutes of science and PE each week.

Children have a constitutional right to opt out of religious education. We will work with schools to make this a reality by issuing new instructions on how to accommodate children of minority faiths or those from non-religious families. We will provide Leaving Cert subjects in coding or computer science, PE and politics and society, while introducing philosophy and a new culture and heritage course for the Junior Cycle. For students with special needs who require assistive technologies, we will ensure they are provided with training specific to their requirements so they can fully realise their potential.

## Stronger school leadership

The quality of school leadership has an enormous impact on educational outcomes. Though we have very many fine school leaders, they currently don't require any leadership qualifications, and have to spend too much of their time on administrative duties.

In 2015, we established a new Centre for School Leadership, with a budget of €3m to mentor and support new school leaders, and to fund school leadership qualifications. In the last budget, we provided more time for Deputy Principals in second level schools to focus on their leadership duties, and provided Teaching Principals with more days out of the classroom. We introduced digital rollbooks to reduce school reliance on paper records.

We will ensure that every newly appointed principal has a Masters-level qualification in school leadership by 2020. We will give local Education and Training Boards the responsibility for delivering school building projects, removing the need for school principals to act as project managers, and we will explore how ETBs can provide greater administrative support to all schools.

## Reducing school costs for parents

Parents pay too much for young children to go to school. We will reduce the cost of education for parents.

Labour in government provided an additional €15m in ring-fenced funding for schools which established book rental schemes to reduce costs for parents. We expanded school meals programmes and made sure that parents were consulted about the uniform policies of schools.

We will increase funding to schools by €60 per child, in return for an end to voluntary contributions and other charges on parents. We will abolish all school transport charges by 2018, and make travel to school using leap cards free for children. Book rental schemes will be a typical feature of every school, reducing book costs for parents by at least 80%. We will double the annual funding available for book rental schemes, and only provide this funding to schools which use it to establish or expand such schemes. We will end the charging of fees to apply for a school place.

## Giving parents a greater say

Irish parents hugely value education, as do our young people. Unfortunately, they get little say in how their local schools are run.

In government, we have developed work on a Parents' Charter that would give parents a say in all school policies. We have increased funding to parents' bodies and student bodies. We introduced the Education Passport to provide clear information on children's progress when they are transferring from primary to second-level school.

We will legislate for our Parents' and Students' Charter. We will publish a new 'School View' website, giving parents information on school performance, subject choice and extracurricular options. This will be of far greater value than the narrowly based "league tables" that are published regularly. We will introduce an Early Education Passport, to ease the transition from pre-school to primary school.

**WE DELIVERED THE FIRST IMPROVEMENTS TO LITERACY AND NUMERACY RESULTS FOR A GENERATION**



## Valuing vocational opportunity

We value the opportunities which college provides. But not every young person wants to go to college, and a well-functioning economy requires people with a variety of skills and experience.

In government, we have begun implementing reform of the Junior Cert, to ensure better focus on the skills young people need such as communication and teamwork. We have introduced 25 new types of apprenticeships.

We will begin reform of the Leaving Cert, with a particular urgency attached to the need to develop vocational Leaving Cert options. We will complete a review of all PLC courses in the first half of 2016, and begin reforming the sector to ensure that further education and training opportunities are available all year round. We will provide 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities over the next five years.

In a modern economy, many people need to continually upskill and reskill throughout their lives. We will provide an increased fund of €25m each year to enhance the availability of life-long learning options in the community, from literacy and numeracy education for those who want to avail of catch-up training, to specific skills training options for those who are looking to reskill in their spare time.

Our ambition is three fold; we want to eradicate illiteracy, afford existing workers the opportunity for second chance education and equip workers with the necessary skills and training to be able to adapt to the skills of the future. Ultimately, this is about supporting people in their ambition to progress and improve their livelihoods to benefit themselves and their families.

## 4.2 MAKING QUALITY CHILDCARE AFFORDABLE FOR EVERYONE

Our State has never invested enough in supporting families with young children. Labour will make low-cost, high-quality childcare for all children under 12 a reality, and dramatically increase the level of spending on early years education and childcare.

We also recognise that a high quality childcare sector depends on a skilled childcare workforce with decent pay and fair conditions. We will work to ensure those who provide childcare services receive the respect and remuneration they deserve.

### Labour will:

- Cap childcare costs for parents, and reduce these costs to no more than €2 per hour by 2021, with the state funding the remaining cost
- Increase paid parental leave by three months, to be shared between both parents
- Transform the quality of early years care and education by ensuring a higher premium for providers with highly qualified staff
- Put decent salaries in place for all people working with young children, to allow them to build sustainable careers, with everyone in the sector earning at least a living wage

In government, we have expanded the subsidised childcare available to low-income families, introduced the first supports for children with special needs in pre-schools, begun inspecting the educational qualities of pre-schools so that every child gets a high-quality experience, and passed a referendum enshrining the rights of children in our constitution.

Labour will dramatically reduce the financial burden on parents of young children, and give every child the high-quality care and support that they deserve. These policies will also support increased labour market participation, particularly amongst women.

**“WE WILL REDUCE  
CHILDCARE COSTS TO €2  
PER HOUR BY 2021  
”**

**Affordable  
childcare for  
all children  
under 12**

Childcare costs in Ireland are among the highest in the world for parents. This prevents many people from going back to work, or can mean that one person's income is spent entirely on childcare.

In the last year, we provided subsidised childcare for an additional 13,000 children. We have begun working on a single childcare programme to replace the five different programmes which exist to support low-income families. Labour's new simplified subsidy programme will be provided through both community and private childcare providers.

We will move immediately to cap the cost of childcare for all children under 12 to €4.25 per hour for up to 40 hours of childcare a week. By 2021, we will reduce this cost to €2 per hour, or a maximum cost of €80 per week. The State will fund the balance.

**The first year  
the most  
important**

The evidence is clear: children perform best when they remain within the home with their parents for the first 12 months of life.

In the last budget, we introduced two weeks' paid paternity leave, recognising that fathers should have the opportunity to bond with their new-born children.

We will protect the existing six months of paid maternity leave and the two weeks of paternity leave recently introduced. In addition, we will provide an additional two weeks paid paternity leave plus three months' paid parental leave, with at least one month reserved for each parent, ensuring that every child can be cared for by their parents for the first 9 months of life. We will increase this to 12 months within the next ten years. We will also commission a review of the level of payment given for maternity, paternity and parental leave and will explore the potential to legislate for negotiated flexible working time arrangements for workers with young families.

**A second  
year pre-school  
year**

Giving children access to high-quality pre-school education from the age of three has been shown to dramatically improve educational outcomes.

From September 2016, every child in Ireland will be able to start pre-school at age three.

To ensure that the time of year that a child is born won't impact on their life chances, children will be able to enrol in pre-school at three different points in the year – September, January and April. We are also providing supports to children with special needs in pre-school.

## Different families have different needs

The childcare sector in Ireland is composed of public and private suppliers ranging from community facilities to private crèches, and registered and unregistered childminders coming to the home of the child. Many parents also choose to stay at home to care for their own children.

In government, we have expanded the childcare subvention scheme to allow private as well as community providers to deliver childcare for low-income families. We increased the home carer tax credit to €1,000 for stay at home parents.

We will build on Ireland's unique model of community, private and home-based childcare and early years education provision. Families will be able to choose to avail of subsidised childcare in private or community childcare centres, or use registered childminders.

## Better quality care and education

Childcare provision varies in quality. "A Breach of Trust", the RTÉ Prime Time Investigates programme in 2013, sharply demonstrated what can go wrong in an ill-equipped and under-resourced system. Less than 1% of all childminders are regulated and the current system of inspection and regulation is fragmented.

In government, we established a new pre-school inspectorate to enhance the quality of pre-school education. The last budget provided funding to carry out a quality audit across all early years services, and more money for the Learner Fund that trains up existing workers.

We will make funding conditional on basic quality guarantees, and increase funding for those with higher qualifications. We will create a unified early years inspectorate. By 2025, at least 60% of all staff working in childcare will be qualified to degree level. We will require all professional childminders to be regulated.

## Mentoring and support

In the education system, there are well established supports for mentoring and continuous professional development (CPD) of staff. However there are few such supports in place for those working with our youngest children.

In government, we established 'Better Start' – a national early years quality support service. Education-focussed inspections are now helping providers to improve their practice. We have funded the roll-out of the Síolta quality assurance programme, so that more children benefit from high quality care.

We will provide intensive CPD for half of all staff in the sector by 2018, and will employ a full-time education officer to produce new curriculum resources for those working with young children. Quality supports will also be provided regionally, through the expansion of Better Start.



## Respecting those who work with young children

Many staff working in the childcare sector are on the minimum wage. This leads to rapid turnovers in staff, and prevents us from building a well-educated, top-quality workforce in the childcare sector. We recognise that staff need to be paid appropriately, and get the opportunity to develop decent, well-paid careers.

Labour in Government has restored capitation levels to providers of the free pre-school year. Our increases to the minimum wage have increased pay for many staff in this sector from €7.65 to €9.15 per hour. Now we want work towards a situation where all pre-school workers receive at least the Living Wage.

We will provide all staff with one hour of paid non-contact time per week to plan their work. We will increase payments to all childcare providers, with a higher premium for providers with well qualified staff. We will examine a two-week payment for holidays for all those engaged in delivering the free pre-school year. A sector-wide agreement on pay and conditions should also be put in place, to ensure that we move towards putting sustainable salary scales in place for those working with our children.

We will also begin to move towards professionalising the sector, and move towards 60% graduates within 10 years. Within our proposals we have committed to increasing salaries to levels similar to those working within our schools. Our costings assume that one third of those working in the sector will be graduates within five years. Under Labour's plans, all early years workers will earn at least a living wage.

## Valuing childminders

About a third of children are cared for by childminders. Childminders need to be supported to promote high standards in the sector, and parents need to be informed so they can identify top quality services for their children. We will protect the existing entitlement for childminders to earn up to €15,000 a year tax free.

We want to see childminders registered, so that the quality of care they are providing will be inspected regularly. To achieve this, we will put new supports in place for childminders, and ensure they can benefit in full from Labour's subsidised childcare programme.

## Planning for the future

The development of childcare facilities throughout Ireland, funded by tax breaks, has created an unsustainable, unplanned network of infrastructure. In some areas, many providers are available, with competition threatening the viability of some providers. In other areas, there are significant space shortages.

We will introduce a new system of forward planning for publicly-funded early years and childcare provision. The state will assess where additional places are required, and will then hold a competition between potential providers to see which option can show evidence of community support. This is based on the existing model of forward planning already in place for the school sector.





### 4.3 A NEW NATIONAL COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICE

Labour in Government is committed to the progressive rollout of Universal Health Care. For people and their families, this means free and timely access to the health service from the initial contact with a GP straight through to treatment in the hospital system.

The introduction of a model of universal health care represents a fundamental change in our health service. We are committed to ending the two tier health system.

We have already started the roll out of free GP care for children and older people. We will extend this to all. We will create a new National Community Health Service and create a new Cabinet position with direct political responsibility to oversee this critical national project.

**Labour will:**

- Introduce a new National Community Health Service providing free GP care for all
- Recruit 5,500 healthcare professionals to reduce waiting lists and overcrowding in hospitals
- Create a better functioning hospital system
- Improve access to mental health services
- Reduce the threshold of the Drug Payment Scheme to €100 for families and €75 for single persons and lower prescription charges capped at €20 per month

We will establish a National Health Forum to bring together all stakeholders in the health system to develop a shared approach and understanding on the future challenges facing Irish health services.

## Free GP care for all

Ireland is the only EU health system that does not offer universal coverage for primary care. Ireland currently has a private primary care system and a public hospital system. Our vision for a more equal health system involves the rollout of a fully functioning system of primary care, free at the point of access.

A new National Community Health Service will provide timely and free access to GP care, mental health care and dental care for all children and adults along with reduced cost of medication and primary care health services.

Over the lifetime of the next Government, free GP care will be phased in for the entire population, starting with those under the age of 18 and those aged 65 and over and progressing to universal access by 2021.

We will introduce new community-based clinical programmes targeting the most prevalent chronic diseases, so that people can get consistent access to treatment and prevention without having to visit a hospital. These programmes will depend on a community based teams made up of nurses, GPs and other health professionals.

We will continue the provision of funding to expand direct access for GPs to ultrasound and X-ray services, and introduce a Minor Ailments Scheme to expand the role of the community pharmacist so that patients with medical cards can go straight to their pharmacies for free non-prescription medicines to treat mild conditions.

To prioritise this transformation of primary care across Ireland, we will appoint a Cabinet Minister with specific responsibility for primary care. This will bring a new focus, budget and accountability to the development of the Primary Care network and will ensure that the Minister for Health can strengthen their focus on making serious improvements to our hospitals and A&Es, while continuing to ensure that services move towards more effective integration.

The provision of primary care centres and teams throughout the country will significantly increase health and social care in local communities which will redirect pressure away from acute hospitals. 90 primary care centres have been completed and a further 16 are under construction. It is expected that construction will begin on a further 14 primary care centres next month.

The HSE estimates that the delivery of free GP care for all will require an additional 1,426 full-time GPs in Ireland by 2021. Labour has a plan to deliver these additional GPs, with a particular focus on three approaches: recruiting new GPs; retaining more of those who are thinking of leaving the profession; and encouraging returners, particularly those who have gone abroad to work. We will supplement these approaches with better supports for part-time GPs who might consider working full-time, and the direct employment of 200 GPs in rural areas.

Labour's plan will add 1,428 full-time GPs to primary care over the next five years – an appropriate increase to provide free GP care for all.

**Reducing  
the costs  
of medication**

We will extend free access and reduce the cost of drugs and related healthcare.

We will reduce the threshold of the Drug Payment Scheme for all non-medical card holders to €100 for families and €75 for single people, and reduce the prescription charge to €1.50 per item subject to a €20 cap per month. These measures will significantly reduce the cost burden on families and prevent those who fall seriously ill from experiencing significant charges for their medication.

**Dental  
health**

Good oral health is vital for people of all ages. As with access to GPs, we want to ensure that no-one is put off accessing a dentist for reasons of cost.

We will begin to widen access by restoring the Dental Treatment Benefit scheme to pre-2009 levels. Our plan is to see that all persons are eligible for two free oral examinations, scale plus polish per year. This will also include access to basic preventative treatments such as cleaning and fillings.

Over time, this service will be extended to a more comprehensive list of treatments. We will also increase the funding for the publicly run dental service and recruit additional dentists and dental nurses to ensure all children go through screening in a timely manner.

## Dignified Maternity services

A mark of a society is how well it treats its expectant women. In the wake of a number of terrible preventable tragedies, Ireland has made some progress in advancing the rights and protections for pregnant women with the enactment of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act in 2013 and the publication of the new National Maternity Strategy.

Labour has been to the fore in pushing these critically important issues. However, the current constitutional mess in relation to termination in Ireland means that it is impossible for the Oireachtas to pass legislation that sufficiently protects the rights of women in pregnancy; in particular their rights to life and to health.

Labour will hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution and, if that is approved, we will put comprehensive legislation to the Houses of the Oireachtas to sufficiently protect the rights of women in pregnancy.

Labour in Government will implement in full the recommendations of the new National Maternity Strategy. In particular, we will work to overhaul the current service model so that women see the most appropriate professional based on their need.

We will ensure higher compliance with internationally recognised ratios of staff to patients and review birthing environments and care choices available to women. We will also ensure greater standardisation of care across maternity units in the State and introduce a new health and wellbeing approach to prenatal and post-natal care with the establishment of specific mother and baby clinics within primary care centres.

We will also establish a Human Fertilisation and Embryology Board to oversee those operating in this sector, and we will establish a new system of State support for couples to access assisted reproductive technology. We will also cap the cost of the morning after pill to make sure it is an affordable, accessible option for any woman in need of it.

**Mental  
Health –  
Early  
intervention**

Early intervention is critical to mental health wellbeing. In Government, we have prioritised the delivery of mental health services for young people at community and primary care level. Many young people need support to get them through a difficult or challenging time in their lives and quite often this support is most appropriately provided at community level.

Labour will extend the Counselling in Primary Care service to all 16- 25 year olds on completion of eMental Health courses and with a GP’s recommendation, and introduce additional training for GPs in recognition, detection and intervention using standardised mental health screening tools in all practices.

We will establish a mental health awareness and advertising programme to build resilience and breakdown prejudices, and continue to ring-fence mental health funding. A new service will be developed to address dual diagnosis (addiction and mental health), headed by a new HSE National Director for Alcohol and Addiction. We will establish a registration and licensing system for all practising counsellors, therapists and psychologists. We will extend the opening hours of Community Mental Health Centres into the late evening and through the weekend, and extend the Jigsaw service to all major towns and cities.

The full details of our approach to mental health wellbeing will be published in Labour’s plan for mental health.

**Palliative  
Care**

We will ensure that quality palliative care is available to all those who need it. We will continue to support work on the needs of general, maternity and paediatric hospitals to develop comprehensive plans for palliative, end-of-life and bereavement care. We will continue to rollout Standards for Bereavement Care Following Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death 2016 and establish trained bereavement teams in each maternity unit/hospital.

## Reducing overcrowding in A&Es

In Government, we established the Emergency Department Taskforce to drive long term solutions to overcrowding in A&Es and to address the issue of delayed discharges which contributes to that overcrowding.

We will increase the number of locations of care for less serious injury. We will reform work practices and the allocation of staff within hospitals by implementing the recommendations of the Emergency Department taskforce on the need for systemic change in dealing with discharges, ranging from a broadening of the role of advanced nurse practitioners to cross-team discharging and changes to the organisation of the working day within hospitals.

Treatment of chronic disease currently account for two thirds of emergency admissions through A&E and 60% of total bed days. Labour's plans to provide treatment for the most prevalent chronic diseases within the community will go a way towards alleviating this. That's just one example of how a strong system of primary care will reduce pressure on hospitals and provide for a stronger overall service.

We will increase the combined number of day care and in-patient beds within hospitals by 1,500 and also increase the number of beds and staff in community care. The HSE bill for agency staff remains too high and we will move to reduce this bill and directly hire more medical, support, paramedic and care staff across the hospital and social care system over the next five years.

We will recruit 1,990 paramedics, healthcare assistants, theatre technicians, and allied health professionals, along with 2,800 nurses, 500 consultants and 300 nursing staff in specialist areas such as midwifery and advanced nurse practitioners. These 5,500 medical professionals will allow us to make significant improvements to hospital care.

## Reducing waiting lists

Delayed health treatment for serious conditions imposes significant costs on individuals that spill over to the wider health system, the economy and society. Not only is there the cost of medication for managing untreated illness, there is the cost to hospitals of repeat visits to outpatient departments, the cost to the labour market and the cost to wider society.

Within the hospital system, shorter wait times and faster access to diagnostics and treatment are only going to become more pressing objectives over the years ahead. However, achieving these goals is not simply about providing more resources. More than anything it is going to be about working differently, and finding new ways to cut waiting lists and guarantee speedy access to treatment.

We will build on the excellent work achieved in the breast cancer treatment programme. We will extend this highly successful model with early assessment initiatives and targeted wait times to other conditions. This will start with the other cancers and neurosurgery. It will involve the recruitment of additional consultants but also greater involvement of advanced nurse practitioners to ensure that patients get the timely diagnoses and treatment every citizen deserves.

## Improving accountability in the hospital system

Labour firmly believes that a clear plan is now required to address poor or absent systems of accountability, persistent cost overruns and the lack of definition of clear responsibility between the HSE and the Minister for Health. We must address key issues of corporate governance, financial planning and ministerial oversight and responsibility.

If re-elected to Government, we will put in place a new Corporate Governance and Financial Planning Strategy for hospitals. We will require that the business plans for hospitals are put on a statutory basis, that all hospitals agree service level agreements and individual hospitals publish their annual accounts. We will also transition the funding of our hospitals from a block grant basis to an activity basis so that money follows the patient first and foremost.

We will require that the accounts of hospitals are audited by the C&AG and that hospital CEOs appear before the Public Accounts Committee.

A critical part of a new framework of accountability in the hospital system must be provision for intervention where hospitals or sections of hospitals are underperforming. We will introduce powers to intervene and take over the management of hospitals or sections of hospitals under specific circumstances and for specified periods.



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## Investing in our health and well-being

We will respond to the obesity crisis by introducing a tax on sugar sweetened drinks within the first year of being returned to Government. This will be levied on a volumetric basis and can be expected to have a significant public health impact, particularly for children. In addition we will ring fence the proceeds from the tax for investment in a number of health awareness programmes for children.

We will also further restrict food advertising, in particular the marketing of foods high in salt, sugar and fat. We will introduce national regulations for front-of-pack traffic light labelling on all food and drink products. In this way we can empower people, especially parents to clearly determine the contents of the food they buy and its potential effects on individual health.

We will establish mother and baby clinics to become a one-stop shop for families and introduce health awareness programmes for pre-school and school age children in the areas of nutrition, alcohol and dental hygiene. We will double the number of schools under the Active Flag programme, introduce new school cycling initiatives, and make sure that all schools are involved in growing food. These steps will ensure healthy living and good nutrition is emphasised at every stage of a child's development.



#### 4.4 IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The need for strong, vibrant communities goes to the heart of Labour's vision for a decent society and a strong Ireland. We need safe, clean, green, flourishing communities with facilities that meet everyone's needs.

**Labour will:**

- Recruit 3,500 new Gardaí over the next five years and release an additional 1,000 Gardaí from frontline duty to make sure the priority is on community policing
- Recruit civilian staff for many routine Garda administrative functions to allow this growth in frontline policing personnel
- Invest in green spaces, footpaths, public parks and cycling routes that improve the quality of life in our communities
- Provide every home, school and business with access to high-speed broadband by 2020

In government, we have provided every second-level school in the country with free access to high-speed broadband, and increased fourfold the availability of commercial broadband. We have allowed schools and sports clubs to make joint applications to build community sports facilities, and expanded the highly successful Dublin Bikes scheme to Galway, Limerick and Cork.

We will constantly look to improve the quality of life for families, with a particular focus on assisting disadvantaged communities by targeting funding to those areas most in need.

**“WE HAVE PROVIDED EVERY SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRY WITH FREE ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND”**

## Quality of life for communities

Labour in government will promote strong communities with good facilities for walking and cycling and high quality public transport connections to neighbouring towns and cities.

It is essential to have a joined-up transport and land-use plan that reduces the amount of time people spend travelling and that promotes active and healthy ways of getting around – walking, cycling, and improved public transport.

We will make walking and cycling attractive and safer by improving our footpaths, our public realm and our cycling routes, and by giving more time for pedestrians to cross busy roads. We will also improve connectivity so that more people are within walking distance of shops and public transport stops. This will help create family-friendly communities that are accessible to all.

Similar to our approach with sports capital grants, we will encourage local authorities to provide high quality community amenities and green infrastructure, close to where people live. Where possible these facilities should be shared between schools, colleges and the local community. We need to make sure that communities have access to schools, crèches, libraries, arts and cultural facilities, and community meeting rooms.

Our green infrastructure fund will see investment in our parks, canals, rivers, sea-front, and ponds and we will provide funding for more tree planting. These facilities not only create high quality amenities for local residents, but they also protect biodiversity, help reduce our carbon emissions and they protect us from the threat of flooding that is increasing as our climate changes.

## Broadband

In government we have initiated the National Broadband Plan to provide access to high-speed broadband to every home, school and business, through a partnership between the commercial sector and State intervention.

We have accelerated commercial broadband provision from just 300,000 premises to over 1.1 million, a figure that will rise to at least 1.6 million by the end of 2016. High-speed broadband has been made available to every second-level school free of charge.

Labour will implement the National Broadband Plan on schedule so that every home, school and business gets access to high-speed broadband by 2020. We will put the policy and regulatory frameworks in place to stimulate commercial companies to deliver high speed broadband to the maximum number of homes and businesses possible across the country. The State intervention will extend high-speed broadband access to premises that commercial investment will not serve. As part of the National Broadband Plan, high-speed broadband will be extended to every primary school in the state.

## Sports capital grants

Sport has hugely positive benefits for individuals and society as a whole. Labour in government has funded three Sports Capital Programmes following years of neglect by the previous administration. This has ensured over €110 million in funding for thousands of local clubs around the country.

We have worked to make the programme more accessible to clubs and organisations including those without a clubhouse or land. Community sports clubs have also had vital funds freed up through a partial rates exemption under the Valuation Act that we introduced in 2015. We have also established Sport Ireland to enhance the administration of sport.

We will continue to boost sport in local communities and at grassroots level through the Sports Capital Programme, which will have a dedicated stream for joint applications from sports clubs and schools. We want to build an even more inclusive sports culture and will continue to invest in Special Olympics Ireland, and to increase participation, particularly participation of women and girls in sport and in sport governing bodies. As part of this we will prioritise the implementation of the new National Physical Activity Plan. This will encourage a greater number of people to become more physically active.

Irish sportsmen and women have always punched above their weight at international level and Labour has ensured funding to help sporting organisations with their preparation for the Rio Olympics this year. We will also fund further world class facilities at the National Indoor Arena at the National Sports Campus. Three main centres for athletics, training and gymnastics within the Arena are set to be completed in 2016.

## Energy-Efficient Homes

A step-change in energy efficiency will help to achieve our climate mitigation targets, while also improving our citizens' living conditions and health outcomes, and reducing the energy bills for households, businesses and public services.

Labour will implement the Affordable Energy Strategy and increase investment in the Better Energy Warmer Homes scheme. We will open up the eligibility criteria so that more households can avail of the service and we will provide stronger incentives to undertake deep retrofits. Our plan will ensure that 225,000 homes will be able to receive grant aided support to improve their energy efficiency, with 10,000 further homes being funded to undertake deep retrofitting measures.

We will increase the funding provided for energy efficiency initiatives and programmes, to improve the thermal efficiency of homes, and to protect those at risk of energy poverty.

Building regulations will be improved to ensure better heat retention and energy efficiency, which will deliver higher standards of living. The Energy Efficiency Obligation scheme will require greater effort from suppliers.

We will end the barriers which impede customers switching their energy supplier and help customers realise the benefits of switching through



## Greener public transport

We will establish a Green Bus Fund to support the replacement of the State bus fleet with cleaner, greener vehicles over time.

We will draw up a new Rail Transport Strategy, with particular focus on improving the reliability and energy efficiency of our rail network. This will explore the electrification of inter-city rail so we can switch from costly and unclean diesel.

We will also bring forward commencement of construction work on the Metro North project ahead of its planned schedule which would see construction begin in 2021. We will improve existing incentives for electric and hybrid car ownership by increasing the grants available to purchasers. We will examine initiatives in other countries to encourage uptake of e-vehicles with a view to introducing such schemes here. We will publish a target by the end of 2016 for the number of Compressed Natural Gas filling stations required to make this a viable transport fuel, particularly for buses and heavy goods vehicles.

We will continue to strongly promote cycling - we will fund the roll out of a city cycle-way system starting with Dublin and we will build on the hugely successful Cycle to Work scheme with a new Cycle to School Scheme to make it easier than ever for children to take up cycling.

## Sustainable waste management

Labour is committed to a national waste management strategy that ensures efficient reliable collection for households and businesses. We also want to see conversion from waste to alternative product uses while ensuring this industry can provide decent, quality employment.

We support the concept of competition for the market in the waste collection sector. Labour believes existing service provision to households and businesses can be improved and we are committed to introducing a new tendering process for waste collection contracts within local authority areas as existing contracts come up for renewal.

Labour supports greater use of waste as an indigenous energy resource and we are committed to further supporting this in the lifetime of the next Government. Three new regional waste management plans for the period 2015-2021 support the development of additional thermal recovery and biological treatment capacity within the State. The REFIT schemes, which support the generation of electricity and CHP technologies including waste-to-energy, anaerobic digestion and landfill gas, continue to support the use of waste as a renewable energy feedstock.

## Community and voluntary sector

There are over half a million people involved in community and voluntary organisations across Ireland. Labour recognises the immense contribution these groups make to Irish society and the need to better support these groups.

We will develop a new strategy for the community and voluntary sector recognising the valuable contribution of local development partnerships and social welfare schemes such as TÚS, C.E. and the Rural Social Scheme. We will work with the voluntary organisations and their statutory counterparts to develop this strategy and will seek to develop a sustainable multi-annual funding model for the sector in recognition that these services need to be able to plan and develop.

While we welcome the role of philanthropy in the sector, we recognise that the first priority is to put a better system of public supports in place.

## Youth sector

We will ensure the Sports Capital Fund gives priority to joint proposals from local sports clubs and schools or youth organizations.

Labour is committed to the full implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020. This strategy outlines the Government's objectives to ensure young people have sufficient opportunities to be healthy and active, get the most out of formal learning, are able to feel safe and economically secure, and that they can feel connected, respected and empowered.

## Policing in the community

The Garda Síochána is entitled to the support of the Government, and taxpayers are entitled to expect that the Government makes sure Garda resources are deployed efficiently and effectively.

In government we introduced the new Policing Authority, a long-standing Labour Party policy. We re-opened the Garda Training College at Templemore and 600 new Gardai will be recruited this year. €29 million has been invested in new Garda vehicles, with the deployment of 370 new vehicles in communities around the country. We also secured €60 million for refurbishing and building Garda stations at 30 locations around the country.

Modern policing requires personnel to be deployed in frontline policing services. The Garda Inspectorate has called for this. Implementation of this reform proposal would release an additional 1,000 Gardaí for frontline duty.

We support and will implement the Garda Inspectorate recommendations on reform of organisational structure, governance and culture, workforce modernisation and technology. We will make the structural changes needed to deliver a better coordinated, properly integrated national policing service and we will recruit an additional 700 members per year to return to previous peak Garda levels of over 14,500. We will ensure that any obstacles to the employment of qualified civilian personnel are removed and will continue to recruit new professional civilian police staff, in order to free up Gardaí to police our communities.

A greater share of the Garda budget will be ring-fenced to further boost community policing – Gardaí policing communities they know, serving the people they know. We will also legislate to allow members of an Garda Síochána to join a trade union for the purposes of collective bargaining in line with the majority of other EU countries. Affiliation to ICTU will be subject to representative bodies and ICTU recognising the unique character of our policing services and that their members voluntarily forswear the right to strike or to engage in other industrial action.



## Anti-social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is the scourge of many neighbourhoods. Low level crime and anti-social behaviour are destructive of community life. That is why a more visible and responsive Garda presence in these communities is essential.

Labour will improve the functioning of Joint Policing Committees. Separately, the Labour approach to tenancing policy and estates management in local authority estates will also help. Local authority management will be required to invite participation by the community sector towards this objective.

## Drugs and Harm Reduction Strategies

In government, Labour appointed a dedicated Minister of State with responsibility for drugs policy. We have partially restored cuts in funding for local and regional drugs and alcohol taskforces.

We started work on a new national drugs strategy. We want to see families, victim support, harm reduction and education at the heart of the new strategy, along with improved funding for the Local Drugs Task Forces.

We will establish a twin-track approach, as in the Portuguese model, where the resources of the criminal justice system are targeted at the pushers and, at the same time, measures to reduce demand for drugs are implemented and medical supports are focussed on the victims of drug abuse.

We will put the Drugs Court on a statutory footing and will expand its remit.

We will continue to support medically-supervised injecting centres, to protect the public and minimise cross-contamination amongst drug users.

## Cyber security

We champion freedom of expression and the preservation of an open, neutral and unitary internet. We see no conflict between those principles and our commitment to stronger measures to combat cybercrime, cyberbullying, child pornography and breaches of privacy and personal data security.

We will implement the recommendations of the Internet Content Governance Advisory Group. This will see an expanded role for a number of relevant government departments in coordinating and overseeing internet content policy at a national level.



## 4.5 AN AGE-FRIENDLY SOCIETY

A society that cares about families must also care for older people. Too often, older people find it impossible to access the supports they need to continue living independent lives.

**Labour will:**

- Ensure a 50% increase in the number of home-help hours by 2021
- Support those recovering from illness to return to their own homes

Labour in government protected vital supports for older people including the State Pension, Free Travel Pass, Living Alone Allowance and free TV licence. In the last Budget, we increased the State Pension and paid a 75% Christmas Bonus to benefit pensioners. We also increased spending on the Free Travel scheme by €3million to ensure every older person who is eligible to use the scheme can do so in practice.

We published the National Carers' Strategy and protected a range of income supports to underpin the Strategy. We provided €940 million in 2016 so that everyone who needs Fair Deal funding will be approved within four weeks. We have restored grant funding for personal monitored alarms, to ensure that older people can live with security and peace-of-mind in their own homes.

Labour will defend existing supports for older people such as those listed above. And with a strong and growing economy, we now have a chance to make further changes that will provide security to all older people in retirement.



## Positive ageing

Older people in Ireland are living longer, healthier lives. To support this, Labour in government has introduced a landmark National Positive Ageing Strategy. We recognise that elderly people want to live as long as possible in their own homes and communities. That said, residential care, if required, must be accessible and of the highest quality. To that end we have published the National Carers' Strategy and a National Dementia Strategy.

"Home First" is a critical part of our policy and we are determined to ensure that adequate supports and services are available to those older people who wish to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. A single assessment tool will be put in place to assess the needs and necessary services required to support an older person staying in their own home. This service will be introduced through the current public health nurse system of care. We will ensure that HSE provided community care services remain free of charge. We will improve these vital services by increasing the number of home help hours by 50% by 2021 and by making available a better mix of day and after-hours services.

## Reablement

We will ensure that older people who have suffered a serious illness or have been hospitalised will be given the supports necessary to allow them to return to living in their own home with confidence through supports for modification of the home and through a new "reablement" scheme. A National Reablement Scheme would have wider benefits of enhancing the physical and mental health of older people as well as reducing the need for home support and long-term care services.

We will provide additional community short stay beds in areas where there is currently a shortage of places, including the Greater Dublin Area and the North East.

We will invest €430m in Community Nursing Units for older people and accommodation for those with a disability. This will significantly enhance and upgrade residential facilities in line with HIQA recommendations. It will also help to ensure that the care provided in new and refurbished facilities is person-centred. We will insist that new build sheltered housing for older people meets the highest standards of design and specification.

## Fair Deal

We recognise that "Fair Deal" plays an important role in making nursing home places available quickly and at reasonable cost. We are providing funding of €940 million in 2016 so that everyone who needs Fair Deal funding will be approved within four weeks.

## Carers

There are many thousands of carers who play a vital role in families and communities across the country.

In government, we published the National Carers' Strategy and protected a range of income supports to underpin the strategy. These include Carers' Allowance, half-rate carers' payment and the household benefits package for people who receive Carer's Allowance and live with the person for whom they are caring. Labour in government secured €1 million from the dormant accounts fund to provide additional financial help for support and training projects for carers. We have developed a single assessment tool for older people which includes a detailed Carers' Needs Assessment, to deliver better overall co-ordination of care services.

Under the Carers' Strategy, an annual forum is held to allow carers to engage with government and to have a strong voice in policy development. We will continue to implement the National Carers' Strategy, and will work with carers and ensure that supports for carers increase at least in line with inflation. We will protect HSE provided community care services as a free-of-charge service and we will ensure that families and individuals who have a carer will fully benefit from the 50% increase in the number of home help hours between 2016 and 2021.

**“ WE WILL PROTECT HSE PROVIDED COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES AS A FREE-OF-CHARGE SERVICE AND WE WILL ENSURE THAT FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE A CARER WILL FULLY BENEFIT FROM THE 50% INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HOME HELP HOURS BETWEEN 2016 AND 2021 ”**

## 4.6 INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Labour recognises that people with disabilities wish to live ordinary lives in ordinary places. But many face multiple barriers generated by society and the State over many decades in terms of paternalistic attitudes, low expectations and poorly designed buildings and services.

We need to turn the tide on this culture of dependence. We will:

- Immediately allocate 10% of funding of disability service providers to independent living initiatives, and we will increase this funding by 10% each year as capacity in the sector develops over time.
- Move towards a system of individualised budgeting for care services, granting power to individuals over the services provided
- Sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into law within the first year of government.

### Independent Living

We will immediately allocate 10% of funding of disability service providers to independent living initiatives, and we will increase this funding by 10% each year as capacity in the sector develops over time. Over time, we want to move towards a system of individualised budgeting for care services, granting power to individuals over the services provided.

A key part of this will be to explore best international practice to put in place a new system of brokers to procure equipment and services for individuals. Personal assistance services must be increased and we will also increase total funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant to €60million. We will update planning and building control legislation and policies to ensure that at least 10% of all 'new build' housing developments meet Universal Design standards. We will explore new innovative fiscal models that are beyond the social welfare system but that can help to financially support people with disabilities.

## Recognising the rights of those with disabilities

A partial capacity to work payment was introduced to support persons with disability to take up work and we have built on this to produce a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. This will involve strengthening our anti-discrimination laws and reforming our mainstream employment services and training programmes to better cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

Labour lived up to our commitment to increase the numbers of people relocated to community based settings. We oversaw significant reform of disability services for young adults, by ensuring that we don't turn our backs on those turning 18 but instead offer training places to them. We have also seen to it that the prevention of disability and early assessment agenda continues to be promoted in programmes such as diabetic retinopathy screening.

We will continue to provide employment supports to those receiving disability payments to ensure they can access job and training schemes. Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been postponed by successive governments – we are already delivering on its content through sustained implementation of disability initiatives and we will sign the Convention into law within the first year of government.

When this is done, we will begin a review of the needs of people with different disabilities and work to accommodate these. As a first step, we recognise the significant barriers to the Deaf community in Ireland and those using Irish Sign language. We will introduce a new voucher scheme to allow purchase of interpreter hours for those who depend on the language. We will support the vision impaired community by developing a National Vision Strategy with them to ensure that preventable blindness is eradicated.

## Supporting children with special needs

In government, we increased spending on special education and introduced the first system of supports for pre-school children with special needs.

As a first step towards a new vision for supporting children with special needs, we will mainstream the pilot model of allocating resource teachers from September 2017 in a way that ensures that no school faces a reduction in resources, but schools that are under-resourced at present are brought up to the level of support they need. We will improve the integration of therapy supports into school settings and we will expand the number of educational psychologists so that money is not an obstacle to appropriate support. We will increase the percentage of college students with a disability to 8% of all new entrants.

## 4.7 ACTION ON CHILD POVERTY

We are determined to eradicate child poverty. Despite progress over recent years, one in nine children in Ireland still live in consistent poverty.

The initiatives we propose here will complement our proposals to introduce free GP care for all, to expand access to school meals, to introduce paid parental leave and high quality, affordable childcare, to eliminate long-term homelessness and to increase the minimum wage. Taken together, these measures will significantly reduce the number of children and young people living in poverty by 2021.

### Labour will:

- Put the elimination of child poverty at the centre of government policy
- Provide the poorest schools with the staffing and funding needed to tackle educational disadvantage
- Continue to expand the school meals programme so that no child goes hungry in school
- Implement early intervention initiatives aimed at children and families in disadvantaged communities
- Increase child benefit from €140 to €155 a month by 2021

In government, we have funded the introduction of Area-Based Childcare (ABC) programmes in areas of concentrated disadvantage such as Limerick, Ballymun and Tallaght. Rates of early school leaving have dropped below 10% for the first time. And we have increased funding for school meals.

**We will build on this work to end child poverty.**



## Putting child poverty at the centre of government policy

We will produce a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2017, with the eradication of child poverty the primary objective of that action plan. We will establish a new body – the End Child Poverty Commission to work to eradicate child poverty to make sure that we at least halve child poverty by 2021.

## Tackling educational disadvantage

Children from disadvantaged communities remain more likely to have difficulty with reading or maths, and to drop out of school.

In government, we have ensured that early school leaving has fallen below 10% for the first time. We have reformed the Junior Cert to put an end to young disadvantaged boys, in particular, disengaging from school. We have provided State funding to iScoil for those who have disengaged from school. And we have increased funding for school meals.

We will increase the school leaving age to 17 to end a situation where one in ten drop out before getting a Leaving Cert. We will continue funding the ABC programmes and iScoil, and restore funding of School Completion Programmes to 2011 levels, and bring their governance and funding back within the education sector. Labour will rapidly expand the school meals programme, to ensure that no child goes hungry in school. We will identify the poorest schools in the country, in both urban and rural areas, and provide them with the funding, staffing and supports necessary to tackle deeply entrenched levels of disadvantage.

## Area-Based Childcare programmes

Concentrated disadvantage leads to much greater inequality in society. Tackling that inequality means tackling the root causes of inequality, which start in the earliest years.

In government, Labour has funded Area-Based Childcare (ABC) programmes in areas of concentrated disadvantage such as Limerick, Ballymun and Tallaght.

We are committed to a strategy of capacity building and investing in the quality of our public services to children and families. This will include primary care, early years, primary schools, family and community support services. To support this, we are committed to the mainstreaming youngballymun, an evidence-based model prioritising children and families in communities impacted by socio-economic disadvantage.

We will continue to implement prevention and early intervention initiatives aimed at children and families, with a particular focus on areas of disadvantage.

## School meals

No child should ever go to school hungry. We recognise that hungry children have difficulty paying attention and benefitting from education. This year, we increased the funding available for school meals by €3m, with over 1,430 schools and community groups now providing meals in schools, pre-schools and community groups.

We will increase the funding available for school meals by €5m each year, to expand school meals to at least a third of all school and pre-school settings, with a particular focus on the promotion of breakfast clubs. This will include funding for minor capital work required in some schools.

Responsibility for management of the school meals programme will be transferred to the education sector, so that we develop a coherent approach to tackling poverty and disadvantage in schools.

## Child Benefit

Over the last two budgets, we have increased Child Benefit by €10 per child per month, benefitting 623,000 families. We will continue to invest in Child Benefit, and increase Child Benefit payments by €15 per month by 2021.

## Child Protection

We have embarked upon an unprecedented range of legal and constitutional reforms to protect our children. The passage of the Children's Rights referendum will have implications for all future legislation, and the creation of TUSLA and passage of the Children and Family Relationships Act were both designed to put the interests of children first.

Early intervention and well integrated care and support between TUSLA, education and mental health services is critical to ensuring a well-functioning child protection service. Labour is committed to bringing about greater integration of these services with TUSLA.

We will also review the high staff turnover ratios within child protection services and explore ways to overcome worker burnout in terms of better supervision, manageable caseloads and a greater experience mix amongst colleagues in services. We will fully commence all sections of the Children and Family Relationships Act.

**“WE ARE DETERMINED TO ERADICATE CHILD POVERTY”**



5.

Standing Up for

a Modern Ireland



## Standing Up for a Modern Ireland

Labour will continue to lead on social change by making Ireland a more modern and progressive country, strengthening the rights of women, children and the most vulnerable and working for a more equal and tolerant society.

- Deliver true equality for women
- Open up government to greater scrutiny
- Ensure our education system better reflects modern Ireland
- Make communities safer by enhancing crime prevention measures and reducing levels of reoffending
- Enact a national LGBT strategy
- Protect Irish language and culture, and our place in the world

Equality is a founding principle of the Labour Party, and there is no better means of achieving equality than making sure that every child is given an equal opportunity to thrive. Equality is at the heart of what it means to be a citizen in our democracy, and it is at the heart of Labour's view of the world.

**“EQUALITY IS A  
FOUNDING PRINCIPLE OF  
THE LABOUR PARTY”**

## 5.1 TRUE EQUALITY FOR ALL

Women don't earn the same as men, and are denied access to necessary healthcare. An estimated two-thirds of low-paid workers in Ireland are women, and the State has always underinvested in childcare. Ireland is an increasingly diverse and multicultural nation.

### Labour will:

- Hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, otherwise known as the 8th Amendment
- Take action to reduce Ireland's gender pay gap
- Double the number of multi-denominational schools by 2021
- Amend the Equal Status Act so that local children can access local schools
- Prioritise independent living supports for those with disabilities
- Publish and enact a new national LGBT strategy

In government, we have introduced gender quotas that will see a significant rise in the number of women in Dáil Éireann, and introduced a 40% target for the representation of women on State boards. We acted where successive governments had failed women, and legislated to give meaning to the judgement in the X case.

Labour in government has driven real change and reform towards a more pluralist system of school patronage which reflects the diverse beliefs of families across Ireland. The referendum on marriage equality, and the overwhelming popular support for that referendum, was a historic victory for the rights of gay and lesbian people, and also for all those who respect and value diversity.

These changes, and many others, have made Ireland a more progressive and welcoming country. Only Labour will build upon these changes to continue working to deliver a republic that embraces all of her people.

“THE REFERENDUM ON MARRIAGE  
EQUALITY WAS A HISTORIC VICTORY FOR  
THE RIGHTS OF GAY AND LESBIAN PEOPLE”

**Improved  
reproductive  
healthcare  
services  
for women**

A mark of a country's health services is how it treats pregnant women. In the wake of a number of terrible preventable tragedies, Ireland has made some progress in advancing the rights and protections for pregnant women with the enactment of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act in 2013 and the publication of the new National Maternity Strategy.

Labour has been to the fore in pushing these critically important issues. However, the current constitutional mess in relation to termination in Ireland means that it is impossible for the Oireachtas to pass legislation that sufficiently protects the rights of women in pregnancy; in particular their rights to life and to health.

Labour will hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution and, if that is approved, we will put comprehensive legislation to the Houses of the Oireachtas to sufficiently protect the rights of women in pregnancy.

We will establish a Human Fertilisation and Embryology Board to oversee those operating in this sector, and we will establish a new system of State support for couples to access assisted reproductive technology. We will also cap the cost of the morning after pill to make sure it is an affordable, accessible option for any woman in need of it.

We will enact the Adoption Information and Tracing Bill, following further consultation, to ensure all adopted people have the right to obtain their birth certificate.



## Increasing the number of women in public life

For true equality, women must be able to play an equal part in all realms of life from business to public life.

We have introduced new laws which require all political parties to ensure that 30% of their election candidates are women, and that threshold will increase to 40% over time. We have also introduced a 40% target for the representation of women on State boards, and we are delivering on this.

We will increase the target to 45% of all State board appointments, and will enact new policies to make this the case on every individual State board – enterprise, agriculture and finance areas need the input of women just as much as education, childcare and health areas. We will legislate to require colleges to give proportionate scholarship funding to women and men, in order to increase the number of women in receipt of sporting and scientific scholarships.

We will commission a National Action Plan for Women's Equality to ensure gender equality issues remain at the heart of all government decisions.

## The role of women in the home

The Constitutional Convention voted overwhelmingly in favour of amending article 42.1 of the Constitution. Article 42.1 states that mothers 'shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to neglect of their duties within the home.'

Labour will act on the recommendations of the Constitutional Convention to amend Article 42.1 to provide for State recognition and support for all persons caring for others within the family home. We will establish an inter-departmental task force to formulate wording for a referendum to amend Article 42.1 that reflects the submissions to the Constitutional Convention on this issue.



## Equal pay for women and men

It is unacceptable that a significant gender pay gap still exists in our economy. In 2012, this gender pay gap meant a difference of 14.4% between men and women's pay.

Labour will ensure that all large companies and public sector employers are required to publish the difference in pay between their male and female employees each year. Over time, this will highlight which companies are taking corrective action and will allow workers and consumers to react accordingly. We will examine the feasibility and cost implications of flexible work options for parents who are returning to work.

We are introducing a second free pre-school year with effect from September 2016, have introduced paid paternity leave for the first time to acknowledge the role of fathers in raising children, and have delivered increases worth €3,000 a year to those in full-time work on the Minimum Wage.

Labour's plan for low-cost childcare for all children under the age of 12 will substantially reduce the cost of going to work for women. Our revised Working Family Credit will better support women who want to enter or re-enter the workplace. Increasing the Minimum Wage to a living wage level will particularly benefit women, as an estimated two-thirds of those on the Minimum Wage are women.

## Greater school choice

A growing number of parents want their children to experience multi-denominational education. Multi-denominational schools can be more inclusive of all children in a community, regardless of their background. We cannot provide choice of school in every town and village across Ireland, but we can build a national network of multi-denominational schools. The wishes of those who want denominational education, and those who want multid denominational education, must be respected equally.

In government, we established the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, and have progressed their recommendations. Since 2011, there has been a 43% increase in the number of multi-denominational schools, with a 54% increase in the number of children attending such schools. We recognised Educate Together as a patron of second-level schools.

We believe that more needs to be done to provide greater school choice. We will continue to provide new schools in areas where the population is increasing, and we will speed up the process of reorganising schools in areas where parents have demanded an alternative to the status quo. This reorganisation will include examining whether federal models could provide better support to small schools in rural communities. We will provide a further 100 multi-denominational schools by 2021. We will publish a White Paper to build on the report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, and clearly set out long-term policy in this area.

## Local schools for local children

Children benefit from meeting and getting to know children from various backgrounds and religions. Diversity in our schools is an opportunity for our society, not something we should feel threatened by.

The emerging evidence of parents feeling forced to baptise their children to ensure a school place is a national scandal which must come to an end.

Labour's Admission to Schools Bill will go a long way to improve the fairness of access to schools for all children. It will ban the practice of charging parents to apply for a school place, and make sure that all schools are welcoming of all children.

We will amend the Equal Status Act, to ensure that publicly funded schools prioritise children from the local community, rather than focusing on their religion. It will still be possible for schools to prioritise on the grounds of religion in cases where the ethos of the school might otherwise be diminished, such as in the case of minority faith schools which serve dispersed communities.

## True equality for LGBT people

Labour has always championed LGBT rights. Over the past five years, we have delivered monumental change for LGBT people. Marriage equality, the Children & Family Relationships Bill, amending Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Act and the recent passage of the Gender Recognition Act are all changes delivered by Labour.

Now that the necessary legislative changes have taken place, we believe it is time to address the cultural problems that cause discrimination against LGBT people.

Working with the voluntary sector and across government departments, we will enact a national LGBT strategy that will focus on tackling hate crimes, discrimination in schools and workplaces and improving the mental and sexual health of LGBT people. We will fully commence all sections of the Children and Family Relationships Act and will also introduce a new bill to expunge the criminal records of gay men who were convicted under historical indecency laws. In 2017, we will review the operation of the Gender Recognition Act.

## Integration and new communities

Ireland's population is more diverse than ever before and embraces new communities from across the world. We need appropriate integration structures to assist in social cohesion. Labour in government has worked with Migrant Groups to look at new ways to develop better integration practices. We also established a nationwide Polish–Irish festival recognising the unique position of the Polish diaspora – one of the largest ex-pat communities in Ireland. The implementation of the new National Integration Strategy will be a key priority for Labour in the next government. We will create local integration strategies and guidelines for all community groups in receipt of public funding. The new strategy will look at ways to encourage participation in public life, including politics, for migrants and their families.

The Labour Party will introduce, on a one-off basis, an earned regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants living in Ireland. This scheme will be both pragmatic and fair and will be developed in consultation with migrant NGOs and the relevant government departments within the lifetime of the next government.

Ensuring a fair and humane system for asylum and refugee applications remains a core task. In government Labour has overseen the publication of a report into the Protection Process including the Direct Provision System. This report included 176 recommendations some of which we have begun to implement including the waiving of prescription charges for those living in direct provision and increasing the rate allowance paid to children living in these centres.

We have also introduced a Protection Bill which will see new applications for asylum processed more quickly to ensure people are not left living in limbo for many years while their application is pending. If re-elected we will continue to implement the recommendations within the report to ensure that those seeking asylum are treated with dignity and respect whilst they await the outcome of their application. We will also continue to work on developing comprehensive immigration legislation, which is transparent and clear for those wishing to work and live in the state.

## Traveller recognition

We support the formal recognition of the Travelling Community as a group in Irish society with a unique culture, heritage and ethnic identity. In government we have outlined the roadmap to achieve this by commencing work on a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. We will continue to consult with Traveller NGOs on the completion and implementation of this Strategy to address the accommodation, health, education and other issues faced by the Traveller community.

We will give responsibility to the Housing Agency to address key concerns around housing for Travellers. We will also look at innovative ways of offering support for education and work place activation for members of the Travelling community. We will more than double the number of Travellers going to college.

## 5.2 LAW REFORM

All of our work is focussed on making sure that our communities are safe places in which to grow up and grow old, and that our society is one that promotes justice and fairness at all levels. The structures that underpin our justice system require ongoing review and reform.

The establishment of the Garda Authority is the most significant reform in the history of the Garda Síochána. Labour is determined to put victims and their needs at the heart of the justice system.

### Labour will:

- Support and resource the new Garda Authority to deliver a transformation in the oversight of policing performance in the State.
- Establish a Garda Serious and Organised Crime Unit to tackle organised crime, cybercrime, serious fraud and suspicious financial transactions.
- Support victims of sexual and domestic violence and ensure a more compassionate overall approach to the victims of crime.

## Criminal law reform

The criminal code is vast and complex, contained in hundreds of years of statutes and court judgments. We will commence work on a single, comprehensive, statutory criminal code, making the law available in one easily accessible instrument.

We will further modernise and reform criminal justice legislation, including the rules of evidence and procedures and pre-trial processes, to remove anomalies in laws, rules and procedure that restrict the due administration of justice.

We will introduce harmonised search warrant, arrest and detention period provisions for all violent and serious crime, to avoid the pitfalls and anomalies that now exist.

A new Sentencing Bill will set out aggravating and mitigating circumstances to be taken into account, and will bring greater consistency. This will include requiring the prosecution to address the court on sentencing, including the available non-incarceration options. Information on sentencing practice will be collected and made available on a systematic and timely basis.

We will bring in greater pre-trial case management, such as plea and directions hearings.

We will legislate for more robust traceability of sale of second-hand machinery, goods and scrap, to better tackle rural crime.

We will simplify and consolidate road traffic law and eliminate the scandalous loopholes that allow drunk drivers to walk free.



## The courts and civil law reform

We will legislate for a Judicial Council, with lay representation, that will provide an effective mechanism for dealing with complaints against judges. We will also further reform and update the judicial appointments procedures, requiring the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board to expressly consider the diversity of appointments.

We will legislate for a statutory framework for mediation as an alternative to litigation, and establish a dedicated family court structure throughout the State.

We will legislate to improve the operations of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. And we will amend the law to allow damages to be paid by way of periodic payments to persons with catastrophic injuries.

We will not support legislation for gambling casinos in Ireland. We will update and consolidate consumer rights legislation.

We will consolidate, update, and reform all the laws relating to our courts system and will task the Department of Justice to work with the Courts Service and professional bodies to ensure greater use of electronic communications and case management systems throughout the legal system.

## Supporting victims of sexual and domestic violence

Sexual abuse and sexual violence are heinous crimes and it is vital that victims receive the support they need when they make disclosures. The Garda Síochána must be fully equipped and trained to deal with incidences and reports of sexual violence. Training is currently available but it is not mandatory for Gardaí at present. Labour will introduce mandatory training on sexual violence for all trainee Gardaí.

We will also introduce a protocol for third level institutions and provide training to staff on best practice for handling reports of sexual violence from college students and supporting victims of sexual violence.

The signing of the Istanbul Convention marks an important milestone for all those who have campaigned for better protections and supports for victims of domestic violence. It reaffirms the commitment of government to foster a culture and to implement meaningful changes which can help reduce the incidence of domestic violence, better support victims and bring the perpetrators to justice.

In government, we published an Action Plan for implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Ireland. This includes actions such as the provision of education and training of public sector staff involved in this area; development and delivery of training for legal professionals; and implementation of co-ordinated, integrated national helpline service provision for responding to domestic and sexual violence.

We will enact a new Domestic Violence Bill to improve the protections available to victims of domestic violence, most critically for those victims in

crisis situations and will also make the courts process easier for victims of domestic violence. This will include measures to reduce potential intimidation, limit the requirement for victims to give evidence before large numbers of strangers, bar electronic communications by perpetrators of domestic violence and allow for interim barring orders in emergency or crisis situations.

We will legislate to ensure that victims of crime are at the heart of the justice process and that their rights to information, advice and other appropriate assistance are met effectively and efficiently. We will oblige Gardaí to maintain adequate contact with victims, to report progress on the investigation and prosecution of their case and to ensure that adequate advance notice is given about the proposed release of offenders.

## White collar crime

The investigation and prosecution of white collar crime will always be difficult. This isn't an exclusively Irish phenomenon. Public disquiet over the apparent immunity of white collar criminals is not due to the collapse of any particular trial as a result of defects in our law. Instead, public concern is largely about the failure to bring prosecutions in the first place.

We need to allocate the resources to prosecute white collar crime.

We will create a Garda Serious and Organised Crime Unit, properly resourced and with the professional expertise needed to tackle organised crime, cybercrime, serious fraud and suspicious financial transactions in both the public and private sector. We will create a specialist division within the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, which will become actively engaged and make appropriate directions much earlier in the investigation of white collar crime.

We will legislate for a formal structure for granting immunity to those suspected of white collar crime, in accordance with clearly defined criteria, where this assists in the more effective suppression and prosecution of criminal activities. We will legislate for a pre-trial process that enables the court to ensure that the issues are clarified in advance of trial and to direct how they should be explained to a jury, to deal with issues of third party disclosure and of admissibility of evidence, and to direct the preparation of statements by each side setting out the nature of the prosecution and defence cases.

Our laws on the admissibility of documentary evidence are cumbersome and unnecessarily complex. The ability to admit in evidence the contents of potentially relevant and incriminating documents is a very real consideration for prosecuting authorities in deciding whether to bring charges in complex fraud trials.

The logic underlying the hearsay rule no longer stands up. We will amend the rules of evidence to allow for the admissibility of computer generated business records where they satisfy general standards of reliability.



## Punishment and prisons

Our prisons are still overcrowded and our prison system is among the most expensive in the world. The criminal justice system must provide for a safer society, at a lower cost to the taxpayer. We need to switch from over-reliance on costly prison sentences to less costly non-custodial options and greater use of open prisons, for appropriate prisoners. In government, we have ensured that St. Patrick's institution will be closed in the early months of 2016.

We will reduce the number of prisoners in our jails when other, cheaper sanctions would serve the same purpose. Prison must be a penalty of last resort for non-violent offenders. We will mandate the courts to instead make much more effective use of alternative sanctions such as Community Service Orders.

We will reform sentencing practice at District Court level to reduce the number of very short prison sentences handed down for minor, non-violent crimes.

We will continue to resource projects which divert young people from criminality, and provide for alternative sanctions.

We will bring to an end the 'revolving door' scandal, under which persons sent to jail in default of payment of fines can escape both the fine and the imprisonment under a system that arrests, records, processes and releases them in a matter of hours.

We will reform, consolidate and restate prison law in modern terms.

### 5.3 OPENING UP GOVERNMENT AND EMPOWERING CITIZENS

Labour has always believed that openness and accountability are at the heart of good policy making and effective public service management. We responded to the crisis by making reform in this area a priority.

**Labour will:**

- Make all Government data open and transparent
- Introduce a free and secure Digital Portal for every citizen and business
- Create an independent Electoral and Public Offices Commission
- Allow 16 year olds to vote in local elections and European Elections
- Allow the people of Dublin to decide whether they want a directly elected Mayor and establish a new layer of local democracy in communities across the country

Labour has already done much to reform our system of government. We destroyed the link between big money and politics by imposing limits for election spending and for political donations. We passed legislation to protect whistleblowers and regulate lobbying, and greatly improved the Freedom of Information and Ombudsman Acts. Critically, we have opened up the system of appointment to State boards by providing for a role for the Public Appointments Service. Ireland has also joined the Open Government Partnership.

We will go further. We believe in Open Government – and not just as a slogan.



## Open data and public sector reform

The data held by public bodies is a valuable resource, not only for each body but also for citizens as a whole. It makes it possible to improve access and ease of use in public services. Digital technology offers new opportunities to improve the provision of public services and to improve the interaction between public service providers and consumers. Yet these can be fractured, with duplication of inputs and process.

Labour in Government established an Open Data Governance Board, with industry experts to drive our open data strategy. We agreed an open data technical framework to standardise published data sets. We established our national open data portal at [data.gov.ie](http://data.gov.ie).

We will promote and support the use of open data throughout the public service and welcome private sector adoption and use. We will publish a national Open Data Action Plan on the principle that all data held and managed by public bodies should be made available subject to safeguards in relation to privacy, vulnerable people or commercial and operational considerations. Labour is conscious of the risk of digital exclusion and we will ensure that our digital government agenda doesn't leave behind any citizens, especially older citizens.

We will introduce a free and secure Digital Portal for every citizen and business, enabling them to communicate with Government Departments and public bodies. The portal will give users a window on their transactions with the State. It will facilitate amendments to basic information by a user and allow a single regulatory check to apply across all the system. We will ensure that the high standards of verification required by Revenue, the Passport Service and the Public Services Card are used across the system.

We will substantially increase the resources available to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer to coordinate activity across the public service. We will enact a Data Sharing and Governance Act to ensure that the highest modern standards of data protection apply, with associated transparency and governance obligations, to information sharing between public service bodies. The legislation will include an effective oversight role for the Oireachtas. We will engage with the National Statistics Board on the development of a National Data Infrastructure.

Labour in government has driven the reform of public services. Measures to reduce public service numbers, public service pay, and the number of state bodies were all central to the turnaround in our public finances. Additional productivity measures were central to maintaining front line services. These changes were implemented by way of two negotiated public service agreements.

Additional reforms have also included changes to sick leave and annual leave arrangements, more open competitions for positions within the civil service and the transfer of staff to areas where they were needed most. Labour will compliment these changes with a new training and

development shared service to drive higher performance levels in a positive manner.

We have also responded to criticism about a lack of specialists in the civil service by establishing the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service. We will now set up similar specialisms for statistic and data analytics.

Central to our programme has been the creation of a more integrated public administration. That is why we have introduced shared services in the HR, Procurement and Financial Management functions. A Civil Service Management Board has been established to formalise cooperate working among the heads of Government Department. That Board is responsible to an Accountability Board with private sector membership. Common Governance Standards have been set. Labour will introduce measures to facilitate easier transfer between parts of the public service.

## The Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is an essential interlocutor between citizens and the providers of public services. He acts as a guarantor of the rights of citizens.

In government we have extended the remit of the Ombudsman to include a number of bodies not previously covered. We believe that the role should be further extended to include redress for public services, whether provided by public or private bodies, including private bodies in receipt of public funds.

## Public sector standards

Labour will enact the Public Sector Standards Bill, establishing a Public Sector Standards Commissioner, to oversee a new framework, operational at local and national level for the first time, of ethical standards for public representative and public officials. The Bill imposes statutory prohibitions on the use of insider information and on the seeking by public officials of benefits to further their interests. The Bill also provides for a new statutory board to address conflicts of interest that might arise as public officials take up roles in the private sector.

## Electoral reform

We will establish a powerful and independent Electoral Commission charged with the independent management of elections and election and political finances.

The Commission would remove from Ministers and Departments the responsibility for running elections and referendums, take over responsibility for the electoral register and encourage voter registration and turnout. The Commission would also take over the powers of Referendum and Constituency Commissions.

The number of people living in Ireland who were born elsewhere is at an unprecedented high. We believe that all EU citizens who have lived in Ireland for five years should be entitled to vote in general elections. This should be extended on a reciprocal basis. We will mount an information campaign to encourage all non-Irish citizens who have the right to vote, including all those who are currently entitled to vote in local elections, to do so. We will enable citizens who emigrate to remain on the electoral register for up to 5 years.

We will change the law to allow 16-year-olds to vote in local and European elections. We will also revise the terms of reference for the revision of constituencies to ensure the fairest and most proportionate distribution of seats possible. We will abolish three-seat constituencies which provide the least proportionate level of representation.

“WE WILL ALLOW  
16 YEAR OLDS TO VOTE  
IN LOCAL ELECTIONS”



## Dáil reform

During the 31st Dáil we implemented a number of reforms to make the Dáil more effective and more efficient. We increased the number of sitting days by 33%, increased the time for asking questions of the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Ministers, introduced a right of appeal to the chair where members were dissatisfied with Ministers' answers, opened up the law-making process, with a new pre-legislative stage that encourages engagement with experts, interest groups and the public, made it easier to debate topical issues and facilitated TDs to bring forward their own legislation.

But we need to go further. Our Dáil and Seanad need to undergo the same root and branch examination of their workings that we have applied to other major institutions in the State. They need a comprehensive and sustained programme of reform.

We will give responsibility for Dáil Reform to a committee with a majority of backbench members who have a real interest in securing for themselves a greater role in the day-to-day business of the House.

What we propose is not more incremental reform to Dáil standing orders but a fundamental redrafting. The re-drafters would examine the various unwritten rules and practices, discard those that no longer serve a useful purpose and reduce the rest to writing.

### **Matters to be covered would include:**

- The responsibility of the Ceann Comhairle to impartially ensure that the interests of members and the public interest are fully protected
- The obligation on ministers to ensure that questions are answered properly and fully (including an obligation to provide redress and correction if the House is misled), and rules covering the standard of replies.
- Rules covering the passage of legislation to ensure the provision of adequate time for debate.

It should be no function of the next Government or of Party leaders to decide who the next Ceann Comhairle should be. We have changed the rules so that the members of the next Dáil will elect their chair by secret ballot. This will reinforce the independence of the office holder, making it clear that he or she has no ties to the Government of the day.



## Dáil business

A Government needs to get its legislative programme through the Dáil and Seanad. But the Houses need the opportunity and resources to scrutinise legislation and to hold the Government to account.

We haven't got the balance right. There is too much government control over the parliamentary agenda, both as regards content and timing.

While the Dáil and its members need a daily opportunity, in the public interest, to raise matters of current interest or controversy with the Taoiseach and Ministers, it does not need to order its business on a daily basis in the present way.

Ministers should be in attendance at the Order of Business, and respond to any questions raised by members of the Dáil in relation to policy that falls within their remit. Questions relating to the scheduling of legislation will be directed to the Chief Whip rather than the Taoiseach.

At present, Ministers answering questions spend much of their time physically facing away from those they are being questioned by. We will examine the feasibility of arranging the Dáil in a manner similar to the Seanad, allowing a more genuine engagement between Ministers and Deputies.

More Dáil time should be routinely available for debating procedural and business motions without eating into time allocated to debating the business of the nation rather than the internal running of the House.

Committee chairs in the next Dáil will be allocated between parties and groups according to the d'Hondt system as used in the Northern Ireland Assembly. These office holders should be required by standing orders to make declarations of impartiality and independence.

Membership of committees should be determined using a transparent process supervised by the independent Ceann Comhairle, aimed at securing a broadly proportional allocation between the parties.

The next Dáil should examine the merits of dedicating one week out of every four primarily to committee work – during this week, Leaders' Questions, Question Time and Topical Issue Debates will take place, but other Dáil business will generally be suspended to allow for a focus on committee work. Committees could still meet as required in plenary weeks, but the aim would be to concentrate as much business as possible in the committee week.

We need a written parliamentary question system for statutory bodies – the HSE, CIE, the ESB, the VHI, and so on. Each body's CEO would be required to reply to a question within a specified time limit, to be published in official Dáil record. In addition, CEOs would be required to attend before Oireachtas committees, to answer oral questions. Ministers will remain responsible for answering questions on public policy.

## Oireachtas TV

A dedicated Oireachtas TV channel should not be confined to broadcasting sessions in the House or in committee. There should be room for much more explanation, interpretation and analysis of, and debate about, the work going on, as with C-SPAN in the United States.

## The Whip

Every major political party, since Charles Stewart Parnell devised it in the 1880s, has operated the party whip. Irish public representatives are more bound by party discipline than their counterparts in the UK, US, or most of the western world.

As long as individuals group together to put a common agenda to the people, they will organise together in our elected assemblies in order to see that agenda advanced. Under our system the Government depends for its survival on retaining the support of a majority in the Dáil. It is constitutionally obliged to resign if it loses that support. There must be some form of parliamentary discipline and cohesion on the part of those who support the Government.

But the time has come for a rebalanced approach, which gives greater recognition to the standing of individual members rather than the interests of the party. We cannot bring this change about simply by changing any rules set out in the Constitution or in legislation or standing orders. The issue is one of attitude, across the parties.

If our proposals are accepted and implemented then, under a reformed Dáil, with greater independence and greater power to hold the Government to account, TDs themselves will have greater standing and independence. Inevitably the parties will react to changed circumstances by moving towards a more relaxed, less whipped regime.

## Public inquiries

Commissions of investigation were designed to ensure the co-operation of witnesses, without extensive legal representation, through a 'carrot and stick' approach. The carrot element of the investigation is that it is held in private. The stick element was meant to be that, if the commission of investigation could make no progress, a full blown public inquiry could be held.

Commissions of investigation have worked very well in practice – there have been 12 of them to date. But the stick aspect means that setting up a tribunal of inquiry must continue to be a realistic possibility where no cooperation is being given to a private commission of investigation.

Tribunals of inquiry are unlikely ever again to be routinely employed but they do remain an essential reserve power. We will legislate as recommended by the Law Reform Commission for a reformed tribunal process with targeted terms of reference, limited legal representation – and the ability to end it all if unforeseen or protracted problems arise.

We will also legislate to address in a targeted way the specific concerns raised in the operation of the IBRC commission of investigation. Those concerns do not appear to reflect wider problems with the statutory model itself.

## Parliamentary inquiries

We in Labour believe that it must be a function of the National Parliament to engage in scrutiny and oversight of the Government and the public service.

To assist Oireachtas inquiries, and to make them more efficient and effective, we propose legislation allowing for the appointment of a parliamentary inspector, from time to time as occasion requires. The investigator would provide a mechanism for the timely and cost-effective investigation of issues giving rise to significant public concern. The investigator would have power to inquire privately into matters of public interest and, so far as possible, establish the factual position. Where the investigator was unable to establish clear facts, the report would if necessary be followed by a formal parliamentary inquiry. In those situations, the evidence collected by the investigator would be available to the committee or tribunal, thereby reducing time and cost. The inquiry would "hit the ground running".

## **Independent, Diverse and Quality media**

A strong and accountable government needs the external oversight of a strong and thriving media. We will ensure adequate funding for public service broadcasting and implement measures to support Ireland's vibrant commercial broadcasters. In government, Labour has moved to protect media diversity by enhancing the regulation of media mergers.

We will replace the TV licence with a public service broadcasting charge (PSBC) and will intensify efforts to combat evasion so that everyone pays a fair and affordable share. This will both place the national broadcaster on a more secure long-term financial footing, and support commercial broadcasters by allowing for the abolition of the Broadcasting Levy.

## **Strengthening Local democracy**

Labour's vision for local democracy is one that mixes empowerment and effectiveness. We want to see ordinary citizens having more of a say in the management of their communities through direct elections. We will rebuild urban government by legislating to establish directly elected councils in all medium sized towns with a separate budget and mayor.

Continued reform of our systems of local government is essential to meeting the needs of citizens and their communities. The old system of town councils unevenly spread throughout the country has been ended, however a vacuum in local leadership has now opened up across many towns and villages across the country. A new system of urban government is vital for the continued regeneration and growth of our towns and surrounding areas.

Labour has a longstanding commitment to establishing a directly elected Mayor of Dublin. In government, we allowed the four councils to decide whether or not to allow the people of Dublin a vote on this issue.

Labour will give the people of Dublin their say by holding a countywide plebiscite. A directly elected Mayor of Dublin City and County will be supported by a revamped Dublin Regional Assembly so that Dublin has the leadership structures it needs to thrive as a modern capital.



## 5.4 CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Our constitution must be a living, breathing document, regularly adapted to make sure it reflects our society and our values. We will continue to seek the permission of the people to make constitutional changes that will enhance their rights.

### **Labour will initiate and support referendum proposals:**

- To repeal the 8th Amendment
- To recognise the state's role as guardian of our environment, our heritage and our natural resources
- To enhance our democracy
- To modernise the reference to a woman's place in the home

We will also reinstate the constitutional convention during 2017, and provide the convention with more time to consider broad issues in greater detail.

During the last five years we put a series of referendums before the people of Ireland. The marriage equality referendum will long be remembered as a watershed moment in Irish society, while the people also had their say on the powers of Oireachtas committees, the future of Seanad Éireann, judicial pay, the creation of a new Court of Appeal, the rights of Children, and the age of presidential candidates.

As Ireland changes, so too must our basic law, Bunreacht na hÉireann.

## The Constitutional Convention

In 2011, Labour proposed the establishment of a constitutional convention comprising 66 members of the public, 33 members of the Oireachtas and an independent chair. The Convention, established in 2011, produced nine reports with a range of recommendations.

In government, we accepted the case made by the Convention for referendum to be held on the following questions: marriage equality, reducing the age threshold for Presidential candidates, reducing the voting age to 16, removing the offence of blasphemy, enhancing the references to the Ceann Comhairle and including a reference to Oireachtas Committees in the constitution.

In 2015, the people voted on the first two of those issues, passing the marriage equality referendum. Labour will hold referendums on three of the four remaining areas which have been accepted within the first two years of the next Government. The Constitutional Convention has made a positive determination in relation to Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Given the number and complexity of constitutional matters involved, we will establish an independent expert legal panel, with broad membership, to assess the legal and regulatory impact of this before such a question can be put to the people.

We will re-establish the Constitutional Convention, with a mandate to examine in greater detail four issues which require careful and sensitive consideration: end of life issues; the place of faith in the constitution (including the issue of religious declarations being required of office holders); allowing for positive discrimination to combat inequality for those with disabilities in society; and the role of the State as custodian of the physical environment, in particular the public water supply. Labour believes that the State's role as custodian of the physical environment, on land and sea and in the air, including plant and animal life must be explicitly recognised in the Constitution. Consideration must be given to the appropriate mechanism to ensure that the public water supply remains in public ownership and cannot be sold to private interests.

In addition to respecting the view of the next Constitutional Convention on these areas, the Labour Party is committed to putting a small number of issues before the people which we do not believe require further consideration by the Convention.

## Protecting the rights of women

In the wake of a number of terrible preventable tragedies in this country, Ireland has made some progress in advancing the rights and protections for pregnant women with the enactment of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act in 2013 and the development of the new National Maternity Strategy which is currently underway.

We will hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution and, if this is successful, we will ensure that comprehensive legislation is put to the Houses of the Oireachtas to sufficiently protect the rights of women in pregnancy; in particular their right to life and to health. In future legislation, Labour is committed to recognising the importance of sustaining embryonic and foetal life in pregnancy while allowing termination under strict conditions in the event of: fatal foetal abnormalities; real and substantial risk to the health of the woman (physical or mental) in the early stages of pregnancy; risk of severe or disabling damage to the woman's health in the later stages of pregnancy; and where the effect of a pregnancy arising out of rape, incest or serious sexual assault has been to create a risk to the physical or mental health of the woman.

We also propose to amend the current provision dealing with women in the home in line with the recommendations of the Constitutional Convention.

## Enhancing our democracy

In government, we asked the people of Ireland to make decisions on Oireachtas committees, the future of the Seanad, and the age of Presidential candidates. In addition to these referenda, we have extended the number of hours the Dáil sits for, changed the role of Oireachtas committees to give them greater powers to hold the Government to account, allowed for the election of the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot, and ensured that committee chairs will be appointed in an impartial manner through the use of the d'Hondt system.

Our democracy can only benefit from an ongoing process of reinvigoration. We will hold a number of referendums on one day designed to enhance our democracy.

These will include reducing the voting age to 16, enhancing the references to the Ceann Comhairle and including a reference to Oireachtas Committees in the constitution. In addition to these proposals from the Constitutional Convention, we will allow the people to decide on removing the absolute constitutional ban on revealing information about discussions at Cabinet, and allowing for citizen participation in nominating Presidential candidates.

## 5.5 ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Labour believes that arts and culture are an intrinsic part of society. Policy in this area must foster and strengthen the creative capacity of all of our citizens and communities, giving them opportunities for arts participation, while also supporting the world class artists we produce. We have an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage that is being added to every day by our remarkably talented artistic community.

### Labour will:

- Increase funding for the arts and heritage by €150m, including doubling the funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board
- Introduce a new Irish Culture and Heritage course for the Junior Cycle
- Continue the growth of Irish-medium education so that parents have greater access to schools that allow for education through Irish.
- Promote the establishment of new Gaelcholáistí especially in places that of proven demand for Gaelscoileanna.

Ireland is a wonderful country, with a heritage built on a rich tapestry of arts, culture and language. Labour will ensure that we continue to build on the best version of ourselves.





## Arts and culture at the centre of Irish identity

We have an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage that is being added to every day by our remarkably talented artistic community. Labour believes in treasuring our cultural past, while also supporting the artists of today. The participation in and enjoyment of the arts and our cultural institutions should be for the many, not for the few. Every citizen of this State should have an opportunity to participate. That's why we will push for greater access and more innovative uses of our artistic and cultural resources to the benefit of all our citizens.

Over recent years arts and cultural groups have operated with reduced budgets, while maintaining world class outputs. Labour has begun the process of restoring funding to the Arts Council and Culture Ireland. We also increased the income tax exemption threshold for artists from €40,000 to €50,000. We oversaw the first ever Arts in Education Charter, reasserting the importance of the arts within education.

We will double State funding for the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board and will explore the potential for making special provision for artists within the social welfare system. For those receiving jobseekers payments, we will aim to relax activation rules subject to a maximum period of 18 months of continuous claiming. We will review, on an ongoing basis, the thresholds for the artists' tax exemption, with eligibility based on a five year income average. We will create an Arts Capital Fund, similar to the Sports Capital Fund, and will make participation in the 'Percent For Art Scheme' compulsory for all public bodies. Under Labour, arts funding will be used to ensure minority voices are heard and championed.

A clear online funding manual will be provided for artists and organisations with consistency across the sector, and we will review the rights of artists, including exploring ways of strengthening copyright laws and amending the Competition Act to ensure that artists benefit by enjoying greater financial security from their work.

We will expand the work already done under the Arts in Education Charter, and introduce a new Culture and Heritage course for the Junior Cycle to facilitate and promote the learning and exploration of all elements of culture, heritage and arts in Ireland, both historical and contemporary. We will also support the introduction or expansion of translation services in our national cultural institutions in order to enlarge their potential audiences.

Presently, the Republic of Ireland contains two UNESCO World Heritage Sites – Brú na Bóinne and Sceilg Mhíchíl. We recognise the huge economic and cultural benefits of WHS-designation and will pursue a greater number of applications to UNESCO on behalf of more of our world-class heritage sites. We will aim to strengthen partnerships and networks between the Heritage Council and our local authorities to ensure a more joined-up approach to preserving and promoting local heritage sites.

In line with this work, we will roll out an Arts and Health Strategy across acute, community and children's hospitals across the country. We will conduct a full review of the Section 481 Tax Relief with a renewed focus to ensure that high quality and diverse films are being produced.

We have world class artists, musicians, writers and designers. Modelled on the successful Global Irish Economic Forum, we will create a Global Arts Forum for Ireland which will provide an opportunity to highlight our talent, and to map a strong and healthy future for arts and culture at home and abroad.

**“WE HAVE WORLD CLASS ARTISTS,  
MUSICIANS, WRITERS AND DESIGNERS.  
MODELLED ON THE SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL  
IRISH ECONOMIC FORUM, WE WILL CREATE  
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STRONG AND HEALTHY FUTURE FOR ARTS  
AND CULTURE AT HOME AND ABROAD”**



## Ár dTeanga dúchasach

Aithníonn Páirtí an Lucht Oibre an áit lárnach a bhfuil ag teanga na Gaeilge i gcomhthéacs oidhreacht agus stair na hÉireann agus gur áis shaibhir bheo na linne seo í. Fáiltímid roimh an árdú suntasach atá tagtha ar líon na ndaoine a labhraíonn Gaeilge go laethúil agus go rialta le dhá dhaoine anuas agus geallaimid go leanfaimid ar aghaidh le cur chun cinn na teanga sa chéad rialtas eile.

Táimid tiomanta don Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge agus féadfar as seo amach cur leis na hachmhainní a thugtar don Straitéis mar gheall ar an bhfeabhas atá tagtha ar an ngeilleagar.

Cinntoidh rialtas ina bhfuil Páirtí an Lucht Oibre páirteach go bhfuil áit ollmhór ag teanga na Gaeilge san earnáil oideachais. Tugadh isteach curaclam nua teanga comhtháite cheana do na páistí is óige i mbunscoileanna, ionas go mbeidh said in ann an Béarla agus an Ghaeilge a labhairt le chéile. Soláthraítear tumoideachas Gaeilge iomlán ar feadh dhá bhliain i nGaelscoileanna leis an curaclam nua. Toradh dearfach atá ceangailte leis na marcanna méadaithe a bhaineann le scrúdú béil na hArdteistiméireachta ná go bhfuil méadú tagtha ar úsáid labhartha na teanga, agus méadú 42% eile ar líon na ndaltaí a thugann faoin ábhar ag an ardleibhéal.

Leanfar ar aghaidh le forbairt agus le cothú oideachais trí Ghaeilge ionas go mbeidh rochtain níos fearr ag tuismitheoirí ar scoileanna ina gcuirtear ar chumas daoine an teanga a labhairt. Smaointear le cur chun cinn an oideachas dara-leibhéal i nGaeilge, go háirithe in áiteanna go bhfuil éileamh cruthanta ó Ghaelscoileanna agus scoileanna Gaeltachta. Bunófar córas cigireachta chun a chinntiú go bhfuil áiteanna réamhoideachais d'ardchaighdeán ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge do thuismitheoirí sa Ghaeltacht agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. Cruthófar freisin córas cigireachta chun monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar choláistí samhraidh trasna na tíre.

## Gaeltachtaí láidir

Seasann Páirtí an Lucht Oibre do chosaint agus d'fhorbairt na nGaeltachta.

Cinnteoimid go leanfaidh infheistiú i bhfostaíocht trí Údarás na Gaeltachta i réimsí cosúil leis an turasóireacht, tógraí a bhaineann le bia ceardaithe agus turasóireacht chultúrtha i gcomhthéacs fhorbairt Shlí an Atlantaigh Fhiáin, an Bhealaigh Ghlais agus Shean-Oirthear na hÉireann.

Spreagfar iad siúd a bhfuil chónaí orthu i nGaeltachtaí agus nach bhfuil Gaeilge acu an teanga a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid trí mhaoiniú breise a chur ar fáil sa cheantair seo.

Maidir le seirbhísí poiblí, tuigimid go bhfuil sé rí-tábhachtach go gcuirfeadh gach aon seirbhís stáit ar fáil i nGaeilge agus oibreimid chun an aidhm seo a thabhairt chun críche.

## A living and vibrant national language

Labour recognises the central place of the Irish language in our heritage, in our history and as a rich resource in daily life. We welcome the significant increase in the number of people who say they speak Irish daily and regularly and we are committed to continuing to promote the language in the next Government.

We are committed to the 20 year strategy for the Irish language and in the context of additional resources now available in the public finances, we will allocate more resources to implement the strategy.

Any Government that Labour is part of will ensure that Irish has central part of the Irish Education system. We have introduced a new integrated languages curriculum for the youngest children in primary schools, so that children learn to speak English and Irish together. The new curriculum allows for two full years of immersion in Irish in Gaelscoileanna. The increased marks for oral Irish language at Leaving Cert level has increased the spoken use of the language, while also increasing to 42% the numbers taking the subject at higher level.

We will continue the growth of Irish-medium education so that parents have greater access to schools that allow for education through Irish. We will consider the development of second level education through Irish, especially in places that have proven demand from Gaelscoileanna. We will put an inspection system in place to ensure that high-quality, Irish-medium pre-school places are available for parents in Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. Added to that, we will put in place a new inspection system for Summer Colleges across the country.

## Strong and thriving Gaeltacht communities

Labour stands for the protection and development of the Gaeltacht.

We will continue to invest in employment through Údarás na Gaeltachta in areas such as tourism, artisan food projects and the growing areas of cultural tourism in the context of the development of the Wild Atlantic Way, the Green Way and Ancient East of Ireland. We will provide funding to Irish speaking Gaeltacht areas to encourage those without Irish to use the language.

In terms of public services, we will work to ensure that all citizens can access all government services in Irish.

## 5.6 AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE WORLD

As a small island nation, we need to constantly strive to build international relationships while preserving and nurturing our vibrant heritage. We believe in an Ireland that is confident and secure in our national identity, and in the place we play in the world.

### Labour will:

- Support a strong, social Europe that delivers for its citizens
- Increase our ODA budget by at least €200m by 2021 as we move towards the UN target of 0.7% as share of GNI

Despite the economic crisis, Labour in government maintained the monetary value of Overseas Development Aid. We enacted Ireland's first ever Climate Change legislation, placing us at the forefront of the international debate on how to effectively tackle Climate Change.

## A strong Ireland in a strong Europe

Labour remains and will continue to be committed to the project of a social Europe. We believe that Ireland will be strong and our interests are best served when there is a strong European Union.

The EU must enter a new phase of rebuilding its institutions, its infrastructure and its place in the life of all European citizens. Labour believes Ireland as a small member state should be at the heart of this project.

The rebuilding must focus the Economic Union on the promotion of greater investment, jobs and stability. The creation of good quality jobs for the coming generation will define the success or failure of the EU project over future decades.

The EU must be as much a social union as an economic union. Economic imperatives cannot outweigh social rights and we will campaign to further defend workers' and citizens' rights.

Only a positive policy mix will offer assurance to the citizens of Ireland and in other member states that the EU will continue to be a force for good into the future. It will also offer hope to the people of Greece that their country can be rebuilt on a sustainable footing. Together with its sister social democratic parties, the Labour Party will campaign at the highest levels of the EU to rebuild the EU social project.

We will legislate to provide on a reciprocal basis that citizens of the European Union who have been resident in Ireland for at least five years will be entitled to vote in General Elections.

## EU: Economic and Political union

The Political Union and engagement with EU citizens must be strengthened. Labour wants to see a more effective role for national parliaments. We support a strengthening of the “yellow card” procedure, whereby national parliaments can question the merit of proposed European legislation, and the trialling of a “green card” procedure, where a number of national parliaments can come together to propose legislation at a European level.

The EU must also strengthen its response to the migration crisis and provide further relocation and resettlement of refugees. It must also provide greater assistance to bring peace and stability to war-torn countries in the region.

We will support social democratic efforts to reform the investor state dispute resolution mechanism within the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership. In this way we can ensure that member states enjoy benefits of free trade with North America, without running the risk of undermining our essential consumer protections.

## Brexit

We believe that it is in Ireland’s interests and in the interest of the EU as a whole that the United Kingdom should remain as a full and positively engaged member of the Union.

We will facilitate the negotiations with the UK insofar as it lies within our power to do so, provided that any negotiated arrangement with the UK does not infringe on the fundamental values and cornerstones of the Union. We will oppose any arrangement which serves to erect, whether by design or otherwise, barriers of any kind between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

We will work with our sister parties in the Party of European Socialists, including the British Labour Party, to ensure that the threat of UK exit is not exploited by conservative or xenophobic parties who might seek to weaken standards of workers’ rights, consumer protection, environmental law and the basic rights and protections guaranteed by the treaties to EU citizens.

## A strong all island economy and society

Labour is committed to a strong all island economy and society. As we enter into a decade of commemoration in 2016, Labour wants to commence a national conversation about the future of our island and within it our many diverse communities.

This new national conversation must explore the potential for greater co-operation in developing our common languages, our many sporting and artistic organisations, increased interaction at local authority level and between state agencies.

Labour continue to support the Good Friday Agreement and the institutions created under it and we will press for the full implementation of the Stormont House Agreement to deal with outstanding issues and for securing agreement on key issues among the parties in Northern Ireland.

## Ireland and the developing world

Notwithstanding considerable progress in recent years, chronic poverty, hunger, political insecurity and injustice persist in much of the developing world, and especially in sub-Saharan Africa. These challenges are being exacerbated by climate change.

Despite the economic crisis Labour in government maintained the monetary value of Overseas Development Aid. We remain committed to reaching the UN target of 0.7% of GNI, and will invest at least at least €200m towards reaching that goal.

Labour in government played a leading role in negotiating the Sustainable Development goals and we are committed to achieving those goals at home and abroad.

We support the policy goals set out in the 2013 White Paper "One World One Future". In particular, we support the reorientation of support towards fragile states. We will continue to work with NGOs and CSOs in tackling hunger, injustice and the effects of climate change and in supporting human rights and gender equality. We support the 'Scaling Up Nutrition' movement.

We will work with our international partners to prevent political insecurity and to mitigate its effects. In particular we will work to assist people displaced or impacted by war and civil unrest.

Building on the symbolic support already approved by Dáil Éireann, we will ensure that the next government formally recognises the state of Palestine.

Labour recognises the link between tax and human rights, including how Ireland's tax system can impact on financial flows from developing to developed countries. Labour in government will develop the State's first tax and human rights policy incorporating issues such as corporate transparency, double taxation agreements, and the interaction of national



taxation systems. Ireland's tax and human rights policy will inform Ireland's existing international corporate tax strategy and the State's position in relation to BEPS and EU tax reform.

Labour will continue to work to achieve progress within the UN on the range of treaties and negotiations in the field of weapons of mass destruction, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the efforts to rid the world of landmines, cluster munitions and biological weapons.

## Supporting our Defence Forces

Labour recognises the incredible work done by our armed servicemen and women in maintaining our excellent humanitarian reputation abroad.

We will continue to support the Irish Defence Forces in the Mediterranean and beyond. We will also support them at home by allowing their representative association to affiliate to ICTU and take an active role in national pay bargaining. Affiliation to ICTU will be subject to both the representative association and ICTU recognising the unique character of our security services and that their members voluntarily forswear the right to strike or to engage in other industrial action.

We will also work with veterans to create a National Veterans Policy that clearly and respectfully establishes the State's obligations to those who have served in our armed forces.



6.

# Labour's Economic Plan and Costings

## Labour's Economic Plan & Costing

### Our Proposals

- Balance the budget and reduce our national debt to 75% of GDP by 2021
- Invest €3 in services for families and communities for every €1 reduction in tax
- This means that we will invest an additional €8.368bn in the services families and communities need and reduce tax by €2.866bn for low and middle income earners.

### We will use our strong economy to continue to build a decent society. Specifically, we will:

- Deliver a job for everyone who wants one by 2018 through the creation of at least 150,000 jobs over the next three years
- Abolish USC the first €72,000 of income and target additional relief to the low paid through reductions in PRSI
- Increase the Minimum Wage and raise it to a living wage of €11.30 per hour
- Create 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places over the next five years
- Increase the state pension to €260
- Make free GP available to all
- Reduce class sizes to the smallest levels in the history of the State
- Cap and reduce childcare costs, increase child benefit, and extend parental leave

## MACRO ECONOMIC FORECASTS

Our economic assumptions are underpinned by independent forecasts for the economy and the public finances which were produced by the Department of Finance for Budget 2016 and endorsed by the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. These projections, outlined below forecast average growth of 3.1 per cent over the next five years.

These are cautious forecasts, with significant potential to overachieve in the near term as reflected in upward revisions in recently published forecasts, including those produced by the Central Bank and the European Commission. However, we will adhere to the Department of Finance forecasts in our spending plan.

Labour is committed to tackling the national debt. EU fiscal rules require us to reduce our debt to GDP ratio by 1% a year over the lifetime of the next Government. However, we propose to achieve this at a faster rate of 3%, in order to get the debt ratio back to 75% or below by 2021.

If growth is stronger than expected, we will use the additional resources to increase investment in infrastructure to reinforce the growth potential of the economy. This is the most effective means of reducing the national debt and keeping the public finances in a safe place.

### Budget 2016: GDP Growth (%) and Baseline Fiscal Projections to 2021

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>% change</b>								
<b>GDP Growth</b>	5.2	6.2	4.3	3.5	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.9

Source: CSO for outturn data, Department of Finance (Budget 2016) for forecasts.

## A BALANCED BUDGET

Labour will manage the public finances in a responsible and sustainable manner, underpinned by realistic assumptions for growth in the economy. We will use the fruits of that recovery to provide tax reductions for low and middle income families, and to invest in the services families and communities need.

Labour supported the ratification of the Fiscal Treaty in 2012. We believe that fiscal rules are a necessary part of currency Union. Labour will comply fully with the terms of the European fiscal rules. We are committed to maximising the flexibility in the European fiscal rules to increase the level of public investment in infrastructure and we will support reform, as proposed by our social democratic colleagues in Europe to increase this flexibility further.

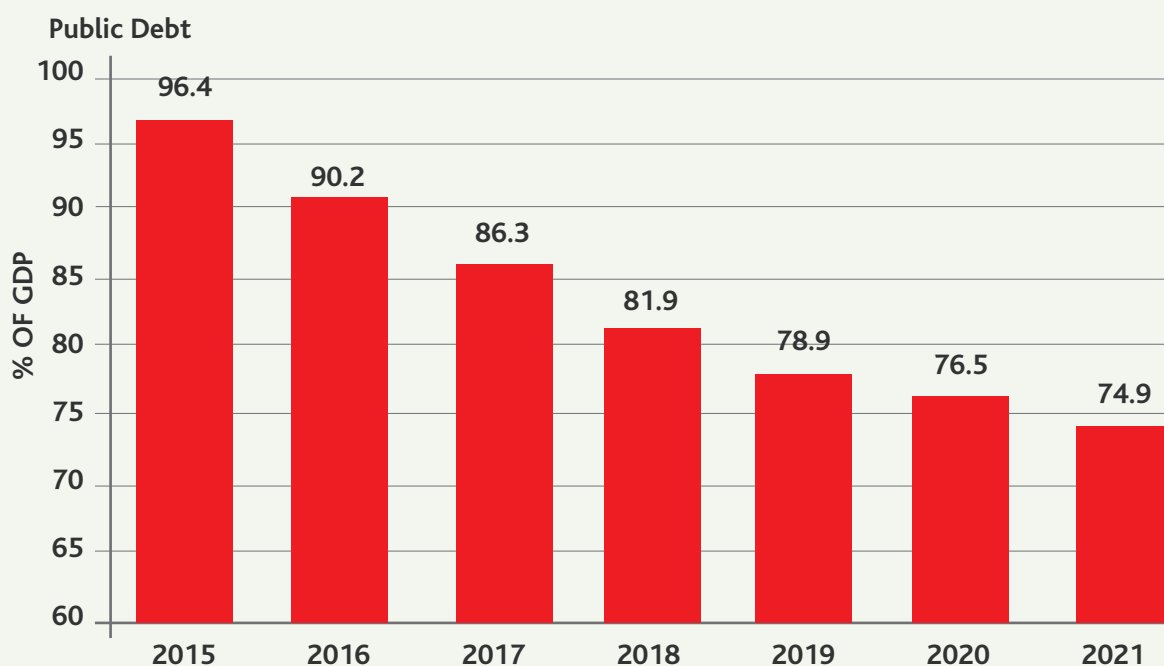
The review of the Capital Investment Plan – Building on Recovery - will be brought forward to the end of 2016. The capital plan, which is already investing €42bn into our economy and sustaining over 35,000 jobs, is based on cautious macroeconomic assumptions. Therefore stronger economic growth may free up additional resources. This is already apparent in recent macroeconomic data. If economic growth exceeds expectations, we will use the additional fiscal space to increase capital spending, targeting identifiable bottlenecks in social and economic infrastructure.

## SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEBT

Over the next five years Labour will balance the budget and target a reduction in Ireland's national debt to 75% of national income in 2021. This is an interim target on the way to achieving a debt ratio below 60% of GDP.

The EU Fiscal Compact specifies that a Member State's budget is in balance when the headline deficit is below 3% of GDP and the deficit in structural terms does not exceed the country specific Medium-Term Objective (MTO). In Ireland's case, the Department of Finance now expects that the MTO will require a structural deficit of no more than 0.5% of GDP. Under our fiscal plan, the MTO will be achieved by 2018.

Compliance with the fiscal rules requires a reduction in the debt burden at an annual average rate of 1% of GDP between 2016 and 2021 with larger reductions in the early years. Under Labour's plan the debt burden will decline at an annual average rate of almost 3% of GDP over this period, reaching an interim target of 75% of GDP by 2021, with the ultimate target of 60% of GDP.



**Labour's Public Finance Plan: Debt Projections, 2015-2021**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>%GDP</b>							
Opening Debt, 1 January	107.5	96.4	90.2	86.3	81.9	78.9	76.5
<b>Contributions to Change:</b>							
GDP Growth	-10.8	-5.6	-4.2	-3.9	-3.6	-3.3	-3.1
Budget Balance	1.5	0.7	0.3	-0.2	-0.1	0.0	0.1
Stock Flow adjustment (as per Budget 2016)	-1.8	0.2	1.1	0.5	1.3	1.5	1.5
Indicative Bank Asset Disposal and Cash Balance reductions	0	-1.5	-1.1	-0.8	-0.6	-0.6	0.0
Closing Debt 31 December	96.4	90.2	86.3	81.9	78.9	76.5	75
Change in Public Debt	-11.1	-6.2	-3.9	-4.4	-3.0	-2.4	-1.5
Required Change in Debt under EU Rules	-2.4	-1.8	-1.5	-1.3	-1.0	-0.9	-0.8

## LABOUR'S ECONOMIC PLAN

We have set out below the total amount of resources that will be available over the next five years for taxation and spending measures, while complying with the requirements of the EU fiscal rules.

The Department of Finance set out in Table A8 the 2016 Budget documentation, the estimated amount fiscal space for the period 2017 to 2021 according the EU fiscal rules.

### Fiscal Space 2017-2021 € million

<b>Gross Fiscal Space (2016 Budget day estimate)</b>	11,070
<b>Add: Discretionary revenue (tax indexation)</b>	1,768
<b>Adjusted Fiscal Space</b>	12,838
<b>Less:</b>	
<b>Expenditure required to maintain current service levels including demographic pressures, the Lansdowne Road Public sector Pay Agreement and increase capital expenditure under the Public Capital programme.</b>	4,166
<b>Net fiscal space (Budget day estimate)</b>	8,672
<b>Add: Impact of new MTO of -0.5% of GDP</b>	1,463
<b>Adjusted Fiscal space</b>	10,135
<b>Add:</b>	
<b>Revenue Raising Measures</b>	1,099
<b>Fiscal Space based on continued recovery</b>	11,234

On Budget day, the Department estimated gross fiscal space for the period 2017-2021 (including the technical assumption of indexing the income tax system) at €11.070 billion. If the tax system is not indexed, this increases the available fiscal space by an additional €1.768 billion to €12.838 billion.

When allowance is made for expenditure necessary to maintain services at current levels while allowing for demographic pressures, for the cost of the Lansdowne Road pay agreement and for increased capital spending committed under the Public Capital Programme, the net amount of remaining fiscal space is €8.672 billion.

Since Budget day changes under the fiscal rules to the definition for Ireland of a balanced budget have increased the available space by €1.463

billion. The revision to Ireland's MTO increases the net fiscal space to €10.135 billion.

Labour will further boost the available space to €11.234 billion with a limited number of revenue raising measures of approximately to €1,099 million after five years.

We believe that the majority of the fiscal space should be used to invest in improving the quality and scope of our public services and for tax reform that is targeted at low and middle income families.

Tax relief measures amount to €2.866 billion. Total discretionary expenditure will amount to €8.368 billion. The ratio of additional expenditure measures to gross tax relief measures is approximately 3:1

## IMPROVING LIVING STANDARDS FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Labour will deliver a new deal on tax and living standards for working people by abolishing USC for low and middle income earners.

### Labour will:

- Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income.
- Change how PRSI operates to reduce the burden on workers earning between €18,305 and €36,608
- Change the tax credit system to ensure those on low to middle incomes benefit most from these changes, while those earning over €120,000 do not benefit at all

### Labour's tax plan 2017 to 2021

	2017 - 2021
Cost(-)/yield (+)	€ million
<b>Tax Relief Measures</b>	
USC Reform:	
Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income	-2612
Increase Earned income tax credit to €1650	-122
PRSI relief for low to middle earners	-82
Capital Gains Tax Relief	-50
<b>Total</b>	<b>-2866</b>
<b>Revenue Raising Measures</b>	
Phase out tax credits for very high incomes	306
Bank levy increased by €350 million in 2017	350
Sugar Sweetened Drink tax	183
Increased tobacco taxes	260
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,099</b>

**LABOUR WILL ABOLISH USC ON THE FIRST €72,000 OF INCOME. THIS WILL BE DONE PROGRESSIVELY OVER THE FIVE-YEAR TERM OF THE NEXT GOVERNMENT**





### USC will be phased out on the first €72,000 of income

In response to the crisis Fianna Fáil hiked taxes on income. They introduced the Universal Social Charge and reduced the personal tax credits. The USC applied to all income provided the individual taxpayer earned more than €4,000 a year.

Labour in government increased this threshold to €13,000 and removed 700,000 taxpayers from the USC net. We have also reduced the rate of USC payable on the first €70,000 of income. Now we intend to go much further.

Labour will abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income. This will be done progressively over the five-year term of the next Government.

### Tax credits

We will adjust personal tax credits for individuals earning in excess of €100,000. The combined effect of this measure and the elimination of USC on the first €72,000 of income will be to gradually reduce the overall financial benefit to such taxpayers. Individuals earning in excess of €120,000 will not benefit from our tax proposals – the gains resulting from the USC measure will be offset by the loss of personal tax credits.

The credit will be withdrawn at the rate of 5% for each €1,000 of income in excess of the threshold amount. This means that the credits will no longer apply for a single person at income in excess of €120,000 (single). A single income couple on income of €120,000 will retain €1,650 in tax credits or €2,650 if they have dependents. The effect will be to ensure that those earning €120,000 or more continue to pay precisely the same amount of tax as they do now.

### PRSI threshold

The third part of our tax plan is to target additional relief at low and middle income working people, earning between €18,305 and €36,608.

In the last Budget, we reduced the burden on low and middle income workers by introducing PRSI relief. We will continue this approach, extending PRSI relief of up to €14 per week for those on incomes under €704 per week or €36,608 per year.

The effect will be that the payment of PRSI kicks in gradually, ensuring more take-home pay for low income workers.

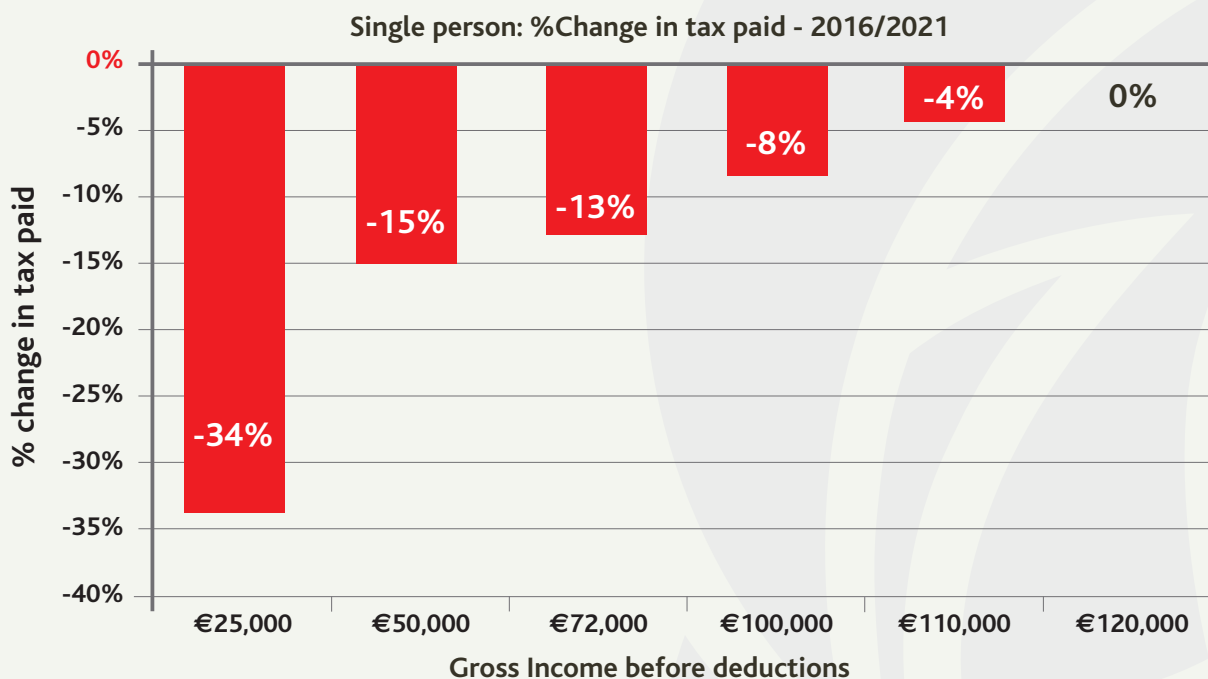
### Equal treatment for the self-employed

We believe that people should pay the same amount of tax whether they are employees or self-employed.

We introduced a tax credit on income earned from work of €550 for the self-employed in the last budget to bring them closer into line with PAYE workers, and we will continue to equalise the tax treatment of self-employed workers and employees.

The earned income tax credit will be increased from €550 to €1,100 in 2017 and €1,650 in 2018 to bring tax on self-employed trading and professional income into line with PAYE earnings. We will also abolish the USC surcharge of 3% on income over €100,000 for the self-employed to bring the USC top rate to 8% for everyone in this income bracket

### Who pays less tax under the Labour tax plan?



### Other tax changes

In order to maintain a sustainable trading environment, Labour recognises that non-banking peer to peer seed investment is a vital part of the support jigsaw for new and early stage firms. We will increase the CGT entrepreneur relief to 15% and increase the lifetime limit to €10m.

The bank levy will be increased by €350 million and will remain in place at this rate until the banks have fully run down their tax loss reserves and resume the payment of corporation income tax at the normal rate.

A tax on sugar sweetened drinks will be introduced at a volumetric rate of €36.96 per hectolitre. This will result in a 15 cent increase in the VAT-inclusive cost of a can of soft drink.

Tobacco duties will be increased each year to yield approximately €260 million after five years.

## INVESTING IN THE SERVICES FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES NEED

Labour will target 75% of the available fiscal space to investment in public services that are available to all to transform the availability and delivery of key services like health, education, childcare and housing.

We will ensure that no family has to worry about the cost of accessing healthcare; that childcare costs do not deter women from working; that children are getting the best possible start in life; and that our older people can grow old with dignity and with the best of care.

### Costs for Labour's Investment in the Services Families & Communities Need

	2017- 2021
	€ million
Health	2,975
Education and Children	2,158
Social Protection	1,720
Housing	530
Other Expenditure	985
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,368</b>



# Labour

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