Standing Up for Equality

Labour’s plan for a modern, more equal Ireland
Our commitments

- **Repeal the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution** and properly legislate for the rights of women in pregnancy.

- **Commission a National Action Plan for Women’s Equality**, take action to tackle the gender pay gap and further increase female participation in governance and public life. Labour will also amend the constitutional reference to the place of women in the home.

- **Provide greater school choice**. We will deliver 100 new multi-denominational schools and make sure that local children can access local schools.

- **Enact Ireland’s first national LGBT strategy**. This will build on the successes of Marriage Equality and the Gender Recognition Act to tackle the cultural issues that disadvantage LGBT people.

- **Promote independent living for people with disabilities**. We will provide services that empower people with disabilities and will continue to implement our Comprehensive Employment Strategy. We will also ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities within the first year of a new government.

- **Introduce a one-off earned regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants**. This will set out a clear pathway to citizenship for migrants resident in Ireland. We will also continue to implement the recommendations of the report on Direct Provision to build a fairer asylum system.

- **Put tackling child poverty at the heart of Government policy**. Labour is committed to substantially increasing funding for school meals programmes, establishing a new End Child Poverty Commission and continuing to increase Child Benefit payments.

*OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, LABOUR IN GOVERNMENT HAS WORKED HARD TO STRENGTHEN RIGHTS AND DELIVER LANDMARK CHANGES THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGISLATIVE AND SOCIAL CHANGE*
Equality is one of the founding values of the Labour Party. Ever since the foundation of Labour by James Connolly in 1912, fighting for the rights of disadvantaged groups within Irish society has been at the core of our political project.

Over the last five years, Labour in government has worked hard to strengthen rights and deliver landmark changes through constitutional, legislative and social change. The referendum on marriage equality, and the overwhelming popular support for that referendum, was a historic victory for the rights of gay and lesbian people, and also for all those who respect and value diversity. Labour is proud of its role in bringing the question of Marriage Equality to a public vote and in working with civil society groups to ensure its passage.

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

Labour in government has driven real change and reform towards a more pluralist system of school patronage which reflects the diverse beliefs of families across Ireland.

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

Labour will continue to push the progressive agenda in the areas of gender equality, integration, school access and minority community rights. We will also ensure that a referendum is held to repeal the eighth amendment to the constitution. For too long, this misguided clause has hamstrung the ability of governments to properly legislate for the rights of women in pregnancy.
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Repealing the eighth amendment
A mark of a country’s health service is how it treats pregnant women.

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

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

We will hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution, otherwise known as the Eighth Amendment, and campaign to win that referendum. If the referendum is passed, we will put comprehensive legislation to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

In future legislation, Labour is committed to recognising the importance of sustaining embryonic and foetal life in pregnancy while allowing termination under strict conditions in the event of: fatal foetal abnormalities; real and substantial risk to the health of the woman (physical or mental) in the early stages of pregnancy; risk of severe or disabling damage to the woman’s health in the later stages of pregnancy; and where the effect of a pregnancy arising out of rape, incest or serious sexual assault has been to create a risk to the physical or mental health of the woman.

Real equality between women and men
For true equality, women must be able to play an equal part in all realms of life from business to public life. Labour in government has introduced new laws which set a clear minimum proportion of female candidates that political parties must run in elections. We have also introduced a 40% target for the representation of women on State boards.

We will increase our target to 45% of all State board appointments, and will enact new policies to make this the case on every individual State
board. We will also require colleges to give proportionate scholarship funding to women and men, in order to increase the number of women in receipt of sporting and scientific scholarships.

We believe it is wholly unacceptable that a significant gender pay gap still exists in our economy. In 2012, this gender pay gap meant a difference of 14.4% between men and women’s pay. Labour will take action to ensure large companies and public sector employers must make public the details of their own internal pay gaps in order to stimulate stronger action towards pay equality.

We will also commission a National Action Plan for Women’s Equality to ensure gender equality issues remain at the heart of all government decisions. More information on Labour’s plans for gender equality will be published in our dedicated Standing Up for Women document.

Equality in education
A growing number of parents want their children to experience multi-denominational education. Multi-denominational schools can be more inclusive of all children in a community, regardless of their background. Children also benefit from meeting and getting to know children from various backgrounds and religions.

While we cannot provide choice of school in every town and village across Ireland, we can build a national network of multi-denominational schools. Labour believes that the wishes of those who want denominational education and those who want multi-denominational education must be respected equally.

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

We believe that more needs to be done to provide greater school choice. Labour will continue to provide new schools in areas where the population is increasing, and we will speed up the process of reorganising schools in areas where parents have demanded an alternative to the status quo. This reorganisation will include examining whether federal models could provide better support to small schools in rural communities.

The emerging evidence of parents feeling forced to baptise their children to ensure a school place is a national scandal which must come to an end. Labour’s Admission to Schools Bill will go a long way to improve the fairness of access to schools for all children. It will ban the practice of charging parents to apply for a school place, and make sure that all schools are welcoming of all children.

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

We will also provide a further 100 multi-denominational schools by 2021 and publish a White Paper to build on the report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism to clearly set out a long-term strategy for the State on school ownership and diversity in education.

Full equality for LGBT people
Labour has always been to the fore in campaigning for the rights of LGBT people. Over the past five years, we have delivered monumental change for LGBT people. The Marriage Equality referendum was a momentous occasion in Irish society, and we are proud of our role in delivering that referendum, and of our work with so many civil society groups and activists to win the referendum.

The Children & Family Relationships Act represented another milestone in protecting and cherishing all family types, including those where LGBT parents are already raising children. By broadening and strengthening the State’s recognition of all family types, we have ensured better treatment for children all over the country. Labour will fully commence all sections of the Children & Family Relationships Act. We will enact the Adoption (Amendment) Bill to amend the Adoption Act 2010 to reflect the adoption provision provided for in the Children and Family Relationships Act.

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

The passage of the Gender Recognition Act has, for the first time, ensured proper recognition of transgender people. In 2017, we will review the operation of the Gender Recognition Act to ensure it is delivering for all citizens who wish to have their true gender officially acknowledged.

Labour has also ensured that Section 37.1 of the Employment Equality Act has been amended. This has provided our LGBT teachers with vital protection from unfair dismissal due to their sexuality.

Following on from these important legislative changes, it is time to address the remaining cultural problems that cause discrimination against LGBT people. Working with the voluntary sector and across government departments, we will enact a national LGBT strategy that will focus on tackling hate crimes, discrimination in schools and workplaces and improving the mental and sexual health of LGBT people.

We will also introduce a new bill to expunge the criminal records of gay men who were convicted under historical indecency laws. This will allow us to apologise to those who were criminalised for consensual relationships, and trigger a necessary discussion around the needs of older LGBT people.

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

At the core of Labour’s plan for people with disabilities is our belief in promoting and supporting independent living. If returned...
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Labour in government launched the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. We will continue to provide employment supports to those receiving disability payments to ensure they can access job and training schemes. Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been postponed by successive governments – we are already delivering on its content through sustained implementation of disability initiatives and we will sign the Convention into law within the first year of government.

Labour’s plan for improving supports for people with disabilities includes putting in place a new system of brokers to assist with individual procurement, increasing personal assistant services and upping the Housing Adaptation Grant to €60million. We will also update planning and building control legislation and policies to ensure that at least 10% of all ‘new build’ housing developments meet Universal Design standards. We will introduce a new voucher scheme to allow purchase of interpreter hours for those who depend on Irish Sign Language and develop a National Vision Strategy in cooperation with the vision impaired community.

For children with special needs, we will build on our work in government increasing spending on special education and introducing the first system of supports for pre-school children with special needs. The next steps are to mainstream the pilot model of allocating resource teachers from September 2017 and expand the number of educational psychologists so that money is not an obstacle to appropriate support. Our goal is to increase the percentage of college students with a disability to 8% of all new entrants.

More information on Labour’s plans to support people with disabilities will be available in our “Dignity in Disability” document.

Integration and new communities

Ireland’s population is more diverse than ever before and embraces new communities from across the world. As we welcome new communities, we will have to develop the appropriate integration structures needed to assist in social cohesion. Labour in government has worked with Migrant Groups to look at new ways to develop better integration practices.

We established a nationwide Polish–Irish festival recognising the unique position of the Polish diaspora as one of the largest ex-pat communities in Ireland. The full implementation of the new National Integration Strategy will be a key priority for Labour in the next government. This new strategy will look at ways to encourage participation in public life, including politics, for migrants and their families. To ensure these goals are achieved in all areas, we will create local integration strategies and guidelines for all community groups in receipt of public funding.

The Labour Party will also introduce, on a one-off basis, an earned regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants living in Ireland. This scheme will be both pragmatic and fair and will be developed in consultation with migrant NGOs. This will allow us to regularise people who have been living in Ireland for years but are currently unable to achieve citizenship.

We recognise the significant problems that still exist in the Direct Provision system and the wide, passionate support for humane change. Ensuring a fair and humane system for asylum and refugee applications remains a core task for Labour. In government we have overseen the publication of a report into the Protection Process including the Direct Provision System. This report included 176 recommendations which we have begun to implement for a fairer system. These include the waiving of prescription charges for those living in direct provision and increasing the rate allowance paid to children living in these centres.
We have also introduced a Protection Bill which will see new applications for asylum processed more quickly to ensure people are not left living in limbo for many years while their application is pending. If re-elected we will continue to implement the recommendations within the report to ensure that those seeking asylum are treated with dignity and respect whilst they await the outcome of their application. We will also continue to work on developing comprehensive immigration legislation, which is transparent and clear for those wishing to work and live in the state.

**Traveller recognition**

Labour will work with the Traveller Community to address the persistent inequalities and cycles of disadvantage within their community, and will do so through with respect and ongoing dialogue with the community. We support the formal recognition of Irish Travellers as a group in Irish society with a unique culture, heritage and ethnic identity.

Working in government, we have outlined a roadmap to achieve this recognition by commencing work on a new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. We will continue to consult with Traveller NGOs on the completion and implementation of this Strategy to address the accommodation, health, education and other issues faced by the Traveller community.

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

**Tackling child poverty**

We are determined to eradicate child poverty. Despite progress over recent years, more focussed intervention is required. We will produce a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2017, with the eradication of child poverty as its primary objective. We will also establish a new body – the End Child Poverty Commission. This body will work to eradicate child poverty to make sure that we at least halve child poverty by 2021. Over the last two budgets, we have increased Child Benefit by €10 per child per month, benefitting 623,000 families. We will continue to invest in Child Benefit, and increase Child Benefit payments by €15 per month by 2021, bringing it to €155 per child per month.

In government, we have ensured that early school leaving has fallen below 10% for the first time. We have provided State funding to iScoil for those who have disengaged from school and increased funding for school meals. We will raise the school leaving age to 17 and increase the funding available for school meals by €5m each year to ensure no child goes hungry at school. We will identify the poorest schools in the country, in both urban and rural areas, and provide them with the funding, staffing and supports necessary to tackle deeply entrenched levels of disadvantage.

Concentrated disadvantage leads to much greater inequality in society. Tackling that inequality means tackling the root causes of inequality, which start in the earliest years. In government, Labour has funded Area-Based Childcare (ABC) programmes in areas of concentrated disadvantage such as Limerick, Ballymun and Tallaght. We will continue to fund ABC approaches to tackling childhood disadvantage and to this end we are committed to mainstreaming youngballymun, an evidence-based model prioritising children and families in communities impacted by socio-economic disadvantage.

The passage of the Childrens’ Rights referendum will have implications for all future legislation, and the creation of TUSLA and passage of the Children and Family Relationships Act were both designed to put the interests of children first. Labour is committed to bringing about greater integration of these services with TUSLA. We will also review the high staff turnover ratios within child protection services and explore ways to overcome worker burnout in terms of better supervision, manageable caseloads and a greater experience mix amongst colleagues in services.
### Costings

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 new multi-denominational schools</td>
<td>€10m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once-off earned regularisation scheme</td>
<td>€4m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reform of Direct Provision</td>
<td>€4m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full implementation of Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities</td>
<td>€5m</td>
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<td>Housing Adaptation Grant</td>
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<td>Child Benefit</td>
<td>€215m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase funding for iScoil +1 mil</td>
<td>€8m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restore funding of School Completion Programmes</td>
<td>€1m</td>
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