



Standing Up for Public Services

Labour's plan to invest in the services that families and communities need

Our proposals

Investment in the services that families and communities need. We will invest €8.368 billion for improvements to the quality and scope of public services. In other words, for every €1 invested in tax reductions, we will invest almost €3 in public services.

Increase public sector numbers. Our plans will increase public sector numbers by over 17,300, with a particular focus on additional staffing in our hospitals, primary care centres, classrooms and Garda stations.

Improve public sector pay. Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement we are unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay cuts, and doing so in a progressive fashion by focusing on the lowest-paid public servants first. We will negotiate a new public sector pay deal in 2018, in advance of the conclusion of the Lansdowne Road Agreement to deal with remaining unresolved issues arising from the FEMPI acts. We will make the State a Living Wage employer by 2018.

Standing Up for Education. We will reduce class sizes to the lowest level in the history of the state. To achieve this, we will recruit an additional 4,563 classroom teachers, 1,000 resource teachers and 1,000 SNAs for our schools. We will end voluntary contributions in most schools, and abolish school transport charges. We will create 50,000 apprenticeships and traineeships, and 100,000 free part-time college places for those who want to reskill.

Standing Up for Families. We will cap childcare costs at no more than €4.25 per hour, and progressively reduce this cost to €2 per hour by 2021. We will professionalise the childcare sector, making sure that everyone earns at least the Living Wage. We will increase paid parental leave by three months, to be shared between both parents, and recruit 155 educational psychologists and 217 speech and language therapists to support children with additional needs.

Standing Up for Safer Communities. We will recruit an additional 700 Gardaí each year to return the force to peak levels of over 14,500. We will also recruit 1,000 civilian staff to free up a further 1,000 Gardaí for frontline duty to make sure our Gardaí are spending their time on the streets of our communities. We will also bring greater consistency to court sentencing, and legislate to improve the protections available to victims of domestic abuse.

A new National Community Health Service. We will continue to roll out free GP care for all, move towards universal health care in the community, and tackle waiting lists and A&E overcrowding. To achieve this, we will recruit an additional 2,800 nurses, 1,163 doctors and consultants, and 2,396 additional healthcare workers in areas such as advanced nurse practitioners and healthcare assistants.

A strong economy for a decent society

Labour believes that a strong economy is not an end in itself, but must be the foundation on which we build a decent society. Over the past five years we have regained our economic sovereignty and we will implement the right policies to ensure we don't ever lose it again. And we will use our economic strength to continue to build a fair and decent society in Ireland.

Labour will:

- Balance the budget and reduce our national debt to 75% of GDP by 2021
- Invest €3 in the services families and communities need for every €1 reduction in USC
- Deliver a job for everyone who wants one by 2018 through the creation of at least 150,000 jobs over the next three years
- Abolish USC on the first €72,000 of income and target additional relief to the lowest paid through reductions in PRSI
- Increase the minimum wage and raise it to a living wage of €11.30 per hour
- Increase the pension to €260
- Reduce class sizes to the smallest levels in the history of the State
- Provide access to free GP care for all
- Cap and reduce childcare costs, increase child benefit, and extend parental leave

“LABOUR BELIEVES THAT A STRONG ECONOMY IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF, BUT MUST BE THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH WE BUILD A DECENT SOCIETY”

A strong economy and better living standards for all

Over five years in government Labour has transformed an economy on the brink of collapse to the fastest growing one in Europe. We have brought the public finances from a ruinous deficit of almost one-third of national income to close to balance. Our national debt is now at the European average and reducing apace.

Five years ago jobs were disappearing at a rate of 1,000 per week. Now they are being created at a rate of over 1,100 each week. Unemployment was at 15%. Now it is 8.6%. There are now over two million people at work.

Over the next five years, Labour's mission is to sustain and spread the benefits of the recovery. A strong economy is not a final destination in itself: our economy and society must work for working people. Our vision is of a shared recovery whose benefits support workers, their families and those left behind by the crash.

We have built a strong economy

In 2011 when we took office Ireland was in the middle of the worst economic crisis in the history of the State. 15% of our people were unemployed. Businesses had been collapsing one after another. International financial markets simply would not lend money to us because the economy had been so recklessly managed. Ireland's reputation was on the floor. The previous Government had borrowed vast sums of money from the Troika under conditions dictated by them.

We said to the people that we would put the public finances back in order, renegotiate the Troika programme, regain our sovereignty and most importantly get Ireland back to work. We said we would go into government to do this only if at the same time we could protect the social welfare system to support the most vulnerable. We worked to maintain industrial and social cohesion across the economy and society.

We have built a strong economy on solid

foundations across all sectors, rather than on the construction sector alone as Fianna Fáil did with such disastrous consequences. It is an economy built to last. Over the next five years we will ensure that its benefits are felt by all.

We will continue to build a decent society

We have ended the worst economic crisis in the history of the State. At the same time, we have reversed the previous Government's cut in the minimum wage, and protected social welfare rates and core public services.

The strong economy we have built now enables us to do much more. We can deliver real and sustained improvements in the living standards of working people, their families and those who depend on the State. For Labour, the purpose of economic success is to raise living standards, to use resources generated by the economy to invest in the services that families and communities need like health, education and early childhood years and to continue to reduce the tax burden on low and middle income households.

A strong green economy

Climate change is the biggest single challenge facing humanity. The Labour Party ensured that we were the first Irish Government to pass legislation that commits us – in law – to meeting EU targets for reducing carbon emissions and adopting renewable energy.

We published the Energy White Paper and became the first Irish Government to commit to a zero-carbon energy future for our country, placing citizens and communities at the heart of energy policy, promoting and enabling deep public engagement on the challenges – and the opportunities – that arise from our climate commitments.

We will establish a Green Infrastructure Fund worth €1 billion. Half of this – €500,000 will come from the disposal of the planned sale of 25% of the State's shares in AIB. This will be matched by €500,000 of private funding.

Labour will continue to act to combat climate

change – and we will act to ensure that our people, businesses and communities are positioned to reap the employment and economic benefits that arise from this, the greatest project facing humanity in the 21st century.

A modern Ireland

Labour has always been the party of social change, bringing about an ever more inclusive and vibrant society which celebrates difference and promotes equality.

This year marks the centenary of the Easter Rising. Now more than ever it is incumbent on all of us to ensure, in the words of the Proclamation, that “the Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens”.

Labour will continue to lead on making Ireland a better place to live for all. We will strengthen the rights of women, children and the most vulnerable. We will work to ensure a tolerant, welcoming society for new citizens and minorities.

A balanced budget and lower debt

Over the next five years Labour will keep the budget close to balance. We are setting a target of reducing national debt to 75% of GDP by 2021, and this should go down to 60% by the end of the next decade.

Labour’s public spending and tax reform proposals for the next five years are based on these targets.

Better public services

Labour in government has driven the reform of public services. We secured greater productivity from public servants to allow us maintain front line services. These changes only happened because we negotiated two public service agreements.

In the next phase of public sector reform, Labour will make it easy for all citizens to use public services. We will introduce a single digital portal, giving each citizen a single and secure

point of communication with all Government Departments and public bodies. Citizens will be able to see and conduct all their interactions with the State through a single channel.

Labour will prioritise the public services families and communities need

Labour will use the majority of the funds that will be available to government over the next five years to invest in improving the quality and scope of our public services.

The cost of Labour’s tax plan will be €2.866 billion over five years. This will leave €8.368 billion to invest in improvements in the quality and scope of public services. In other words, for every €1 invested in tax reductions, we will invest almost €3 in public services.

The most effective way to tackle inequality is to invest in public services that are available to all. We will transform the availability and delivery of key services like health, education, childcare and housing.

We will ensure that no family has to worry about the cost of accessing healthcare; that childcare costs do not deter women from working; that children are getting the best possible start in life; and that our older people can grow old with dignity and with the best of care.

USC will be phased out on the first €72,000 of income

Labour will abolish the Universal Social Charge (USC) on the first €72,000 of individual income by 2021. This will be done in stages, starting from the next Budget. In the last two budgets, we removed 700,000 low paid workers entirely from the USC net. Now we will end the USC burden on low and middle income earners completely. We will also reduce the burden of PRSI on those households.

This means that a single person earning up to €72,000 will pay no USC. But by making changes to tax credits for higher earners we will ensure those earning over €120,000 will not gain from this change.

We will increase investment in infrastructure

Labour's investment in schools, third-level education, training and upskilling will help all our citizens reach their potential and ensure a highly-skilled workforce. Our investment in better roads, more public transport, high speed broadband and other key infrastructure will boost enterprise, generate growth and raise incomes.

Labour will invest an additional €8.368 billion in current and capital spending over the next five years. In addition, Labour will create a €1bn dedicated Green Infrastructure Fund, with €500m of the proceeds from the sale of bank shares combined with private sector funding to increase investment in clean public transport and renewable energy research.

Increasing public sector numbers and pay

Public sector numbers fell from a high of 320,000 to a low of 288,000 resulting from the economic crisis. We have begun restoring public sector numbers, with 295,000 now employed across the public sector.

Because we will focus on investing in the services that families and communities need, we will see a significant increase to public sector numbers between now and 2021, bringing the total size of the public sector to over 315,000. The increases are set out below:

Education	Cost
Classroom teachers	4,563
Resource Teachers	1,000
Special Needs Assistants	1,000
Educational Psychologists	155
Higher Education staff	1,515
Health and children	
Nurses	2,800
Doctors and consultants	1,163
Speech and Language Therapists	217
Other health sector staff	2,396
Safer communities	
Additional Gardaí	1,500
Civilian staff to release frontline Gardaí	1,000
Total increase to public sector numbers	17,309

At the start of the economic crisis, Fianna Fáil mounted a unilateral attack on public sector pay. Without any agreement with public sector workers, they introduced the pension levy and pay cuts to public services.

In contrast, Labour has reached two agreements with public servants, and the Lansdowne Road Agreement will see an additional €1bn invested in public sector pay between 2016 and 2018.

Under the Lansdowne Road Agreement, we are unwinding Fianna Fáil's public sector pay

cuts, and doing so in a progressive fashion by focusing on the lowest-paid public servants first.

Labour will honour the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement, as we have done with every agreement reached with public sector unions. We will negotiate a new public sector pay deal in 2018, in advance of the conclusion of the Lansdowne Road Agreement to deal with remaining unresolved issues arising from the FEMPI acts.

“A STRONG ECONOMY AND A DECENT SOCIETY REQUIRES THAT EVERY CHILD HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS A TOP QUALITY EDUCATION FIT FOR THE DIGITAL AGE”

Standing Up for Education

Education is a great liberating force in society. Investment in and reform of education will help us build a more equal Ireland. Making every school fit for the digital age, making sure that every child is welcome in every school and launching a skills revolution are our priorities.

Labour in government has ensured that ensure all teachers working in our schools are qualified. We have reduced the rental bill for prefabs in schools by 40% and provided high-speed broadband free of charge to every second-level school. We will now ensure that all primary schools are similarly equipped.

We delivered the first improvements to literacy and numeracy results for a generation, reformed the Junior Cert to give all of our students the skills they need for the modern world, and introduced new subjects like coding, philosophy and Chinese.

A strong economy and a decent society requires that every child has the opportunity to access a top quality education fit for the digital age.

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. We need to build on that work to ensure that local schools welcome local children, and to double the number of multi-denominational schools across Ireland.

The key to reaching full employment and maintaining it is to invest in people. This means investing in those currently at work and in those who will be the workers of the future, including those who don't go to third level and those who leave school early.

Our key proposals:

- Deliver the smallest class sizes in the history of the State
- End the use of prefabs in our schools
- Reduce school costs for parents
- Make 21st century skills and subjects part of the education of every child
- Double the number of multi-denominational schools by 2021
- Amend the Equal Status Act so that local children can access local schools
- Create 50,000 apprenticeship and traineeship places over the next five years
- Extend free part-time 3rd level education to those at work, and ensure that 100,000 places are available over the lifetime of the next Government.

Standing Up for Families

Labour will make low-cost for parents, high-quality childcare for all children under 12 a reality, and dramatically increase the level of spending on early years education and childcare.

We also recognise that a high quality childcare sector depends on a skilled childcare workforce with decent pay and fair conditions. We will work to ensure those who provide childcare services receive the respect and remuneration they deserve.

In Government, we have expanded the subsidised childcare available to low-income families, introduced the first supports for children with special needs in pre-schools, begun inspecting the educational qualities of pre-schools so that every child in pre-school gets a high-quality experience, and passed a referendum enshrining the rights of children in our constitution.

Labour will reduce the financial burden on parents of young children, and give every child the high-quality care and support that they deserve. These policies will also support increased labour market participation, particularly amongst women.

There are an estimated 180,000 children in paid childcare with about three-fifths of these in centre based facilities, and two-fifths with childminders. The national average cost of such childcare is estimated by Pobal to be €167 a week, with some parents paying significantly more.

Some parties have proposed models such as tax credits or vouchers. But the evidence is clear – these don't work, and in fact just end up pushing up costs for parents. Public funding, paid directly to childcare providers, allows for greater oversight of early childhood services, and gives the incentives necessary for higher quality childcare.

We are unequivocal - we will support all parents in their choices. We believe in providing them with the opportunity to stay at home for a longer period during those crucial early months of baby's life. When parents need or want to work or train, we will support their childcare costs.

Above all though, children have to be at the heart of our plan. That means a relentless focus on quality care and education.

Our key proposals:

- Cap childcare costs for parents at €4.25 per hour, or €170 per week
- Progressively increase the state subsidy so that the cost parents pay is reduced to no more than €2 per hour by 2021
- Increase paid parental leave by three months, to be shared between both parents
- Transform the quality of early years care and education with greater funding for providers with highly qualified staff
- Provide all staff working with children with one hour of paid time each week to plan their work



Standing Up for Safer Communities

Shared prosperity requires more than having more money in our pockets. The need for strong, vibrant communities goes to the heart of Labour's vision for a decent society. Families and communities need and deserve safe, flourishing communities where children can safely play and families and older people can live without fear.

The new Garda Authority is a major element of the comprehensive programme of justice reform which is being delivered by the Government. For Labour, community policing must be at the very centre of our approach. In Government, we have restarted the recruitment of Gardaí, and over the next five years will bring the police force back to the largest it has ever been. By hiring civilian personnel, we will free up another 1,000 Gardaí, and direct them towards community policing.

We will continue our programme of reform and investment across all aspects of the criminal justice system - crime prevention, detection, policing, the courts and the prisons.

We need a criminal justice system fit for the twenty first century and Labour will make the changes and put in the resources to bring it about.

Our key proposals:

- Recruit an additional 700 Gardaí each year to return the force to peak levels of over 14,500
- Free up a further 1,000 Gardaí for frontline duty by recruiting the same number of civilian staff to make sure our Gardaí are spending their time on the streets of our communities
- Put the Drugs Court on a statutory footing and expand its remit
- Legislate to improve the protections available to victims of domestic violence, most critically for those victims in crisis situations and will also make the courts process easier for victims of domestic violence
- Bring greater consistency to the sentences handed out to criminals by enacting new sentencing legislation
- Create a Garda Serious and Organised Crime Unit to tackle organised crime, cybercrime, serious fraud and suspicious financial transactions in both the public and private sector

Towards a new National Community Health Service

Labour in Government is committed to the progressive rollout of Universal Health Care. For people and their families, this means free and timely access to the health service from the initial contact with a GP straight through to treatment in the hospital system.

The introduction of a model of universal health care represents a fundamental change in our health service. We will create a new National Community Health Service – a public primary care system where access is free to everyone – and create a new Cabinet position with direct political responsibility to oversee this critical national project.

In government, we have taken the first steps, prioritising free GP care for the youngest and oldest in our society, and completing the construction of 90 primary care centres across the country. We want to see 90% of all health services conducted in the community. This will in turn allow for significant improvements to our hospital system.

Those who need to use our hospitals deserve to be treated in a timely manner and provided with world class treatment. This will require the recruitment of additional doctors, nurses and specialist staff, changes in ED work practises and discharge policies, targeted wait times and new initiatives to speed up early diagnosis and treatment.

By 2021, we will achieve significant steps towards the full rollout of Universal Health Care. We will provide free access to GP care, develop more nurse-led services, lower the cost of medicines and increase funding for primary care, community care and our hospitals.

These measures will be complemented by improvements to hospital governance and accountability to ensure the public health service is managed in the best interests of the patient.

“IN GOVERNMENT, WE HAVE TAKEN THE FIRST STEPS, PRIORITISING FREE GP CARE FOR THE YOUNGEST AND OLDEST IN OUR SOCIETY, AND COMPLETING THE CONSTRUCTION OF 90 PRIMARY CARE CENTRES ACROSS THE COUNTRY”

Our key proposals:

- **Universal GP Care.** We will continue to roll out free GP care for all.
- Moving towards Universal Health Care. The majority of our health care needs can be met at community level. This means that many services which are currently provided in hospitals should be provided in the community. These services will include areas such as mental health services, care of the elderly, and disability services.
- **Introduce smarter strategies for tackling the waiting lists crisis** and A&E overcrowding. This is not simply about more resources but about working differently. We will recruit additional health professional staff and introduce initiatives specifically designed for quick and early assessment of patients waiting for diagnosis and treatment.
- **Reduce the costs of necessary medication.** We will reduce the threshold of the Drug Payment Scheme to €100 for families and €75 for single persons and deliver lower prescription charges capped at €20 per month.
- **Enhance accountability in the management of the Irish health system.** We are committed to addressing the causes behind long waiting lists; weak budgeting, insufficient capacity and staff, and poor management. Our plan seeks to address key issues of corporate governance, financial planning, ministerial oversight and responsibility.



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