



**European
Election 2024**

MANIFESTO

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FOREWORD

Foreword by Taoiseach Simon Harris TD

Never before have we faced such an important European election. The choice facing the country is the starkest it has faced in generations. A choice between opportunity and opportunism; substance and soundbites; hard work and cynicism.

In this time of global upheaval, Fine Gael MEPs offer a blend of experience, fresh thinking, know-how and an ability to influence, as part of the most powerful political grouping in Europe – the European People’s Party.

Of course, we don’t know exactly what’s ahead of us. When we published our European Manifesto in 2019, we didn’t have a deal on Brexit, we hadn’t yet seen Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis and the desperate situation in Gaza. Over the next five years, we know the circumstances will change, but we have a vision and a set of priorities that will guide us. They are:

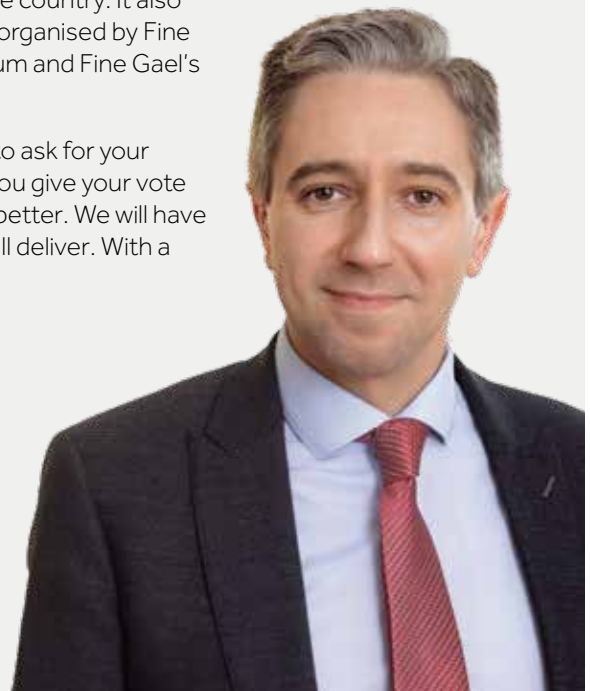
1. Improving your quality of life
2. Working with farmers to build a fair, sustainable and food secure Europe
3. A more assertive foreign and defence policy
4. Firm and fair migration
5. Making Europe Competitive – promoting enterprise and fostering innovation

This manifesto details Fine Gael MEPs’ priorities over the next five years, based on the feedback we have received from voters up and down the country. It also incorporates feedback received from various public meetings organised by Fine Gael’s National Agricultural, Food and Rural Development Forum and Fine Gael’s Small Business and Enterprise Council.

To you, the reader, we want to ask you for your trust. We want to ask for your support. And we want to ask you for your vote. We promise if you give your vote to Fine Gael, we will work, day and night, to help make your life better. We will have your back. We will repay your trust. Together, we promise we will deliver. With a new energy.



Simon Harris TD
Taoiseach





RÉAMHRÁ

Réamhrá ón Taoiseach, Simon Harris TD

Níor thugamar aghaidh ar Thoghchán Eorpach chomh tábhachtach riamh cheana. Is é an rogha atá os comhair na tíre anois an ceann is géire atá os a comhair leis na glúnta. Is rogha é idir deis agus brabúsaíocht; téagar agus giotáin chainte; obair chrua agus soiniciúlacht.

Le linn thréimhse an tsuaite dhomhanda seo, cuireann FPE Fhine Gael meascán taitní, smaointeoireachta úire, saineolais agus chumas tionchair a imirt ar fáil mar chuid den ghrúpa polaitiúil is cumhachtaí san Eoraip - Páirtí an Phobail Eorpaigh.

Ar ndóigh, níl a fhios againn cad atá romhainn. Nuair a d'fhoilsíomar ár bhForógra Eorpach in 2019, ní raibh socrú againn ar an mBreatimeacht, ní raibh Covid-19, an cogadh san Úcráin, an ghéarchéim costas maireachtála agus an staid uafásach in Gaza feicthe againn go fóill. Sna cúig bliana amach romhainn, tá a fhios againn go n-athróidh na cúinsí, ach tá fis agus sraith tosaíochtaí againn a threoróimid. Is iad sin:

1. Feabhas a chur ar do chaighdeán saoil
2. Oibriú le feirmeoirí chun Eoraip chothrom, inbhuanaithe agus slán ó thaobh soláthair an bhia a thógáil.
3. Beartas eachtrach agus cosanta níos ceannasaí
4. Imirce láidir agus chothrom
5. An Eoraip a Dhéanamh lomaíoch - an fhiontraíocht a chur chun cinn agus an nuálaíocht a chothú

Tugann an forógra seo breac-chuntas ar thosaíochtaí FPE Fhine Gael sna cúig bliana amach romhainn, bunaithe ar an aiseolas atá faighte againn ó vótálaithe ar fud na tíre. Cuimsíonn sé aiseolas a fuarthas ó chruinnithe poiblí éagsúla arna n-eagrú ag Fóram Náisiúnta Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Forbartha Tuaithe de chuid Fhine Gael agus ag an gComhairle um Ghnólachtaí Beaga agus Fiontair de chuid Fhine Gael.

Táimid ag iarraidh ort, an léitheoir, do mhuintín a chur ionainn. Táimid ag iarraidh ort tacú linn. Agus táimid ag iarraidh ort do vóta a thabhairt dúinn. Geallaimid má thugann tú do vóta d'Fhine Gael, oibreoimid, lá agus oíche, chun do shaol a fheabhsú. Beimid ar fáil duit. Cúiteoimid do mhuintín leat. Le chéile, geallaimid go ndéanfaimid beart de réir ár mbriathair le fuinneamh nua.

Simon Harris TD
Taoiseach

FOREWORD

Foreword by Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD

Ireland's membership of the EU has been transformative. Our country is almost unrecognisable from what it once was. The economic, social and political shifts over the past five decades have been nothing short of seismic.

Recent polling data from the European Movement Ireland shows that 84% of Irish people believe we should remain a member of the EU. That is an overwhelming endorsement, but we cannot take it for granted. Fine Gael representatives will work on your behalf to ensure that Ireland continues to benefit from our EU membership for the better and that we have influence to shape the EU agenda for the better.

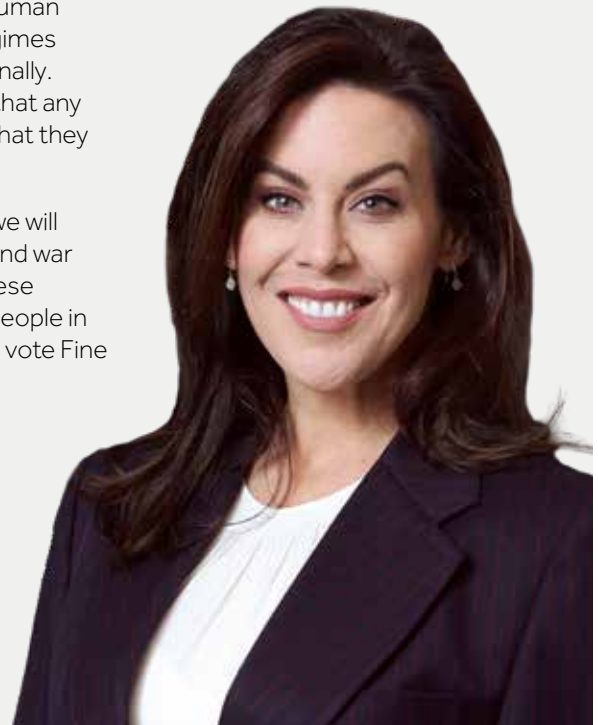
Fifty years ago, Ireland benefitted from the EU's very first enlargement. Over the next five years, we will help more countries to join and help them make the necessary reforms before accession. These countries have to do the work themselves but the EU and member states like Ireland must support them.

We find ourselves in an increasingly contested and volatile global environment. In particular, Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine has clearly had a fundamental impact on Europe's security, including on that of Ireland. We can no longer rely either on our geographic isolation for our security, nor believe that we can insulate ourselves from world events. We must work to broaden and deepen Ireland's international security engagement as well as our domestic efforts to ensure the security of our country. It is incumbent on us to take our own security and responsibility towards our like-minded partners, particularly our fellow EU members, more seriously. Neutrality does not mean having no ability to protect ourselves or our own sovereignty.

Fine Gael will always stand up for democracy, rule of law and human rights. The behaviour of some MEPs towards disreputable regimes around the world has damaged Ireland's reputation internationally. People are entitled to hold any views they like, but it is crucial that any MEP or MEP candidate is up front with the electorate about what they stand for and with whom they keep company.

We have faced many challenges over the past few years and we will face many more in the years to come. Through Brexit, Covid and war in Europe, we have demonstrated that we can get through these challenges, working together. It's vital that we have our best people in the European Parliament working on your behalf. I urge you to vote Fine Gael on Friday 7 June.

Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD
Minister of State for European Affairs and Defence





RÉAMHRÁ

Réamhrá ón Aire Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD

Bhí ballraíocht na hÉireann san AE claochlaitheach don tír. Tá ár dtír beagnach do-aitheanta i gcomparáid leis an tír a bhí inti tráth. Athruithe seismeacha amach is amach is ea iad na hathruithe eacnamaíocha, sóisialta agus polaitiúla le cúig scór bliain anuas.

Léiríonn sonraí pobalbhreithe ó Ghluaiseacht na hEorpa in Éirinn le déanaí go gcreideann 84% de mhuintir na hÉireann gur cheart dúinn fanacht inár mball den AE. Sin moladh iontach, ach ní féidir linn talamh slán a dhéanamh de. Oibreoidh ionadaithe Fhine Gael ar do shon le cinntiú go mbeidh Éire ag baint tairbhe as ár mballraíocht san AE lena leas fós agus go mbeidh tionchar agann chun clár an AE a mhúnlú chun feabhais.

Caoga bliain ó shin, bhain Éire tairbhe as an gcéad mhéadú AE. Sna cúig bliana amach romhainn, cabhróimid le níos mó tíortha teacht isteach san AE agus cabhróimid leo leis na leasuithe riachtanacha a dhéanamh roimh a n-aontachas. Ní mór do na tíortha seo an obair a dhéanamh iad féin ach caithfidh ballstáit amhail Éire tacú leo.

Táimid i dtimpeallacht dhomhanda atá ag éirí níos conspóidí agus níos míshocra. Is léir go raibh tionchar suntasach ag ionradh brúidiúil agus neamhdhleathach na Rúise ar an Úcráin, go háirithe, ar shlándáil na hEorpa, lena n-áirítear ar shlándáil na hÉireann. Ní féidir linn brath a thuilleadh ar ár n-iargúltacht geografach dár slándáil, ná creidiúint gur féidir linn muid féin a choinneáil amach ó imeachtaí an domhain. Ní mór dúinn oibriú chun rannpháirtíocht slándála idirnáisiúnta na hÉireann a leathnú agus a dhoimhniú chomh maith lenár n-iarrachtaí intíre chun slándáil ár dtíre a chinntiú. Tá sé de dhualgas orainn ár slándáil féin agus ár bhfreagracht dár gcomhpháirtithe atá ar aon intinn linn, go háirithe ár gcomhbhaill AE, a ghlacadh níos dáiríre. Ní chiallaíonn neodracht nach bhfuil aon chumas againn muid féin ná ár gceannas féin a chosaint.

Seasfaidh Fine Gael i gcónaí ar son an daonlathais, riail an dlí agus cearta daonna. Rinne iompar cuid dár FPE i leith réimis a bhfuil droch-chlú orthu ar fud an domhain dochar do cháil na hÉireann go hidirnáisiúnta. Is féidir le daoine aon tuairimí a bheith acu is maith leo, ach tá sé rithábhachtach go bhfuil aon FPE nó aon iarrthóir FPE oscailte leis na toghthóirí faoi na rudaí a sheasann siad dóibh agus faoi na daoine lena gcoinníonn siad cuideachta.

Is iomaí dúshlán a bhí os ár gcomhair le blianta beaga anuas agus beidh níos mó os ár gcomhair sna blianta beaga amach romhainn. Tríd an mBreathimeacht, Covid agus trí chogadh san Eoraip, léiríomar gur féidir linn teacht slán as na dúshlán seo, ag obair le chéile. Tá sé rithábhachtach go bhfuil na daoine is fearr againn i bParlaimint na hEorpa ag obair ar do shon. Molaim duit vótáil Fine Gael Dé hAoine 7 Meitheamh.

Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD

An tAire Stáit do Ghnóthaí Eorpacha agus Cosanta

FINE GAEL TEAM FOR EUROPE

MIDLANDS-NORTH WEST



Nina Carberry



Maria Walsh

SOUTH



Seán Kelly



John Mullins

DUBLIN



Regina Doherty



INTRODUCTION

FINE GAEL AT THE HEART OF EUROPE

Fine Gael is the party of Europe, fully involved in the development of the EU and engaged with our EU partners. Ireland's future lies in Europe, a common home we are helping to build.

Fine Gael representatives are at the heart of European policymaking for decades. We are a proud member of the European People's Party, the most influential political block in EU decision-making. The EPP includes 84 parties and partners from 44 countries, the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Parliament, 12 EU and 3 non-EU heads of state and government and 10 members of the European Commission. Crucially, the EPP Group is the largest in the European Parliament and is in a strong position to help shape and deliver legislation that meets the needs of our time.

From the late former Taoiseach John Bruton and Taoisigh Enda Kenny, Leo Varadkar and Simon Harris, to former Tánaistí Simon Coveney and Frances Fitzgerald, Fine Gael public representatives have been in the room when it matters, shaping decisions and giving Irish people a voice in Europe. Our former MEP and First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mairead McGuinness has been leading on the European agenda as a Commissioner and Minister Paschal Donohoe is serving his second term as President of the Eurogroup of finance ministers from euro zone member states.

The Irish people are generally pro-European and pro-European Union and that appreciation grew during the difficult Brexit negotiations. We don't take that position for granted. We must work to ensure that the EU evolves to reflect the wishes of EU citizens and provides strong leadership in these fraught geopolitical times. There is work to do in the coming years, challenges to be overcome and opportunities to be grasped. Fine Gael MEPs will – as they have always done – work to ensure that strategic vulnerabilities are addressed, including energy and critical supply chains.

As digitalisation moves apace, we will work on EU efforts to take advantage of the benefits of artificial intelligence and other developments, while constantly monitoring the risks, including cyberattacks. We will work collaboratively with our European neighbours on climate change and the huge potential of green technologies and renewable energy.

Europe, its values and its way of life are under attack – through physical war and by other means, which threaten our daily lives, our freedom and democracy. We choose multilateralism over nationalism, rule of law over autocracy and free trade over protectionism.

Fine Gael takes the EU seriously, sends our best people to the European Parliament and celebrates the benefits that EU membership brings to Ireland. Too many other parties and candidates seek to attack or undermine the EU to disguise domestic challenges or to duck hard decisions.

Fine Gael is committed to being in the room to find solutions that benefit our citizens. Unlike other candidates or parties, we will not be outside the room complaining.



BROLLACH

FINE GAEL I GCROÍLÁR NA HEORPA

Is é Fine Gael páirtí na hEorpa. Tá sé lánpháirteach i bhforbairt an AE agus i mbun pléite lenár gcomhpháirtithe AE. Is san Eoraip atá todhchaí na hÉireann, baile coiteann a bhfuilimid ag cur leis.

Tá ionadaithe Fhine Gael i gcroílár cheapadh polasaí na hEorpa le blianta fada. Is ball bródúil muid de Pháirtí an Phobail Eorpaigh, an bloc polaitiúil is mó tionchair i gcinnteoireacht an AE. Tá 83 pháirtí agus chomhpháirtithe ó 44 thír san EPP agus Uachtarán an Choimisiúin Eorpaigh, Uachtarán Pharlaimint na hEorpa, 12 cheann stáit agus ceannairí rialtais AE agus 3 cheann stáit agus ceannairí rialtais neamh-AE agus 10 gcomhalta de chuid an Choimisiúin Eorpaigh. Thar aon rud eile, is é an Grúpa EPP an grúpa is mó i bParlaimint na hEorpa agus tá sé i suíomh láidir chun cabhrú le reachtaíocht a mhúnlú agus a sholáthar a fhreastalaíonn ar riachtanais ár linne.

Ón iarThaoiseach John Bruton nach maireann agus ó na Taoisigh Enda Kenny, Leo Varadkar agus Simon Harris, go dtí na hiarThánaistí Simon Coveney agus Frances Fitzgerald, bhí ionadaithe Fhine Gael sa seomra nuair a theastaíonn sé, ag múnlú cinntí agus ag tabhairt ghutha do mhuintir na hÉireann san Eoraip. Tá ár n-iarFPE agus an Chéad Leas-Uachtarán de chuid Pharlaimint na hEorpa, Mairéad McGuinness, chun tosaigh ar an gclár Eorpach mar Choimisinéir agus tá an tAire Paschal Donohoe ag cur a dhara téarma isteach mar Uachtarán ar an nGrúpa Euro d'airí airgeadais ó bhallstáit i limistéar an euro.

Tá muintir na hÉireann ar son na hEorpa agus ar son an Aontais Eorpaigh go hiondúil agus mhéadaigh an tuiscint sin le linn na gcainteanna deacra faoin mBreatimeacht. Ní dhéanaimid talamh slán den seasamh sin. Ní mór dúinn oibriú le cinntiú go bhforbraíonn an AE chun mianta shaoránaigh an AE a léiriú agus ceannaireacht láidir a sholáthar le linn na tréimhse geopholaitiúla corraí seo. Tá obair le déanamh sna blianta amach romhainn, dúshlán le sárú agus deiseanna le tapú. Oibreoidh FPE Fhine Gael - mar a rinne siad riamh - le cinntiú go dtabharfar aghaidh ar laigí straitéiseacha, lena n-áirítear fuinneamh agus slabhraí soláthair criticiúla.

De réir mar a fhorbraítear an digitiú go sciobtha, oibreoidh ar iarrachtaí AE leas a bhaint as buntáistí na hintleachta shaorga agus forbairtí eile, agus faireachán leanúnach a dhéanamh againn ar na rioscaí, lena n-áirítear cibearionsaithe. Comhoibreoidh lenár gcomharsana Eorpacha maidir leis an athrú aeráide agus acmhainneacht ollmhór na dticneolaíochtaí glasa agus na bhfoinsí fuinnimh in-athnuaite.

Tá an Eoraip, a cuid luachanna agus a slí mhaireachtála faoi ionsaí - trí chogadh fisiciúil agus ar bhealaí eile, a chuireann ár saol laethúil, ár saoirse agus ár ndaonlathas i mbaol. Roghnóimid iltaobhachas thar an náisiúnachas, riail an dlí thar an uathlathas agus saorthrádáil thar chaomhnaitheacht.

Tá Fine Gael dáríre faoin Aontas Eorpach, cuireann sé ár ndaoine is fearr chuig Parlaimint na hEorpa agus déanann sé ceiliúradh ar na buntáistí a thugann ballraíocht AE d'Éirinn. Tá an iomarca páirtithe agus iarrthóirí ag iarraidh an AE a ionsaí nó an bonn a bhaint de chun dúshlán intíre a cheilt nó cinntí crua a sheachaint.

Tá Fine Gael tiomanta do bheith sa seomra chun teacht ar réitigh a rachaidh chun tairbhe dár saoránaigh. Murab ionann is iarrthóirí nó páirtithe eile, ní bheimid lasmuigh den seomra ag gearán.

IMPROVING YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE

The European project is about peace and prosperity by improving the lives of all. Amid the political, bureaucratic and technical discourse, this can sometimes be forgotten. Fine Gael will ensure that citizens' voices are heard in the debates in Brussels and Strasbourg and strive at all times to make the lives of all – young, old and those with special needs – easier.

Understanding how the EU works

While Irish people are generally pro-European, this sentiment should be informed by knowledge and understanding. This is all the more important in an era of disinformation and misinformation. Fine Gael will continue to back initiatives that seek to educate people about Europe, such as the Blue Star Programme, which teaches primary school pupils about European cultures and the EU.

Consumer Rights

For the past 50 years, EU consumers enjoy a wide range of rights and protections. They include:

- The right to health protection and safety
- The right to protection of economic interests
- The right to damages
- The right to information and education
- The right to representation
- The right to repair.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure the consumer is at the heart of our economy, protecting consumer rights across the EU, particularly in the online world.
- Help consumers avoid exploitation in the online market and ensure their data is not misused or their data rights breached. This is vital for the digital transition.

Social Rights

In 2017, EU leaders signed up to the European Pillar of Social Rights, based around (i) equal opportunities and access to the labour market, (ii) fair working conditions and (iii) social protection and inclusion. This is about ensuring economic progress goes hand-in-hand with social progress. Given the huge digital, climate and geopolitical developments since then, it's essential that we re-focus this agenda for the next five years.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Shape the review of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2025, ensuring it reflects Ireland's priorities, promoting workers, promoting enterprise and ensuring competitiveness.

Education Opportunities

The Erasmus student exchange programme has been a crucially important educational and cultural programme for Europe. Launched in 1985 by the late Peter Sutherland when he was European Commissioner for Education, the programme facilitates 200,000 students ever year to go on exchange around Europe. For the past five years, the European Universities Initiative is encouraging more strategic collaboration between European institutions and we want this initiative to go further in the coming years.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ensure the Erasmus+ programme is adequately funded and that enough places are available to Irish students.

The loss of access to the Erasmus+ Programme for Northern Ireland students was one of the many problems Brexit caused. In his previous role as Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science,



last July Simon Harris allocated €2 million to support higher education students in Northern Ireland to avail of mobilities and internships across Europe. There is a big North-South dimension to this programme, with many internships taking place in key locations including the Financial Services sector in the IFSC in Dublin.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure Northern Ireland students are funded to take up Erasmus opportunities in Ireland and across the EU.
- Support proposals for the UK to re-join the Erasmus+ student exchange system.

Research Opportunities

The EU's €95 billion Horizon Europe programme is invaluable to our researchers and innovators. It's crucial to Europe's ability to stay competitive and plan for the green, digital and AI transitions, as well as advances in medicine. We welcome that the UK has now rejoined the programme, opening up more opportunities for collaboration.

We must work hard to ensure that Irish institutes are supported to collaborate with other institutes across the EU and compete with the best.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to agree an ambitious successor programme to Horizon Europe.
- Support the development and proper funding of the European Universities Initiative.

Digital Safety, Regulation and Policy

The EU and Ireland are jointly responsible for ensuring everyone, especially children, are safe online. The EU is to the forefront internationally in introducing new laws attempting to regulate what people see on online platforms. Many large technology companies are based in Ireland and we have a bigger responsibility than most to ensure online safety. We must also strike the right balance between regulation and innovation.

Ireland wants to be a digital leader, at the heart of European and global developments. While getting regulation right is important, we also want to see Ireland and Europe becoming global digital leaders, helping companies to stay ahead of the curve.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with EU and Irish colleagues to ensure Irish children are kept safe online.
- Support the proposed revision of the combating child sexual abuse Directive (2011/93/EU).
- Ensure Ireland's Data Protection Commission is adequately resourced, as well as all the other regulatory authorities with responsibilities in the digital area.
- Work to safeguard the country-of-origin principle, which is important to multinationals' presence in Ireland, and advocate for an appropriate regulatory framework at EU level.
- Support the use of Facial Recognition Technology and support EU legislation which provides for it.
- Promote digital innovation and enterprise in Ireland and across the EU.

Violence Against Women

The EU has just passed a new law to combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. It gives women the same level of protection across Europe regardless of the Member State they reside in. Europe can be the first continent in the world to end violence against women. It's a wide-ranging law, from female genital mutilation, to cyber stalking and harassment and steps to prevent rape. Member states have three years to implement the provisions.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ensure Ireland swiftly implements the provisions of the new law to combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.
- Ensure the EU fully implements the Istanbul Convention.

Healthcare for all Europeans

Irish people are very aware of the health benefits that come from EU membership. We want to go further, especially on access to medicines.

The new Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe is designed to ensure access to affordable, available medicines, while maintaining the competitiveness of the EU pharmaceutical industry sector. The Strategy must be pro-competition and pro-innovation, where new research is rewarded.

The EU's Beating Cancer Plan aims to tackle the entire disease pathway, with a focus on prevention, early detection, treatment, and quality of life. This plan needs to be updated and boosted with more funding to make sure it is as effective as possible.

We must ensure that the solidarity displayed by the EU during Covid to ensure faster, less expensive access to vaccines, is repeated to give citizens greater access to life changing drugs.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to reduce the cost and ensure timely access to new and existing drugs for consumers, while also promoting pharmaceutical innovation.
- Back the Beating Cancer Plan and build upon it by developing a European plan to address Alzheimer's disease, dementia and Parkinson's disease.
- Develop a European Cardiovascular Health Plan, as cardiovascular disease is the biggest killer in the EU. This plan should include a European Knowledge Centre and promote a Joint cardiovascular and diabetes health check, as 85% of the people living with diabetes die from cardiovascular disease.
- Work to create a true European Health Union to improve the resilience of our health systems and their interoperability, train the best doctors and nurses, to be equipped to deal with cross-border threats, diversify our supply chains and create strategic inventories to prevent medicine and medical devices shortages, making them accessible to every citizen.
- Work to become an international leader in medical research and pharmaceutical innovation while increasing access to clinical trials, especially to fight rare child diseases such as cancer that do not get enough funding for research.
- Work to double the EU's research budget for the period 2024-2027 while setting a target of 4% of European GDP devoted to research and innovation by 2030.

Mental Health

It is estimated that around 1 in 6 Europeans suffered from mental health issues before the pandemic. The situation has deteriorated since then and we must respond.

Fine Gael will:

- Campaign for better EU funding for mental health,

guidelines and best practice examples.

- Work to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of mental health policies at an EU level, to ensure accountability and effectiveness across member states.

European Child Guarantee

We are committed to meeting our obligations under the European Child Guarantee and ensuring that every child in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic rights. We have already published an Action Plan to meet these obligations and our response to the European Child Guarantee has been further strengthened by the establishment of the Child Poverty and Well-Being Office in the Department of the Taoiseach.

A Europe for All Ages

As Europe ages, we will work to promote active and healthy ageing for all generations and further develop the 'silver', longevity economy. Seniors are increasingly shaping our economies and starting businesses. We must empower people so that they are confident in managing their personal finances.

Fine Gael will:

- Focus on financial literacy to help people plan for their retirement and feel more comfortable online, aware of the benefits but also the threats that come with risks like online fraud.
- Invest in age-friendly cities and regions. We will work to strengthen the European Care Strategy and to implement solutions for affordable long-term care for the elderly and other vulnerable individuals in all communities
- We will support proposals to establish a European Guarantee for older citizens to ensure social inclusion and their full participation in society and the economy.

EU Disability Card

All EU citizens with disabilities should be supported to have full and productive lives, with the same rights in every EU Member State. The European Parliament has just given the green light to a new EU Disability card, which will serve as proof of status across all EU countries and give cardholders equal access to special conditions and preferential treatments anywhere in the EU. Fine Gael will prioritise the implementation of this proposal and ensure the Irish Government takes swift action on its rollout.



Working with Europe on Housing

We need to step up our level of ambition on housing. We will need extra workers, more funding and modern methods of construction. There are challenges across the European Union with regard to the supply of suitably qualified workers for the construction sector, so we need to work at a European level to get more young people to choose construction as a career and create more opportunities for older workers to reskill.

Other European countries are much further ahead than Ireland when it comes to adopting new technologies in the construction sector, including rapid build homes. This is sometimes related to scale but Ireland needs these new technologies. We also need to source extra financing from the private sector and from EU institutions. Last October, the European Investment Bank and the Housing Finance Agency agreed €434 million in funding to build 2,700 affordable student beds. We will look to finance more projects in the years ahead.

This is the European year of skills which is highlighting the need for skills training and upskilling in key sectors, including construction. Higher number of apprenticeships are key in this regard, especially in the construction sector.

Fine Gael will:

- Work at a European level to promote construction as a career choice and look at ways to strengthen the delivery of apprenticeships – in particular construction apprenticeships – across member states.
- Work with European partners to ensure Ireland adopts modern methods of construction.
- Explore new funding opportunities for housing and other areas through the European Investment Bank.
- Develop a European strategy to attract skilled construction workers from outside the European Union to come and work in Europe.

Climate Action

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing this generation and the EU is the world's fastest-warming continent. Addressing climate action is central to the EU Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029 – that is, the EU's political priorities. We need to work together on climate action. This is not a moment for division, for lecturing or

imposing. It is about pragmatic and meaningful policy and action to address the climate and biodiversity challenge.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure the EU prioritises climate policy over the coming five years.
- Prioritise pragmatic and meaningful actions on climate change.
- Work with communities and sectors to ensure a just transition for all.

Nature Restoration

The EU Nature Restoration Law aims to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems by 2050. It's about restoring wetlands, rivers, forests, grasslands and marine ecosystems for future generations.

Fine Gael MEPs voted in favour of the proposed law, once important amendments had been made. It achieves a balance between action to improve biodiversity, while safeguarding food security and guaranteeing that restoration measures will be voluntary for farmers. We believe the public, farmers and fishers recognise the need to take action to tackle biodiversity loss. Under this law, the only farmers involved will be those who wish to voluntarily participate. Irish state lands will be available to contribute to almost all of the rewetting commitments. Even if the legislation is not fully in place yet, we know that landowners and households are already taking action to enhance habitats and adopt nature friendly practices.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure action to restore nature is fair, implemented effectively and backed with proper funding, in consultation with local communities.

Cheaper and more reliable energy

We have set ourselves the ambition of halving Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions by the end of the decade and becoming carbon neutral by 2050. We are making good progress, but we need to do more, working with local communities.

Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine exposed Europe's vulnerabilities when it comes to energy. We simply rely too much on undemocratic parts of the world for

our energy supplies. Already, the EU has responded, diversifying our supply base, investing in renewables and using energy more efficiently. Over the next five years, we must go further on renewable energy development, to improve our energy security, drive down the cost of electricity by removing expensive imported fossil fuels from the system and reach our climate targets.

Ireland's maritime area is almost seven times the size of our land area. This provides us with a huge, as of yet, untapped opportunity, when it comes to electricity generation, especially with advances in technology for floating wind energy. We cannot only secure our own energy requirements, but can become a net exporter of electricity from Ireland across Europe

As we rapidly develop European renewables, EU Member States' electricity grids need to be modernised. An inter-connected EU grid is the objective to allow power flow freely across and between member states. Our planning process can result in excessive delays which discourages investors and delays the delivery of renewable energy. The Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund is our commitment to ensuring strategic investments.

The Celtic Interconnector will enable the exchange of 700MW of electricity between Ireland and France, with the capacity to supply electricity to 450,000 homes. The European Union is partly funding it as a 'Project of Common Interest (PCI) – one of 100 such projects across the EU. We need more such projects in the years ahead, with the backing of local communities.

Networks have to become more digitalised, decentralised and flexible. It means millions of rooftop solar panels, heat pumps and local energy communities sharing their resources, more offshore renewables and more electric vehicles. Around 40% of Europe's distribution grids are more than 40 years old and cross-border transmission capacity is due to double by 2030. Investment is needed to upgrade this infrastructure to the benefit of consumers and businesses.

Ireland is overly dependent on gas and this is a security of supply, economic and climate risk. We need to diversify our sources of energy to become carbon neutral in the

long term. Renewable Hydrogen technology will over the longer-term be a key component of a zero-carbon economy. It provides the potential for long-duration energy storage, dispatchable renewable electricity and a potential export market opportunities, given Ireland's excellent wind resources. Planning for this kind of future requires collaboration across the EU and we will encourage further EU work in this area, which is very much in Ireland's interests.

Fine Gael will:

- Support more onshore and offshore renewable energy developments.
- Work to improve electricity interconnection across the EU and ensure everyone can benefit from our shared resources, particularly wind energy in the northern part of Europe and solar in the south.
- Work at European, national and local level to ensure Ireland's electricity grid can meet the demand of new renewables coming on stream.
- Support further investment by the EU in hydrogen-related research and development initiatives.
- Develop the conditions for Ireland to become a net exporter of electricity in time.

Better public transport

Better public transport is essential if we are to meet our climate goals and provide good service to commuters. Moving from a car dependent transport system will require lower fares to encourage people to make the switch, a more integrated public transport network and better facilities. We will take learnings from other member states of the EU, as we invest unprecedented levels of capital funding in the years ahead.

Given that freedom of movement is such an essential element of EU membership, Fine Gael will explore the possibility of agreeing an EU-wide version of the Irish free travel scheme to improve mobility and reduce cost of living pressures for older people in the EU.

Fine Gael will:

- Work in the European Parliament with representatives of each member state to implement an EU free travel scheme on the same criteria as the Irish one.
- Work to ensure all sources of EU financing are drawn down to deliver public transport projects in Ireland.



- Develop opportunities for a better EV charging network which ensures urban and rural dwellers have access to sufficient charging points.

Balanced regional development across the EU

Domestically in Ireland, we must continue to redress regional imbalances and ensure there is not a drift towards Dublin and the east coast. The forthcoming revision of the National Planning Framework is another opportunity to ensure a spatial plan – linked to the National Development Plan – can achieve a prosperous and regionally balanced Ireland. At EU level, we must also address imbalances. Post-Brexit, it's even more important that Ireland harnesses the potential of regions working together to access funding and improve services for people.

Fine Gael will:

Work with other regions across Europe to boost the economic and social potential of all parts of Ireland. The EU must work to improve the lives of all citizens, no matter where they are living.

Promoting the Irish language

Since 1 January 2022, the Irish language is officially on an equal footing with the EU's other 23 official languages. This is a big achievement but we still have a long way to go and must build on this progress in the coming years.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to promote the practice of EU students completing a semester in Galway, Donegal or other areas via University of Galway's Acadamh in the Gaeltacht or Kerry/Cork with UCC or MTU.
- Work in the European Parliament and other EU institutions to identify more sources of funding to promote the Irish language.
- Promote the Irish language as a draw for tourism. We must tap into Ireland's huge diaspora and encourage our European friends to discover An Ghaeilge.
- Support businesses to use bilingual packaging, where possible, and provided this can be done cost effectively.

An Ghaeilge a Chur Chun Cinn

Ón 1 Eanáir 2022, tá an Ghaeilge ar chomhchéim leis an 23 theanga oifigiúla AE eile go hoifigiúil. Is éacht mór é seo ach tá bóthar fada romhainn fós agus caithfidh cur leis an dul chun cinn seo sna blianta amach romhainn. .

Déanfaidh Fine Gael an méid seo a leanas:

- Oibriú chun cleachtas mac léinn an AE atá ag críochnú seimeastair i nGaillimh, i nDún na nGall nó i gceantair eile trí Acadamh Ollscoil na Gaillimhe sa Ghaeltacht nó i gCiarraí/i gCorcaigh le UCC nó MTU a chur chun cinn.
- Oibriú i bParlaimint na hEorpa agus in institiúidí eile an AE chun tuilleadh foinsí maoinithe a aithint chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn.
- An Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn mar tharraingt don turasóireacht. Ní mór dúinn leas a bhaint as diaspora ollmhór na hÉireann agus ár gcairde Eorpacha a spreagadh le spéis a chur sa Ghaeilge.
- Tacú le gnólachtaí pacáistíocht dhátheangach a úsáid, nuair is féidir, agus ar an gcoinníoll gur féidir é sin a dhéanamh go cost-éifeachtúil.

Irish workers in the EU Institutions

Ireland has punched above its weight for decades in the European Union institutions. Irish officials have reached the upper echelons consistently but we need to ensure that Irish people continue to play their part at every level in EU agencies and institutions. We must step up work on new ways to encourage young Irish people to pursue a career in the EU. Better language skills are an important part of this task.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with EU institutions and the Irish Government to ensure more Irish people pursue a career in the EU.
- Work with third level providers on a roadmap for students to gain the skills for a career in the EU.
- Develop a communications programme to create greater awareness amongst school-leavers and graduates of career opportunities in the EU
- Work with EU institutions and the Irish Government to support the Irish language's full status as an official language of the European Union. It is important that we have a steady pipeline of translators to fill relevant posts.

WORKING WITH FARMERS TO BUILD A FAIR, SUSTAINABLE AND FOOD SECURE EUROPE

Fine Gael is the party of farmers, fishers and rural Ireland. Agriculture is Ireland's oldest indigenous sector and remains a vital part of our economy and society. The role of farmers in ensuring food security and protecting the countryside must be recognised and rewarded.

As Taoiseach Simon Harris has said, Fine Gael will never talk down to farmers or rural Ireland. We will sit down and work with them and for them. We are committed to engaging in a new partnership with farmers, one where they are central to the changes we are making.

A Green Deal for European farmers must be a fair one.

Ireland's unique farming model based on grass-based production and family farms must be protected and safeguarded in EU agricultural policy.

Fine Gael will:

- Engage in a new partnership on agriculture where farmers are central to delivering on our food, environment and rural development targets.
- Be a strong pro-farmer voice at the decision-making table of European legislation and policy.
- Ensure farmers' social and economic sustainability is considered alongside environmental sustainability in the European Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy.

Common Agricultural Policy

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been critical for the development of Irish agriculture over the last 50 years.

At its heart we believe the purpose of the CAP should be

to support active farmers in the production of a stable supply of quality food, to underpin a reasonable quality of life for farmers, and to assist in tackling climate change and other challenges.

The CAP has ensured safe and affordable food for EU consumers. It has allowed EU farming produce to gain a foothold in global markets. This is especially important for Irish agriculture. Farmers want to be able to produce food, secure a fair price for their produce and make their contribution to environment and climate delivery.

We are now into the second year of the current reform which is due to run until 2027. We acknowledge farmer frustrations with red tape, increasingly complex schemes, and concerns it is not delivering the best results for farmers, consumers, or the environment.

Work should begin now on drawing up proposals for a simpler, more effective CAP post 2027. Securing the budget for the CAP in the overall budget negotiations and shaping further reform of CAP will be a key task of those elected to the European Parliament in June.

Fine Gael will:

- Fight for a post-2027 CAP budget that reflects the importance of the work farmers do – supporting food production and positive environmental action.
- Any new measures proposed in the new CAP budget should not be at the expense of existing funding.
- Target supports towards active farmers and place a special emphasis on farm succession by exploring approaches that encourage new entrants while supporting older generations.



- Simplify the administrative burden on farms by pushing for flexibly designed and farmer-friendly schemes and compliance measures that fairly reward farmers across all sectors for actions undertaken.
- Undertake a review of payment redistribution measures in the current CAP that considers their impact on farm viability.
- Work to enhance supports to encourage farm capital investments in addition to supports for farmers to undertake action on biodiversity and water quality.
- Highlight the importance of increased investment by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine in IT capabilities to avoid payment delays.

Engaging with farmers on new EU policies

Outside of the Common Agricultural Policy a number of other pieces of legislation have a significant impact on agriculture. Areas such as the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive, and newer proposals such as the Nature Restoration Law and Industrial Emissions Directive contain a number of provisions specific to agriculture.

It is important that the views of farmers and the agricultural sector are at the decision-making table when these pieces of legislation are being discussed. Working in partnership with farmers, rather than confrontation, is the best way to achieve results.

Fine Gael will:

- Prioritise voluntary, well-funded schemes that support farmers to carry out positive environmental actions, bringing new sources of funding into the sector in addition to the CAP.
- Ensure the family farm model is protected and that sustainable, grass-based production is not classified as industrial activity.
- Respect the right of farmers to determine what they do with their own farms and land. Growth in areas such as forestry and organics must encourage farmers to integrate these options as part of their wider farm enterprise in a way that best suits them.
- Maximise all EU funding avenues to support farmers integrating renewable energy opportunities such as solar energy or anaerobic digestion into their farming operation.

- Support a review of the EU's Unfair Trading Practices to consider the effectiveness of the current legislation in supporting the work of Ireland's Agri-Food Regulator (An Rialálaí Agraibhia) in bringing fairness and transparency to the sector.

Supporting Fishers

We are committed to the sustainable development of the fisheries sector, ensuring that stocks are protected so the next generation have the opportunity to continue the family tradition of deriving an income from the sea.

Coastal communities face a unique set of challenges. Supporting the Irish fishing industry will benefit economic activity in these areas and help protect our maritime environments.

Fine Gael will:

- Commit to a review of the Common Fisheries Policy.
- Support a strong European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.

Nitrates Derogation

The Nitrates Derogation is an important element of sustainable grass-based production in Ireland. The nitrates derogation allows farmers to operate in a more economically viable way in return for complying with a higher set of standards. The sector is committed to improving water quality as part of this effort. Agriculture is not solely responsible for impacts on water quality but it does have a role to play. Farmers have already shown their willingness to take action in this area and it is important that they are further supported.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with state agencies, local authorities, industry, and farm organisations to bring forward practical solutions which benefit farmers and help Ireland retain our derogation after 2025.
- Highlight to our colleagues across Europe, the unique circumstances in Ireland that give rise to the derogation and use our influence within the EPP to protect the derogation.
- Continue to invest in initiatives that allow farmers to make improvements to their farms that positively impact water quality.

A MORE ASSERTIVE FOREIGN, DEFENCE AND SECURITY POLICY

Along with our European People's Party colleagues, we will work to build a Europe that can defend itself. It's simply not credible for Ireland to leave it to others. We must play our part. The world has changed. Threats are likely to come from cyber warfare and on the battlefield. It's time that Ireland adopts a more assertive foreign, defence and security policy. This can be done in a way that protects our policy of military neutrality.

The Irish State has a proud history of peace-keeping and making our mark in the world. The Irish people are also making a huge difference to the daily lives of millions of people around the world through official development assistance and by other means. Diplomatically, we punch above our weight and, working with like-minded countries, we can bring our influence to bear on global issues like migration, climate, international conflicts and human rights. Our membership of multilateral fora like the EU and the UN enhances, not dilutes, our power.

We have built strong relationships with our European neighbours and we will continue to work in partnership to uphold our shared values and objectives.

Russia should not have a say on where we send our peacekeeping troops. The triple lock is no longer fit for purpose and we will replace it with a new mechanism that protects our sovereignty, our military neutrality and remains fully consistent with the principles of the UN Charter and international law.

We must strengthen cybersecurity. There are increasing reports of foreign cyber attacks, disinformation and the misuse of spyware against journalists. Ireland must improve our own cyber defence capabilities and expertise and work with EU partners for a coordinated EU response.

Conflict in Gaza

We call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all remaining hostages. We need a surge in humanitarian assistance to Gaza and also to ensure access to that humanitarian assistance.

Ireland, Norway and Spain have taken the decision to recognise the State of Palestine, while we have also been clear we unequivocally recognise the State of Israel. We made this decision to help create a peaceful future. A two-state solution is the only credible path to peace and security for Israel, for Palestine and for their peoples.

Fine Gael will:

- Continue to press for an immediate ceasefire and the release of all hostages as a strong and united voice with European and international colleagues.
- Continue to prioritise the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Middle East peace process more broadly in our diplomatic efforts.
- Continue to make the case for a meaningful interpretation of Israel's human rights obligations under the EU-Israel association agreement at Commission level.
- Ensure the EU continues to provide multi-million euro funding to the UN's aid agency in Palestine, UNRWA.

Conflict in Ukraine

Fine Gael and the European People's Party are unequivocal in our support for Ukraine. We know war is a darkness that threatens all our democracies and our European values. We will always support democracy and freedom and we will stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes. Russia cannot win this war.



Fine Gael will:

- Stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes.
- Support Ukraine's efforts to achieve EU membership as soon as possible.
- Work to improve the sanctions regime against Russia and eradicate loopholes.

Defence Policy

Ireland is a founder member of PESCO. Fine Gael will seek to opt into programmes on a case-by-case basis. This does not compromise our policy of military neutrality and we will not be joining NATO.

We must monitor our borders in an age of increased maritime and haulage smuggling. The threat of terrorism now extends worldwide and physical borders are no longer as relevant.

EU Member States will sit down and work out the future of European cooperation on security and defence. Unlike other parties, Fine Gael wants to be in the room and to help shape that future.

Enlargement

Fine Gael is pro-European and we are pro-enlargement. Enlargement has been good for Europe and we believe the next significant enlargement should be into the western Balkans. We support the countries of the western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, joining the EU as soon as they are ready. The current geopolitical environment underscores the urgency of the situation. The EU has to show good faith towards those countries that have been waiting for a long time.

Fine Gael will:

- Support further enlargement of the EU.

Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)

A cohort of Irish politicians, some of whom are standing in these elections, believe that threatening legal action rather than answering questions is how politics is best served.

In Ireland, through the Defamation Bill, we are introducing provisions for preventing strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) from exercising a 'chilling effect' on freedom of expression, and particularly, on investigative journalism or public debate on issues of public interest.

Fine Gael will:

- Monitor how the recent anti-SLAPP law at EU level is being implemented across all member states and examine if further measures are required.

Misinformation and Disinformation

While Putin's invasion of Ukraine is 3,000km away, the war is already all around us in the form of cyber warfare and disinformation. We need to find ways to shatter the walls of misinformation that are encircling us. Education is our most potent weapon.

The EU has shown leadership in devising new laws to regulate online activity, but we need to do more to protect children online.

Fine Gael will:

- Develop critical media literacy programmes to empower people to discern truth from falsehood, neutralising the impact of disinformation campaigns.
- Work to tackle deepfakes and ensure social media companies act faster in taking down illegal content.

Reinvigorating our relationship with the UK

While the UK is no longer in the EU, we should work to enhance EU-UK relations. That ranges from the continued fallout from Brexit to enhanced cooperation on a range of different issues. For example, we strongly welcome that the UK has become an associated country to Horizon Europe, meaning its researchers can access Horizon Europe funding.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to enhance EU-UK cooperation on a range of issues, including education, research, energy, financial services, agri-food, transport and migration.

North-South Cooperation

Fine Gael played a pivotal role in ensuring there is no hard border on the island of Ireland. Brexit will never be 'done' – it will require constant attention and updating of rules.

The Windsor Framework gives Northern Ireland access to the EU single market for goods, while at the same time being part of the UK internal market. It's important that the EU and UK implements the Trade and Cooperation

Agreement and the Withdrawal Agreement fully and in good faith.

The EU's cross-border PEACE and PEACEPLUS programmes have provided funding of over €3 billion to promote shared peace and prosperity on the island of Ireland. The Interreg programme is also investing to promote cross-border cooperation on research and innovation, environmental protection, sustainable transport and health and social care.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to enhance north-south cooperation in areas of mutual benefit, including agriculture, transport, education, tourism, and the Single Electricity Market.
- Promote the continued funding of PEACEPLUS and Interreg programmes to help communities north and south.
- Continue to be a voice for the people of Northern Ireland at EU level.
- Utilise the EU to fund the growth of the all-island economy.

Encouraging more students to study either side of the border

Fine Gael strongly supports the recommendations of the report carried out by Professor Pól O Dochartaigh to reform how A-levels are converted to CAO points. Admissions policies are a matter for the universities

themselves, but Fine Gael will do what it can to assist in this regard. We hope that revisions will be in place for students looking to start their studies in September 2024.

We have forged really important bonds with partners in Northern Ireland to help improve access to education and research. For example, in February the Government announced a new partnership with Queen's University in Belfast, recognising the importance of increasing healthcare graduates across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. Between the expansion in places in the six medical schools in Ireland and the new places at Queen's, by September 2024 we will have delivered a more than 25% increase in places for students compared to 2021.

Building Alliances in Europe

Ireland has lost a natural ally at EU meetings because of Brexit. Fine Gael is working to build new alliances in the European Parliament and through the EPP to achieve our goals, including on the single market, competitiveness, EU competition laws, innovation, and investment.

On a range of issues from agriculture to taxation to strategic autonomy, to security, to climate action and to the recognition of Palestine, Ireland is working with like-minded EU Member States to guide the EU position.



FIRM AND FAIR MIGRATION

Ireland will maintain a migration system that is firm, fair and enforced and we will do so in accordance with international law and fundamental rights. Migration is an unprecedented challenge, but we will meet it by remaining united and taking comprehensive action every day.

Taoiseach Simon Harris is ensuring we break down silos or “not-my-problem” attitudes to ensure all state agencies and communities are working together. At a European level, we must also work together. Acting alone just doesn’t make sense. That is why we are signing up to the European Union Migration Pact to ensure Europe acts together on migration. This is a European-wide deal which imposes statutory timelines for the processing of applications and allows for the return of applicants more quickly because Ireland cannot do this on its own.

We cannot and should not lose sight of the benefits of migration. Our economy is built on being open: we need workers in all sectors like agriculture, in our health service and to build homes. In all, 66,000 people have permits allowing them to work here — 21,000 of those are caring for our families in hospitals or minding our elderly in nursing homes.

Having once called for an expansion of our asylum system and an increase in the number of refugees we accept, Sinn Féin are distributing leaflets to households calling for an end to open borders. We won’t play politics on migration. We will focus on taking swift action in the best interests of all people in Ireland.

New Pact on Migration and Asylum

After years of difficult negotiations, we have now agreed a new Pact on Migration and Asylum. This is the biggest overhaul of Migration rules in decades and we are backing it.

The Pact will:

- Ensure migration and asylum is managed to ensure the system is fair, efficient and coherent.
- Allow significantly faster processing of international protection applications.
- Reduce secondary movements of applicants, reduce the number of applications we have to process, reduce the time people spend in State provided accommodation, and make the return of those not entitled to protection much more efficient.
- Speed up the processing of asylum applications so that people in need of our protection get it quickly and those who don’t are returned to their country of origin efficiently.
- Save money in the long run, due to the reduced need to house asylum seekers.

It will take some time to implement this Pact in Ireland and we need to get that right, with the input of communities and everyone involved. We will ensure it’s a firmer system. Those who need our help will get it, but those who are not entitled to come to this country will get a decision quickly and will leave quickly as well.

We will repeal the International Protection Act 2015 and replace it with new legislation to provide for faster processing, better screening and more efficient returns, as provided for in the Pact.

Fine Gael will:

- Implement the new Pact on Migration and Asylum and establish a migration system that is firm but fair.

Faster processing times

Getting through applications faster is a key lever we control. We have doubled the number of people working in the International Protection Office. Minister Helen McEntee is taking action to free up 100 more gardaí from desk duties to work on enforcement, including deportations. A tender is also due to issue shortly to provide for charter flights to return unsuccessful international protection applicants. People being granted asylum in Ireland will know sooner and people denied will leave sooner. This system works. Since introducing fast-processing, the number of people applying from safe countries has halved. Applicants are receiving their first instance decision in around 3 months. It gives protection quickly to those who need it, while also demonstrating to applicants who don't need it that there is nothing to gain from going down the asylum route.

Since April, the International Protection Office is accelerating the processing of applicants from the country of origin with the highest number of applications in the previous three months. This new measure is in addition to those currently prioritised and accelerated under the safe country of origin list.

Fine Gael will:

- Speed up asylum applications and actively monitor the Safe Country of Origin List.
- Continue to increase resources at all stages in the International Protection system.

Agreements with Third Countries

As part of the European People's Party, we will support EU legislation to provide for the processing of asylum applications in safe third countries. Under these proposals, an EU Member State could provide that anyone applying for asylum in that country could also be transferred to a safe third country and undergo the asylum process there. Any such agreements would be

in line with the core obligations of the Geneva Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Our approach will always treat people with dignity and respect, informed by the protection of human rights. Those who need help will get it.

Better engagement with communities

We will move away from the emergency use of hotels for housing asylum seekers. It's simply unacceptable that the only functioning hotel in a town can be taken away from a community overnight.

We need to do better and to listen to people. The Irish people want to play their part and we will work to create a system that helps them do that.

While we work to increase accommodation places for migrants, we will not allow encampments to bed in for months again. It is unsafe and against the law. We are working now to stand up more facilities quickly on state land. We cannot allow any more unnecessary delays in making state land available for accommodation.



MAKING EUROPE COMPETITIVE – PROMOTING ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

An ambitious and fair EU Trade Policy

Ireland is a pro-enterprise, free trade economy. We believe it is in Ireland's interests to maintain and strengthen that economic model in Europe and the rest of the world. However, this model is under threat. In the face of increased subsidies in the US and China, there is momentum in parts of Europe towards subsidising certain industries and businesses. This could damage the level playing field of the Single Market and lead to distortions between member states. One of the core principles of EU membership is fair competition and a level playing field across the continent. Strategic autonomy should not mean more tariffs, subsidies and protectionism. We believe the State can prompt investment and stimulate growth, but innovation is best left to our entrepreneurs, our researchers and our inventors.

We need to be quicker at agreeing new trade deals. We stand for an ambitious, outward-looking trade model while ensuring that imports meet the high standards we demand of our own farmers/producers.

Fine Gael will:

- Push for an ambitious and open EU trade agenda.
- Work with like-minded countries to safeguard the principles of EU economic policy, based on competitiveness, innovation and a level-playing field.
- Promote an open, multilateral, rules-based trade system.
- Promote new Free Trade Agreements, ensuring proper assurances are in place in regard to sustainability and human rights.
- The Mercosur deal cannot progress until concerns in regard to additional climate and environmental

provisions and an adequate economic assessment are addressed.

Single Market

The Single Market is the beating heart of the EU for the last 30 years. It facilitates the free movement of people, goods, services and capital. It promotes competition among businesses based on an agreed set of rules and it gives choice to consumers, breaking down barriers. While much has been achieved, the Single Market remains an unfinished project. Not only do we need to adapt to new advances in the digital or green economy, we need to get back to basics on the Single Market and ensure its founding principles are upheld.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to complete the Single Market and unleash its potential.
- Ensure the original objectives of the Single Market – to facilitate the free movement of people, goods, services and capital – are maintained.

Capital Markets Union

The EU requires massive investments to address the green and digital transitions and the demands of an aging population. These investments must assist our competitiveness and allow for the growth of new and emerging industries. The scale of the investment is such that public funding will not be sufficient and a renewed focus is required to encourage private investment in our future.

We need to boost our capital markets union and unlock sources of private financing to deliver on our ambitions.

SMEs and farmers in Ireland are heavily reliant on bank financing and can be reluctant to take on debt or to issue equity. Banks can either refuse funding or take a conservative approach, leaving SMEs short of finance. We need to borrow from the US model and think more about seed capital, venture capital and private equity. We also need to consolidate the fragmented nature of the European equity market and make it simpler for SMEs to access.

Too many EU companies, including Irish companies, move out of the EU when they reach a certain size, moving to the US to avail of a deeper, more liquid capital market. Europe needs more innovative companies to remain in the EU as they scale-up. This requires accessing funds from capital markets.

Today we do not have a single market when it comes to capital. Barriers to the free flow of capital in the Single Market must be removed and replaced by a system that works better for businesses, investors and savers.

We will work to advance the Single Market for Capital. This will create better opportunities for companies, small and large, to access finance and opportunities for citizens to save, invest and plan for retirement by facilitating greater access to capital markets for retail investors.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to advance Capital Markets Union (CMU).
- Work to maintain good relations with capital markets in London and make the best use of the EU-UK forum for discussion on financial services.
- Work to diversify financing options for SMEs to secure their future in the EU and this competitiveness globally.
- Work to enable a new, safe environment for people to invest in and build up financial independence, especially when it comes to long term financial instruments such as pensions.
- Work to provide access to lower-cost financing for SMEs and start-ups.
- Look for ways to grow the Irish Stock Exchange as a source of equity and growth for indigenous business.

Banking Union

Banks have a crucial role to play in financing the investment needed for our green and digital future. The banking union was established in the aftermath of the

financial crisis, to ensure that banks can withstand any future financial crises and non-viable banks are resolved without using taxpayers' money.

Completing the banking union requires four steps: establishing a common European safety net for depositors to complement national schemes; promoting diversification of banks' sovereign exposures; improving the management of failing banks; and creating the conditions for a true single market for banking services.

Today Irish consumers do not have access to financial products, including loans from European banks. Completing the Banking Union would increase competition and provide greater choice to Irish businesses and consumers.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to complete the banking union to the benefit of consumers and businesses.

The future of Cash and Digital Euro

Consumers and businesses are more and more digital, yet cash remains important. We welcome EU Commission proposals to ensure the legal tender status of cash, to ensure its availability and acceptability in making payments. Digital payment methods are a complement to cash - not a replacement for bank notes and coins.

The ECB and the EU Commission are working on launching a digital euro, backed by Europe's central banks. This would be a central bank digital eurocurrency and an electronic equivalent to cash. It would complement banknotes and coins, giving people an additional choice when purchasing goods and services.

We believe that it would bolster Europe's financial resilience and competitiveness. It would enable all citizens to make payments anywhere in the euro area and at all times in safe, sovereign money, issued by the ECB. As it would be backed by a central bank, the digital euro would be transferable into cash unlike a so called crypto-currencies asset, which provides no such guarantee.

The debate on a digital euro will advance with the European Parliament playing a key role. We need to make



sure consumers are well informed, that their privacy is protected and they have confidence in the concept of a digital euro.

Fine Gael will:

- Back plans for a digital euro to give more choice to consumers, provided legitimate concerns such as privacy are addressed.
- Ensure continued acceptance of and access to cash.

Corporation Tax

Ireland's corporate tax regime is a vital component of our foreign direct investment offering and we will work resolutely to defend it. We will resist any attempts to harmonise corporate tax or any tangential moves to do so. We have signed up to the OECD global framework for corporate tax as we believe it is important that we are part of this wider agreement. However, we have done so while still protecting tax sovereignty.

Fine Gael will:

- Strongly defend Ireland's Corporate Tax regime.
- Insist that Irish tax policy will continue to be set in Ireland.

Late Payment Directive

The EU is looking to strengthen the existing Directive on late payments with a new regulation. It is designed to improve payment discipline of public authorities, large companies and SMEs, while protecting businesses, especially smaller businesses, from late payments. Bigger companies have better bargaining power when it comes to payments and it makes sense to strengthen the hand of smaller companies. Cash flow is vital to smaller companies and it is estimated that one in four bankruptcies are due to invoices not being paid on time. This new regulation will tighten up the rules and adjust the balance of power.

Fine Gael will:

- Prioritise the early adoption of the Late Payments Directive once the new Parliament is re-elected, ensuring steady cash flow for small businesses.
- Ensure that small businesses are given special status or a derogation so that this measure benefits them.

Reducing the regulatory burden for SMEs

As part of the recent package for small business, Taoiseach Simon Harris and Minister Peter Burke committed to implementing an enhanced SME Test. This test ensures any major proposal coming to Government must be assessed for its impact on small and medium-sized businesses.

The European Commission has committed to reducing the burden of regulation for business by 25%. This is a welcome development and should focus efforts on streamlining regulations. Regulation is important to provide legal certainty to businesses and consumers, but it can also stymie companies from making investments. We will work with our EU partners to identify areas where regulation has become excessive and needs to be cut.

Fine Gael will:

- Advocate that new EU laws are only passed if they are needed and minimise additional regulations on small business. SMEs should be exempt from any new laws, where appropriate. Implementation of existing EU legislation should be the priority for the coming five years.
- Work to step up use of the SME Test at European level to ensure new laws always take SMEs into consideration.

Trade Sanctions

The EU has adopted 13 packages of sanctions against Russia in response to its illegal invasion of Ukraine and a 14th package is under consideration. Full implementation of these sanctions is essential to have the desired effect. Circumvention of sanctions through third countries or through other means, persist and this is not good enough.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with our EU partners to close loopholes and tighten up the implementation of sanctions.

FINE GAEL 



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