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

• **Repeal the Eighth Amendment.** Labour in government will hold a referendum to remove Article 40.3.3 from the Constitution. If this is passed, we will legislate to properly protect women’s health in pregnancy.

• **Continue to boost the number of women in public life.** We will target 45% female participation in all state boards and continue to support necessary gender quotas for political parties.

• **Amend the constitutional reference to women in the home.** Labour will propose new gender-neutral wording that supports all those who provide care within the family home.

• **Tackle the gender pay gap** by compelling all large companies and public sector employers to publish their internal pay gap openly.

• **Introduce a new Working Family Benefit** to better support women who want to re-enter the workforce or are working in low paid jobs. Labour will also increase the minimum wage to a living wage, disproportionately benefiting the two-thirds of low-income workers who are women.

• **Deliver quality, low-cost childcare.** This will help working mothers and assist primary carers, most of whom are women, to enter and remain within the world of work.

**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 a founding principle of the Labour Party. For decades, we have fought in government and outside of it for greater female representation and stronger gender equality throughout Irish society.

Over the past number of years, Ireland has gradually transformed into a new kind of society with far greater parity between women and men than ever before in our history. The last five years of Labour in government have played a decisive role in this.

Labour has introduced new gender quotas for political parties and State boards to ensure a minimum threshold on the number of women candidates for governance positions. Already, this has seen a marked increase in female candidates – twice as many women are putting their names forward to become TDs in 2016 as in 2011.

Labour also ensured that the State finally met its obligation to women under the X Case ruling and legislated to protect a woman’s right to life while pregnant. The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013 was the first piece of legislation to unambiguously prioritise the protection of women’s lives in pregnancy.

However, there is still much work to be done to deliver a truly equal Ireland.

On average, women still don’t earn the same as men. They are denied access to necessary healthcare due to the constitutional mess surrounding the so-called Eighth Amendment. And the Irish state has historically underinvested in the childcare services that are vital to ensuring all women who want it can reach their full potential in the world of work.

Labour has always been in the vanguard of social change and we always will be. We will continue to stand up for women’s rights and fight hard to make Ireland a better and more egalitarian society for women.
Repealing the eighth amendment
A mark of a country 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.

Improving reproductive healthcare
Repealing the Eighth Amendment is a priority for the Labour Party. However, there are many other issues around reproductive services that require action from the next Government. If re-elected, we are determined to implement the recommendations of the new National Maternity Strategy.

In particular, we will ensure higher compliance with internationally recognised ratios of staff to patients. We will review appropriate birthing environments and care choices so that
women can be supported in their preferences. We will also support greater standardisation of care across maternity units in the State and introduce a new health and wellbeing approach to prenatal and post natal care with the establishment of specific mother and baby clinics within primary care centres.

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

The existing threshold for minimum female candidates in political parties is set to increase to 40% over time. This will ensure that a real and steady increase in females TDs sitting in Dáil Éireann over the next two or three election cycles.

Labour has also brought in a 40% target for the representation of women on State boards. This will ensure a more diverse, representative make-up of those who make decisions and recommendations in public life. We are committed to increasing the target to 45% of all new appointments. We will also enact new policies to make sure this is the case on every individual State board. We believe that enterprise, agriculture and finance need the input of women just as much as education, childcare and health.

Sport is also an area where women receive less support. We will therefore legislate to require colleges to give proportionate scholarship funding to women and men. This will have the effect of increasing the number of women in receipt of sporting and scientific scholarships.

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More women in public life
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Labour in Government took long-overdue action to overcome the persistent lack of women at high levels of decision-making in Irish society.

We introduced strict gender quotas for political parties to ensure more effort is made to encourage women into public representation. This measure has seen the number of female candidates on the ballot double since 2011, and will see a steady and considerable rise in the number of women elected to serve in Dáil Éireann.

The Constitutional Convention voted in favour by a huge 88% to amend this article.

Labour is determined to act on this recommendation. We believe that a revised Article 42.1 should be put to the people. The new wording should remove the gendered language and provide for State recognition and support for all persons caring for others within the family home.

If re-elected to Government, we will establish

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an inter-departmental task force to formulate wording for a referendum to amend Article 42.1. This wording should fully reflect the existing submissions made to the Constitutional Convention on the issue.

Equal pay for women and men
The increases in the National Minimum Wage and work towards a Living Wage will have a very positive effect on women in work. Two thirds of workers on the Minimum Wage are women, all of whom will have seen their pay increase by €3,000 a year due to Labour’s increases in 2011 and 2015.

It is, however, wholly unacceptable that a significant gender pay gap still exists in our economy. As recently as 2012, this gender pay gap meant a real difference of 14.4% between the pay of women and men.

If returned to Government, Labour will ensure that all large companies and public sector employers are required to publish the difference in pay between their male and female employees each year. Over time, this will highlight which companies are taking corrective action and allow workers and consumers to react accordingly.

Supporting women in work
Labour is committed to making sure it becomes easier than ever for women, especially women with children, to enter and re-enter the
workplace on their own terms. At present there still remain far too many barriers to women seeking work or promotion.

To help working mothers, Labour in government ensured that a second free pre-school year will become available from September 2016. We have also introduced paid paternity leave for the first time to acknowledge the role of fathers in raising their children.

Our plans for a revised Working Family Benefit will also better support women who want to enter the workplace or increase the hours they work. Labour believes that the existing Family Income Supplement (FIS) system is too complex and unbalanced in its current form. The Working Family Benefit will replace FIS with a mechanism that is more supportive, easier to understand and engage with, and that contains a number of financial disregards to better support single-parent families, the majority of which are headed by women. This simpler, more supportive Working Family Benefit will ensure that all parents working full time will earn at least €12 per hour.

Labour in Government has already raised the minimum wage from €7.65 to €9.15 per hour. Our goal is to continue with this trend and target a minimum wage of 60% of median earnings by 2021. Increasing the Minimum Wage to a Living Wage level in this manner will particularly benefit working women, given that
an estimated two-thirds of those presently on the Minimum Wage are women.

**Delivering quality, low-cost childcare**
Labour’s plan for low-cost childcare for all children under the age of 12 will substantially reduce the cost of going to work for women. As a considerable majority of primary caregivers are mothers, capping and reducing childcare costs will overwhelmingly help women who wish to balance an independent career with high-quality care for their children.

Over the past five years we have expanded the subsidised childcare available to low-income families, introduced the first supports for children with special needs in preschools, and passed a referendum enshrining the rights of children in our constitution. Now we must go further and deliver truly affordable childcare costs for all.

If returned to government, Labour will immediately cap childcare costs for parents at the current national average. After this, we will work to reduce these costs to no more than €2 per hour (€80 per week) by 2021. This will be done by progressively expanding State subsidies and will not negatively impact on the pay and conditions of childcare workers.

Labour’s plan for the childcare sector is not just to cut costs to parents but to improve the overall quality of the services provided. We will make funding conditional on basic quality guarantees, and increase funding for those providers whose staff possess higher qualifications. By 2025, at least 60% of all staff working in childcare will be qualified to degree level.

Recognising the different needs of different families, we will ensure that choice remains a core element of Irish childcare. Families will be able to choose to avail of subsidised childcare in private or community childcare centres, or to use registered childminders. We will require all professional childminders to be regulated to ensure a high standard of care.

Labour is also determined to ensure the childcare sector becomes a better place in which to work. We recognise that staff need to be paid appropriately, and will work towards a situation where all early years workers earn at least the Living Wage. We will provide all those who work with young children with one hour of paid non-contact time per week to better plan their work. And we will support the setting up of a sector-wide agreement on pay and conditions.

More information on Labour’s childcare plans can be found in our dedicated Childcare document.

**Expanding parental leave**
Protecting and increasing parental leave will be absolutely essential to ensuring greater equality between working parents and ensuring the best possible results for children in their earliest months.

We are fully committed to protecting the existing six months of paid maternity leave and paternity leave.

In addition, we will provide three months’ paid parental leave on top of existing entitlements. These months are to be shared between both parents, to ensure that every child can be properly cared for in the family home over the first nine months of life.

We will also commission a review of the level of payment given for maternity, paternity and parental leave to ensure they remain sufficient for the needs of modern families.

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## Costings

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<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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<tr>
<td>National Maternity Strategy-more obstetricians and midwives</td>
<td>€24m</td>
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<td>New State supports for couples to access assisted reproductive technology</td>
<td>€10m</td>
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<td>Working Family Benefit</td>
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<td>Labour’s Affordable Childcare plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extend Parental Leave by 13 weeks</td>
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<td>Childcare Workers’ Pay</td>
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