

Opening statement

In the last year Aontú has come of age. Our vote has surpassed Labour, the Soc Dens and PbP in the last election. We were the only party that stood with the people in the recent referendums. We made the common-sense argument and we won.

Indeed, Aontú has, for the last five years, Aontú has often stood alone in the Dáil for you. We have held our ground in your interest. Whether it has been raising real concerns about the phenomenal government waste, the disastrous government immigration policy, why 100,000 homes remain empty in the middle of a housing crisis, censorship legislation or carbon taxes on fuel, we have been on the right side of the argument – your side.

We are offering a step change in how this country is governed. We want to end the culture of waste, lack of accountability and indifference shown to many across the state who need government to deliver for them.

We have done that with one TD. Imagine the impact we can have with a team of Aontú TDs fighting your corner and standing firm on issues that matter to you, your business and your family. That power is now in your hands. You can change the direction of this country with your vote.

We have proven that we can deliver, and more importantly, that no matter what way the wind blows or how many other parties follow the latest trend, we will be resolute in what we believe in and won't be afraid to use our voice for you in the best interests of the country.

I am immensely grateful to all of our activists, our newly elected representatives and our supporters for standing with us throughout the lifetime of the 33rd Dáil. As we look into the 34th, I am confident that 'Team Common Sense' will challenge the political establishment like never before.

The is a wave of support coming towards Aontú at the doors. Opinion polls are showing arise in our support. More and more people are hearing our message. For the first time, there is an Aontú candidate running in every constituency, giving every citizen the opportunity to vote Aontú #1.

In many constituencies the last seat will be between the government and the Aontú candidate. Don't spread your vote so thin over independents and microorganisations that the government candidate still slips through. Concentrate your vote on the one party that is listening to you.

The government is wasting your money. Do not waste your vote. I am asking you to vote Aontú #1. Le gach deá ghuí,

Peadar Tóibín TD Leader of Aontú

Ráiteas Tosaigh

Le bliain anuas tá Aontú tagtha in aois. Tá ár vóta tar éis dul thar Páirtí an Lucht Oibre, na Daonlaithe Sóisialta agus Daoine Roimh Brabach sa toghchán deireanach. Ba sinne an t-aon pháirtí a sheas leis na daoine sna reifrinn le déanaí. Rinneamar an argóint chiallmhar agus bhuaigh muid.

Go deimhin, is minic a sheas Aontú, go haonarach le cúig bliana anuas san Oireachtas agus d'fhán siad leo chun do leasa. Cibé imní a bhí l gceist-imní faoi dhramhaíl uafásach an rialtais, faoi bheartas tubaisteach inimirce an rialtais, faoin bhfáth go bhfuil 100,000 teach folamh i lár géarchéime tithíochta, faoin reachtaíocht chinsireachta nó faoi chánacha carbóin ar bhreosla, bhíomar ar an taobh cheart den argóint – bhur dtaobh.

Táimid ag tairiscint athrú céime ar an dóigh a bhfuil an tír seo á rialú. Ba mhaith linn deireadh a chur le cultúr na dramhaíola, na heaspa cuntasachta agus na neamhshuime a léiríodh do go leor ar fud an stáit a bhfuil gá acu le rialtas a bheith níos fearr agus seachadadh a dhéanamh ar a son.

Táimid tar éis é sin a dhéanamh le TD amháin. Samhlaigh cad is féidir linn a dhéanamh le foireann de Theachtaí Dála Aontú ag troid i do chúinne agus ag seasamh go daingean ar cheisteanna atá tábhachtach duitse, do do ghnó agus do do theaghlach. Tá an chumhacht sin i do lámha.

Tá sé cruthaithe againn gur féidir linn a sheachadadh, agus níos tábhachtaí fós, is cuma cén bealach a shéideann an ghaoth nó cé mhéad páirtí eile a leanann an treocht is déanaí, go mbeimid diongbháilte lena gcreidimid ann agus nach mbeidh eagla orainn ár nguth a úsáid le labhairt ar son á gcreidimid, ar mhaithe le leas na tíre.

Táim thar a bheith buíoch dár ngníomhaithe go léir, dár n-ionadaithe nua-thofa agus dár lucht tacaíochta as seasamh linn ar feadh shaolré an 33ú Dáil. Agus muid ag breathnú isteach ar an 34ú, táim lánchinnte go dtabharfaidh 'Foireann na Céille' dúshlán don bhunaíocht pholaitiúil mar nach raibh riamh ann.

Is tonn tacaíochta é seo ag teacht i dtreo Aontú ag na doirse. Tá pobalbhreith ag teacht chun cinn inár dtacaíocht. Tá níos mó daoine ag éisteacht lenár dteachtaireacht. Don chéad uair, tá iarrthóir Aontú ag rith i ngach toghcheantar, rud a thugann deis do gach saoránach vóta a chaitheamh in Aontú #1.

Beidh an suíochan deireanach I gcuid mhaith toghcheantar idir an rialtas agus iarrthóir Aontú. Ná caith do vóta chomh tanaí sin thar eagraíochtaí neamhspleácha agus micrea-eagraíochtaí go sleamhnaíonn iarrthóir an rialtais tríd fós. Dírigh do vóta ar an bpáirtí amháin atá ag éisteacht leat.

Tá do chuid airgid curtha amú ag an rialtas. Ná cuir do vóta amú. Táim ag iarraidh ort vótáil Aontú #1.

Peadar Tóibín TD Ceannaire Aontú

Contents

Housing 5
Health 15
Immigration 23
Cost of Living 35
Enterprise 41
Accountability 47
Economics 57
Human Rights 62
Gaeilge 72
Defence & Foreign Affairs 77
Agriculture & Rural Life 82
Crime 94
Our candidates 104

Common Sense Housing Policy

Manifesto 2024





8.1% increase in rent for new tenants





9.843

4,561

adults who are homeless

children who are homeless



of 18-34 year olds are living in their parents' home



Ireland has the 4th highest number of homeless people in Europe

Our Housing Priorities

- Aontú in government will provide 8,000 vacant home grants of up to €70,000 each costing the exchequer €560m a year. Aontú will significantly reduce the bureaucracy and red tape surrounding the drawing down of this funding.
- Aontú will provide a similar grant of up to €30,000 for refurbishment of above the shops accommodation. This will cost for €60m. We will reduce the regulation that is stopping so many people living in the centre of towns.
- We will build 15,000 social and affordable homes a year for the life of the next Dáil.
- · We will introduce a no-fault eviction ban for tenants.
- · Aontú will zero rate construction materials for the period of the next Dáil to lower the cost of building homes.
- We will introduce Operation Shamrock we will bring construction workers home. Aontú will build accommodation for returning workers in a speedy fashion under Class 17 of the Exempt Development Regulations. This would cut down the time of build radically. It would cost €350m.

The housing crisis has defined the last decade of Irish politics and threatens to define the future of our nation for years to come. Up to a million people are being forced to live in misery due to mortgage distress, homelessness, waiting lists of many years and/or grossly unaffordable rents and mortgages. It has been far too long since any Irish government has lived up to their responsibilities.

The record of at least three successive governments on housing and homelessness in Ireland has been nothing short of shameful.

There are 14,486 people officially registered as homeless in this state. That's 10,067 adults and 4,419 children are accessing emergency accommodation in Ireland.

This is the equivalent of everyone who lives Killarney, Co. Kerry homeless.

This is equivalent to 180 classrooms of children, homeless in Ireland at the moment. Let that sink in.

These figures are getting worse every day under the FF/FG/Green government.

These figures do not count those who are sleeping rough or those who are sleeping on couches with friends and families.

Empty homes

There are 4,000 empty Local Authority Homes, each empty for on average 8 months. Aontú will turn around empty local authority homes for re-let within 2 months.

The private sector, in contrast, are turning around empty homes within 3 weeks. We will reduce the turn around renovation spec so that properties are turned around in no longer than 1 month.

Local authorities current have enforcement powers in relation to empty homes, such as the power to issue Compulsory Purchase Orders. However, the use of these powers has been of limited use given it does not guarantee a property is brought back into use. We will utilise CPO's for properties that have been empty for longer than 5 years.

Refurbishment grants are not being managed properly by the Government. The Minister for Housing has confirmed to Aontú that a mere €4.3 million has been spent through the vacant property refurbishment grant since it was launched in July 2022.

According to our research, only five of these are being processed and approved per month. At that rate, it would take 1,600 years to refurbish all empty homes and bring them back into use.

Aontú in government will provide 8,000 vacant home grants of up to €70,000 each costing the exchequer €560m a year. Aontú will significantly reduce the bureaucracy and red tape surrounding the drawing down of this funding.

Aontú will provide a similar grant of up to €30,000 for refurbishment of above the shops accommodation. This will cost for €60m. We will reduce the regulation that is stopping so many people living in the centre of towns.

Social and Affordable Housing

An increase in the supply of housing is the key to resolving the housing crisis. Firstly, the supply of social and affordable housing needs to be increased. In the 30s, the 50s, and the 80s, in tough economic times, social and affordable housing was built at far higher rates.

Last year, the number of people living in homelessness exceeded the number of social housing units built. Out of a target of 9,100 new build social homes, just 8,100 were delivered last year. Last year the target for affordable purchase and cost rental homes was 5,500 homes. 1,500 affordable purchase and cost rental homes were delivered.

- · We will build 15,000 social and affordable homes a year for the life of the next Dáil.
- · We need to ensure that the Traveller Accommodation Budgets are spent appropriately and fully by each Local Authority.
- · Aontú will create, develop and implement an immediate plan to renovate/rejuvenate the interiors of social housing throughout the country.
- · Those in rural areas who own land, but cannot afford to build, or whose current housing is run down, should be permitted to sign over a site to the local authority on which a social house can be built and rented back to them.
- · Aontú proposes a carrot and stick approach to mandate utilisation of the land grant funding and vacant house tax to get empty homes in the state back into use.

Rental Crisis

The average rent in Dublin is more than €2,390 a month. Annually this is a full €3,000 more than the before-tax-income of a person working full time on the minimum wage. The HAP Support scheme can't keep up with the rate of rent increases.

Young couples and families are moving back in with their parents for years to try cobble together a deposit. People are having to live further outside of Dublin to afford a home. This is adding to the urban sprawl, commuting hell and air pollution. Aontú proposes a number of reforms to begin solving the rental crisis:

- · Ensure the 2% Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) cap is adhered to.
- · Ease "over shop" accommodation regulation to allow for empty commercial properties to be used to accommodate families.
- · We will introduce a no-fault eviction ban for tenants.

When the ban was debated in the Dáil, we argued for the need to offer specific protections against eviction for people who have a disability, or who are suffering from cancer or another severe illness, and also for tenants who are pregnant or who have given birth to a child within the last three years and people aged over 65 years. The reality is that there are many local authorities around the country where there is not a single available emergency homeless accommodation bed.

Government parties voted against our proposal.

Home Ownership and Construction

The Government have destroyed the ambition of millions of people to be able to own their own home. The myth of an affordable home has been the lie that they have built their disastrous housing policy on, whilst thousands of Irish people remain homeless. In 2023, the average cost of a home under the Affordable Housing Fund was €266,869 – anything but affordable.

Successive Governments have and continue to give the impression that they are in control of the number of homes / housing units being built each year. The reality is that since the 2008-2010 economic crash, the Government has relied almost exclusively on a small pool of private developers and vulture funds to build houses and apartments.

As an example, there are over half a million young people still living in their parents homes. Over the last 10 years, this policy has failed abysmally and will continue to fail unless the Government recognises that they are not in control and decide to directly compete with the current monopoly, who can decide where to build, when to build and charge whatever they can to maximise their profits.

- · Aontú will end the eternal regulation change. The current housing Minister has changed building regulation several times. As a result, many builders expect further change which will allow more units to be achieved per site. This has the effect of slowing down the building of houses.
- · Aontú want to engage engineers and architects to design housing schemes and invite tenders from house building firms or contractors of all sizes.
- \cdot Aontú will seek to re-zone land across the country for housing, and seek to control the cost of units through the public building process.
- · Aontú seeks to implement policies which will end the cosy relationship between vulture funds, developers and the government parties. The housing policy of the Irish government should not give a blank cheque to international investors and pit young families against vulture funds.
- · Aontú will introduce amendments to EU law to delete advantages that FF/FG give to international investment vehicles which allows them a competitive advantage over families seeking a home.

- · Aontú will zero rate construction materials for the period of the next Dáil to lower the cost of building homes.
- · Aontú will reduce HBFI rates from 13% to 5% and subsidise the connection fees of utilities for new homes.

This will reduce the cost of building homes and make projects more viable. These proposals would reduce the price of a house by €55,000 homes.

· Aontú will reform and speed up the planning permission process. We will do this by recruiting more planners by providing proper pay and conditions for planners. We will end land bank speculation.

We have already introduced a Bill into the Dail that would end tax advantages for predatory Real Estate Investment Trusts or (REITs). We have also introduced a Bill into the Dail that would end Air bnb operating in in large towns and cities for an emergency period of 2 years.

Though these priorities, we believe the Government will be competing with, rather than relying on, private developers to meet the country's housing needs.

Homelessness

There were 400 homeless deaths in Dublin over the last five years. The recording of homeless deaths is confined to Dublin. What does it say about the broken and callous nature of our political system that we cannot even figure out how many have died on the streets of Ireland?

Over €2.1bn has been spent by Local Authorities on services for households experiencing homelessness between 2009-2022. Most of this money has gone to commercial hotels and B&Bs. Our proposal repurposes that funding towards emergency accommodation to be allocated to housing associations and local authorities.

- · Aontú will ensure that there is a standardised reporting of homeless deaths in each county.
- · Aontú will ensure better communication between various state entities and wrap around supports for homeless people in terms of the prison service, social work, mental health and addiction services.

Tenants' Rights

Due to the dysfunction within the market and the lack of tenants' rights within the law, many tenants are living in poor conditions, paying exorbitant rents and suffering due to the precarious nature of contracts. Indeed, most of the people presenting as homeless is coming from the private rental sector. A number of reforms in this sector will stem this human tide.

Many small Landlords around the country have found themselves landlords by circumstance, with high mortgages and difficulties with a minority of tenants who do not fulfil their contracts or their obligations.

- · Greater security of tenure must be provided. Tenancies of indefinite duration must be provided for.
- · The grounds of sale should be removed from the Residential Tenancies Act. "Buy to Let" landlords who achieved tax breaks from the state should be prevented from issuing vacant possession "Notices to Quit".
- · We need the State to increase the number purchases of 'tenants in situ' house sales in Ireland.
- · It should be made easier to remove tenants who wilfully damage property or do not live up to their agreed tenancy agreement.

Infrastructural Development

Human resources and Infrastructure are key to the provision of homes. This government has completely ignored the provision of infrastructure over the last 10 years. For the majority of the last 10 years Ireland has been second last in the EU for expenditure on infrastructure as a result tens of thousands of home builds are blocked for the want of water and waste water.

· Aontú in government would invest €3.5bn in the provision of clean and wastewater next year making it possible to build tens of thousands of new homes.

Operation Shamrock

There are hundreds of thousands of construction workers building houses at the moment. The problem is up to half of these are building houses in Australia and Canada.

Aontú will launch Operation Shamrock to attract key Irish construction workers who have moved abroad to come home. This will include a relocation package of €5,000 in vouchers to spend on flights, accommodation etc for workers who have left Ireland more than 2 years ago.

We would also provide a €10,000 tax credit for these specific workers spread over 3 years. The worker would have to remain within the Irish state working in the sector for 4 years after moving home. For 10,000 staff this would cost €100m.

Aontú will build accommodation for returning workers in a speedy fashion under Class 17 of the Exempt Development Regulations. This would cut down the time of build radically. It would cost €350m.

Aontú will also improve workforce planning in radically increase the number of construction apprentices from 1,500 a year to 3,000 a year.

Student Accommodation

Right now, in Ireland students are crying out for accommodation. Student towns and cities have hostels full of students, or students commuting long distances from the home places. This in untenable. We've seen situations where students are handing out leaflets on main streets looking for accommodation.

- · Aontú seek to end the interference of the EU on the ability of the Irish Government to regulate Air BnB's. At present students are living in hostels while tourists are in houses right across the country. We will ensure than no vacant property in a student town is being used as an Air BnB, we will ban them by way of legislation.
- · Aontú will ensure that basic, affordable, non-extravagant student accommodation is made available for students on campus, and we will ensure value for money in this process.

Defective Blocks

We have a crisis of defective buildings all across the country, and all due to decisions not to enforce standards in the building industry, a clear case of negligence on the part of our political classes and permanent government.

While all leave families and family businesses facing unaffordable costs, for which the government must accept liability, the most dishonest of these is where the government actually took time in the Dáil to enact regulations, pretending to the public that they could rely on those regulations, and then chose not to actually provide the resources to do the work.

This is the case with substandard building materials which have been found across at least 16 counties of Ireland.

The government, political and permanent, has done its utmost to run away from this problem, such as making deliberate decisions not to do full scientific laboratory investigations.

This has resulted in thousands young families and others, already burdened with expensive mortgages, facing complete rebuilding of their homes when these billions in total costs could have been avoided for less than the cost of new windows for one house.

It has taken the private initiative of the victims themselves to investigate and find the source of the problem and the authorities are still working on updating regulations, even though the problem is known and has been acted upon in many other countries.

The proper resources have still not been provided to enforce even the current regulations, with the excuse from the Housing Minister that there will be new building quality legislation next year. But he has given no guarantee that there will actually be a budget for enforcement of these new regulations either.

We support 100% redress.

Fire certification of apartment blocks remains a function of the private sector, where the certifier is paid by the developer. While we may have some confidence in the professional liability of the certifiers, we believe that this should be a function of a properly resourced public buildings control office, as is the case in other countries.

Aontú has signed up to the People's Document of the Donegal Mica Action Group, which lays out what is required for all victims throughout the country and what is required to stop problems like this now and in the future.

While the financial and psychological harms to home-owning families are front and centre, this failure of governance has caused immense harm to community buildings, accommodation for renters, family farms and businesses and these need to be addressed as well.

100% Redress for the financial costs is the starting point along with technical and psychological support for victims who are not familiar with the technical issues and have to face the terrible psychological burden of losing their forever homes. The operation of the current scheme represents a hostile environment for victims, with the government more concerned to evade responsibility than to help victims.

We believe that the necessary resources are not available in local councils or in the regional health service and these extra resources must be made available by central government to support victims locally in every stage from suspect building through to final completion of any rebuild.

The level of necessary remediation must be based on the scientific evidence and not on direction from Merrion Street. In the case of defective blocks and defective aggregate in foundations, where international experts say total demolition and rebuild is the proper option, then that must be the case.

There needs to be flexibility in planning to allow temporary accommodation on site where needed, or to downsize or change building technology where this can speed up building or reduce costs.

Where aggregates or concrete products need to be used, the local council must be provided with full laboratory resources to ensure that all known deleterious materials, whether or not included in the relevant standards/regulations, are excluded. Failure to do this could mean that we just have the same problem again in a few years' time.

Our Common Sense

Health Policy

Manifesto 2024







81%

increase in children waiting to access CAMHS



children STILL waiting on scoliosis treatment

Our Health Priorities

- · Aontú seeks to change the funding of the health service to a patient engagement model. Where a patient receives an operation, a treatment, an engagement or a consultation, the state will pay the provider.
- Aontú would impose a recruitment freeze for admin and management. The non replacement of 600 WTE in this sector would save the HSE €30m.
- The cost of employing an extra nurse/midwife in the Irish public health sector into the future is approximately €76,148 per annum. 3,500 new nurses and midwives would cost €259m
- Health workers will be included in Operation Shamrock, seeking to bring nurses, consultants and other healthcare workers home with a return package.
- Aontú is opposed to the closure of further EDs including Navan ED and will seek an Emergency Department in the Mid West to take pressure off University Hospital Limerick.
- Aontú would allocate an additional in €10 million in funding to establish 12 additional CAMHS teams.
- The existing provision of specialist mental health staff in hospital A&Es, prisons and on-campus medical centres in universities needs to be expanded, and should include mental health nursing cover available to respond to mental health challenges and crises as they arise. The cost of this additional cover is estimated to be approximately €4 million.
- Aontú seek to employ an additional 400 Consultants next year at a cost of €88m.

Our health service is overmanaged, under resourced and crippled with Government red tape and regulation. Only recently did we have a HSE recruitment freeze. whilst nurses and doctors have been crying out for help with Accident and Emergency departments on their knees.

In a modern European country, the sight of ambulances waiting to unload sick patients into hospitals is a disgrace. Primary care services are on the brink of collapse, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to get an appointment with your GP. Mental health services, when they are available, are an Eircode lottery, especially CAMH services. Aontú will protect essential services and invest in the long-term viability of our health service.

Unscheduled Care

Aontú have uncovered some very concerning statistics through Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information Requests in relation to the situation in our hospitals. For example, from 2017 to 2022 some 482,844 people left the Emergency Department around Ireland without being seen.

From 2019 until the end of the first quarter of 2024 12,847 nurses left their jobs. We know that during the first six months of this year there was a recruitment freeze on nurses in our hospitals, with many nurses effectively locked out of working in our health service.

Aontú is opposed to the closure of further EDs including Navan ED and will seek an Emergency Department in the Mid West to take pressure off University Hospital Limerick.

Mental Health Services

The under-resourcing of CAMHS has become a national scandal, with over 4,361 on waiting lists. This is particularly concerning as the delay in treatment of mental illness is associated with poorer long-term outcomes.

- · Aontú will allocate an additional in €10 million in funding to establish 12 additional CAMHS teams.
- The existing provision for specialist mental health staff in hospital A&Es, prisons and oncampus medical centres in universities needs to be expanded, and should include out of hours mental health nursing cover to respond to mental health challenges and crises as they arise. The cost of this additional cover is estimated to be approximately €4 million.
- · Aontú aims to hire 40 additional specialist nurses in the areas of mental health, intellectual disability and suicide prevention. These nurses would help to boost existing frontline staff and be transferred to hospitals and centres where they are most needed.

Family Carers

Aontú brought two motions to the Dáil in the past year seeking the abolition of the means test for the carers' allowance. We were the only political party in the Dáil to advocate a No vote in the recent Care Referendum, in which the government sought to eviscerate carers by reducing their constitutional grounds for seeking economic support from the State.

Over a half a million people in Ireland provide regular unpaid care to family members or loved ones. Those who provide care within the home should be paid for the work they are doing and should not be penalised based on their spouse's income rates.

- · Aontú seeks an abolition of the means test for the carers' allowance.
- · Aontú wants better access to respite services and increased weeks of respite for those in receipt of round-the-clock care, to alleviate the pressures on family carers.
- · Aontú are advocating for more regulated and public home care hours to be provided by the State, rather than agencies, so that people can receive care in their own homes and allow the family carer a daily break from their work.

Ambulance Service

Aontú has uncovered the fact that the number of people who were dead by the time an ambulance reached them has increased by 70% since 2016.

Correspondence from the Director of the National Ambulance Service to Aontú also shows that in 2016 some 15,395 or 8% of ambulances took longer than one hour to handover a patient in a hospital. By 2022 this figure had risen to 94,639 - 38% of ambulances waited longer than an hour to handover a patient in a hospital before being dispatched on the next call.

The delay in discharging a patient at the hospital is having an impact on response times. One of the biggest reasons for the delays in dispatch or discharging on the hospital grounds is the scarcity of trolleys in ED departments.

It often happens that when a patient is transported from the ambulance into the hospital on an ambulance trolley, they are left waiting in ED on the ambulance trolley, and thus the ambulance has to wait until an alternative trolley is freed up.

- · Aontú will increase the number of staff employed by the National Ambulance Service, and the number of ambulance vehicles available within the health service in line with population growth.
- · Aontú will ensure that each emergency department has a bank of ambulance trollies in storage to ensure that no ambulance is needlessly held up at hospitals due to a scarcity of trollies. Quicker deployment and handover will save lives.

Recruitment

It is a national scandal that in the middle of the crisis in health, the HSE imposed a recruitment freeze/embargo on nurses in our hospitals. This had the effect of locking qualified nurses, particularly those returning from abroad, out of our health service.

One of the many damaging consequences of austerity on our healthcare system was the migration of thousands of health professionals. The effects are still evident on service provision, difficulties in retaining existing staff and attracting much needed consultant and specialist staff.

There has been a breakdown of trust in relation to contractual arrangements, which was evidenced by the first strike by our nursing profession in more than a generation. Aontú believes that rebuilding the health system requires rebuilding trust between government and the health professions.

Staff numbers in Ireland's acute public hospitals should increase by 15,500 over the next 13 years, according to a report by the ERSI into the healthcare system. We need more nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians and occupational therapists.

Out of 700 doctors who graduated last year 400 of them emigrated. Nurses are voting with their feet and are emigration in large numbers every year

To recruit staff we need to improve wages, terms and conditions. We also need to bring Irish Doctors and Nurses home from Australia and Canada. To do this Aontú will launch Operation Shamrock to attract key Irish workers who have moved abroad to come home.

The subject of the first round of Operation Shamrock will be Doctors, Nurses and Construction workers.

Aontú Parliamentary Questions have found out that over half of all undergraduate medical students in Irish universities are from outside the EU. They pay 130,000 for their fees.

This means that many of these people will be lost to the Irish health service in the future. We want to significantly increase the college places for Irish medical students.

The cost of employing an extra nurse/midwife in the Irish public health sector into the future is approximately €76,148 per annum. 3,500 new nurses and midwives would cost €259m

· Aontú seeks to change the funding of the health service to a patient engagement model. Where a patient receives an operation, a treatment, an engagement or a consultation, the state will pay the provider. We believe that this will increase the flow of government expenditure to the front line and reduce the layers of management staff within the health service.

·35,000 management and administrative staff work within the HSE. This means that 1 in 4 staff within the HSE works in management and administration. Aontú will aim to increase the number of frontline staff and reduce the number of admin and management staff. The latter will be achieved through natural retirement. It is estimated that 600 people retire from Management and Administration each year within the HSE. With a recruitment freeze for admin and management, the non replacement of 600 WTE in this sector would save the HSE €30m.

- · Aontú will reduce the use of agency staff in the HSE by 20% for each of the next 5 years. This will save €123m next year.
- · Aontú seeks to employ an additional 400 Consultants next year at a cost of €88m

Patient safety

Last year there were 107,000 adverse incidents in the health service. Over the last 5 years 3,140 people have lost their lives in hospitals due to adverse incidents. €2.5 billion has been paid out in compensation for adverse incidents in hospitals in 10 years. No one has been held to account.

The Aoife Johnston case is just one heartbreaking example. This is happening because of overcrowding, and no one has ever been held to account. The cost of the cyber-attack on the HSE is over €100m and another €657 million on security upgrades.

The human cost, in terms of hundreds of thousands of very ill people not getting the treatment that they need is colossal. We don't know how many people have died or suffered significant morbidity as a result.

Regarding Cervical Check, the government promised that no woman would have to go to court to achieve justice for the damage done by Cervical Check. The former Taoiseach even made an apology in front of the Dáil. Yet since then, 400 women have had to go to court to take cases. Incredibly 85% of Cervical Samples are still being sent abroad. No one held to account.

General Practice

GPs interact with every individual and every family. They should be at the heart of a responsive, proactive and cost-effective health system. Aontú believes GP's should be incentivized to offer a wider range of services, either directly or through an Integrated Group Practice. It is clear that with increased investment in facilities and staff, GP's can offer a much wider set of services, from minor surgical procedures to mental health, if facilities and space are provided.

This makes sense, both in terms of patient-friendly delivery of care and also relieving pressures on the health system. Pharmacists must also have a greater role in the delivery of healthcare to citizens.

There are not enough GPs in Ireland to meet patient numbers. The crisis is particularly acute in rural Ireland. It is creating a risk to life and health in many parts of the country. There are only 4,300 GPs in Ireland. We are currently 2,000 doctors shy of what is a safe number and 1,000 doctors will retire over the next 5 years.

Last year 442 Irish doctors left to work abroad; more than half of the 725 doctors that graduated the previous year.

Thousands of people cant get on to a doctors list and those who can are now waiting up to 2 weeks for an appointment. This is pushing people in greater numbers into A&E departments, further clogging hospitals.

· Aontú will press for 10% of the current health budget being assigned to the development and delivery of Primary Care in communities.

While there has been some increase in college places and some doctors have come from abroad, we are no where near fixing this problem. Between population growth, an older population, doctor retirements and young Irish doctors emigrating the issue is getting worse. When will this government see beyond the M50 and stem the fall in General Practitioners.

The dearth of GPs in rural Ireland has to have a material effect on health and life expectancy. The Government is so Dublin-based that they don't even recognise the problem.

Healthcare in rural communities

More than two out of three GPs in rural Ireland are not taking on new patients and some have waiting times of up to two weeks for an appointment, a study by the Irish Independent has shown.

Just 32pc of practices outside of the country's main cities are open to taking on new patients, compared with almost half of urban practices, reflecting a clear divide in access. While exceptions can be made, many practices said they were not in the position to take on new patients unless they fell within their catchment area or fit other criteria, with decisions made on a case-by-case basis by the GP.

The eastern region is the worst affected, with the vast majority of practices contacted revealing they are currently not accepting patients. Wicklow and Wexford practices appear the worst affected by full patient lists.

Information Communication Technology

The HSE has not embraced Information Communications Technology (ICT) to the necessary levels. The Health Service needs to have the ability to manage all aspects of the delivery of healthcare in a digital environment. One of the oldest truisms of management is; what can't be measured cannot be (effectively) managed, and this remains of relevance to Healthcare. This includes staffing and administration, the digitising and transferability of patient records electronically across different domains and developing the capability to align to rapidly evolving E-medicine.



Preface

The lack of planning, consistency, sustainability, and community consultation by the Government on its immigration policies has created chaos.

It was Aontú who first raised the massive problems in the government approach. We have been challenging the government ever since. Until opinion polls started to show that 70% of the Irish people were deeply uncomfortable with the government's policy, the government was oblivious to what was happening.

Aontú Parliamentary Questions have shown that it has been taking years for the first asylum decision to be made for thousands of applicants. It was taking up to **10 years** for an asylum applicant to exhaust all of the appeals before a final decision is made.

Another Aontú Parliamentary Question has shown that last year, there were **1,792** deportation orders made. Shockingly the government only enforced **98** of these. That's 5% of all deportation orders being enforced. There were **648** voluntary deportations, yet the government cannot confirm if these people left the country.

What is the point of having a system that is supposed to differentiate between people who need help and those who don't and then at the end of the process both groups have the same outcomes and stay in Ireland.

Thousands of people are arriving in Ireland who have destroyed their travel documents. This makes it much more difficult to process asylum applications. Aontú believe that a person who has purposefully destroyed their travel documents should not be given leave to land.

76% of people applying for asylum in Ireland don't do it at the airports or the ports but at the International Protection Office. The vast majority have come from Britain through the north of Ireland. Aontú asked the Minister for Justice, how many are coming through this route. The Minister told us she did not know. The Minister told us that applicants are not asked how they came into the country.

It's outrageous that the Minister for Justice is not even asking the relevant questions. Aontú seek an Irish sea border at the airports and ferry ports in the North of Ireland so that the Island is treated as a unit in terms of the asylum process. Aontú are advocating for the creation of a single Border Agency that will be responsible for the management of applications, enforcement of decisions, accommodation, community consultation and border security.

Aontú is a party of self-determination. We oppose the EU Migration Pact which will erode the ability of domestic governments to manage their immigration systems and adapt to any changes in migration.

Aontú seek a strict and speedy immigration system that differentiates between those who need help, those who are fleeing war and violence, and those who don't. There are good people living in Ireland who have come from other countries doing important and valuable work. Aontú believes in equality and respect for all those who are legally contributing to Irish society.

New Irish Border Agency

We will create a new Border Agency. It will take over responsibility for border control, processing of applications and enforcement. Currently only a few hundred people are involved in managing our border systems and they are operating across two different government departments and in four different guises – the Garda National Immigration Bureau, the International Protection Office, The Border Management Unit and the International Protection Procurement Service.

As an example, there are currently only 31 staff in the International Protection Procurement Service which is charged with finding accommodation for what will be 20,000 IPAS applicants by the end of 2024 – that is 1 member of staff for 709 individuals which is clearly not efficient or sustainable.

Aontú have looked extensively at other EU countries of similar size to determine a better way forward. Lithuania, a country of similar population and size, have an integrated border force of over 4,000 staff – our investment in a new Border Agency will be of the same magnitude.

2002

Re-instate Planning Laws

We will re-instate the application of planning laws for asylum accommodation. Currently, no planning is required for IPAS accommodation – we have former industrial complexes, hotels and other buildings being automatically converted to house migrants without any input from the local population.

If the building of homes, business premises or any other community facility must run the gauntlet of planning processes, then not only should this apply to asylum accommodation, but the public must also be able to have their say on those applications.

Aontú will end the exemption for asylum accommodation from planning law.

A Community Dividend

Where communities agree to host migrants, there must be a community dividend. The Government set aside millions of euros for this purpose, yet allocated only a small amount.

If a town or village agree to an increase in their population, the Government must provide immediate, sustainable investment in public services such as schools, healthcare and housing so that not only can local services cope with more demand, but that those who wish to create conflict with others on the basis of pressure on public services will have no fertile ground on which to spread disharmony.



Applications determined in 6 months

We will ensure that every application for asylum is processed within 6 months. This will be achieved through the new Border Agency which will be appropriately staffed. We have had asylum applicants wait up to ten years for their applications to be determined, and this must end.

Aontú will create a new court and properly resource it to decide on asylum applications. Where the new court refuse an appeal, the applicant must be subject to enforced deportation.

For several years and indeed recently, the system overseen by the Government has made no difference in the outcome of applications – those who were granted asylum were able to stay alongside those who had their applications refused because agencies were not forced to act on implementing rules that were already in place.



End the destruction of documents

The situation where some migrants destroy their travel documents to prevent the lawful processing of any asylum application or deportation is in flagrant breach of Irish and European law.

We are clear, where an applicant deliberately destroys or loses travel documents, they will be refused permission to land. There have been instances where people have come to this country, destroyed their travel documents and rather than being held as is mandated in Irish law, they are released from their port of entry and are able to make their way to claim asylum at the IPAS centre in Dublin. There are no checks as to where these people then go.

We know that the vast majority of those entering the country do so having first been in another European country. Their details are recorded by the EU Frontex system and so Irish authorities will know from where someone has come from should they destroy their travel documents.

That information is currently underutilised, and we want to ensure that anyone who comes to this country with intentions to frustrate our lawful processes as their very first act, will not be allowed to remain.

No entry for criminals

The Government are not checking well-established international databases for the criminal background of anyone entering the country – a major scandal uncovered by Aontú.

We will not permit the entry into the country of anyone with a criminal record. Living in Ireland is a privilege, one which will not be extended to those who have not respected the laws either in their home country or in another in which they have lived.



Enforcing deportations

Voluntary deportation is a myth perpetuated by this Government.

After a long asylum process where the State has spent large amounts of public resources, there is no difference to the outcome of an asylum application – if someone is refused the right to remain, they can simply ignore the outcome as the Gardaí will not seek to remove them. This must end.

Under the new Border Agency, appropriate numbers of staff will be dedicated to enforcing deportation orders and seeing those who have been ordered from the State physically leave.

8

Fairness in allocation of resources

This Government has created a situation whereby some people who have entered the country have been given priority in areas like accommodation, health or transport.

We will ensure that non-citizens will no longer be prioritised over Irish citizens for any public service. The idea that modular homes can be provided for some coming to the country whilst refused to Irish people and their families who are homeless is not reconcilable. The government's policy is creating deep anger and division.

There should be no circumstances whereby resources are prioritised for those entering the country for any reason, over those who have lived here their whole lives and have paid the taxes that sustain such services. Aontú will demand this be enshrined in law.

An Irish Sea Border

We will create an Irish Sea Border for people. The Government has failed in its most basic border protection duty – to know where people are entering the State from.

By establishing a border in the Irish Sea for the movement of people, we can manage the flow of people either through ports or through the land border with the north of Ireland.

Through Aontú's research, we forced the Minister to admit the vast majority of those entering the State were coming from the north of Ireland. It should also be noted that the benefits of the Common Travel Area are for British and Irish citizens only.

If we can implement a system for goods in line with international law, we believe this can be implemented in line with the Common Travel Area, the mechanics of which already allow for measures such as inspections and related migration action.

It has been argued that this measure would affect the Common Travel Area, however, there are already preventative, and intelligence led checks on the land border as well as a specific Irish-British operations called Operation Gull which aims to intercept and remove migrants who use this route to enter illegally. In Ireland, relevant activities are sometimes called Operation Sonnet.

In theory, the CTA allows British and Irish travellers to enter both jurisdictions without immigration control or a passport, however, it is increasingly common practice to require some form of government-issued ID or a passport to travel by air or sea between the two.

Indeed, the High Court has outlined in Pachero & Anor v MJE & Ors [2011] IEHC 491, 29 December 2011, para 18:

"While in theory both Irish and British citizens are entitled to arrive here free from immigration control by virtue of the common travel area, increasingly in practice such passengers who arrive by air from the United Kingdom are required to produce their passports (or, at least, some other form of acceptable identity document) in order to prove to immigration officers that they are either Irish or British citizens who can avail of the common travel area."



Oversight of State resources

Aontú has fought extensively to bring information about our migration system to the public. This is in stark contrast to the actions of the Government parties who have sought to limit the amount of information the public had access to in order to conceal their scandalous failures.

Going forward, Aontú will seek the relevant Minister to lay before the Dáil a report that will comprehensively outline the resources and finance being used in the system each year so that Irish taxpayers can hold their elected representatives to account.

Whilst this may seem an uncontroversial demand, up until now the Dáil has only voted on Departmental Accounts which cover spending that may be accrued, whereas there have been numerous instances of several tens of millions of euro being spent on the IPAS system in particular without the Oireachtas having been advised or support sought.

Common Sense Cost of Living Policy

Manifesto 2024





of the cost of a litre of petrol is tax



of parents said they
sometimes or always
worry about not being
able to provide their
children with daily
essentials*



€5.88

added to a 40kg bag of coal by Carbon Tax

€80

a week on groceries in 2021

€1,000

would cost this much more now per year

Our Cost-of-Living Priorities

- Aontú will reverse the last two Excise increases on petrol and diesel and pause all carbon tax increases until the cost of living crisis subsides.
- We will commit to ensuring no further toll increases over the next three years.
- Zero rate Electricity on VAT while electricity prices remain high. This will cost of €195,000,000 a year.

The Cost-Of-Living crisis has caused untold hardships to many ordinary people in the country. Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the blocking of the Suez Canal, prices appear to be going up for almost every product.

Toll Charges

Since 2020 a total of €1.5 Billion has been collected at toll bridges around the country, according to figures released to Aontú under the Freedom of Information Act. Last year alone, nearly €390 million euro was collected. Across the country tolls brought in €46 million more last year than the previous year. On the back of that increase in revenue there can be no logical argument for a further increase in charges, yet each year the charges are being increased. Ireland is becoming a commuter hell due to a lack of regional investment - large numbers of people in Meath, Louth, Kildare, and Wicklow and even further afield are forced to drive to Dublin for work each day. They're spending hours in traffic, paying an enormous price for petrol, tolls, parking, and the added costs of childcare due to the length of their commute. This is not tenable. Aontú in Government will:

- · Commit to ensuring no further toll increases over the next three years.
- · Begin the process of purchasing toll bridges to ensure that government controls charges, and that any excess money brought in (which is beyond what is required to maintain the roads) will be used for the upkeep and maintenance of primary and secondary roads across the country.
- Scrutinise the accounts of the private operators with whom the government are in partnership.

Cost of Fuel

According to data released to Aontú the government collected €3.8 Billion in tax on fuel last year, the highest amount collected in any year over the past decade. €107 million was derived from Carbon Tax on Natural Gas – which is the highest amount on record. €2.4 Billion of it came from Mineral Oil Tax, while €19 Million came from Solid Fuel Carbon Tax and €4.2 Million from electricity tax.

This is an astronomical amount of money collected from tax on fuel. The government, ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has been at pains to try and convince the public that they're doing everything they can to tackle and reduce the cost of fuel. The reality presented in these figures is that the government is actually cashing in on the rise in price and have taken in more tax than ever before.

Given that these figures show that the tax intake isn't taking a hit in relation to fuel, and is actually rising steadily, the government should halt the excise duty increases and work to reduce the tax rate given the enormous burden on families, farmers and commuters around the country. In government;

- · Aontú will reverse the last excise increases on petrol and diesel.
- · Aontú will stall the carbon tax rises, until such time as the price of fuel has consistently dropped and reverse the last rise.

Electricity prices

Irish consumers pay €500 more on average than any other citizens in Europe. This crippling additional cost has pushed households into limiting their electricity use. Despite a credit being applied by the 2025 Budget, families will not feel a relief as the Public Service Obligation Levy and the Carbon Tax will wipe out any benefit.

The Greens in Government have sought to hoodwink the public into thinking that they are actually benefitting from certain measures whilst actually cutting them back. As an example, only recently Electric Ireland cut the rate of payment to homeowners who use solar panels to sell power back to the grid.

Childcare

Aontú cannot overstate the seriousness of the crisis we are in. In 2019 there were 77 net closures of childcare providers. In 2020 there were 70 net closures. In 2021 there were net 62 services that closed. Last year there were well over 80 net closures of services.

The debate on childcare and early years learning today is incredibly bizarre. We are on the precipice of the collapse of the Smaller Childcare and ECCE sector and most of the TDs speaking on the issues from the government and the opposition side have failed to mention the elephant in the room.

Its not surprising in many ways as its often the case that the Dáil is a bubble. So much of the debate there ignores the realities of the lives of the people.

Not only are these closures disasters for the providers, as they have lost years of effort, personal investment and blood seat and tears. But it also means that many hundreds of staff have lost their jobs. Above all of this, it has deleted the availability of Early Years Education and childcare in many towns and villages throughout the country.

The most frustrating element of this is, that it is not by accident this has happened. The Minister has been told week after week that his actions are the cause of this damage.

We commend the workers and the providers that deliver to us a superb Early Years Education and Childcare Services in this country.

We want to commend the Early Years Education and all the providers and staff that went on strike last a number of times.

Despite the closure, the job losses. Minister Roderic O Gorman has stated that that the strike action was not necessary.

It's a bit rich for a Minister who is on a salary of €183,000 a year to tell providers and staff who are on less than the minimum wage that their strike is not necessary.

This wasn't the first time that these workers have had to go on strike indeed they have been campaigning for the last 4 years to ensure that their sector is viable and can pay decent wages. This has been a long and arduous campaign, one that should have never had happened.

The critical element to all of this is that the Minister is for sure cutting the cost of childcare but he is doing so by making hundreds of providers non-viable. The Minister's policy is closing down childcare provides. What is the logic of reducing the cost of childcare if parents can't get the childcare because it has been closed down.

Childcare providers are not alone. The same situation has happened with the Nursing Homes today. Nursing Homes are closing down because the government are refusing to provide the necessary funding.

The same is happening with children in state care. There is such as crisis in the provision of care in this sector that the sate is now using care companies that are not vetted and are not regulated. This is leaving children exposed to sexual exploitation.

The caring professions are simply not a priority of the state. We are placing the most precious people in our lives, our children and our parents into care. Yet the state will not do right to the people who care for these people.

The Minister for Children states that the sector is discommoding parents. The Minister's stubbornness is discommoding parents. 11,000 parents have signed a petition in support of the Childcare Sector and their battle with the Minister.

His actions are actively closing businesses especially In rural Ireland. Not only are these businesses being damaged, but whole swathes of Ireland will be without any childcare or ECCE service. The minister prides himself on being a minister of equality yet his actions are causing massive damage in a sector where women are the owners. I urge the Minister to meet with the sector with a real proposal that will allow these businesses to survive the economic crisis.

Common Sense

Enterprise Policy

Manifesto 2024



Our Enterprise Priorities

- Aontú will mandate the ESB, which is making extraordinarily high profits, to reduce their profit levels and lower the cost of electricity.
- Aontú will invest €3.5bn in water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Aontú will provide an addition €1.25bn in additional investment to strengthen our national grid and develop offshore grid infrastructure.
- Aontú will reduce VAT for hospitality to 9% special VAT rate which would cost up to €764m a year.
- Aontú will direct the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to further promote regional towns and cities in terms of new business projects. Aontú also seeks to build a new international class city on the west coast of Ireland.
- Aontú seeks to reduce excise on alcohol sold in pubs and restaurants in Ireland by 10c a unit. This will increase footfall for the hospitality sector.

Aontú supports Indigenous Business

Aontú is a pro enterprise party. Enterprise is the spark in the Irish economy that provides prosperity and much needed jobs. Aontú supports Foreign Direct Investment and will work to ensure that the conditions necessary for FDI to flourish exist in Ireland. We do believe that the Irish government are weak on indigenous enterprise.

Indigenous enterprise is the poor relation of the Irish government's enterprise policy. This over dependence of FDI has left our country exposed to international factors.

FDI is mobile. Indigenous enterprise is sticker. FDI can and will move more readily on the basis of international factors. The Irish government has become very dependent on FDI corporation taxes. This leaves Ireland overly exposed as FDI may move on the basis decisions on labour costs, corporation taxes and the incoming US government.

Better Integration of FDI and Indigenous Enterprise

Aontú is clear that the links between FDI aided companies and Irish enterprises could and must be significantly enhanced. We will advocate strongly for policies that strengthen these links, both operationally and strategically.

Challenges for Irish Businesses

Irish businesses of all sizes have had to content with a range of challenges over the last number of years - Covid, energy prices and spiralling costs. Aontú want to ensure that the environment for business to flourish and maintain employment levels is reduced of red tape, where incentives are targeted and where our skill base remains competitive.

Solutions

Most Irish businesses simply seek competitive inputs costs, well education staff, good transport and ICT infrastructure, a balanced regulatory system and fair government supports. In most of these areas the government has let down the people. Energy prices

Ireland has amongst the highest costs for electricity in Europe and research published by BusinessEurope in July found Ireland's energy prices over the coming years could be significantly higher than in other European countries.

- ·Aontú will mandate the ESB, which is making extraordinarily high profits, to reduce their profit levels and lower the cost of electricity.
- ·Aontú will decouple the price of electricity from the price gas.
- ·Aontú will increase competition the energy market.
- ·Aontú will reverse the last two Excise increases on petrol and diesel and pause all carbon tax increases until the cost of living crisis subsides.

· Aontú will provide a €500m fund over 5 years to help Irish enterprise become more energy efficient.

We are committed to the upgrade of the national grid and the continued interconnection projects, but we want to see a focus being brought to offshore and onshore renewable energy solutions and storage which can be utilised to lower domestic and business energy costs. This will require a review of regulation which we will deliver within the first year of Government. Aontú is also mindful of the need community consent in these projects.

Infrastructure

We know that water infrastructure and transport gridlock, particularly in greater Dublin, is causing delays in business plans for expansion. Infrastructure projects such as Metro North, the Navan to Dublin Rail Line, the Western Rail Corridor remain bogged down in regulation and process despite having cost millions of euro.

- · Aontú will set up a commission to investigate the reform of the whole infrastructure planning and building process to reduce the time, regulation and expense of building infrastructural projects in Ireland.
- · Aontú will invest €3.5bn in water and wastewater infrastructure.
- · Aontú will provide an addition €1.25bn in additional investment to strengthen our national grid and develop offshore grid infrastructure.
- · supported by an additional Exchequer contribution of €750 million

Housing infrastructure

Given the failure of government parties to adequately grapple the issue of home building over the last four years, employers such as Ryanair, Supermac and Ashford Castle have been forced to build accommodation for their staff.

We are determined through our housing policy to ensure that housing is available for workers across the country in a reformed system that can build properties as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- · Aontú will create the conditions through public and private construction to ensure that there will be 60,000 homes built each year from 2026.
- · The National Broadband Plan will receive €400 million to accelerate the roll-out of Ireland's high speed broadband network
- Operation Shamrock to Bring our young people Home.

Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) grant

Created as part of Budget 2024, the ICOB grant was funded to the tune of €257m and was based on 2023 commercial rates bills. This scheme did not take into account crucial energy costs, and we are proposing that the fund be increased to €450m with a portion of any grant based on the annual cost of electricity in the previous twelve months.

Microfinance Ireland

We recognise the work of MFI and its support for small and growing businesses across the country. Aontú wishes to see the expansion of all loan schemes with a reduction in the interest rate to 3% across the board.

Dublin Airport

Aontú will increase the passenger cap on Dublin Airport in line with increased use at Cork, Knock and Shannon airports. Crucially will also invest in Shannon, Cork and Knock airports to improve connectivity from these airports. We will also work alongside freight carriers to expand tonnage from 80m to 100m tonnes annually.

Hospitality and VAT

Aontú was a key supporter of reducing VAT for hospitality to 9% special VAT rate which would cost up to €764m a year. We were the first party to proposed separating out restaurants and pubs from large hotels for the purpose of this reduction. It is imperative that smaller business are able to access assistance at a time when costs are rising alongside staffing costs.

Aontú seeks to reduce excise on alcohol sold in pubs and restaurants in Ireland by 10c a unit. This will increase footfall for the hospitality sector. The famed Irish pub is becoming an endangered species. Alcohol consumed on site is healthier than alcohol consumed at home as there is more human interaction and more supervision of quantities.

Skills

We are committed to investing in educating and training to ensure that the Irish workforce remains competitive. We will work with education partners to ensure third and fourth level providers are future proofing courses, and with apprenticeship and lifelong learning through local providers to ensure courses are accessible, affordable and in particular, adaptable for those who need assistance.

Business Rates

A priority for Aontú is a systematic review of commercial rates across the state in a costneutral reallocation exercise. We believe businesses should pay rates for the services provided by the state, but that rates should be reflective of the size, scale and profitability of a business. This is not the case at present and it is a major burden on domestic enterprises.

Aontú will seek to develop a digital and environmental tax that will provide a level playing field between many physical small businesses and large international giants such as Amazon. Out high streets are empty out of small businesses as these oligopolies swallow up more retail.

Spatially Balanced Enterprise Development

Ireland is moving towards becoming a 'City State', with Dublin increasingly semi-detached from its national hinterland, not unlike London. Aontú believes this phenomenon has not been properly recognized let alone addressed. A continuation of existing trends would undermine and subvert our cohesion as a country.

It is intrinsically regressive. We will press for more balanced national development, one which relieves pressure on our major cities and which benefits the whole country. There are now three Ireland's; Dublin, a sprawling commuter belt and regions under significant pressure. Aontú opposes this fundamentally. Aontú will direct the IDA and Enterprise Ireland to further promote regional towns and cities in terms of new business projects.

Aontú also seeks to build a new international class city on the west coast of Ireland.



Our Common Sense

Accountability Policy

Manifesto 2024





€1,700,000,000

overspend on the National Children's Hospital



€2,000,000,000

overspend on funding to NGO's





Dáil bike shed

Security hut



Dáil printer



Pre-fab homes



Carrick-on-Shannon bus stop



Children missing from Tusla care



€1,600,000

RTÉ Barter account



€10,300,000

Apple tax legal fees

More accountability Less waste

Aontú is proposing that a **Junior Minister** be appointed within the Department of the Taoiseach with direct responsibility for ensuring efficiency and eradicating waste throughout the public sector. They will report to the Taoiseach weekly. We are repeatedly told that decisions taken within agencies such as the OPW are not signed off by or overseen by Ministers. This new role will put an end to Ministers dodging responsibility.

We will change **job specifications** of all senior civil servants so they have a responsibility to mind the public purse and ensure value for money for taxpayers. Where they fail, there must be disciplinary measures up to and including losing their job. If there is no cost for waste, there will be no change.

We will also **end the outsourcing of OPW contracts** to third parties. The Office of Public Procurement should be equipped to ensure that these contracts are managed internally and are therefore scrutinised.

We will **empower the Comptroller and Auditor General** to intervene at any point in a contractual process to determine if rules have been followed and if the public is getting value for money throughout. This will need additional staff and resources for the CAG, which we will provide.

Currently, public contracts have a low level of specificity which can and have been taken advantage of. Tender documents need to be **far more complete** and specific to reduce the issue of continuous changes, additions and the ability of contractors to leverage more money from the state. We will ensure that the Office of Public Procurement has a **statutory responsibility** to ensure this.

A legacy of waste

The government has spent €300m on Metro North and not one shovel has been put in the ground. No one held to account.

The government spent €22 million on ventilators that didn't work and has spent €50,000 storing them in a shed. No one held to account.

Over 100 electric buses were bought that didn't move an inch for over 18 months because someone forgot to apply for planning permission for their charging points. **No one held to account.**

Flood defences in Midleton, promised in 2017 and the planning permission has still not even been submitted. **No one held to account.**

€20 million on pointless referendums where government Ministers blatantly mislead the public. No one held to account.

When the Taoiseach was Minister for Health, his Department measured a building incorrectly and spent €10 million on space that did not exist. No one held to account.

The M50 bridges built for £58m and Commuters are still paying billions of euro to use these bridges. No one held to account.

The Department of Foreign Affairs spent more than €825,000 on an OPW-led project to refurbish toilets and changing facilities at their headquarters. No one held to account.

The Office of Public Works (OPW) spent almost €70,000 on three sets of curtains at Dublin Castle. No one held to account.

The Dublin Criminal Court Complex cost €132m to build through PPP. It will cost you €603m. No one held to account.

The M50 upgrade cost €219m to build. It will cost you €1.015bn through PPP. No one held to account.

The M17/18 Gort to Tuam cost €271m to build. It will cost you €979m through PPP. No one held to account.

The MTU Music School in Cork cost €49m to build. It will cost you €222m through PPP. No one held to account.

The N25 New Ross Bypass cost €151m to build. It will cost you €346m through PPP. No one held to account.

The National Conference Centre cost €190m to build. It will cost you €763m through PPP. No one held to account.

Only Aontú is exposing and holding the Government parties to account.

Aontú has been to the fore in highlighting examples of government waste of tax-payer money, utilising our seat on the Oireachtas Finance Committee to seek accountability for disastrous spending. All told, among the huge scandals we have noted, this Government has wasted €billions of your money.

Whether it be through grilling Robert Watt, the Secretary General of the Department of Health, on why he feels he deserves a salary of €326,000 (to be reached in two years' time), which is roughly the same as the US president, close to double the salary of the British Prime Minister, or holding the government to account over the extortionate cost of the Leinster House bicycle shelter, Aontú has been doing most of the heavy lifting on these scandals.

We also recognise however, that not every scandal has just a financial cost, but may have costs to those we seek to serve, their children and their families. That cannot be overlooked and cannot be dodged.

Office of Public Works

The OPW have come under scrutiny recently for paying huge amounts on resources for politicians such as the bike shelter and security hut in Leinster house which came in at €336,000 and €1.4 million respectively. The most recent information on the Distillery Building in Smithfield, which the OPW is renting at a cost of €12 million, even though it has been left vacant, is damning.

In the aftermath of the scandal the government were at pains to stress that the decision regarding spending was not theirs to make and was made by civil servants. This is not how the country should be run – democratically elected governments should have reasonable oversight and control over public spending.

That is what politicians are elected to do. Aontú will overhaul the current system to ensure that Ministers must sign off on future OPW projects or contracts which cost more than €1 million.