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Social Justice Matters

2018 guide to a fairer Irish society



From Here to Where?

Negotiating a Better and Fairer Future

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A silhouette illustration of a diverse group of people of various ages and ethnicities, standing together. The text 'Social Justice Ireland' is overlaid on the bottom center of the group.

Social Justice Ireland

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INTRODUCTION

More than a decade after the economic crash that caused great damage to many people in Ireland, we are emerging into a period of tenuous prosperity overshadowed by global instability. During that tumultuous decade a new generation found their political voice and have signaled a redirection for Irish political discourse. As Ireland sees exceptional economic growth accompanied by many challenges on infrastructure, services and sustainability, we must decide where we want to go. It is time to point Ireland in a clear direction; but taking us from here to where?

That direction couldn't be more important given our current circumstances. Ireland is at a crossroads. Will we be a tempering force on the global stage marching forward on progressive issues such as equality, climate justice, sustainability and good governance? Or will populism find a foothold here too, trading hard progressive policies for easy regressive politics in an era of heightened rhetoric?

On inequality, can we negotiate an end to the unacceptable levels of poverty in Ireland? 780,000 people in Ireland currently live in poverty, 250,000 of those are children and 100,000 have a job and are classed as 'working poor'. All the while private corporations amass record profits by using Ireland as a tax reducing location. Rectifying these inequalities requires new approaches to policies on corporate tax, social housing, employment, income, social protection, infrastructure and healthcare.

On climate and sustainability, can we accept that no amount of accounting trickery will lessen the damage we are doing to our environment? Without definitive action, our climate targets will be missed and the consequences of that will manifest in very real economic and ecological terms. Can we negotiate multi-technology sustainable approaches to decarbonising transport, decarbonising our heat and energy sectors and decarbonising agriculture, while punishing climate offenders. Ireland is primed to be a world leader in renewable energy. Let's not negotiate ourselves to the back of the pack.

On governance, as policy has become more centralised at national level in the name of efficiency, can we negotiate new avenues of participation to

be opened up so as to strengthen our democracy? Can we really respect the principle of subsidiarity and strengthen local government while moving to a deliberative form of democracy in which all sectors of society have a real voice?

At this pivotal time for Irish society, let us take a view on what the recession has taught us, let us distribute the prosperity we have earned fairly and sustainably and let us bolster the confidence of a new generation so as to secure the supply of new progressive ideas and ambitions. Let us begin charting a new course. But, from here to where? That is the question addressed by the various contributors to this book. These papers were originally presented at a conference organised by *Social Justice Ireland* on the theme: From Here to Where?

Social Justice Ireland expresses its deep gratitude to the authors of the various chapters that follow. We wish to thank them as they have made this publication possible. They brought a great deal of experience, research, knowledge and wisdom to their task and contributed their time and obvious talent to preparing these chapters.

This work is partly supported by the SSNO funding scheme of the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal. A special ‘thank you’ to them.

Social Justice Ireland advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for societies as a whole. We work to build a just society through developing and delivering credible analysis and policy to improve society and the lives of people. We identify sustainable options for the future and provide viable pathways forward. In all of this we focus on human rights and the common good. This publication is a contribution to this process.

In presenting this volume we do not attempt to cover all the questions that arise around this topic. This volume is offered as a contribution to the ongoing public debate around these and related issues. We trust that those engaged in shaping Ireland’s future for the next decade and beyond will find it of value.

Brigid Reynolds
Seán Healy
November 13th, 2018

From Here to Where?

Negotiating a Better and
Fairer Future



1. Learning from the past to shape the future

Paddy Cosgrave

The text of this paper may be accessed on the
Social Justice Ireland website at:
<https://www.socialjustice.ie/>

2. What the next Programme for Government can learn from newsrooms

Christine Bohan

For a long time, Ireland has followed the model that growth is automatically good. If the economy is growing then it can be said that all is well. This approach is replicated across other governments but also across other institutions: in 2007, when Facebook was plateauing at a mere 70 million users, it set up a dedicated Growth Team aimed at increasing the number of users. Today, it has more than 2 billion, more than any country in the world, and more akin to the size of a religion than anything else.

But with size comes problems. In the same way that many other institutions have seen a crisis in trust, so too has Facebook. Just one third of Irish people (33%) say that they trust social media platforms and search engines, according to this year's Edelman Trust Barometer, while 35% say that they trust the government.

This is the central problem with using growth as your key metric. It erodes trust. Focusing on quantitative measures is good for business, but by ignoring qualitative metrics, you gloss over people's lived experiences, whether that is their use of a social network or living in a society. Numbers are subjective: you choose the metrics you want to pay attention to. As a country, we've decided to put a focus on GDP, but why that? And at the expense of what?

In Ireland, the problem with relying on growth as a metric was highlighted by the Keep the Recovery Going slogan during the 2016 general election, which showed the gulf between how the government saw the country and how the people living in it saw it. Fine Gael pointed to the metrics which showed that the country was getting back on track after the recession; the electorate pointed to their quality of life.

In my own experience at The Journal, we learned a long time ago that we can't just look at the number of people who come to the site every day as a metric for whether we're succeeding or not. The site is the biggest news website in the country, with more readers every day than any of our competitors, but we also have to look at the more meaningful measures to ensure that we're still going to be successful in five, ten, twenty years: do our readers trust us as a news source? Would they recommend us to a friend? Are we doing our job and serving them strong, original articles? And if the answers aren't what we want them to be, what are we going to do about it?

So more than anything, I would suggest that this is a time when institutions - countries, social media publishers, newsrooms - should not just be focusing on growth as a metric, but instead of more qualitative metrics. For Ireland, this would be questions like is this a fair country? Is this an equal country? Are people getting the opportunities that they need to build a life? Are they happy?

I have used what I have learned about metrics from working in newsrooms over the past decade and applied it to the way that Ireland currently looks at its own metrics, particularly its economic growth. I write this as a journalist and an editor, as a woman in her 30s, and as someone who thinks Ireland is generally a good country in which to live - but which could do with some tweaking around the edges. For that reason, in looking at what I think the next Programme for Government should include, I've started by taking a step back and looking at what exactly it's trying to achieve and working from there. As Joseph Stiglitz wrote in 2009, "If we have the wrong metrics, we will strive for the wrong things."

Wait, qualitative metrics? Don't online journalists just care about clicks?

For a long time, there was a perception that online journalism was all about how many readers would click into an article to read it. It was a perception and for a lot of news websites, it was also the reality. Page views and unique views - i.e. the number of readers - were an established way of looking at success in part because of the advertising industry. Commercial partners generally are happy with these straightforward, replicable metrics. In some ways, it was a replication of the business model of newspapers: count how

many people are buying your paper and seeing the ads in order to determine whether it was a success or not.

Some websites began rebelling against this confining approach in the last five years or so, arguing that they didn't take into account the experience that readers were having when they read the news from a modern newsroom. Some readers may subscribe and read newsletters from a news website, for example, or listen to a podcast by its journalists, or follow its stories on Instagram or YouTube. In other words, as media has become more distributed, it began requiring an equally distributed solution for measuring its influence.

The other problem though was that just counting the number of readers was a purely quantitative measure and it ignored any kind of qualitative metric. In this era where distrust of the media has become far more prevalent with the spread of misinformation, understanding the experience that readers value when reading their news online has become much more important.

The shift towards qualitative metrics means that newsrooms will still look at how many people read the website every day and week and month, but increasingly they'll also look at how long readers are spending reading articles, whether they're sharing them on Facebook or WhatsApp or Twitter, and how much of each article they actually read (rather than just skim). It's a move away from the idea that online audiences only want short, snappy, fast food when it comes to getting their news online and towards a more engaged approach.

No news website wants someone clicking into a story once, whether they come from social media, a search engine or somewhere else, and never returning. That's not sustainable as a business model. Instead, you want to engage your audience: you want someone who clicks in to your news website for the first time and is given a reason to stay, to return, and to engage with the site through some other action, such as liking it on social media or downloading the app.

The problem with these qualitative measures is that, much as with some of the alternatives to GDP, it can make it difficult to compare news organisations. For example, the Irish Times does a number of excellent podcasts, while The Journal has just started dipping its toe into the world

of podcasts. The Journal does a number of email newsletters, which other media outlets don't. So how do you compare these newsrooms when the output is so different?

The answer for us, at least, has been to continue to use replicable metrics that will allow us to compare us to competitors, mainly for commercial reasons, but to also come up with metrics that are important to us and to make sure that we're achieving them. For example, our team was widely praised on social media for its information-led coverage of the Eighth Amendment. Our news editor wrote a brilliant piece about Tom Humphreys on the day he was sentenced which was shared widely and was at the centre of the discussion around his sentence. We sent an email newsletter to subscribers for every one of the 99 days that the Disclosures Tribunal sat, and received a large number of emails from readers about how invaluable they found them to be. Some of these things are more measurable than others, but we keep track of them and they're important to what we consider to be our growth as a news website. They show where our priorities are. Metrics should reflect what a company cares about, and so each media company should be looking at the data points that are relevant to its workings.

And that brings us to the problem with GDP. In the same way that relying solely on views has been a problem for websites because it doesn't reflect the nuances of whether they're succeeding or not, solely relying on GDP is a similar problem for countries.

The problems with using economic growth as the most important metric

At a recent Press Council event to discuss how the media covers minority communities, Mike Allen of Focus Ireland was (rightly) critical of journalists and sub-editors for using photographs of rough sleepers to illustrate stories about homelessness in Ireland. Rough sleepers, he pointed out, make up just over 100 out of the 10,000 homeless people in Ireland. By using images of rough sleepers, readers will conceptualise homelessness in that way, and as a result, see the solution as being about that too. So the answer to homelessness becomes about providing emergency shelter for these rough sleepers instead of building and providing homes for the people forced to live in emergency accommodation and homeless hubs, Allen said. One

might also add that it leads to a greater ‘othering’ of homeless people if this is the only image used.

It is the same myopic issue with GDP: by focusing on this one metric, a government will automatically work towards solutions that increase economic growth and eschew others which don’t.

GDP was pioneered in the 1930s by economist Simon Kuznets, who cautioned against it being used as a measure of welfare in a country - it merely provides a measure of the final goods and services produced in an economy over a given period, without any attention to what is produced, how it’s produced or who is producing it. If Ireland was a major weapons manufacturer, for example, this would lead to an increase in GDP, but would also have a questionable effect on social good. However, GDP’s replicability and measurability has led to it being used widely for precisely the purpose of measuring welfare in a society.

That is the main advantage offered by using GDP. It offers a clean way to compare one country to another to give an idea of the strength of each country’s economy. It has been compared to a speedometer: it can tell you whether your economy is going faster or slower, but nothing about whether your car is overheating, about to run out of fuel, or going in the right direction. Because it only measures production, like farmers’ harvests, retail sales and manufacturers’ shipments, it doesn’t capture increasing obesity rates, collapsing fish stocks, or increases in mortality. When people choose to work part-time in order to have a better work-life balance, GDP actually goes down.

The figure can be notoriously skewed. The most obvious example of this came in July 2016 when the Irish economy grew by 26.3% in one year, more than three times the expected rate, after a number of large multinationals switched their base to Ireland. Economist Paul Krugman described it as ‘leprechaun economics’ while the Irish Times pragmatically noted that these changes “were widely recognised as not reflecting changes to the real economy”.

It has other flaws. It doesn’t take into account the environmental costs of some activities and like so many things, it overlooks the value of the work done by people - mainly women - who work in the home. If you hire

a cleaner to work in your house once a week and a window cleaner to come once a month, you will pay them and these payments will factor into GDP. If you do your own cleaning, these activities will not contribute to GDP. Additionally, it doesn't include the way that digital activities have changed the economy.

Economist Diane Coyle has noted that statistics such as GDP “guide policy and allow citizens to hold politicians to account”. Reliable, independent statistics “are a public good in democratic, information-based economies,” she wrote. “The pace of change in the OECD countries is making the existing statistical framework decreasingly appropriate for measuring the economy and it is therefore hindering the development of policies for high productivity and growth. Different statistics will not change the current reality... but they will help shape the future.”

This is not to lay the blame on economists. They merely come up with the figure. Economist Michael Porter, who has come up with an alternative to using GDP as a metric, has said that GDP is not bad - it just measures what it measures, and like page views, what it measures is limited. It is politicians who decide the importance that is put on it, and the policies that are put in place as a result of it.

However it is worth looking at the questions that GDP overlooks, as proposed by economist Jennifer Blanke, which highlights the gaps which could be provided for by focusing on other metrics.

Firstly, is economic growth fair? It is not just how much is produced that matters, but how these gains are distributed. Does this growth translate into improvements in living standards across the society for the many, not the few? Secondly, is economic growth green? Again, it is not just about how much we produce and grow, but how we do it, and the pressure that this puts on our natural environment.

And thirdly, is the economic growth improving our lives? As mentioned above, consumers increasingly make use of businesses such as Airbnb, Spotify and in some countries, Uber, where they can make more use of what already exists rather than simply producing more “stuff”. These business models add economic and consumer value, rather than quantity.

The CSO has begun phasing in a new metric called the gross national income (GNI) measure, which excludes companies moving capital assets to Ireland. But it is also worth looking at the other alternatives which could fill the gaps left by GDP and GNI that the next government should be considering when it comes to helping shape its direction over the coming years.

Ok, so what are the alternatives?

Earlier this year, Chris Moran, the former Audience Editor at The Guardian, came up with five characteristics for what makes a good metric. Moran was talking about metrics for a newsroom, but they can be equally applied to ones used by a country too. The five were:

- Relevant - does it align with core goals?
- Measurable - is it objective? Can it be defined?
- Actionable - can you do something positive and impactful with the data?
- Reliable - is the metric technically robust? Will it be relevant in a year?
- Readable - can it be easily misunderstood? Does it require a lot of context?

By this measure, GDP ticks at least three out of the five boxes. Whether or not is it actionable and relevant depends on the ideology of the government at any given time. Similarly, the New Economics Foundation in the UK has argued that indicators on how a country is doing need to matter to people, be clear and easy to communicate, and be far reaching.

There are a number of metrics other than GDP which could tick most, if not all, of these boxes and fill the gaps left by GDP. Here are three of them.

In 2014, Harvard economist Michael Porter unveiled what he called the Social Progress Index, which is intended to act as a complement to GDP - it measures everything *except* economic growth. The SPI looks at 51 social and environmental indicators that measure outcomes, such as life expectancy, literacy, and freedom of choice, rather than inputs, such as the size of government spending. Porter has said that it aims to capture the breadth of issues that constitute well-being and identify priority areas for improvement.

In its 2018 report, Ireland is ranked 12 out of 146 countries. Norway comes first, followed by Iceland and Switzerland, with Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Japan and New Zealand also in the top ten. Afghanistan, Chad and the Central African Republic are the three lowest-ranking countries on the index. Ireland scores highest on opportunity indicators, such as access to advanced education, inclusiveness and personal rights, ranking first of the 146 countries. It scores less well on health, environmental and infrastructural issues, such as wastewater treatment and access to quality healthcare. That the healthcare system is problematic will not come as a surprise to the public or politicians in Ireland, but using an index like the SPI would allow the government to benchmark achievement - or lack of - in solving the healthcare system.

On a different scale, the New Economics Foundation in Britain has proposed looking at just five key indicators as a better indicator than GDP: good jobs, well-being, the environment, fairness and health. These factors, they argue, will tell if an economy is going in the right direction. On the issue of good jobs, for example, the indicator says that everyone should be able to find secure, stable employment that pays at least enough to provide a decent standard of living. It found that 61% of the UK labour force had a secure job that paid at least the living wage. The figures were designed for the United Kingdom and there is no index showing how other countries would compare. However the indicators are, in principle, just as meaningful for other countries.

In the middle of the economic crisis, then-French president Nicolas Sarkozy asked economists Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean Paul Fitoussi to identify the limits of GDP and come up with a better measure than GDP to assess an economy's performance. In their report published in 2009, they recommended that income and consumption should be looked at, rather than production, to evaluate material well-being in a country, with an emphasis on the household perspective rather than the national one. The report also calls for more prominence to be given to the distribution of income, consumption and wealth.

There is one thing that these three suggestions, and others like them, have in common. They have not - yet? - captured the public imagination and become used as everyday indicators. It is hard to usurp a metric that has been around for almost 100 years. And yet, Ireland has been at the forefront

of a number of social changes in recent years. There is no reason why it can not also lead when it come to implementing a change in how it measures success.

The only qualitative index that has succeeded in entering the lexicon has been the Human Development Index, the 28-year-old metric which rolls together a country's GDP, the health of its citizens, based on their life expectancy, and the health of the citizens, based on literacy and school-enrolment data. Ireland currently ranks 4th, behind Norway, Switzerland and Australia. If this is to be used as the sole alternative to GDP, the Government might happily say all is well. This highlights the potential importance of the other measures identified in the Social Progress Index in helping guide Government decisions.

What kind of government policies could we expect to see if the metrics were changed?

So theoretically, if the government were to change its focus away from economic growth and prioritises more qualitative measures, such as the ones mentioned above, what kind of policies could we expect to see stemming from that which don't currently exist? Let's speculate here.

Firstly, Ireland might consider a trial of basic income. Giving the commencement speech at Harvard in May 2017, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg spoke out in support of basic income. "Every generation expands its definition of equality," Zuckerberg said. "Now it's time for our generation to define a new social contract. We should have a society that measures progress not by economic metrics like GDP but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to make sure everyone has a cushion to try new ideas."

With his speech, Zuckerberg became the most high-profile of the band of tech entrepreneurs who have spoken out in favour of basic income. Unlikely allies of a massive social policy shift, perhaps, but they are keenly aware that job insecurity is inescapable as many jobs become automated.

It is one perspective on a policy that has appeal across the political spectrum: for those on the left, it is a way to alleviate poverty and provide a support system for people in low-paid employment. For those on the right,

including even Charles Murray, it is seen as a way to slash bureaucracy and replace it with a leaner welfare state. For those in between, it is a way of reshaping the relationship that people have with the State. The idea has been picking up traction in recent years; a 2016 EU-wide poll by Dalia Research found that 64% of people were in favour of basic income.

Basic income is repeatedly described as an idea whose time has come, but it is teetering on the brink of a breakthrough. Basic Income Ireland says that a basic income in which people would receive, for example, a payment of €198 per week, in line with existing payments, would “reach people who drop through the net of the current social welfare system, it drastically reduces bureaucracy, it frees claimants from intrusive scrutiny, it supports care work and creative work, it gives young people more security, it provides a financial incentive to take up any paid work that is on offer, and it provides a platform for entrepreneurship”. This has major benefits for people who are self-employed, on short-term contracts, or in precarious employment, in particular.

Given all this, the question would be why a trial hasn't been run already in Ireland, especially given that it has been discussed here since the 1970s and got as far as a government green paper in 2002. One answer can be seen in a fairly damning OECD report earlier this year into a basic income trial in Finland suggested that introducing basic income would require an income tax hike of almost 30%, would increase income inequality, and would raise the poverty rate of Finland from 11.4% to 14.1%. The OECD instead suggested a universal credit system, which would replace some benefit payments with a single monthly payment.

The report highlighted the two great unknowns: How much would it actually cost, compared to the existing social welfare system, and what would the outcomes be? Here, Ireland could look to what other trials have learned.

Secondly, Ireland might look at increasing its carbon tax. Two big things happened on 8th October 2018. A landmark report published by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change found that the immediate consequences of climate change are worse than previously thought, and that the world has just 12 years to act in order to limit the most devastating consequences. On the same day, American economist William Nordhaus

was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in part for coming up with the idea of carbon tax.

The very next day, the Irish government did not include an increase in carbon tax in its announcement of Budget 2019, despite having flagged in advance that it *would* be included. “We will have to grasp the nettle in increasing the carbon tax,” Taoiseach Leo Varadkar had told journalists at a pre-Budget briefing in August.

When asked why it had not been included in the Budget, Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe said that he had put a lot of thought into the implementation of a successful carbon tax, and come to the conclusion that given the “significant” impact it would have on living standards - if, as expected, it had increase from somewhere between €20 and €100 per tonne - that he would not address it in this year’s Budget.

Green Party leader Eamon Ryan described the lack of carbon tax increase as ‘shameful’. “Their argument that more research had to be done on what a carbon tax increase would deliver was just ridiculous,” he wrote in a column on *The Journal* on the day the Budget was published. “That move has been studied more than any of the other measures introduced today.”

He pointed to political expediency as an explanation: “The truth is it was scrapped because both Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance want to gain seats in rural Ireland at the next election. They calculated that binning the tax increase would make them look good to that constituency.”

Ireland first introduced a charge on the burning of carbon-based solid fuels like turf, coal and other fossil fuels which emit carbon dioxide on 1 May 2013. It is currently charged at €20 per tonne of CO₂ emitted and is applied at the point of sale. One estimate suggests that the average household spends €58 per year on carbon tax.

Ireland is already falling far short of achieving its climate change targets for 2020, 2030 and 2050. In a scathing annual report, the Climate Change Advisory Council said that Ireland is in an “even worse position” compared to the previous year as greenhouse gas emissions increase again. Chair John Fitzgerald recently warned TDs and Senators that Ireland risked “going

backwards” in its efforts, and that Ireland’s carbon tax levels are too low and need to be increase.

Scientists and economists have said that a carbon tax is the most powerful and effective way to stem greenhouse gas emissions. William Nordhaus, who won the Nobel Economic Prize on the day that the IPCC report was published, has described it as the social cost of carbon: an economic model which looks at the amount of damage caused by emissions and extracts a price from it. If one tonne of carbon causes, for example, €50 of damage, which is quantified in rising sea levels which could damage a home, raise insurance costs and decrease property value, then that cost should be baked in to the cost of the carbon. By making polluters pay the same amount that they’re damaging the environment to pollute, the market is given a clear signal about the effect of using carbon.

A carbon tax creates a market incentive to solve climate change, which any economist will tell you is more powerful than expecting corporations and consumers to act out of a sense of altruism or moral/social responsibility. It does not contribute to economic growth - on the contrary, it is more likely to penalise producers - but it creates a qualitatively better country in which to live.

Thirdly, successive governments have failed to make meaningful reform in the area of childcare. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions summed up the problems with childcare thus: “It now appears that the net result of official policy to date has been to deliver working families the worst of both worlds: some of the most expensive childcare in the European Union, staffed by workers who are among the worst paid. By any definition, that represents policy failure on a major scale.”

Childcare is expensive in Ireland. The country has some of the highest-costing childcare across the OECD: couples with a 3-year-old child spend an average of 12% of their disposable income on childcare, while lone parents spend 16% and people on low incomes spend 20%, according to a recent report by Pobal published in September 2018 using data from the ESRI’s Growing Up In Ireland research.

The study found that the high cost of childcare is shutting women out of the workforce. The current employment rate for mothers who have a child

aged three to five is 54.5%, according to the OECD, which found that the average rate is 68.8%. Anecdotally, I've found in visiting other workplaces and going to conferences and events that women in their 30s and 40s are just not present at the levels that you would expect.

Katherine Zappone has noted that investment in childcare has increased by 80% since 2016 but that it will take a number of Budgets to correct “decades of under-investment”. This may become a priority for this government and future governments, but focusing on quality of life metrics would ensure that it would rank more highly than it currently does.

While the problems with the health and housing sectors would obviously be major goals under these qualitative metrics, not every idea involves a massive change to the system. By having quality of life indicators at the core of its goals, a government could also look at smaller changes which could either have a long-term impact or which would increase the level of trust that people feel towards the State. For example, policies like making sanitary products available in State-owned buildings, expanding restorative justice programmes across the country, teaching financial literacy at school, investing in cycling infrastructure and reforming the defamation laws would all go some way towards achieving this.

Simply by changing the goalposts and saying that economic growth is no longer the focus, the government opens up a broad range of options.

Conclusion

It has become a feature in some newsrooms nowadays to display a screen showing important traffic statistics: how many users are reading an article at any given time, for example, or what the most-read articles on the site are. Whether it is explicit or not, the figures are a motivating force. Journalists are given the message that success will be recognised by having their work appear on the screen and this may motivate the stories that they choose to write and how they write them.

In much the same way, the Irish government focuses on economic growth. The Central Bank issues quarterly figures on it. The Minister for Finance frequently refers to it. He called it the “baseline scenario” that underpins the Budget for next year. In a report in September of this year, he warned that

the biggest potential problem of shifting demographics in coming decades as the population ages was that it “could lead to a slower pace of economic growth”. At an ESRI conference in July, he noted that the challenge Ireland now faces is how to use budgetary policy to deal with Ireland’s changing economic growth rates.

If that is a choice that the government has actively made then so be it. But if it is done merely because it is the way that things have always been done, then it is ripe for change. In the same way that newsrooms are striving to build trust and engage their readers, the next Programme for Government could do worse than examining what metrics it wants to focus on and then working on its priorities based on that.

3. Worse off than their parents? The rising generation of private renters

Tony Fahey

1. Introduction

A boom in private rented housing and a corresponding decline in home ownership are remarkable developments currently underway in Ireland. Speaking at a press conference two years ago, Simon Coveney, T.D., the then government minister responsible for housing, noted that the private rented sector had doubled in size in the previous twenty years and that he expected it to double again in the next twenty years. The occasion for the press conference was the launch of the government's new *Strategy for the Rental Sector*,¹ a strategy I will talk about again later. In his remarks, the minister was referring to an increase in the share of households living in private rented accommodation from under 10% in the early 1990s to nearly 20% today and the likely though not yet inevitable prospect of a further increase in that share to perhaps 40% in twenty years from now.

In my talk today, I want to draw attention to this development for two reasons. One is that it is likely to be bad for many people, particularly the generation of younger adults among whom the growth in private renting is concentrated. If this growth continues in its current form, it is likely to cause many young adults to be worse off than their parents as far as housing is concerned. Most of the growing population of young private renters today grew up in homes that were owned by their parents and had two essential features of secure long-term housing: it was affordable and families could stay in it as long as they liked. If private renting continues to expand at it is now doing, many children from those homes (possibly a majority) are facing a future where, as they establish their own households, they will live for a long time, perhaps a life-time, in private rented housing that has neither of these features. It is expensive and rapidly becoming

¹ 13 December 2016. A video of the press conference is available at <https://youtu.be/P4p9BR-qmKE>.

more so. It already costs private renters much more of their incomes than their parents had to pay for housing or than householders in other tenures pay today. And it is insecure: under current legislation, private renters have a right to stay in their homes for six years but there are exemptions which weaken that right and leave them open to being forced to move even before six years pass. They thus face a constant threat of being asked to leave by the landlord over and above the risk they face of being pressured out by rent increases.

The second reason for drawing attention to the growth of private renting is that it raises questions about fundamental aspects of the state's evolving response to social inequality. In most western societies, the state sought to soften the impact of market forces by using its tax-and-spend powers to reduce income inequalities and help provide core social services (such as education and health care) to those who need them. Social policy in Ireland has historically shared these concerns but in addition it has relied to an exceptional degree on the distribution of *wealth* to relieve market pressures and enable households to shape their own destiny. The foundations of this tradition go back to the land reforms of the early twentieth century – the programme of tenant purchase of land holdings which removed the landlord class from the rural economy and achieved the largest downward distribution of wealth (in the form of farmland) found anywhere outside of eastern Europe in the early twentieth century. But the focus soon switched from farms to homes. The state instituted supports for owner occupation of housing that, as land reform had done, distributed wealth downwards by enabling lower income households to buy their homes. It also enhanced the economic independence of households vis-à-vis both the market and the state.

The growth of private renting today marks the demise of this long tradition. It removes wealth distribution from the state's equality toolbox and as far as housing is concerned, brings households back towards dependence on the market for their ongoing accommodation.² Mitigating policies have been introduced to help low-income private renters to cope with rent burdens accompanying this change but these have mixed effects and expose the taxpayer to potentially high future costs. Long-term pressures on pensions

² For an interpretation of how this development has come about, see M. Byrne & M. Norris (2018) 'Procyclical Social Housing and the Crisis of Irish Housing Policy: Marketization, Social Housing, and the Property Boom and Bust', *Housing Policy Debate*, 28:1.

are also likely to arise as households age into retirement and have to meet rent costs out of their pensions, a burden that is largely unknown for the current generation of pensioners.

Together, these changes amount to a more radical turn-about in the direction of policy than has occurred in any other area of the Irish welfare state in recent decades. There has been much comment of late on the neo-liberal turn in Irish social policy, much of which is unwarranted. However, housing is the one area where, as the rise in private renting shows, a sharp turn towards the market has occurred. Some efforts have been made to plot a future policy course which would redirect developments towards a more socially conscious future (I refer especially below to contributions from the National Economic and Social Council in this regard). But these have yet to take hold in government. In a conference such as today's where the theme is the future direction and sustainability of social policy, the possibility that current trends in Irish housing represent a turn for the worse that stores up problems for the future is worth highlighting.

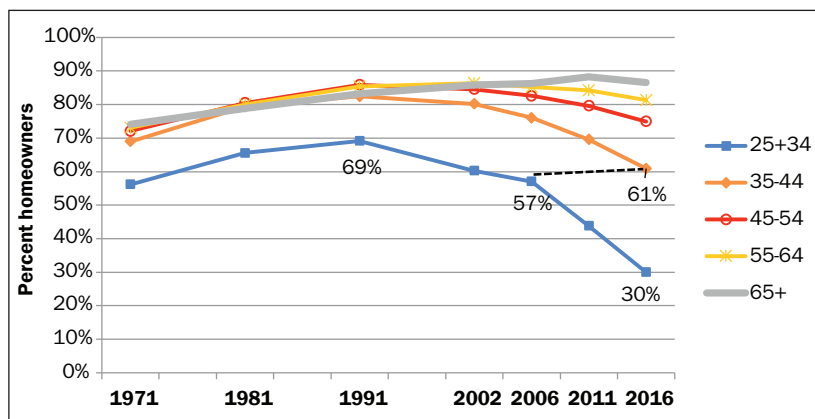
I now turn to four aspects of this broad topic that illustrate what is involved. They are (1) the decline in home ownership and rise of private renting; (2) the rising cost of housing, especially for private renters; (3) tenancy conditions for private renters; and (4) policy responses that mitigate immediate cost pressures for private renters (here I refer especially to the Housing Assistance Payment).

2. Home ownership, private renting & wealth distribution

Owner occupation of housing rose steadily over most of the 20th century in Ireland and reached a peak in the early 1990s. Figure 1 shows the decline in home ownership from that peak which began slowly in the 1990s and picked up pace as time went on. The striking feature of this decline is how sharply it differs sharply by age: it has scarcely occurred at all among older ages and has been steep among the youngest households. In fact, for the oldest age-group (those aged 65 and over), home ownership is slightly higher today (at 87%) than it was in 1991 (at 85%). At the other end of the age-range, householders aged 25-34 had a high level of home ownership for their age in 1991 (69%), but today that proportion has fallen to 30%. In the next older age age-group, those aged 35-44, home ownership has fallen

from 82% in 1991 to 62% today. We do not have exact breakdowns by age of households in the two other main tenures, social rented and private rented housing, but the indications are that the share in social housing has hovered around 10% of all householders in the age-group over most of this period.³ This would mean that of the 70% of 25-34 year-old householders who were not home owners in 2016, some 60% were private renters, up from 20% in 1991. The corresponding share in private renting among 35-44 year-old householders today is 30%, up from about 8-9% in 1991.

Figure 1. Falling home ownership rates among younger households



Note: The data here relate only to 'reference persons' (what used to be called 'household heads'). The graph shows the percentage of that population in each age-group who are home owners rather than renters. Source: Censuses of Population 1971-2016

The long-term significance of the surge in private renting among younger households is unclear. Only time will tell whether those households will continue to be private renters as they age or will transition across to either social housing or home ownership. The prospects for social housing are limited in that regard, given that the scale of the government's plans for the sector⁴ is pitched more at stopping its further contraction than expanding it to the point where it could absorb a bigger share of private renters. As to the prospects of private renters for eventually transitioning into owner

³ See NES (2014) *Home Ownership and Rental: What Road is Ireland On?* (Dublin: National Social and Economic Council), pp. 11-14 for detailed breakdowns of trends in housing tenure under a number of headings (age, social class, household type, region and nationality).

⁴ As set out in the *Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* (July 2016)

occupation, recent experience has not been encouraging. Over the past ten years, the rate of such transition has been slight, as the dotted line in Figure 1 suggests. This shows that householders aged 25-34 in 2006, who had a home ownership rate of 57%, made only marginal gains in home ownership over the following decade: by 2016, when they were aged 35-44, their home ownership rate had increased only to 61%, a gain of four percentage points.

For the future, some factors may aid a faster recovery of home ownership among these age-groups. Inheritance is one such factor, though it is uncertain how this important mechanism of wealth transfer within families affects the acquisition of housing in the next generation. It may help younger people to acquire their own homes, but it may also help small investors in the buy-to-let market and thus fuel competition with purchase for owner occupation. Recent improvements in housing supply will tend to bring down the purchase price of housing.⁵ Here too the effect on owner occupation is unclear given that the level of future competition from buy-to-let investors for new housing is unknown but so far seems to be strong.⁶ These indications mean that Minister Simon Coveney's prediction of a further doubling of the private rented sector over the next twenty years is not certain but is well within the bounds of possibility. Unless recovery of home ownership among younger households occurs an improbably rapid pace, those households are likely to be the carriers of this expansion and to become the first generation since the mid-twentieth century to enter middle age with a majority in private rented accommodation.

As the country embarks on this turn to private renting, it is worth pointing to an aspect of Irish life that is likely to be lost in consequence – the relatively equal distribution of housing wealth that emerged from the long build-up of owner occupation that occurred in the decades prior to 1991. The background factor here was the role that public policy played

⁵ See the *Daft.ie House Price Report Q3 2018*.

⁶ New features here are the recent growing interest in the Irish rental housing market among large investment institutions and supports for this trend made by government. The latter supports include the legalisation of REITs (real estate investment trusts) in the Finance Act 2013 and the efforts to protect returns to investment in residential rental property included in the *Strategy for the Rental Sector 2016*. A REIT for residential property set up in Ireland in 2015 (IRES – the Irish Residential REIT) had acquired ownership of 2,600 homes in Dublin by mid-2018 and shown rapid growth in profits (*Irish Times* 'Ires Reit shareholders in line for increased dividends', 21 August 2018). In May 2018, Irish Life Investment Managers block-purchased a new development of 262 apartments in Dublin, homes in which about 1,000 people had already registered an interest when the development was announced (*Irish Times*, 12 May 2018).

in providing access to home ownership among lower income households. The two key policy instruments in that regard were tenant purchase of local authority housing and the provision of local authority mortgages to low-income households.⁷ Table 1 shows the outcome of these policies by the end of the 20th century: even low-income households owned substantial housing wealth and were less disadvantaged by inequalities in housing wealth than they were by inequalities in income. In 2000, households in the bottom quintile (fifth) of the income distribution had only 7.3% of total household income but had 15.2% of housing wealth (net of mortgage debt). The top income quintile had 5.6 times more income than the bottom income quintile but had only 1.6 times more housing wealth. We do not have up-to-date analyses of the effects of the growth of private renting on the distribution of housing wealth across income categories today, but the likely outcome is a tendency towards concentration of housing ownership among higher income households. Thus, an important aspect of relative equality in wealth that had developed in the past is now on course to being lost in Ireland.

Table 1. Even low-income households have a substantial share of housing wealth, Ireland 2000.

Income quintile	% of total equivalised income	% of total net housing wealth
Bottom	7.3	15.2
2	11.3	16.1
3	17.0	19.2
4	23.8	24.3
Top	40.7	25.3

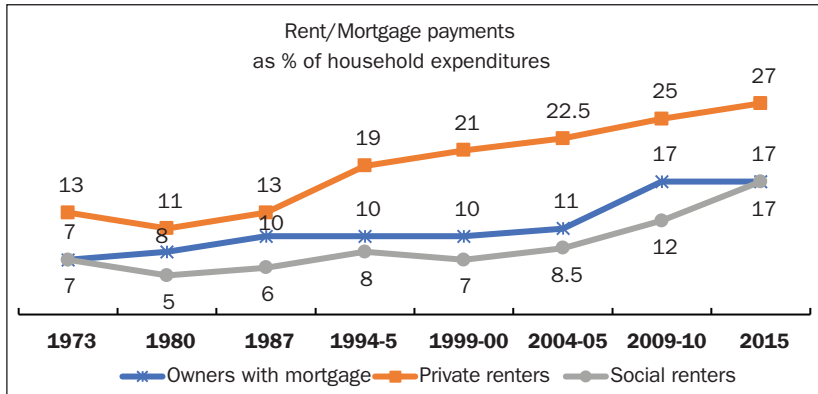
Source: Living in Ireland Survey 2000 (from T. Fahey, B. Nolan & B. Maitre *Housing, Poverty and Wealth in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, 2004, Table 6.1)

⁷ For a detailed account of the operation of these mechanisms and their evolution over time, see Michelle Norris (2016) *Property, Family and the Irish Welfare State*. Palgrave Macmillan

3. Rising housing costs, especially for private renters

A more immediate worsening of social inequality arising from the growth of private renting becomes evident when we look at the rise in the cost of private rents, both in absolute terms and relative to trends in parallel costs for other housing tenures, namely, mortgage payments for home owners and rents for social housing tenants. Figure 2 shows that for private sector tenants, the share of weekly household spending that is consumed by rent has been rising steadily for thirty years. This rise commenced somewhat before the expansion in private renting began in the 1990s. By 2015, the cost of private renting as measured in this way had more than doubled since 1987, rising from 13% of household expenditure then to 27% in 2015. Some excess of private rents over mortgage payments for home owners or social rents had been present since the 1970s but this excess widened sharply after 1987 and created a new axis of disadvantage in the housing system, one based on age as well as the usual axes of social difference represented by income and social class. By the early 2000s, private rents on average accounted for twice as large a share of household expenditure as mortgage payments and gave rise to housing affordability problems among private sector tenants that were more widespread and severe than for households in any other tenure.⁸

Figure 2. Rising cost of housing, especially for private renters



Source: Household Budget Surveys 1973-2015

⁸ T. Fahey (2004) 'Housing Affordability: Is the Real Problem in the Private Rented Sector' *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, Summer 2004.

Some catch-up in the cost of mortgage payments for home-owners and rents for social tenants occurred in the decade after 2004-05 – and indeed the rising cost of social housing rents in this period is especially notable. Yet the relative disadvantage of private sector tenants on this measure of housing costs remains. In fact, the picture set out in Figure 2 understates that relative disadvantage as far as comparisons with home purchasers are concerned, especially in the present context where private renting is becoming a long-term prospect for many households rather than, as in the past, a transitional tenure. Mortgage costs for home purchase as a share of household incomes tend to taper down over time and come to an end when the mortgage is paid off. For private sector tenants, by contrast, rents are a permanent feature, they are as likely to inflate as deflate over time and they do not adjust to drops in income occasioned by retirement, unemployment or illness. Thus, they build in an element of long-term financial insecurity among private tenants that adds to the relative disadvantage in current costs shown in Figure 2.

There have been some efforts from government to restrain the rising cost of private rents. However, the most significant direct measure taken so far, as set out in the *Strategy for the Rental Sector* (2016), has sought merely to slow the rate of rent increases in certain urban ‘rent pressure zones’ to a maximum of 4% per year. That upper limit if effectively implemented would still allow a doubling of rent over 21 years. Even that upper limit provides exemptions which together have permitted rent increases in the targeted urban areas to exceed 4% per year.⁹ This is in a context where the national rate of increase in private rents remain in the range 7-10% per year.¹⁰

In the longer term, the *Strategy for the Rental Sector* looks to market forces to produce an increase in supply of private rented housing and provide the key to stabilising rents. It sets out no ambitions for bringing private rents closer into line with the lower housing costs faced by other tenures. The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) has called for a more ambitious approach which would not stop at stabilising private rents but would seek to improve long-term affordability and promote secure occupancy for households in the sector. It couches these objectives within

⁹ Ronan Lyons *The Daft.ie Rental Price Report Q1 2018*, available at www.daft.ie.

¹⁰ The PRTB Rent Index (the state’s official measure of trends in private sector residential rents) gives a somewhat lower measure of current national rent inflation than the Daft.ie Rental Price Report.

a proposed framework for a comprehensive state-led urban-infrastructure development. This would encompass, among other things, an expansion of social housing, the promotion of affordable home purchase and the provision of capital or tax-based subsidies for private renting conditional on the setting of affordable rents.¹¹ The work of NESC in this area shows that there has been no shortage of thinking on how Ireland's current housing problems might be fixed, including the worsening affordability problems faced by private sector tenants. What has been lacking, rather, is an appropriate scale and ambition in the state response and a return to socially-directed rather than market led solutions.

4. Tenancy conditions for private renters

An important part of the NESC's concept of 'secure occupancy' for private sector tenants is the notion of leases of indefinite duration. Such leases would give private sector tenants a degree of security of tenure in their homes which would approximate that enjoyed by owner occupiers, save that it would be conditional on keeping up rent payments. Such leases are currently unavailable in Ireland. It is likely to take a long and complex development of statute law, case law, administrative practice and social convention for such leases to emerge and become a widely understood and readily utilised aspect of the housing system in Ireland.

In the meantime, tenancy conditions in the private rented sector have been improved in some ways but available types of leases are still geared towards transitional tenancies rather than long-term (much less life-time) occupancy. The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 and the consequent setting of a new regulator for the sector, the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB), were first steps in the area. The 2004 Act provided for four-year leases, in place of what in effect were tenancies-at-will that had previously been the norm. Even these relatively short leases were designed to accommodate the small scale and often short time-horizons of most landlords in the sector by allowing them a range of grounds for early termination. These grounds included reclaiming the property for family use, sale of the property (which typically requires vacant possession) and refurbishment. The *Strategy for*

¹¹ From a battery of closely argued NESC reports in this field, see especially *Homeownership or Rental: What Road is Ireland On?* (2014); *Ireland's Rental Sector: Pathways to Secure Occupancy and Affordable Supply* (2015); and *Urban Development Land, Housing and Infrastructure: Fixing Ireland's Broken System* (2018).

the Rental Sector (2016) expressed a general intention to develop leases of indefinite duration in the future. But the concrete immediate steps it set in train consisted in marginal strengthening of the leases provided for in the 2004 legislation. In 2016, the term of these leases was extended from four to six years and there was some tightening of the grounds for early termination of leases by landlords.

A more adequate pace of development of tenure conditions for private residential tenancies is likely to become possible only on the basis of overall structural reforms of the sector, possibly along the lines talked about by NESC. Imposing more restrictive tenancy conditions on the existing large complement of informal, small scale landlords would run the risk of driving them out of the sector. Attracting larger scale professional landlords into the sector would require prospects for long-term profitability which may currently be in place at the upper end of the private rental market but would put strains on the affordability of rents for the majority of tenants. The kinds of reforms which would reconcile these opposing tensions would require some degree of tax support, state-backed credit privileges or direct grants for private landlords, conditional on the setting of rents within specified affordability limits. There has been little movement towards reforms of this kind in Ireland as yet.

5. Policies to mitigate rent pressures for private sector tenants

As the private rented sector first expanded in the 1990s, state-provided rent supports (or what are often called ‘social supports’) for low-income private tenants who could not afford their rents became a growing feature of Irish welfare provision. The growth of these supports reflected the relative contraction in social housing, the main traditional housing option for low-income households, and the consequent rising flow of those households into the private rented sector.¹² Private sector rent supports have evolved as a means of mitigating rent pressures for such households. The first intervention of this kind was the Rent Supplement, a housing-related income support for welfare dependent households that was introduced in

¹² M. Norris ‘Policy Drivers of the Retreat and Revival of Private Renting: regulation, finance, taxes and subsidies’, in Lorcan Sirt (ed.) *Renting in Ireland: the social, voluntary and private sectors*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp.19-37

1978 but only became a major spending programme in the 1990s. Since then, two new support schemes for private renters have been added: the Residential Accommodation Scheme (introduced in 2004) and the Housing Assistance Payment (introduced on a phased basis from 2014 to 2017). Where the Rent Supplement was designed as a short-term income support for welfare dependent households who were not at work, the RAS and HAP schemes were intended as longer-term housing supports for both welfare dependent and working households.¹³

In 2016, about 82,000 households in the private rented sector received one or other of these supports. These households accounted for almost 26% of private sector tenancies. If we add these to the housing provided by local authorities and approved housing bodies, the total complement of socially supported households came to 254,000, which is 15% of all housing units. Of these, nearly one-third was accounted for by private sector tenancies receiving rent supports.

Table 2. Socially supported housing in Ireland, 2016

		No of units	% of all housing units*	% of private rented housing units**
Social housing	Local authorities	142,000	8.3	
	Approved Housing Bodies	30,000	1.8	
Socially supported private rented housing	Rent supplement	37,000	2.2	11.6
	RAS/HAP	45,000	2.6	14.1
Totals		254,000	15.0	25.7

* 1,702,289 households (Census 2016). **320,000 private rented households (estimated)

Source: E. Corrigan and D. Watson (2018) *Social Housing in the Irish Housing Market*, ESRI Working Paper no. 594, p. 11.

A key ongoing difficulty faced by state supports for private sector tenants is the balance they must strike between two opposing imperatives – limiting any inflationary effect rent supports might have on rent levels, which requires that supports be kept low, and responding effectively to need,

¹³ See D. O’Callaghan (2017) ‘Analysis of Current Expenditure on Housing Supports’ Spending Review 2017, Irish Government Economic Evaluation Service (IGES), Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; E. Corrigan and D. Watson (2018) *Social Housing in the Irish Housing Market*, ESRI Working Paper no. 594.

which requires that the supports be reasonably generous. The effects of the conflict between these two imperatives are felt most by those at the at or close to the thresholds of need by which entitlement to rent support is defined. The more those thresholds are kept low, the greater the pressure imposed on borderline households. The more the thresholds are raised to encompass borderline cases, the greater the risk that the supports raise the floor for market rents and put pressure on the next higher tier of households, turning them into new borderline cases.

6. Conclusion

The sense of crisis in the Irish housing system at present is understandably driven by the seemingly intractable problem of homelessness. As economic recovery has taken off, the housing market has responded sluggishly to an upsurge in population and new household formation. An acute housing shortage has ensued and a rise in households in temporary and emergency accommodation has been a highly visible result, many of them consisting of families with children. The population of homeless now numbers close to 10,000, having more than tripled over the past four years.

However, public preoccupation with the acute problem of homelessness has distracted attention from the less severe but chronic problems of housing unaffordability and insecurity arising in the much larger and steadily growing population housed in the private rented sector. That population now numbers approximately 750,000. In contrast to the recent upsurge in homelessness, the stresses found in the private rented sector have their origins not in the recent economic recovery nor even in the economic crash which preceded it. Rather they reflect developments which have been underway for over twenty years. At the heart of these developments is a marketisation of welfare which has taken hold in housing to a degree which is unparalleled in any other area of Irish social provision. It amounts not just to a downgrading of the role of social housing in the traditional sense (that is, housing provided directly by the state or by non-profit landlords acting as proxies for the state).

It also represents a downgrading of owner occupation of housing as a policy option. The latter is a form of housing tenure which makes households into the providers of their own accommodation and amounts to a form of insulation from the fluctuations of the market. It can be labelled a

privatised form of housing tenure, but it differs from private renting tenure in that, if made widely available, it avoids concentration of housing wealth and the resulting intensification of social inequality in housing. This form of market protection in the past was widely available even to low income households. Now it is on the way to becoming the preserve of the better-off.

A return to past forms of support for either social housing or owner occupation is not the only way of reversing the current excessive turn to the market in housing. Other options have been spelled out in great detail, as referred to earlier. These allow for a range of types of housing provision which include relatively socialised and relatively marketized delivery mechanisms within a variegated overall housing system. For younger households, the current rate of growth in private renting is not producing the right mix of tenures in the Irish housing system and needs to be tackled as a medium to long-term policy priority.

4. With 12 years left to limit climate catastrophe, Ireland needs to govern the clock

Cara Augustenborg

1. Introduction

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published a special report¹⁴ looking at the likely impacts if the world warms by 1.5°C, the target almost all the world's governments agreed to in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement. Having already warmed 1°C since the start of the Industrial Revolution, the Earth is well on its way to exceeding 1.5°C. In fact, even if all the United Nations achieve their intended nationally determined contributions to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, we are still looking toward a world that is at least 2.7°C warmer by the end of the century compared to the 1850s. The IPCC's latest report says that by 2030 emissions need to be about 45% below what they were in 2010 to stay below 1.5°C. That estimate gives us just 12 years to rapidly decarbonise and avoid climate catastrophe. Such an extreme transformation is the price we pay for kicking the can down the road and delaying action to date.

Fortunately, much of the world has already begun to embrace the transition to a low-carbon economy. In 2015, Costa Rica achieved a record-breaking 75 days on completely renewable energy sources¹⁵; Denmark is well on their way to achieving a low carbon future, with residents in Copenhagen already producing half the greenhouse gas emissions of the OECD average¹⁶; and Iceland, who suffered a similar banking-related economic collapse to Ireland, credits their economic recovery to investment in green

¹⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018) **Global Warming of 1.5 °C** <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>

¹⁵ The Guardian (26 Mar 2015) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2015/mar/26/costa-rica-only-renewable-energy-first-75-days-of-2015-video>

¹⁶ OECD (29 Jan 2013) http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Measuring%20Local%20Green%20Growth_Copenhagen_29%20January%2013%20FINAL%20for%20Francois.pdf

energy¹⁷. Some of the world's least developed countries (such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Bhutan) are leap-frogging the old carbon-based economic model in favour of the new low-carbon economy¹⁸, in a similar fashion to the way they embraced mobile-phone technology over land line phones. Ireland remains one of the only EU countries that continues to lag, with greenhouse gas emissions rising rather than declining.

Ireland's fuel mix for electricity generation is dominated by carbon-based fossil fuels (83%), including gas (48%), coal (22%), peat (12%) and oil (1%)¹⁹. In 2013, then Minister for Environment, Phil Hogan, defined a low-carbon society as "near zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 in the case of energy, buildings and transport, and carbon neutrality in the case of agriculture."²⁰ Currently, energy, transport and agriculture emit approximately 20%, 19% and 32% of total Irish greenhouse gas emissions, respectively²¹. Ireland has the third highest emissions per capita for residential energy use in the EU and total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been increasing by over 3.5 per cent per year since 2015²². No matter how 'low-carbon' society is defined, Ireland is still a long way away from realising it.

Ireland enacted its first legislation to address climate change in the form of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act in 2015. The act was intended to "*provide certainty surrounding Government policy and provide a clear pathway for [greenhouse gas] emissions reductions*" and referenced the Government's National Policy Position to achieve near zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 in the case of energy, buildings and transport, and carbon neutrality in agriculture. The legislation forced the Government to publish their first National Mitigation Plan in over 8 years. However, the plan was weak in measurable impact and criticised by NGOs and the Government's own Climate Change Advisory Council, who warned that the actions in the National Mitigation Plan were "not sufficient to put Ireland on a pathway

¹⁷ Graeber, D. (2 Mar 2013) <https://oilprice.com/Finance/the-Economy/Iceland-Credits-Green-Energy-for-GDP-Growth.htm>

¹⁸ International Institute for Environment and Development (22 Jan 2013) <https://www.iied.org/low-carbon-resilience-least-developed-countries-panacea-address-climate-change>

¹⁹ SEAI (2014) Energy in Ireland 1990-2013 Report

²⁰ Oireachtas.ie (2013) <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie/Debates%20Authoring/DebatesWebPack.nsf/committeetakes/ENJ2013071000003?opendocument#B00100>

²¹ EPA (2014) <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/GHGprov.pdf>

²² Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (2017) Greenhouse gas emissions report http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/airemissions/ghgemissions2016/Report_GHG%201990-2016%20April_for%20Website-v3.pdf

to achieve our 2020 targets or our long-term decarbonisation objective”²³. The Council explained that “If Ireland does not introduce major new policies and measures it will miss its 2020 targets”, resulting in large EU fines estimated at up to €455 million. On its current trajectory, Ireland will also miss the proposed 2030 EU decarbonisation targets.

Ireland’s troubling increase in greenhouse gas emissions is largely due to a booming economy, which (unlike most other EU countries) failed to decouple from fossil fuel consumption when it had the chance. Government policies to promote intensification of beef and dairy farming; to prioritise road construction over sustainable transport options, and to continue burning peat and coal for energy are leading the country in the wrong direction with respect to climate change. Most recently, the Government rejected the advice of their Climate Change Advisory Council to impose a modest carbon tax in Budget 2018 to kick start a low-carbon direction of travel and simultaneously address fuel poverty. Such a tax was also recommended by the Citizens Assembly in 2017 when they considered ‘*How Ireland can be a leader in tackling climate change*’, demonstrating the people are further ahead than the politicians when it comes to understanding the urgent need to transition to a low-carbon economy and a willingness to make sacrifices to encourage that transition.

In October 2018, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment called the Irish Government’s failure to take more effective measures to address climate change “a breach of Ireland’s human rights obligations”, stating the Government “must take additional actions on an urgent basis on climate change”, and concluding “climate change clearly and adversely impacts the right to life, a right which the Government of Ireland is legally obligated to respect, protect and fulfil”²⁴. Friends of the Irish Environment is now taking a legal case against the Government to ask the High Court “to quash and remit the inadequate 2017 National Mitigation Plan in order that it can be remade to protect these fundamental human rights”.

²³ Ireland’s Climate Change Advisory Council (2017) Periodic Review <http://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/FINAL%20Web%20Version%20PRR%20Press%20Release.pdf>

²⁴ United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures (2018) Statement on the human rights obligations related to climate change, with a particular focus on the right to life <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/FriendsIrishEnvironment25Oct2018.pdf>

2. Governing the clock

With a planetary clock counting down toward 1.5°C of planetary warning, there is an urgent need for Ireland to enact new policies and measures to bend the country's greenhouse gas emissions curve downward and move onto a sustainable path to 2050. The Government's Climate Change Advisory Council has recommended several measures including a substantial increase in the carbon tax; phasing out coal and peat for heating and power generation; more investment in clean public transport and electric vehicles; improved planning to minimise commuting; and urgent implementation of decarbonisation measures in the agricultural sector.

A major obstacle to implementing such measures is the dearth of analysis and governance to plan for such transition. For example, the agricultural research body Teagasc's work is dominated by improving livestock farming rather than diversifying out of such climate intensive farming practices into practices like horticulture, organic farming, or agro-forestry. Over 30% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, making Ireland unique as a developed country with a developing country's emissions profile. Ireland has strengths that offer opportunities to become a leader in addressing the challenge of climate change in the agricultural sector, but to lead in climate smart agriculture Ireland needs to reduce absolute emissions from agriculture. Based on future climate projections, Europe will experience increasing drought conditions over the coming years and such conditions have already taken a significant toll on food production. In the long term, this means Ireland could have to produce more food to try to help support the rest of Europe and should focus on producing food products that will be needed in Europe and appropriate to Ireland's changed climate. Ireland's current focus on Infant formula for the Chinese market is clearly not one of those products. There is an urgent need for Irish agricultural policy to stop putting short-term financial gains above the long-term well-being of the Irish landscape, environment, public health, and climate projections. For GHG emissions from the agricultural sector to decline while simultaneously increasing profit, there is an urgent need to develop alternative agricultural models away from the Government's business-as-usual approach to intensify livestock farming.

Similarly, in transport, while some efforts have been made to incentivise electric vehicle (EV) purchase, the public charging infrastructure has been

neglected to the point of discouraging prospective buyers unless they have a second fossil-fuel based car for long-haul trips. While the Government's long-term commitment to ban the purchase of new diesel or petrol vehicles from 2030 sounds ambitious, but without a realistic action plan to transform charging infrastructure, this commitment is nothing more than a dream. A completely electrified transport system must be constructed over the next three decades, including both electric cars and an electrified public transport system. Most importantly, cycling must be part of the transition. There are many co-benefits in cycling beyond its role to address climate change. -Cycling could contribute to solving Ireland's obesity crisis, mental health crisis, and economically struggling high streets. There is evidence to show people who cycle are healthier, less prone to depression and more inclined to stop and shop. In Copenhagen, 45% of the population uses bikes for their daily commute, while in Dublin we're at less than 6%. Last year, Ireland spent less than 1.5% of the transport budget on sustainable transport (mostly in the form of safe cycling education for kids). The EPA reported last May transport emissions will increase 13%-19% on current levels by 2020. Hard questions must be asked about how and when transport will contribute to the low-carbon transition.

The same can be said for the Government's pledge to replace large-scale peat production with alternative energy sources by 2030, which has been referred to by activists as decidedly unambitious, creating a "fire sale" over the next 12 years that will result in most of the peat being harvested in that time. A lack of planning in household energy consumption is also apparent in Government policy. Ambitious regulations coming from the EU Buildings Directive will require new buildings to be designed to nearly zero energy building standards by 2021, leading to a 50% to 60% improvement in terms of energy efficiency and reduction in CO₂ emissions. Two million existing homes in Ireland will need retrofit, which requires a new national renovation strategy. At an average cost of EUR 28,000 per home for deep energy retrofit, this is a significant technical and financial challenge further exacerbated and ignored due to the country's current housing crisis, which prioritises speed in construction over energy efficiency.

3. Conclusion

One advantage of Ireland's self-proclaimed label as a "climate laggard" is that there is no shortage of ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions when starting from such poor performance. Solutions exist for every sector. Aside from the positive benefits to climate change from moving to a low-carbon economy, there are numerous other social benefits from this transition, such as employment growth and greater social equity through increased energy and food sovereignty and improved public health from discontinuing the burning of fossil fuels. The technology already exists for Ireland to become a low-carbon society and, through the production of its own renewable energy and less dependency on fossil fuel imports, to become more stable economically and have higher employment and investment potential than Ireland's current system²⁵. The only missing piece is the planning and governance required to implement those solutions at a scale that can measurably reduce GHG emissions.

Irish society is designed to function within a narrow environmental envelope. When that environment fails, it impacts everything about the way people live and work. Risk of extreme storms on the West coast of Ireland is now up 25% due to climate change. Fodder crises due to extreme weather are becoming a regular occurrence. Over 260 homes were flooded in floods in December 2015 and will continually be at risk as the climate continues to warm. Combine this with the thousands of homes and businesses that are at risk due to sea level rise and Ireland will have another kind of housing crisis on our hands, one due to climate displacement. After the 2015 floods, then Taoiseach, Enda Kenny proposed the idea of relocating those who live in high risk flooding areas, but the Stern review has shown that the benefits of strong, early action to address climate change considerably outweigh the costs of doing so²⁶. As the Earth's temperature rises, so too will the cost of adaptation and residual damages will remain inevitable which the State must begin preparing for to protect citizens.

²⁵ Irish Examiner (14 Jul 2008) <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/energy-imports-near-top-in-eu-at-91-67253.html>

²⁶ http://www.wwf.se/source.php/1169157/Stern%20Report_Exec%20Summary.pdfhttp://www.wwf.se/source.php/1169157/Stern%20Report_Exec%20Summary.pdf

Israel's first female prime minister, Golda Meir, regarded as one of the most accomplished women of the twentieth century, once said "I must govern the clock, not be governed by it". The clock is unavoidable, but what Ireland's Government does with its limited remaining time is up to us. We control the activities we choose to do in that time and we must choose to do something to reduce our country's greenhouse gas emissions immediately.

5. Power Monopoly: Central – local relations in Ireland

Theresa Reidy

Introduction

The economic crisis presented profound challenges for representative democracy in Ireland. There were concerns about the functioning of political institutions and the nature of electoral politics long before the crisis but economic prosperity largely contributed to keeping those worries at bay (Coakley, 2013). Political reform became an important part of the debate in the lead up to the 2011 general election. It was the first time in decades, if ever, that the issue appeared substantively on the political agenda. All of the political parties produced political reform documents and the coalition government which took up office promised a ‘democratic revolution’ (Farrell, 2017). There was a shared narrative on the problems which beset the political system. These included cronyism, localism, sub-optimal decision-making and executive dominance. A multitude of reforms were proposed to address these issues. Political reform had dropped down the agenda by 2016 but at the general election some manifestoes did include proposals on Dáil reform and the Labour Party in particular proposed some structural reforms to local government. However, over the decade from 2008, strikingly little attention has been given to one of the most significant anomalies in the Irish system of governance, the centralisation of power and decision making at national government level.

Ireland was one of the most centralised states in Europe when the economic crisis struck (Ladner et al., 2016) and it has emerged from the crisis with this power imbalance almost completely intact. Decision making powers are concentrated at national level and even more specifically in central government. Despite some important Dáil reforms, the government continues to control much of the political agenda and instruments of transparency and accountability remain under-developed and under-utilised. There has never been any regional governance of significance

(Chubb, 1992) and local government remains woefully weak with some research suggesting that reforms enacted during the economic crisis may have exaggerated the existing power imbalance (Askim et al., 2017; Farrell, 2017, Ladner et al., 2018; Reidy, 2019). Yet, the extent of the political centralisation in the state is rarely acknowledged or discussed as a serious political problem outside of academic discussions about local government. And the consequences of political centralisation receive little public treatment.

This paper will focus on the imbalance in political decision making in Ireland. It will concentrate on the position and role of local government in the overall system and evaluate how these have changed particularly since 2008. Section one will provide an overview of the structures of local government, the legal basis of its operation and its main functions. Section two will locate local government in a comparative European context to demonstrate the extent to which the concentration of power in central government in Ireland is anomalous. It will draw on financial data to highlight the fiscal imbalance in central-local relations. Section three highlights three areas where the negative consequences of power centralisation are especially visible; local government finances, reduced local accountability and imbalanced regional development. The need for greater devolution of power to local government has been well documented in reports and policy papers but it exists more as political slogan than policy action. But it is a concept which urgently needs to be reclaimed and delivered if Ireland is to break out of the destructive centralism which infects politics and the chapter concludes with some reflections on this point.

1. Diagnosing the problem: the centralisation mentality

The most important sub-national tier of government in Ireland exists at local level. There are 31 councils in the state. These include city councils, county councils and, city and county councils. These local authorities have a constitutional mandate, a list of delegated functions and direct elections which take place on a five-year cycle. This suggests a structure that is robust and stable but a deeper investigation reveals a system which has endured waves of institutional re-organisation since 1922 (Haslam, 2003). And the

focus on structural design has often acted as a substitute for addressing glaring functional weaknesses within the system (Reidy, 2019)

Since independence in 1922, the number of local authority units has decreased substantially and all democratic structures below the city and county council have been abolished. Some of the most important rationalisations include the abolition of rural district councils in 1925 and the abolition of town councils in 2014. Council amalgamations were also finalised in 2014. In both Waterford and Limerick, the city council and county councils were amalgamated into a single authority for each jurisdiction. The two councils in Tipperary were also amalgamated. An initial decision to amalgamate the councils in Cork was reversed and the boundary of Cork city was expanded significantly in a later policy decision agreed in 2017. A plan to amalgamate authorities in Galway remains on the political agenda and is scheduled to take place after the local government elections in 2019. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Askim et al (2017: 561) reported that there was a 72.8% reduction in the number of local authority units in Ireland between 2004 and 2014 and that across Europe, Ireland had the highest level of territorial upscaling during this period. Furthermore, they report that the territorial upscaling was the result of centrist decisions and not driven by agreements among authorities at the local level. Local government institutions have very little capacity to shape the overall design of the governance tier. The initial decision to amalgamate the two local authorities in Cork in 2015 is a notable exception. It was resolutely resisted by the city council leading to a further evaluation and subsequent reversal of the original amalgamation decision (McKinnion, 2017) but this case is important primarily because of it being exceptional.

Ireland operates an unusual system of management within its councils with power shared between councillors and an appointed chief executive (known as the Manager until 2014). Since a constitutional reform in 1999, councillors are elected every five years and by law they have a number of reserved powers which are their sole domain. These include setting the annual budget and agreeing the development plan for the authority. Their planning powers were restricted following corruption scandals revealed in a number of tribunals in the 1990s. In theory and practice, the day to day management of the council and any item that is not listed as an exclusive function of the elected council is the responsibility of the chief executive. Councils had a well-deserved reputation for inefficiency, jobbery

and corruption for much of the twentieth century (Barrington, 1991; Byrne, 2012) and this undoubtedly influenced policy decisions which transferred responsibility for areas from personnel to planning away from the elected council to the management team, in a series of reforms. A direct consequence of successive policy changes has been a denuding of the role of political representatives (Quinlivan, 2008; 2015).

In addition to councils, there is also a maze of boards, agencies and authorities with responsibility for tourism, area specific economic development and Gaeltacht areas but the feature which distinguishes these organisations from councils is that they do not have direct elections (MacCarthaigh, 2008). Councillors occasionally sit on the boards of these organisations but councils do not have oversight over their work and most of the organisations report directly to government departments.

Councils have roles in the delivery of services in eight main areas which are: Housing and building, Road transport and safety, Water services, Development management, Environmental services, Recreation and amenity, Agriculture, education, health and welfare, and Miscellaneous services. At first glance, the list aligns with the functional areas overseen by local authorities in many other European states. However, Irish local authorities have quite restricted responsibilities in these areas, are primarily service providers and, they have limited capacity to shape policy. More importantly, local authorities have been stripped of specific service responsibilities in key areas as a consequence of centralising reforms initiated by governments from across the political spectrum.

Four areas of policy loss are noted here to highlight the point. A single health agency, the HSE was established in 2005 and replaced ten regional boards, eliminating councillor contributions to health administration. Voluntary Education Committees were reformed into Education and Training Boards in 2013 and the contribution of councillors to these new bodies was reduced. The administration of third level grants was transferred to a new body SUSI in 2011 and the establishment of Irish Water in 2013 removed responsibility for water services from local authorities. The scale of the functional loss is especially evident through an examination of the budgets of local authorities and looking at expenditure under some of the eight functional areas, it is clear that local authorities have little but

a notional influence in some categories, most especially in health (see Considine and Reidy, 2015).

However, local authorities have gained responsibilities and two policy initiatives stand out: *Better Local Government* (1996) and *Putting People First* (2014). *Better Local Government* allocated more precise policy roles to councillors and established special policy committees (SPCs) while *Putting People First* emphasised the role of local authorities in shaping economic and social development. Two specific developments highlight the additional responsibilities given to local government in the area of economic and social development. City and county enterprise boards were re-fashioned into Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and aligned and integrated into the council network. Greater community engagement was delivered with the establishment of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in each of the 31 local authorities. The PPNs were intended to enhance the local democracy dimension of local government and representatives from social and cultural groups, minority communities and environmental bodies are included in the PPNs. Early evaluations of PPNs are encouraging and the 2017 annual report noted that PPNs had 882 representatives on 382 boards and that these representatives had made 63 written submissions on matters of local and national policy (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2017).

It is difficult to create a scorecard of local government functional changes following the reform waves since the 1990s. Local authorities have been stripped of functional responsibilities in health, education and infrastructure but new roles in social and economic development have been allocated, especially in the 2014 reforms and demands for local authorities to have specific functions in these areas were first made in the 1960s (see Devlin Report, 1970). However, an impression is created that local government is on the receiving end of policy changes in several areas and that centralising decisions are often taken without regard for the erosion of local democracy or the principle of subsidiarity.

2. Irish local government in the halfpenny place: a European comparison

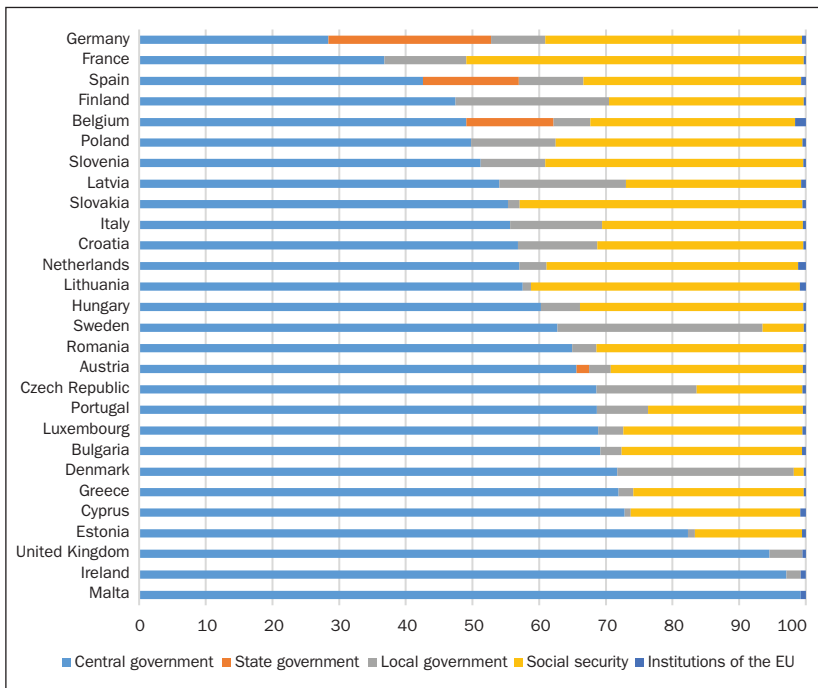
The centralised approach to governance in Ireland pre-dates independence. Local government structures developed during the nineteenth century and there was a strong preference for decision making to be managed in Dublin (as the centre of colonial administration in Ireland). The ethos of centralised decision making inherited by the nascent Irish state in 1922 was embraced and extended (Lee, 1987; Tierney, 2003). Among European countries, unsurprisingly Irish local government structures have most in common with other regions of the UK (Haslam, 2003). However, devolution reforms introduced by the New Labour government in the UK from 1997 enhanced power sharing across layers of government but no such changes have been attempted in Ireland. The establishment of regional government structures in Ireland was driven by the development of EU funding pathways (Callanan, 2018) and the structures are entirely administrative, have no direct election and exist largely without the knowledge of the vast majority of the electorate. The eight regional authorities and two assemblies were replaced by three assemblies in 2014.

The extent of the centralisation of power is well established and has been documented in several reports. Hence, it is unusual the issue does not receive greater treatment in public debate on the nature of government and politics in Ireland. The Devlin Group noted the significant dependence of local government on central government in the late 1960s (Chubb, 1992; Devlin Report, 1970) and this point was re-iterated in the Barrington Report (1991) which argued for substantial devolution of powers to local government, greater financial independence and the development of a sub-county layer of governance. The Barrington Report did inform some policy changes and influenced the shape of the Local Government Act (1991) but as Quinn argues the response to the Barrington Report was 'minimalist, selective, piecemeal and conservative' (2015: 11). More recently, the imbalanced nature of central-local relations was again highlighted in the *Putting People First* (2012: 10) policy document of the Fine Gael and Labour coalition which stated 'The role of local government in Ireland is narrow by international comparison'. The diagnosis of centralisation is not disputed in either political or policy reports and indeed neither is the need for devolution of further powers. However, devolution efforts are often disconnected and research has suggested there is deep hostility to

devolution stemming from a distrust of local councils and a centralising mentality (Chubb, 1992; Tierney, 2003; Quinn, 2015).

The starkest evidence of the imbalance in power across layers of government is to be found in the comparative financial data for taxing and spending by level of government published by Eurostat. Figure 1 presents a breakdown of the revenue raised by each layer of government. Ireland is in second last position, with only Malta having a lower share of revenue raised at local level. More than 95% of tax revenues are raised by central government in Ireland. If the old maxim that ‘money is power’ holds, we can see that central government is where the power lies in Ireland. The figure also demonstrates quite clearly how atypical Ireland is relative to other small EU states like Finland, Austria and Denmark.

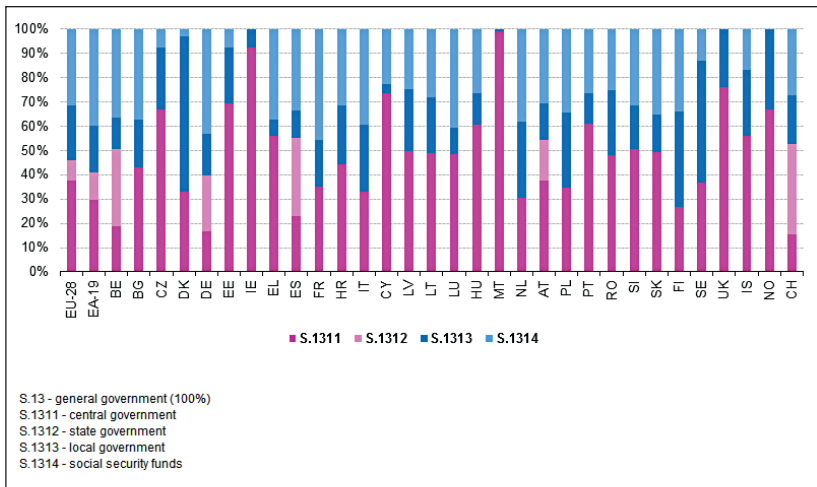
Figure 1: Share of tax revenues by level of government in EU countries, 2016



Source: Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_finance_statistics_-_revenue_and_expenditure_by_subsector_of_general_government (accessed 1 November 2018)

The data in Figure 2 outline the public spending patterns of central and local government across the EU. Ninety three percent of all public spending in Ireland is disbursed by central government with local government responsible for seven percent of total spending. Again only Malta has more centralised public spending practices within the EU. And Ireland does not have state/regional government structures.

Figure 2: Share of public spending by level of government in EU countries, 2016



Source: Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_finance_statistics_-_revenue_and_expenditure_by_subsector_of_general_government (accessed 1 November 2018)

The data presented in the two figures also reveal another important point about the financing of local government in Ireland. Local authorities spend more money than they raise in revenue and thus are heavily dependent on central government to fund large sections of their work. This is a common trend in central-local fiscal relations (Ladner et al., 2016) but the gap is even more notable in Ireland given the extreme imbalance in taxing and spending powers.

3. Does centralisation matter?

Subsidiarity is a principle that is most often associated with the European Union but it also underpins the essence of local government. It requires that decisions should be taken at the closest level to the citizen that is practicable. The 1983 European Charter of Local Self Government has subsidiarity as its underpinning motivation and outlined that public services can be delivered best by local providers who are most knowledgeable about the specific and distinct needs of individual communities. Fundamentally, this idea acknowledges that communities are heterogeneous and that local service delivery should take account of this. Ireland signed the Charter in 1997 and it came into effect in 2002. However, the extent of Ireland's embrace of subsidiarity remains very much in question.

Centralisation of power and state finances do have consequences. Management of the public finances in Ireland is more complex because of the extent of the state's fiscal centralisation. The annual budget is the most important financial day of the year because it makes almost all of the most important financial decisions for each budget year. This is not the case in most other countries because financial decision making is decentralised across layers of government. Commonly across EU states, local and regional taxes are levied on individuals, businesses and property. Property tax is an especially important source of revenue for local authorities in most states and it contributes to a degree a stability in sub-national revenues which has long been absent in Ireland. As Joumard and Konsgrud (2003: 186) argue, property is immovable, property tax evasion is difficult and infrastructural improvements in an area can enhance property values thereby providing some degree of a feedback loop. Revenues from property taxes tend to be very stable. This means that local property taxes can provide authorities with a steady source of income that is less likely than other revenue streams to be impacted by changes in central government finances or the business cycle. Given that Ireland has experienced quite high volatility in its tax revenues, it is surprising that the decision to re-introduce a property tax was delayed until 2013.

The need to establish a reliable revenue base for local government was a common refrain in reports and policy papers (NESC, 1985; KPMG, 1996; Indecon, 2005; Government Green Paper, 2008; Commission on Taxation Report, 2009) and a local property tax was identified as the most suitable

starting point to provide a stable revenue source. But it was not until the economic crisis that the decision was taken to act on years of policy recommendations (Considine and Reidy, 2015). Regrettably, significant restrictions were imposed on the autonomy of local councillors to alter the incidence of the local property tax. The rate may only be raised or decreased by 0.15% and the system of valuation is determined centrally by the minister for finance. Revenues from the tax accounted for just 9% of local government funding in 2017. The introduction of the tax is a positive step but the limitations on its incidence reduces its potential to develop as a more significant source of revenue for local government and it also minimises the extent to which there is local accountability and responsibility for local government financing (Considine and Reidy, 2015).

Moving to the political effects of centralisation, it is clear that arguments about uniformity of service provision and the need to meet public expectation levels were at the forefront of decisions which led to centralisation of health, education and infrastructure decisions (Collins et al., 2007; MacCarthaigh, 2008). Long standing concerns about inefficiency in local government (Barrington, 1991) and corruption (Byrne, 2012) also underpin the overall view that centralised service provision is superior. But, Ireland is almost unique in this assumption that centralisation leads to more effective service delivery. Diminution in local accountability was identified as a concern in a number of the consolidations listed above (most notably in the creation of the HSE: see Collins et al., 2007). But clearly accountability is given a lesser priority in the calculus of decision making.

A final area which must be noted in the discussion on the consequences of centralisation is regional development. The pattern of population movement towards the east of the country developed in tandem with industrialisation and reflected a trend common in many other European states. The extent to which public policy was leading to imbalanced development became a subject of some discussion during the *Celtic Tiger* period (see O'Leary 2003). It also featured in a different guise at the general election in 2016 when concerns that the economic recovery was concentrated in the wider Dublin area was identified as a factor in the collapse in the vote for Fine Gael and the Labour Party at that election (Marsh, Farrell and Reidy, 2018). As discussed in the earlier section, a number of reports emphasised the need for local authorities to be given enhanced roles in economic and social development (Devlin, 1970, Barrington, 1991) but it was not until the 2014 reform introduced as part

of the *Putting People First* programme that substantial progress was made in that direction. Delivering enhanced regional growth was also a requirement for the McKinnion (2017) review of local government structures in Cork. It may take considerable time before the effectiveness of these reforms can be evaluated but the urgent need to deliver more balanced regional development and the role of local authorities in achieving that objective is not in any doubt.

4. Reclaiming de-centralisation

This paper has sought to demonstrate that Ireland has one of the most centralised states in Europe. The only layer of democracy below national politics exists at local level in the form of councils. There is no meaningful regional government. More importantly, local government in Ireland is very restricted. The institutional structures of local government have been reformed on multiple occasions leaving Ireland with one of the highest representation ratios at local level across Europe (Reidy, 2019). Callanan (2003: 8) summarises the strengths of the Irish local government system as its ‘closeness to the population, its elected status, its accessibility and the opportunities it provides for participation in the democratic process’. These are the political dimensions of local government and although the representation ratio is particularly high, regular elections since 1999, the removal of the dual mandate in 2003 and the introduction of PPNs since 2014 have enhanced the vibrancy of local politics and local participation.

But the characterisation that local government in Ireland exists as ‘mere administration’ retains much validity. Local authorities have been stripped of roles in key areas and although there have been compensating powers allocated, it remains to be seen how successful these measures will be. Essentially, this means that decisions about a range of services are taken at national level and the potential of local communities to shape and develop their areas is more limited than it need be and more limited than is the case in most of our European neighbours.

Finally and perhaps most fundamentally the fiscal balance in central-local relations remains extreme. Until local authorities gain access to greater streams of revenue over which they are directly responsible for the tax base and rates, local government will not develop as a meaningful and independent layer of government.

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6. Towards wellbeing for all

Proposals for a Programme for Government

Seán Healy, Colette Bennett,
Eamon Murphy, Michelle Murphy

Introduction

While there is considerable discussion around what kind of Ireland we want to live in, very little attention is given to one of the key policy instruments that might actually get us there – the Programme that will be negotiated by the next Government. This paper proposes a framework to guide public policy over a five to ten-year period (or the lifetime the next Government or two). It sets out the priorities that should shape our society and our economy, and these priorities, in turn, guide and influence policy decisions (including decisions on taxation and expenditure) for five or ten years. It does this with the objective of securing wellbeing for this and future generations in Ireland and beyond.

Almost since the conclusion of the General Election of February 2016, there has been talk of the likelihood of another election not being far away. While such talk has been shown to be unfounded, it now seems much more likely than not that Ireland will go to the polls soon to elect a new government.

The makeup of the next Government can only be speculated upon, but whichever parties and politicians comprise it, the Government of the 33rd Dáil and its Programme for Government will have major impacts on Irish society and will be in a position to shape the future of this country for a considerable time to come.

There is, therefore, a clear need to ensure that the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* is focused on creating a more just and sustainable Ireland.

Right now, the Irish economy is booming. Employment is at a record high, and tax receipts in many areas are rising on a regular basis. While there is

no guarantee that either of these situations will persist, particularly given the many challenges that Ireland faces in the coming months and years, this should be seen as an opportunity to make improvements in the many areas of Irish life where we lag behind our European peers, including in the quality of public service provision, infrastructural investment, and the level of revenue generation. Developing the economy should not be seen as an end in itself; it is a means to provide the resources and conditions to secure wellbeing for all of Ireland's population in a sustainable manner.

Central to all of this are the answers to five key questions that the politicians and policymakers developing the next Programme for Government must consider:

- **Where should Ireland be** in five and ten years' time?
- What **services and infrastructure** are required to get there?
- How are these services and infrastructure to be **delivered**?
- How are these services and infrastructure to be **paid for**?
- How can we develop and maintain a **vibrant and sustainable economy and society**?

The answers to these questions should be central to informing the structure and content of the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil*. This is particularly so in relation to the first question. Many of the challenges that the next Government faces are of a scale that means they will not be fixed over the course of one Dáil term. The next government must have the foresight to plan for a decade and more down the line, because it is only within such timeframes that Ireland will be able to resolve our failings in areas such as housing, healthcare, poverty, childcare and environmental sustainability among others.

Context and Vision

As previously mentioned, Ireland's economy is booming again. One of the good news stories of Ireland's recent recovery has been the falling rates of unemployment and the increased levels of employment. Consumer demand is up, Irish exports are thriving, and interest rates are still low by historic standards. Emigrants are gradually beginning to return.

But despite such positive trends, Ireland is still experiencing high levels of poverty, social exclusion, and deprivation; high levels of public and private debt; high levels of youth unemployment; and a notable divide between urban and rural progress and living standards. Vulnerable households, who gained nothing from the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era, were among those who suffered proportionately the most during the downturn with Budget cuts to public services and welfare rates, as well as an increase in precarious and underemployment. Despite the improved economic situation, and some sound steps in the right direction, many such households are continuing to feel the strain of austerity policies.

It should go without saying that there is a widespread desire among ordinary citizens that the conditions that led to the financial crash of 2007/8 are not recreated. Policymakers must learn from the mistakes of the pre-crisis period. The *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* will be an opportunity to ensure this does not happen, and that Ireland is set on the path to becoming a just society in which human rights are respected, human dignity is upheld, human development is promoted, and the environment is respected and protected.

If the Programme for Government is guided by such a vision, and underpinned by these values, Ireland can become a nation in which all women, men and children have what they require to live life with dignity and to fulfil their potential, with sufficient income, access to the services they need, and active inclusion in a genuinely participatory and sustainable society.

These proposed outcomes reflect the aspirations of the majority of Irish citizens. *Social Justice Ireland* believes such a future can and should be delivered, and that the 33rd Dáil can take the first steps by putting these principles at the heart of their Programme for Government. A policy framework to deliver such a future is set out in the following pages.

Focus of the Programme for Government

The *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should focus on the following five key areas that, if fully delivered, would ensure the sustainability of a just society and a sound economy while securing the wellbeing of all Ireland’s people:

- A vibrant economy
- Decent services and infrastructure
- A just taxation system
- Good governance
- A sustainable society

Each of these areas, set out in Table 1, overlap but it is of value to separate them for analytical purposes. The Programme for Government must address each of these areas comprehensively and in an integrated manner, working on them simultaneously, not sequentially. In order to ensure an integrated approach, we recommend the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Committee to oversee the implementation of a Programme for Government based on these principles. This Committee should produce a quarterly report setting out the overall progress made on implementing every individual commitment contained in the Programme for Government and on the progress made in implementation since the previous quarterly report. This report should be published at the end of each quarter, and, should also set out progress made on implementing the Country Specific Recommendations produced in the European Semester Progress.

A further strengthening of the implementation process would be for the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) to produce a mid-term strategic review of the priorities being pursued and the progress, or otherwise, being made under the Programme for Government. This should be undertaken when the Government has been two and a half years in office.

The Programme for Government should also include a permanent forum for regular dialogue on policy. This forum should discuss social and environmental as well as economic policy. One key function of this forum could be monitoring the implementation of the Programme for Government, ensuring strategic priorities are being met.

Choices will have to be made in terms of when and how various policies will be implemented and monitored. Not all the challenges that Ireland faces can be resolved at once. The rationale behind the sequencing of these choices must be clearly communicated. Furthermore, the resourcing and timeline for delivery of policies must be realistic. Regular updates on implementation and progress are essential to ensure public support. The

publication of a quarterly review of progress on implementing every item, action and commitment would enhance public awareness of and support for the choices made in the Programme for Government.

In learning from our past mistakes, we must accept that any approach prioritising the economy over other areas will not result in a society that is balanced or fair. Decent services and infrastructure, just taxation, good governance and sustainability are essential if the economy is to be stable and vibrant and if it is to grow in a way that is suited to the development of a society characterised by justice, equality and well-being.

As noted earlier, this is a long-term strategy that should be designed to outlast a single Programme for Government in order to fully address Ireland’s many crises and protect both the economy and society from future shocks.

Policy Framework

Table 1: Five Priorities for the Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil²⁷

Vibrant economy	Decent services and infrastructure	Just taxation	Good governance	Sustainability
Fiscal stability and sustainable economic growth	Secure, well-funded public services and social infrastructure	Tax-take closer to the EU average	Deliberative democracy and PPNs	Environmental protection and climate justice
An adequate investment programme	Reduced unemployment & improved employment quality	Equity in taxation and reduced income inequality	Real social dialogue	Balanced regional development
A more just economic structure	Achievement of seven Social, Economic and Cultural rights	A fair share of corporate profits for the State	Reformed policy and budgetary evaluation	New indicators of progress and Satellite National Accounts

²⁷ This Policy Framework is adapted from *Social Justice Ireland's* publication *Social Justice Matters - 2018 guide to a fairer Irish society* <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/5239/socialjusticematters.pdf?cs=true>

i) A vibrant economy

To ensure a vibrant economy and macroeconomic stability, the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should concentrate on restoring fiscal and financial stability, supporting an adequate investment programme and creating a more just economic structure. Each of these measures are connected. An investment programme, if properly structured and correctly targeted will contribute to real economic growth, sustain employment and produce the social infrastructure required to reduce inequality and deliver improved living standards in Ireland.

An economy run competently in the interests of all society is one of the main expectations of citizens in a modern democracy. To ensure macroeconomic and fiscal stability, the Government must secure its revenue stream, broaden the tax-base, and increase its tax-take.

Caution is advised when considering substantially reducing – or indeed abolishing – the revenue flow from any particular source, including the Universal Social Charge, property taxes or others. While Ireland’s macroeconomy is healthy in many respects, policymakers should proceed cautiously. Ireland’s reliance on exports for economic growth makes us susceptible to outside shocks and there is cause for concern in the global economy, as well as a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the eventual outcome and repercussions of Brexit.

With this in mind, the Programme for Government should ensure the use of any available funds to support a public investment programme. This would not only stimulate domestic consumption, alleviating reliance on the export sector, but would also create employment and strengthen Ireland’s infrastructure.

By committing to an infrastructure investment programme within the Programme for Government, the 33rd Dáil would go a long way towards securing a minimum standard of living for all inhabitants of Ireland; secure, adequate housing; a quality, community-based healthcare system; affordable childcare; a properly functioning broadband system; decent public transport and quality education are basic expectations of a modern European society.

Investment is needed to produce a well-functioning economy, to generate high-quality employment, to ensure adequate income support and to ensure access to high quality services - the kind that the majority of Irish people rely on to underpin their standard of living. *Ireland 2040*²⁸ provided an outline of the type of infrastructure investment needed but would need some adjustments to ensure investment is balanced and clearly focused on securing a society that prioritises the wellbeing of all. The Programme for Government should set out the details of what these necessary adjustments are and how they can be delivered at the required scale.

While the level of public investment has been growing in recent years²⁹, it has been growing from a historically low base³⁰. The level of capital expenditure is often a good illustration of whether government really has a vision for the kind of future we are setting out here. Increased investment not only generates increased full-time employment but also improves the long run productivity of the Irish economy. Indeed, the Programme for Government should acknowledge that it is difficult, if not impossible, to meet the macroeconomic goals of full employment or infrastructural maintenance and expansion, or the social goals of adequate housing, healthcare and education services, without adequate levels of investment.

Increased investment must be carefully planned. Our services in housing, health, education and transport are already under significant pressure. A clear analysis of the type of investment required and the sequence in which it will be delivered must be clearly communicated and implemented. This would assist in preventing further pressure on already overstretched services in areas such as housing and transport whilst simultaneously addressing the shortfalls Ireland faces in these areas.

It is vital that the Programme for Government priorities also align with the investment priorities of European Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 to ensure an integrated approach and the best use of resources.

²⁸ Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework was published in 2018 and is Government's overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development.

²⁹ In Budget 2019, Gross Capital Expenditure was €8.4bn. This is an increase of €800m of what had been forecast for 2019 in the previous budget, and is a substantial increase on previous years (Department of Finance, 2018).

³⁰ This figure is almost double the Gross Capital Expenditure in Budget 2015.

If the lessons of the late-2000s have taught us nothing else, it is that our small open economy is prone to shocks that can cause large swathes of revenue to disappear very quickly. Ireland must broaden its tax base in order to mitigate against the effects of a future economic slowdown. We address the tax issue later in this paper.

There is also a need for a more just economic structure in Ireland. Figures from the most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) (CSO, 2017) indicate that one in six people in Ireland are living at risk of poverty, and one in five children are living in households at risk of poverty. Perhaps more shockingly, there are over 100,000 people in Ireland with a job who are living at risk of poverty, and around a quarter of a million people who experience deprivation despite being employed.

Government should strive to create a new economic model based on fairness and wellbeing. Among other things, this would mean that people with a job have sufficient income to live life with dignity, that social welfare payments are set at an adequate level and are indexed, and that public services are funded sufficiently in order to close the gap between the living standards of the least well off in society and what is considered to be a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in a developed Western country.

The eradication of persistent poverty³¹, particularly among children, should be a primary focus of the next Government, and we would hope that by the time the next Programme for Government comes into being a robust National Action Plan for Social Inclusion will be in place, with the objective of eradicating poverty. In particular, Government needs an ambitious poverty reduction target with appropriate subsidiary targets for vulnerable groups including children, lone parents, jobless households and people living in social rented housing. The current target on child poverty (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014), for example, is to reduce the rate of children experiencing consistent poverty to 2% by 2020. The consistent poverty rate among children is currently 8.3%, so it is clear that we have a lot of work to do.

³¹ Persistent-at-risk-of-poverty rate is defined as the share of persons with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold in the current year and in at least two of the preceding three years. The threshold is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=tespm150>

The next Government should implement a Cost of Disability Allowance to acknowledge that those living with a disability face a higher cost of living than those without. This should form part of an integrated policy approach for people with a disability that is consistent and coherent across all departments and services and is consistent across the life cycle.

In Ireland, the top 20 per cent receive almost 40 per cent of income, compared to the bottom 20 per cent who receive just over 8 per cent of income (CSO, 2017)³². The bottom income decile has a deprivation rate of over 50 per cent, compared to just 1 per cent for the top (ibid) decile.

While income inequality has fallen in the last 5 years, it is clear that this reduction has not been sufficient. *Social Justice Ireland* has been saying for years that the economy cannot be treated in isolation. Policymakers must acknowledge that a thriving economy is not a goal in itself, but a means to social development and well-being for everyone. Substantial evidence has emerged in recent years to support the view that economies and societies perform better across a number of different metrics, from better health to lower crime rates, where there is less inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; OECD, 2018).

With this in mind, Government should move to implement a system of Basic Income³³ in Ireland. This would have the benefit of placing an income floor underneath every individual which can be relied upon regardless of changing circumstances, whilst also structuring Ireland's welfare system in a way that better meets the needs of the modern economy, increasing flexibility for individuals of working age and reducing inequality in society. The Secretary General of the United Nations highlighted the need for stronger safety nets and a universal basic income as a response to the changing nature of work in a recent speech to the UN General Assembly³⁴.

As the next step on the road towards a Basic Income system, the Government of the 33rd Dáil should implement a universal pension, giving a payment from the state to all individuals over the State Pension

³² For further income distribution analysis see pages 49-52 *Social Justice Matters - 2018 guide to a fairer Irish society* <https://www.socialjustice.ie/sites/default/files/attach/publication/5239/socialjusticematters.pdf?cs=true>

³³ In February 2018, the Council of Europe voted in favour of a resolution to introduce a system of Basic Income. More at: <http://basicincome.org/news/2018/02/europe-council-europe-adopts-resolution-basic-income/>

³⁴ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-09-25/address-73rd-general-assembly>

Age based on residency and not – as is currently the case – based on social insurance history and means-testing. *Social Justice Ireland* has published a comprehensive study outlining how a universal pension could be implemented³⁵.

It is time to ensure that the Irish economy is truly working in the interests of Irish society, and not the other way around. The gains from positive economic trends must be shared more widely and more fairly.

ii) Decent services and infrastructure

To ensure the vindication of the social, economic and cultural rights of all Irish citizens and residents, the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should seek to secure the delivery of decent services and infrastructure, and combat unemployment and underemployment.

Most Irish people would like to see their services and infrastructure equal to the norm in Western Europe but, in reality, they fall short of that in many areas. The next Programme for Government should contain a strong focus on improving public services and social infrastructure in Ireland, with the aim of bringing them up to the standard of other Western European countries.

Ireland has serious deficits in services such as education, childcare and health, and in social infrastructure like housing and rural broadband. Adequate social infrastructure and services are necessary to support economic development. They are also essential if Ireland is to achieve dignity and equality for all citizens, from children to older people to those living with a disability.

This is particularly so in the context of an increased total fertility rate and our gradually ageing population³⁶. These are both positive trends, but long-term planning is required so that Ireland can reap the benefits of these demographic developments and enter this period with services and infrastructure to meet the inevitable demand. To date, investment to prepare for the increasingly ageing population has been lacking, if not non-existent.

³⁵ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/universal-state-social-welfare-pension-ireland>

³⁶ The percentage of the population older than 65 will increase from 13.3 per cent to 20.6 per cent, and the percentage older than 80 will more than double, from 1.5 per cent to 3.2 per cent (CSO, 2018).

Delays often have an unduly detrimental effect on society; often long-term. Key investment priorities in the Programme for Government should be social and affordable housing, primary care and mental health facilities, infrastructure for rural broadband, childcare infrastructure and early education facilities. A Cost-Rental system of housing provision has a significant role to play in alleviating Ireland's current housing issues, particularly in providing affordable accommodation for those 340,000 households in the private rented sector.

The goal of universal provision, particularly in healthcare must remain. The deterioration of the health service will continue so long as the system is incoherent, unequal and dominated by short-term incentives and interests. *Social Justice Ireland* has pointed out in the past that a sustained long-term vision for the health system is required – something that is only possible with a blueprint that is forged through consensus and will not change with each change in Government. The *SláinteCare Report* is such a blueprint. The next Government must ensure that the necessary resources are available for the *SláinteCare Implementation Strategy*, including the necessary €3 billion infrastructure investment over six years.

Among the keys to alleviating strain on the Irish healthcare system, getting value for money and making the necessary plans to care for our ageing population, are:

- The full integration of the Primary Care Networks into the primary care system to secure a reformed structure;
- The creation of a statutory entitlement to Home Care Services;
- The construction of additional nursing and primary care facilities;
- The creation of additional respite care and long-stay care facilities for older people and people with disabilities.

Ireland 2040 and the *National Development Plan (NDP)* are important initiatives, in particular because they are a welcome return to some element of long-term planning in Ireland. However, as much as they have been heralded by Government and the media, these plans feature a significant number of projects that have already been announced, as well as relatively little additional spending compared to that which would have taken place anyway had Government's capital budget increased gradually over the period. There is certainly not sufficient capital spending included to close the deficit between Ireland and our European counterparts. The next

Programme for Government should aim to build upon the work done in the NDP.

There must be a continued focus on addressing issues within the labour market. Unemployment continues to fall and employment has now reached record levels. But behind headline numbers, several undesirable trends have emerged which look like becoming entrenched features of the Irish jobs market. They include a growth in low paid and precarious work³⁷, a substantial increase in the potential additional labour force³⁸ and increased underemployment. These features have implications for active inclusion and education and training policy.

Likewise, there is a need to recognise all work, including work in the home and work done by voluntary carers. A new departure would be for the Programme for Government to change the definition of work and of what constitutes a 'contribution' to society. It must be acknowledged that the contribution to society of carers and volunteers is significant in terms of economic, social and individual well-being even though this contribution is not recognised in the national accounts because it is unpaid work.

Ireland performs poorly compared to our European peers in the area of Lifelong Learning and so, as part of a human capital investment strategy, the Government of the 33rd Dáil should increase investment in this area.

Ireland's economy is booming. In order to ensure that those on lowest incomes are not left behind (as happened in the late 1990's) and that the recovery is felt by all, the Programme for Government must be based on a socially just approach. An important step in this direction would be the equalisation of Jobseekers Allowance rates for young people and the introduction of refundable tax credits.

For some years after 2006, Ireland's poverty rates fell slowly, driven by increases in social welfare payments delivered in the Budgets of 2005-2007. These increases compensated only partly for the extent to which social

³⁷ A report published in late 2017 by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU, 2017) asserted that while employment is rising in the aftermath of the recession, so too is the instance of precarious employment, with nearly 160,000 people – or 8 per cent of the workforce in Ireland – having significant variations in their hours of work, from week to week or month to month. Over half of those were in temporary employment because they could not find permanent work – a 179 per cent increase since 2008

³⁸ The potential additional labour force was 37,800 in Q2 2016 and increased to 131,900 in Q2 2018. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lfs/labourforcesurveyquarter22018/>

welfare rates had fallen behind other incomes in society over the preceding two decades.

As these advances were reversed after the crash, the ‘at-risk-of-poverty-rate’ grew notably. The demographic group which is at, by far, the greatest risk of poverty is children; approximately one in five were at risk of poverty in 2016 (CSO, 2017). As previously stated, tackling these rates must be a priority. In particular, any worthy programme for government should, at a minimum, include a commitment to eradicate child poverty over the course of its term and include appropriate subsidiary targets for vulnerable groups including lone parents, jobless households and people living in social rented housing.

With economic growth strong once again, policy should now aim to provide equity in social welfare rates across genders, with adequate payments for children and for those with disabilities. This should be combined with the adoption of the Living Wage as the minimum wage by the end of the term of office of the 33rd Dáil.

Social Justice Ireland believes strongly in the importance of developing a rights-based approach to social, economic and cultural policy. Such an approach would go a long way towards addressing the growing inequality Ireland has been experiencing. We believe that every person has seven core rights, whose vindication are essential to the development of a just society and which should be part of any future Programme for Government. We also believe that these rights are so fundamental to the experience of Irish citizens and their expectations of what our well-off democracy should provide that there will be almost universal agreement on these rights among Irish people.

These core rights are:

- the right to sufficient income to live life with dignity;
- the right to meaningful work;
- the right to appropriate accommodation;
- the right to relevant education;
- the right to essential healthcare;
- the right to real participation
- and the right to cultural respect.

The achievement of each of these rights should form the basis of the new Programme for Government. To be vindicated, these rights will require greater public expenditure to fund a broader provision of services.

The economy cannot be treated in isolation. A thriving economy is not an end in itself; what counts is what the fruits of that economy are used for. Certainly, great disparities in wealth and power divide society, weakening the bonds between people and undermining social solidarity. But they are also bad for the economy, as a greater proportion of income and wealth concentrated in the lower income groups of society would result in a more powerful economic multiplier. A lot of the present political instability and social unrest is as a result of inequalities in society. Ireland is not immune to this.

To this end equality must also be a central component of the new Programme for Government. Inequality has been at the heart of much of the upheaval faced by the world in the last few years. Some of this has been caused by economic changes that were either inevitable or the downside of desirable developments; technological progress cannot be arrested, nor can the improving competitiveness of emerging economies of the Global South. But failure to ensure the gains from these trends are more widely shared has led to political and social upheaval in other countries and the new Programme for Government will require action be taken to avoid similar outcomes here.

iii) Just Taxation

Taxation plays a key role in shaping Irish society through funding public services, supporting economic activity and redistributing resources to enhance fairness in society. The *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should set out a plan to raise sufficient taxation to finance the levels of services and infrastructure needed in the coming decades – something that is currently being largely ignored.

The recent re-emergence of economic growth should be seen as an opportunity to secure our revenue base and revitalise our depleted social infrastructure (and plan for future demographic challenges), rather than reduce taxes. Previous benchmarks, set relative to the overall proportion of national income collected in taxation, have become redundant following

recent revisions to Ireland’s GDP levels³⁹. The tax-minimising and tax planning operations of a small number of large multinational firms mean that Ireland’s GDP is not a realistic representation of Ireland’s economic output and so an alternative benchmark is required.

We propose a new tax take target set on a per-capita basis; an approach which minimises some of the distortionary effects that have emerged in recent years. Our target is calculated using CSO population data, ESRI population projections, and CSO and Department of Finance data on recent and future nominal overall taxation levels. The target is that Ireland’s overall level of taxation should reach a level equivalent to €15,000 per capita in 2017 terms. This target should increase each year in line with growth in GNI*.

Table 2 below compares our target to recent expectations of the Department of Finance. We also calculate the overall tax gap for the economy; the difference between the level of taxation that is proposed to be collected and that which would be collected if the *Social Justice Ireland* target was achieved. In 2018 the overall tax gap is €2.8 billion and the average gap over the period 2017-2019 will be €2.6 billion per annum.

Table 2: Ireland’s Tax Gap, 2017-2019

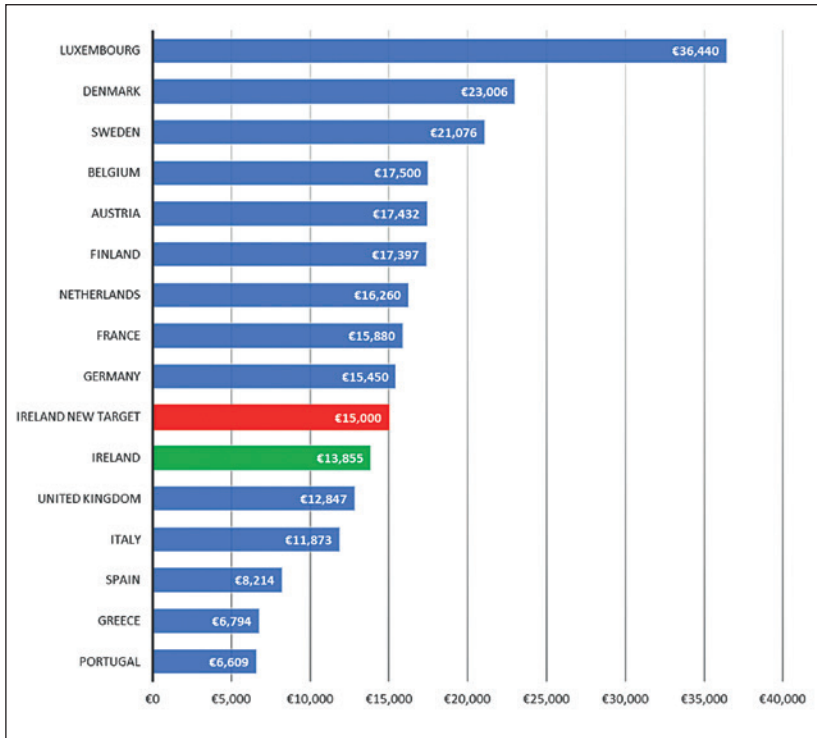
	2017	2018	2019
Tax-take € per capita			
Budget 2018 projection	€14,402	€14,979	€15,448
Social Justice Ireland target	€15,000	€15,495	€15,960
Difference	€598	€516	€512
Overall Tax-take €m			
Budget 2018 projection	€68,806m	€72,136m	€74,988m
Social Justice Ireland target	€71,663m	€74,620m	€77,473m
Tax Gap	€2,857m	€2,484m	€2,485m

Notes: Calculated from Department of Finance (2017: 49), CSO population data, ESRI population projections (Morgenroth, 2018:48), and CSO online database table GFA03. GNI* is assumed to move in line with GNP – as per Department of Finance (2017:49). The Tax Gap is calculated as the difference between the Department of Finance projected tax take and that which would be collected if total tax receipts were equal to the *Social Justice Ireland* target.

³⁹ For many years *Social Justice Ireland* proposed that the overall level of taxation should reach 34.9 per cent of GDP

Increasing the overall tax take to this level would require a number of changes to the tax base and the current structure of the Irish taxation system. Increasing the overall taxation revenue to meet this new target would represent a small overall increase in taxation levels and one which is unlikely to have any significant negative impact on the economy.

Chart 1: Per-Capita Tax Take in EU-15 states, 2016



Source: Eurostat online database and see notes to Table 2.

Chart 1 compares the target to the situation in other comparable high-income EU states (the EU-15) using the latest Eurostat data which is for 2016. In that year Ireland's per capita tax figure was €13,855, it grew to €14,402 in 2017. The *Social Justice Ireland* tax target of €15,000 per capita (in 2017 terms) would not alter Ireland's relative position or alter its status as among the lowest taxed economies in Europe. As a policy objective, Ireland

can remain a low-tax economy, but it should not be incapable of adequately supporting the economic, social and infrastructural requirements necessary to support our society and complete our convergence with the rest of Europe.

The Programme for Government should be the first such Government document to recognise that European-average levels of services and infrastructure cannot be delivered without moving towards European-average levels of taxation. It should also acknowledge that Ireland faces demographic challenges over the coming decades and that increased public revenue will be required to deal with this.

Ireland can never hope to address its longer-term deficits in infrastructure and social provision if we continue to collect substantially less income than that required by other European countries. Increasing the total tax-take should be done in a fair, timely and equitable manner. The plan to increase the total tax-take should also be communicated in a timely manner so that people are aware of future tax changes and the rationale behind these changes. The necessary extra revenue should be attained by reforming the tax code, broadening the tax base, and ensuring those who benefit most from Ireland's economic system contribute most. This will also involve ensuring the corporate sector pays a fair share of tax.

Another core objective of the Programme for Government must be reducing income inequality. Ireland's tax and social welfare system play a key role in the redistribution of resources. Without this redistribution almost half of the Irish population (44.9 per cent) would have been living in poverty in 2016 (CSO, 2017). Such an underlying poverty rate suggests a deeply unequal distribution of direct income. For Ireland, the key point is that despite the aforementioned role of the social transfer system, the underlying degree of direct income inequality dictates that our income distribution remains much more unequal than in many of the EU countries we wish to emulate in terms of economic and social development. Though the promotion of pre-redistribution income equality is important, redistribution through tax and spending decisions should be used to achieve greater equality in Ireland.

Income inequality, gender inequality, inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcome are problems in Irish society. They produce a range

of negative outcomes for those who are poor and/or excluded, exacerbated by growing inequality in recent years. Stiglitz (2016) has asserted that excessive inequality tends to lead to weaker economic performance. The Programme for Government should acknowledge this and set out a strategy to ensure this trend is reversed, including increases in social protection payments to **fully** reverse the cuts implemented since 2010 combined with a strategy to benchmark social welfare payments in parallel with rises in average incomes.

As mentioned, another key priority in the Programme for Government must be the reconceptualization of the role of the Irish corporation tax regime. Under international pressure from the EU, the G20 and OECD, controversial loopholes have been closed but a serious discussion about the role of corporation tax in Ireland's industrial strategy is still needed.

This strategy of attracting foreign direct investment through the use of a low headline corporation tax rate has recently caused reputational damage, due to the utilisation of the Irish tax regime by multinational corporations to avoid taxes on their corporate profits.

The Programme for Government should recognise the damage being done and set a minimum effective corporate tax rate as a step towards a fair resolution of the current unacceptable situation. It should also include a commitment to negotiate a Europe-wide minimum headline corporation tax rate of 17.5%. This could evolve from the ongoing discussions around a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB). The minimum rate should be set well below the 2017 EU-28 average headline rate of 21.9 per cent but above the existing low Irish level. A headline rate of 17.5 per cent and a minimum effective rate of 10 per cent seem appropriate. This reform would simultaneously maintain Ireland's low corporate tax position and provide additional revenues to the exchequer. It will still allow scope for incentives to be offered by individual countries but would prevent a race to the bottom in terms of corporate taxation. Rather than introducing this change overnight, agreement may need to be reached at EU level to phase it in over three to five years.

The Programme for Government should aim to make taxation fairer and more efficient, and should include commitment to the following initiatives:

- Implement a national minimum effective corporate tax rate of 6%, which would ensure that large multinationals pay a fairer share of the corporate tax burden;
- Reform the R&D Tax credit for corporations by removing the tax refund element for unused credits;
- Remove the ability for banks that received taxpayer-funded bailouts to carry forward all their losses from the financial crash to offset against future tax liabilities. This should be limited to only a proportion of losses;
- Change from a Local Property Tax to a Site Value Tax, which would perform the dual role of raising revenue for government and encouraging the flow of capital towards productive social and economic enterprise. Empty homes and vacant site levies would also encourage good behaviour whilst raising revenue;
- Restore the 80 per cent Windfall Gains Tax;
- Take a lead role in negotiating a Financial Transactions Tax, which, in cooperation with other European countries, would serve to curb speculative finance while raising money for government;
- Bring in a system of Refundable Tax Credits for working people, to make low-paid work more rewarding;
- Standard rate all discretionary tax expenditures;
- Bring in a system of Basic Income, which would integrate the present tax, work and social welfare systems, and eliminate the disincentives of the current system. (See boxed text at the end of this section).

The Programme for Government should pursue taxation policies which would allocate capital to productive investment and away from speculative finance. What speculation does take place should be taxed in such a way as to discourage it, whilst simultaneously generating revenue for investment in social infrastructure. A commitment to work with other EU countries to introduce a Financial Transactions Tax⁴⁰ should form part of the Programme for Government. The revenue generated by this tax should be used for national economic and social development and international development co-operation purposes, in particular assisting Ireland and other developed countries to fund overseas aid and reach the UN ODA target.

⁴⁰ A Financial Transactions Tax (FTT) or Tobin Tax. The Tobin tax, first proposed by the Nobel Prize winner James Tobin, is a progressive tax, designed to target only those profiting from speculation. It is levied at a very small rate on all transactions but given the scale of these transactions globally, it has the ability to raise significant funds. https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/taxation-financial-sector/en

International cooperation on taxation should be to the benefit of all countries. Leadership and political will is what is most required.

Social Justice Ireland has long argued that Ireland's total tax-take is simply too low to pay for the services and infrastructure we expect as citizens of a developed nation. The Programme for Government should acknowledge this and increase Ireland's total tax-take in a just way so that the burden falls on those most able to bear it.

Basic Income

Ireland's social welfare system is not fit for purpose in the 21st century. *Social Justice Ireland* has consistently argued that the present tax, work and social welfare systems should be integrated and reformed through the introduction of a system of Universal Basic Income (UBI).

A UBI is an income paid unconditionally to every person without any means test or work requirement. In a UBI system, every person would receive a weekly tax-free payment from the Exchequer while all other personal income is taxed. The UBI payment would replace income from social welfare for a person who is unemployed and replace tax credits for a person who is employed.

The Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil should provide for the establishment of a Commission on Basic Income with the purpose of setting out the costings and the pathways to introducing a Basic Income system in Ireland within the five-year term of office.

iv) Good Governance

Events of the last few years have shown that Ireland's governance is not at the required standard in certain areas. While efforts have been made to rectify this, there is still a long way to go. This is particularly true in the area of financial regulation. Ireland is, ostensibly, at the beginning of a new era. The *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should seize the opportunity to implement real reform in the political system, in areas including:

- Financial regulation;
- The Oireachtas;
- Government budgets;
- Land speculation;
- Social dialogue and deliberative democracy;
- Transparent negotiation.

A 2015 report from the OECD into the Irish budgetary process stated that “the level of budget engagement by the Houses of the Oireachtas is the lowest observed in any OECD country”. It observed a lack of engagement with parliament as a partner throughout the budget process; a lack of parliamentary input to medium-term fiscal planning; and of delaying and limiting legislative scrutiny of budget Bills and meaningful debate (OECD, 2015). Measures have been taken to improve matters including the establishment of the Parliamentary Budget Office. The next government should continue to address this dearth of openness and engagement.

For example, government should also publish their analysis of the distributional impact of budgetary measures and engage in public debate in light of that analysis. If organisations like *Social Justice Ireland* can – as we do every year – calculate and publish such distributional impacts within 24 hours of the Budget being announced, then the Department of Finance should be quite capable of doing so in advance of the Budget itself.

Policy evaluation has often been extremely poor over the years in Ireland’s policy development process. A step in the right direction would see the Programme for Government aim to increase the transparency of budgetary and other important decisions, which are often opaque. Impact assessment and poverty proofing should be carried out on all Government initiatives.

The Programme for Government should also include plans to implement the recommendations of the Kenny Report of 1974. This would ensure that all or a substantial part of the increase in the value of land attributable to the decisions and operations of public authorities be secured for the benefit of the community. Any consequent receipts at local government level should be ring-fenced for the provision and maintenance of social and affordable housing within the Local Authority, rather than general distribution.

The need for such governance has been highlighted in the Report of the Mahon Tribunal and elsewhere. Irish citizens deserve a system where decisions taken by public bodies are taken in the interest of the common good and are not adversely influenced by other factors.

The result of the Seanad abolition referendum in 2013 showed that while a majority want to retain a bicameral Oireachtas, a significant portion of the electorate is unhappy with it in its present form. As part of a programme of real reform, the Programme for Government should seek to improve the structure of the upper house, including making the selection process more democratic.

The first National Economic Dialogue was held in July 2015 and has been held every summer since then. *Social Justice Ireland* welcomes this tentative step towards a deliberative approach to policy-making and believes the Programme for Government should include a permanent and ongoing forum along these lines for regular dialogue on policy. This dialogue should discuss social and environmental as well as economic policy. Such social dialogue, in various forms, is common across Europe's most successful societies and economies and can play a key role in building a vibrant and sustainable society here in Ireland. However, for this dialogue to be worthwhile, a commitment to engagement by key Government stakeholders is necessary (which presumably would be the case if it were included in the Programme for Government), in addition to an expansion of this concept so that it becomes a National Dialogue for Sustainable Economic, Environmental and Social Development.

To facilitate real participation, a process of 'deliberative democracy'⁴¹ is required. Structures should be created to enable discussion and debate to take place without any imposition of power differentials (Healy & Reynolds, 2011). Issues and positions are argued and discussed on the basis of the available evidence rather than on the basis of assertions by those who are powerful and unwilling to consider the evidence. Such debate produces evidence-based policy and ensures a high level of accountability among stakeholders. The Citizen's Assembly is an example of a forum of deliberative democracy, albeit with limited scope and an agenda set by Government.

⁴¹ For more on the concept of deliberative democracy, see Gutmann & Thompson (2004).

The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in Local Authorities are providing an opportunity for real engagement between local people and the local authorities across the country. They are a good step towards a more deliberative democratic system and they should be supported in developing their engagement with Local Authorities.

Among the work being done by PPNs is the generating of a Vision for Community Well-being for each local area. These statements consider six domains, each of which is essential for human well-being: Economy & Resources; Social & Community Development; Participation, Democracy & Good Governance; Values, Culture & Meaning; Health (physical & mental); and Environment & Sustainability. The structure of these Visions acknowledges the interdependence of each of these areas for the holistic well-being of individuals and communities.

Government will make the final decisions on all policy issues; that has always been the case. But it is important that any new policymaking approach adopted by Government is integrated and inclusive and engages all sectors of society. Without this, lop-sided outcomes that will benefit only some will emerge.

At past National Economic Dialogues, *Social Justice Ireland* has posed five questions that should form the basis of any discussion on a framework for Ireland's future. We set these out at the start of this paper and we repeat them here:

- Where should Ireland be in ten years' time?
- What services and infrastructure are required by Ireland?
- How are these to be delivered?
- How are these services and infrastructure to be paid for?
- How can we maintain a vibrant and sustainable economy and society?

These are questions that must be asked as part of any discussion on Ireland's future. Action must be taken to ensure that meaningful consultation is engaged in with the major sectors of Irish society. Reforming governance and getting much broader participation in decision-making are essential if Ireland is to have a just and inclusive future, and the Programme for Government should acknowledge as much.

Social Justice Ireland believes that a new social model for Ireland must be founded on the idea of deliberative democracy, in which decisions about what kind of society and economy Ireland needs are founded upon reasoned, evidence-based and enlightened debate, involving all sectors of society and in which decisions taken by government are explained and accessible to the general public.

Reforming governance and widening democratic participation are a necessity. In some instances, there are lessons to be learned, good and bad, from the old social partnership process. If Government wishes for all of society to take responsibility for producing a more viable future, then it must involve all of us in shaping it. When groups have been involved in shaping decisions they are far more likely to take responsibility for implementing these decisions, difficult and demanding as they may be.

We find ourselves at a time in Irish history where not only is there real demand for reform, but real opportunity to implement it. The new Programme for Government should grasp this opportunity.

v) Sustainability

Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present while not compromising the needs of the future. Sustainability should be at the heart of all government decision-making and the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil*. Environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability all form part of this reality.

Prioritising sustainability will require the introduction of measures to:

- promote climate justice and protect the environment;
- promote balanced regional development;
- develop new economic and social indicators to measure performance.

Climate change remains the largest long-term challenge facing Ireland today. The challenge of reducing Ireland's fossil fuel emissions should not be postponed in deference to the goal of economic growth. Yet this is what has been happening, and this was particularly clear in Budget 2019 when government passed on the opportunity to implement a carbon tax.

It is no longer enough to say that the next Programme for Government should adopt ambitious statutory targets limiting fossil fuel emissions and introduce taxation measures necessary to compensate for the full costs of resource extraction and pollution. Targets have been adopted in the past and are repeatedly missed with no consequences for government. A likely scenario in 2020 will involve Ireland paying hundreds of millions, if not billions of euros, in fines for failing to meet our 2020 goals.

Commitments made at the COP21 conference in Paris in 2015 were based on the growing realisation that our environment is finite – a fact that had often been ignored in the past. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change outlines the urgent and unprecedented changes Governments must make to meet the ambitious target of keeping temperatures between 1.5C and 2C within the next twelve years⁴². The next Programme for Government cannot ignore these facts the way previous programmes have. This provides Ireland with special challenges as it seeks simultaneously to prioritise a type of agricultural development that will have negative impacts on the environment. This is a challenge to be met, rather than a responsibility to be shirked. The next Government must explore new initiative to promote behavioural change through the taxation system, including carbon taxes and policies to deal with single-use plastics. A key component of the Programme for Government must be the development of a comprehensive mitigation and transition programme to accompany an ambitious climate policy.

The Programme for Government should also take concrete measures to prevent a two-tier recovery between urban and rural areas from becoming embedded in Ireland. Policy must ensure balanced regional development through the provision of public services – including cultural, economic and social services – and through capital spending projects.

One of the most obvious ways in which this can be done is by finally rolling out a good quality rural broadband network, but as has been well documented, this process has been flawed and subject to repeated delays. Regarding the goal of ensuring that rural Ireland does not get left further behind, the roll-out of rural broadband must be a priority

⁴² <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>

for the next Government. A better, more integrated and accessible – and environmentally friendly – public transport network will also be key.

The next Programme for Government should also set out a strategy to meet Ireland's Overseas Development Aid target (and UN target⁴³) of 0.7 per cent of national income by 2025. Ireland is regularly commended by the OECD Development Assistance Committee Peer Review for the effectiveness of our aid programme. We can be justifiably proud of our record of providing high quality, untied, grant-based aid, and Budget 2019 took the first truly significant step in more than a decade towards the 0.7 per cent goal. However, many other countries have taken a leadership role in moving towards the 0.7 per cent target, and Ireland's record in this regard has historically been very poor. Budget 2019 will hopefully be seen in hindsight as a turning point, but a defined strategy is needed.

Finally, creating a sustainable Ireland requires adoption of new indicators to measure progress. GDP alone as a measure of progress is unsatisfactory, as it only describes the monetary value of gross output, income and expenditure in an economy.

The *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, (2009) led by Nobel prize winning economists Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz and established by President Sarkozy, argued that new indicators measuring environmental and financial sustainability, well-being, and happiness are required, and *Social Justice Ireland* is fully supportive of such a conclusion.

Such an approach would acknowledge that many activities that make up GDP are in fact detrimental to society and antithetical to the common good. The Programme for Government should develop and adopt new indicators of progress alongside traditional national accounting measures such as GNP, GDP and GNI.

An integrated approach

If there is to be an inclusive and just recovery, all five of these policy areas must be developed in an integrated and sustainable manner. A competent mechanism to ensure this integration is essential. Priority in the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* must be given to long-term outcomes. To this

⁴³ <http://iif.un.org/content/un-target-oda-global>

end, multiannual budgeting is essential, as is a constant focus on medium to long-term policy goals. As already pointed out, many of the challenges, deficits and crises facing Ireland cannot be solved over the term of one government.

Global Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an intergovernmental 17-point plan, with 169 targets, to end poverty, half climate change and fight injustice and inequality. They were agreed by the United Nations in 2015 and apply to all countries in world.

The *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should build on the National Implementation Strategy published this year by setting out the steps Ireland will take both at home and abroad to ensure these goals are attained by the target date of 2030. This Implementation Plan should be coordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach to ensure cross-department integration. It should also set interim targets designed to ensure that Ireland achieves all seventeen goals by 2030.

Substantial investment over a protracted period is required if Ireland's social and physical infrastructure deficits are to be addressed. Such investment is also required given the demographic changes the country faces in the coming decades as the population grows and ages. The policy challenges which Ireland faces in the coming decades require a framework such as the one set out here if they are to be addressed in an integrated and sustainable manner.

A Programme for Government that incorporated the integrated approach and policy priorities set out in this paper would need to have a detailed plan for each of the five key policy areas we have identified. What would these plans address? Here we set out some suggestions for inclusions in each of these five sub-plans. These sub-plans should set out priority and time lined actions to meet the key policy commitments in the Programme for Government and should be updated and revised on an annual basis.

Table 3: Suggested Priority Area Sub Plans

Vibrant economy	Decent services and infrastructure	Just taxation	Good governance	Sustainability
<p>Resource an infrastructure investment programme including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction of social housing units. - Broadband. - Water infrastructure. - Additional primary care and community nursing facilities. 	<p>Reform the healthcare system by, for example, fully integrating the Primary Care Networks into the primary care system.</p> <p>Create a statutory entitlement to Home Care Services</p>	<p>Outline a strategy to increase Ireland’s overall level of taxation to finance the levels of services and infrastructure needed in coming decade.</p>	<p>Publish detailed quarterly reports on the implementation of all commitments in the Programme for Government.</p> <p>Set out and deliver action plan to move towards deliberative democracy at all levels, involving all sectors of society.</p>	<p>Publish comprehensive implementation, mitigation and transition plan to address climate change including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investment in Retrofitting. - Carbon taxation roadmap. - Set ambitious emissions reduction targets to 2030.
<p>Fully resource public services to improve the living standards of all.</p> <p>Make elimination of persistent poverty among children a primary focus of Programme for Government.</p>	<p>Invest in Lifelong Learning as part of human capital investment strategy.</p> <p>Resource up-skilling of those who are/or at risk of unemployment by integrating training and labour market programmes aligned with regional skills needs.</p>	<p>Introduce tax reforms including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restore 80% Windfall Gains Tax. - Standard rate discretionary tax expenditures. - Change LPT to Site Value Tax. - Make tax credits refundable. 	<p>Establish a National Dialogue for Sustainable Economic, Environmental and Social Development as a forum for regular dialogue on policy.</p> <p>Take a ‘social dialogue’ approach to all policy development.</p>	<p>Frontload rollout of a quality rural broadband infrastructure as a priority.</p> <p>Develop an integrated, accessible and environmentally friendly public transport network.</p> <p>Assign biodiversity, natural capital and ecosystems value into our national accounting system.</p>
<p>Work towards equality by developing a rights-based approach to social and economic policy.</p> <p>Start moving towards a basic income system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduce a Universal Pension as a first step. 	<p>Develop a Cost Rental system of housing provision.</p> <p>Invest in the provision of quality, accessible and universal childcare infrastructure.</p>	<p>Introduce a Minimum Effective Corporate Tax Rate on all corporate profits passing through Ireland.</p>	<p>Introduce impact assessment and poverty proofing on all Government initiatives.</p>	<p>Develop new measures of progress ensuring social and environmental issues are incorporated into our overall national accounts.</p>

Conclusion

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the *Programme for Government of the 33rd Dáil* should focus on the following five questions:

- Where should Ireland be in five and ten years' time?
- What level of public infrastructure and services do Irish people want?
- How are these to be delivered?
- How are they to be financed?
- How can we secure a vibrant and sustainable economy as we travel towards the destination this debate would identify?

In this paper we have identified five key policy areas that must be addressed in an integrated and sustainable manner if Ireland is to achieve wellbeing for all in the coming decade. These are focused on achieving:

- A vibrant economy
- Decent services and infrastructure
- A just taxation system
- Good governance
- A sustainable society

We have also set out some suggestions for what should be included in the sub-plans to be developed under each of these five headings.

Future policy development will likely involve increasing public spending and tax levels, as well as changes in how services are delivered. It is important to ensure that all policy decisions in the coming years work to deliver sustainable outcomes that respect this and future generations. In a society characterised by good governance, these questions would be openly debated and decided upon.

At this pivotal time for politicians and policy-makers, it is important that we learn what the recession has taught, that we decide to distribute the prosperity we have earned fairly and sustainably and that we bolster the confidence of a new generation to secure the supply of new and progressive ideas and ambitions that are essential if we are to secure wellbeing for this and future generations in Ireland and beyond.

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Social justice matters. That is why *Social Justice Ireland* publishes this book at this time. As Ireland's economy recovers and resources are available to Government, the choices made in the period ahead have major implications for the future of Irish society, for the provision of decent services and infrastructure, for sustainability and for the flourishing of Ireland's economy. The choices made will decide whether or not Ireland becomes a just society – where human dignity is promoted, human development is facilitated, human rights are respected and the environment is protected.

In this, its Socio-Economic Review for 2018, *Social Justice Ireland* presents:

- a detailed analysis of a range of key matters which are central to social justice.
- a vision of Ireland's future as a just and sustainable society, and
- a policy framework to move consistently and coherently towards becoming a just society.
- It also sets out detailed policy proposals needed to move in this direction.

Among the topics addressed in **Social Justice Matters** are:

- A Guiding Vision and a Policy Framework
- Income Distribution
- Taxation
- Work, Unemployment and Job-Creation
- Housing and Accommodation
- Healthcare
- Education and educational Disadvantage
- Other Public Services
- People and Participation
- Sustainability
- Rural Development
- The Global South
- Values

Social Justice Matters provides a key reference point for anybody working on Irish social justice issues in 2018.



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