



FINE GAEL 

LET'S TAKE
IRELAND
FORWARD
TOGETHER

European Election
Manifesto 2019





Contents

FOREWARD FROM AN TAOISEACH LEO VARADKAR TD	02
INTRODUCTION FROM MINISTER FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS HELEN MCENTEE TD	04
DRIVING EUROPE'S SOCIAL AGENDA	05
Promoting gender equality	06
CREATING MORE JOBS, INVESTMENT AND A COMPETITIVE EU	07
The Single Market	07
Taxation	08
Banking and financial reform	08
Trade and investment	09
Reducing red tape	09
Investing in our future	10
BREXIT AND FORGING NEW ALLIANCES IN EUROPE	12
Securing a Brexit deal	13
Forging new alliances	13
A FAIR COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND FISHERIES POLICY	14
Agriculture	14
Fisheries	15
LEADING ON CLIMATE CHANGE	16
Climate	16
Environment	17
PROMOTING A SAFE AND COMPASSIONATE EUROPE	18
Protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law	18
Security and defence policy	18
Migration and asylum	19
Making an impact globally	20

Foreword

Fine Gael is the party of Europe. We brought Ireland into the Single European Act and the Single Market and we helped shape the Union it has become today. These European elections come at a critical juncture in our history. Our place at the heart of the most powerful grouping in European politics, the European People's Party, has stood to us throughout the Brexit process. We will stay steadfast in securing an orderly Brexit deal that protects our economy and the Good Friday Agreement.

This manifesto outlines how we plan to ensure Ireland is not defined by Brexit. It is about the future, not the past. At present, the EU is considering the future shape of Europe - whether and how the EU needs to be reformed to face new challenges. We will ensure Irish views are at the heart of this process. We believe in a global Ireland at the centre of the world, in control of our destiny and with the power to shape a better future for the Irish and European citizens of today and tomorrow.

Europe is interwoven into Fine Gael's policies. At our most recent National Conference in March 2019, Fine Gael delegates voted to add 'Europe and Openness' to our Party's values – the core beliefs around which we base our policies and ideas for the future.

We have a five-step vision for a better future:

- 1. A strong economy that rewards work, backs business and enables all citizens to reach their potential.**
- 2. A society in which nobody feels left out – equal opportunities and a second chance for all.**
- 3. World class infrastructure – to facilitate balanced growth in Ireland through *Project Ireland 2040*.**
- 4. Protecting our environment for the next generation.**
- 5. Ireland – at the centre of the world – at the heart of the European Union and committed to the United Nations.**



An Taoiseach
LEO VARADKAR TD



Mairead McGuinness MEP,
Andrew Doyle TD, Maria Walsh,
Frances Fitzgerald TD, Seán Kelly MEP,
Deirdre Clune MEP, and Mark Durkan.

At a time when some countries are turning inwards and choosing nationalism ahead of multilateralism, the EU must step up and demonstrate the power of shared decision-making. As a global island, we believe that multilateralism strengthens, not diminishes, our diversity, our self-confidence and our security. Ireland and the EU must play our part in shaping together the kind of world in which we want to live, rather than responding to a world shaped by others.

Harnessing the influence of our strong team, Fine Gael MEPs' priorities will be:

1. Driving Europe's social agenda
2. Creating more jobs, investment and a competitive EU
3. Brexit and forging new alliances in Europe
4. A fair Common Agricultural Policy and Fisheries Policy
5. Leading on climate change
6. Promoting a safe and compassionate Europe

An Taoiseach
LEO VARADKAR TD

Introduction

Fine Gael wants Ireland to be at the heart of Europe. This is something that was raised by people when I travelled the country last year as part of our Citizens' Dialogue on the Future of Europe. Irish people are overwhelmingly in support of our membership of the EU.

Ireland's population is the youngest in Europe with a third of our people aged under 25. These young Irish people are particularly supportive of the EU and want to be part of its future. They believe in a fairer and more integrated Europe. One that they can benefit and learn from. One where they can continue to travel, work, study and live in; without traditional barriers or borders.

Fine Gael believes in investing and delivering in programmes that help to develop our future and keep us competitive in an ever globalised world.

The Irish Citizens' Dialogue process that I led last year heard a wide range of views from right across society based on different thematic areas.

Those themes helped to frame our discussion that led to the Government publishing our paper on the Future of Europe that will be presented by the Taoiseach and myself in Sibiu, Romania in May of this year.

This manifesto outlines our policies and priorities for the next five years in the European Parliament.

Fine Gael wants to be your voice in Europe. Fine Gael, as members of the European People's Party, is best placed to ensure you are heard at the centre of EU decision making.



HELEN MCENTEE TD
Minister for European Affairs

HELEN MCENTEE TD
Minister for European Affairs

Driving Europe's Social Agenda

The European Union and its Member States have endured a difficult decade. The era of bailouts created a perception of a Union defined by austerity. But this is not the case; there are so many more dimensions to Europe. The EU has been the driving force behind the strengthening of key areas of social policy in Ireland since the 1970s, such as equality and non-discrimination legislation. Recent polling data reaffirms the Irish people's support for the EU and their recognition of the benefits our membership has brought to Ireland.

We know from the recent *Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe* that Irish people's overarching desire is for fairness – fairness between Member States, fairness in education and employment opportunities, and fairness between generations. Moreover, the EU needs to communicate better what it does and reaffirm its significance in the daily lives of EU citizens.

Arising from the Social Summit in Gothenburg (November 2017), EU leaders signed up to the European Pillar of Social Rights. It sets out how the EU can deliver new and more effective rights for citizens across 20 principles in three categories: (i) equal opportunities and access to the labour market, (ii) fair working conditions and (iii) social protection and inclusion.

By standing for a social Europe relevant to citizens' needs and economic circumstances, Fine Gael MEPs will stand up to nationalists and populists who want to undermine the EU. Promoting this approach with more transparent democratic engagement, including through legislative initiatives, will be important in resisting those who want to erode the EU's platforms for social rights and environmental action.

The future of work is one of the defining challenges of our time and we need to adapt our labour laws and social security services, upgrade the skills of our people and sufficiently support all actions we take in this area.

Building on this, our MEPs, strongly represented on the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, have already passed new legislation that helps parents to share caring responsibilities more fairly so that women have more opportunities to develop their full potential in the labour market. MEPs passed laws that ban cancer-causing chemicals and save thousands of lives. Most recently, MEPs set rules for a fair European labour market and delivered rules that make precarious work more transparent and predictable.

A key priority for our MEPs in the next parliamentary term will be promoting work-life balance and gender equality. We will seek to broaden the impact of what the EU can do to promote gender equality, such as taking action on the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap.

Ensuring all European citizens live healthier lives must be a priority for the new legislative mandate. We will prioritise health care and develop cooperation between MEPs and Member States on health services and ensure people feel empowered to cross borders for medical attention, supported by improving patient access with more patient-centred health systems.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Progress the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, ensuring it remains a priority of the next European Commission and European Parliament, including giving it due focus in deliberations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).
- Work with the Irish Government to ensure the Pillar is actively prioritised and seek to improve the number of categories in which Ireland scores 'best performer' among all Member States.
- Secure increased funding for the European Social Fund (ESF+). It is not enough to draft laws, take initiatives and coordinate policies. We also need to put our money where our mouth is. The ESF+ will provide the main EU financial instrument for improving workers' mobility and employment opportunities and strengthening social cohesion and fairness. This includes the Youth Employment Initiative, which helps to fund the Youth Guarantee offering under 25s an offer of employment, training or education.
- Promote good mental health and promote awareness of opportunities to link Ireland, the EU, Member States and MEPs more closely together in the area of mental health.
- Propose that the European Commission designate 2022 as the European Year of Good Mental Health.
- Support the efforts of the *Work Forum* to monitor Member States' implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Promote independent living across the EU for people with disabilities, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Promote the work of the Disability Intergroup in the European Parliament to ensure MEPs focus on improving the lives of people with disabilities during the next legislature.
- Combat the challenges of an ageing population. As part of the EPP grouping, we will support innovation and investment in the area of health and develop the silver economy to promote active ageing.
- Support efforts to create a European Master Plan to pool our joint resources and data in order to research ways of tackling diseases such as cancer. We will increase funds and strengthen the European Innovation Council in order to enable better support to innovators and entrepreneurs on high-risk and breakthrough innovations so that new markets can be created.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Back proposals to better ensure that women and men receive equal pay for equal work by reducing the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap and further advance equal opportunities for women in economic and social life.
- Promote a better work-life balance and facilitate greater choice on how parents and care givers balance their work and caring responsibilities.
- Promote in the European Parliament the adoption of the policy objectives in the National Women's Council of Ireland's *Feminist Manifesto for Europe*, which includes a 40% quota for company boardrooms across Europe.
- Advocate for 'wage transparency' in SMEs across the single market, building on Ireland's wage transparency legislation to promote gender equality.

20 KEY PRINCIPLES OF EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

- 01 Education, training life-long learning
- 02 Gender equality
- 03 Equal opportunities
- 04 Active support to employment
- 05 Secure and adaptable employment
- 06 Wages
- 07 Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals
- 08 Social dialogue and involvement of workers
- 09 Work-life balance
- 10 Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection
- 11 Childcare and support to children
- 12 Social protection
- 13 Unemployment benefits
- 14 Minimum income
- 15 Old age income and pensions
- 16 Health care
- 17 Inclusion of people with disabilities
- 18 Long-term care
- 19 Housing and assistance for the homeless
- 20 Access to essential services

Creating more jobs, investment and a competitive EU

A successful economy allows us to shape the kind of society we want. Along with our EPP colleagues, Fine Gael will continue to break down barriers in the single and digital markets, positioning the EU to be competitive on the world stage and to improve living standards for all.

The Single Market is among the most important achievements of the EU, but it is not yet complete. People should be able to avail of cheaper loans and insurance across Europe under the Single Market and yet that is simply not a reality. Completing the Single Market and Digital Single Market will be key priorities for Fine Gael MEPs in the next European Parliament term.

Completing the Single Market will be a key enabler in delivering the EPP target of creating an additional 5 million new jobs in the coming years, especially for the younger generation. We will also support a competitive EU and open up new markets with additional free trade agreements.

We will complete the Banking Union with a European Deposit Insurance Scheme – provided that the risks in the European banking system have been significantly reduced - in order to safeguard citizens' savings and strengthen the tools needed to boost investments during downturns.

Having moved from being a net beneficiary to being a net contributor today, Fine Gael MEPs will work towards agreeing a fair and ambitious new EU budget from 2021 to 2027. We are open to contributing more funding over the next period, but only if it is spent on areas that contribute to the advancement of the European ideal – sustaining the CAP, funding for research and innovation and unlocking the potential of disadvantaged areas within the EU.

SINGLE MARKET

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Lead measures to complete the Single Market and Digital Single Market, particularly regarding services. Completing the existing Single Market could potentially deliver €651 billion to €1.1 trillion additional benefit per year, creating 7.5 million jobs by 2030.
- Fulfil the promise of the Single Market in all areas. We will work towards a well-developed single market for financial services, in the area of banking, mortgages and insurance. We believe in an EU-wide insolvency regime and an EU-wide credit worthiness procedure which would help to develop the single market for financial services.
- Work more closely with Member States and EPP colleagues on the cost of medicines. We should pool the buying power of the EU's 450 million people. This could save billions for taxpayers, freeing up funding to ensure that modern medicines are available to patients at the same time in every country.

- Monitor Member States' transposition of, and the adequacy of, the newly ratified Copyright Directive (April 2019) which updates current copyright rules to cater for the digital age, guaranteeing fair pay for creators, strong rights for users and responsibility for platforms.
- Promote a pan-European pension market which allows for easier portability of pensions and access to private pensions in other Member States. A key part of the Capital Markets Union (CMU) agenda aims to boost pension provision in the EU. This complements the Irish Government's *Roadmap for Pension Reform* to address the potential pensions time bomb.

TAXATION

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Actively engage with work in the area of the digital economy at both OECD and EU level. We will be committed participants and supporters of tax reform efforts led by the OECD through the BEPS process.
- Oppose any proposals to introduce a digital services tax, if the EU goes down this route alone. Taxation policy needs to catch up with the reality of a changing digital economy. This work is best done on a global basis through the OECD. Fine Gael will not support unilateral measures which could cause a trading risk and which will undermine the competitiveness of exporting Member States.
- Re-affirm Ireland's commitment to a 12.5% corporation tax rate and closely monitor proposals for a common corporate tax base, a financial transactions tax and a digital services tax.
- Support the retention of national competency over fiscal and taxation matters and resist proposals for a new European Finance Minister with special budgetary powers.

BANKING AND FINANCIAL REFORM

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Support efforts to complete the European Banking Union and the creation of an effective European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS), which would ensure savings are equally protected across Member States and further sever the link between banks and the State.
- Support the Capital Markets Union (CMU), which aims to provide new sources of funding for SMEs and reduce the cost of raising capital.
- Work to strengthen the European Stability Mechanism's responsibility for the development and monitoring of financial assistance programmes. The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) is the euro area's crisis lending body.
- Advocate for the retention of the current intergovernmental voting structure of the ESM, whereby Ireland retains decision-making responsibility. While we believe the ESM should have greater responsibilities in some areas, Member States should remain in control of decision making.
- Support an ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 that responds to emerging challenges such as climate change and the digital agenda.
- Work with the European Investment Bank and other EU institutions to maximise investment in Ireland, particularly for our SMEs, through the InvestEU fund, the Connecting Europe Facility for Transport and other mechanisms.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to open new markets for Irish exports through new free and fair-trade agreements, while defending our high standards and preventing unfair trade practices.
- Help strengthen the EU-US Transatlantic Relationship, making use of Ireland's unique connection to the US.
- Support the agreement of an ambitious EU-US trade deal. We welcome the Council's new mandate for negotiations. Fine Gael MEPs supported the CETA agreement and the EU Japan trade agreement because they are good for jobs, investment and growth.
- Support the full implementation of the Strategic Partnership Agreement with Japan, alongside the Economic Partnership Agreement.
- Re-invigorate the idea of 'entrepreneur ambassadors' based on the model of the European Round Table of Industrialists, as a forum for senior industry figures to meet and consider new ideas.
- Promote Ireland's position as the largest English-speaking country in the EU post-Brexit – particularly in the legal and financial areas.
- Work with European Parliament colleagues to share best practice on 'night culture'. The night time economy is increasingly regarded as a source of untapped potential and big European cities are moving ahead with proposals to broaden the set of cultural options open to residents and tourists.

REDUCING RED TAPE

The SME test – Think Small First – is an example of how a simple EU proposal can have a big impact in every town and village in Ireland. The SME Test now obliges policymakers to consider the negative impact of any new legislation or regulation which may create a burden on SMEs through stakeholder engagement and other mechanisms. Decisions taken in Brussels must not block, but facilitate, business growth.

Fine Gael MEPs will work to:

- >> Cut bureaucracy for SMEs, including using digital tools and simulations which can free up SMEs from unnecessary and burdensome reporting duties.
- >> Cut 1,000 outdated EU rules and regulations in line with the EPP Group to eliminate inefficiencies and streamline our productive capacities.
- >> Support new proposals to strengthen and improve the Better Regulation Agenda following the recent public consultation and 'stocktaking' of the current system. This will ensure new EU laws pass a common sense test and are of a high quality (through impact assessment) and abide by the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
- >> Modernise our legislation so that we are ready for technological changes and provide a solid and functioning legal framework for companies operating in Europe.

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Responding to Irish people's feedback in the *Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe*, we want to see Europe invest more in young people, through education, training, innovation and employment opportunities. *Horizon 2020* has successfully supported collaborative research and investment in our long-term future. EU funding in the research and innovation area has helped discover new planets, make major advances on cancer treatment and come up with new innovations to tackle climate change. We want to build on *Horizon 2020* with the EU's new and even more ambitious research and innovation training programme for the post-2020 period, *Horizon Europe*. This funding allows us to deliver on key priorities such as the Paris Agreement on climate change.

As outlined in the Irish Government's *Future Jobs Ireland 2019*, we need to embrace innovation and technological change in order to position Ireland to respond to the profound challenges ahead. It is in Ireland's interests to inhabit a world that is globalised and open and which responds to the challenges of the future through collaboration. Turning inwards and protecting what we have only leads to a spiral of diminishing returns. Our people are our greatest resource and our unique competitive advantage. For our economy to flourish, we need to be able to up-skill throughout our careers.

Through the Erasmus programme we can promote a collaborative approach. Erasmus is one of the most recognised and successful EU programmes since its inception by the late Peter Sutherland. We want to expand the Erasmus programme and open it up to even more parts of society not traditionally associated with the programme.

While Fine Gael MEPs will make their mark over the next five-year term, Irish officials in the EU will continue to make their mark in the EU for decades to come. Irish people have held the highest civil service positions in the EU institutions over the past four decades. We want to make sure the EU institutions are attractive places to work for our young people and enable them to have the academic and language skills to succeed.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to triple funding for Erasmus to €45 billion for the next EU budget 2021-2027, in line with the European Parliament's position. This will help develop young Irish people's language skills and their ability to work in the EU institutions. It will also complement the targets contained in the Government's *Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026* and the *Action Plan for Education*, aiming to make Ireland's education system the best in Europe in the next decade.
- Expand the Erasmus programme into other areas such as vocational training and schools.
- Work closely with Irish universities and researchers to promote the EU's new ambitious research and innovation programme – *Horizon Europe* – and help to ensure Irish projects get their fair share of funds.
- Continue to support the European Parliament Ambassador School Programme for second-level students.
- Expand DiscoverEU Interrail for all 18-year-olds to encourage a new generation to discover Europe and build positive relationships and outlooks across the continent.
- Advocate policies that close skills gaps and which seek to match workers' skills with the skills employers need.

- Seek to increase investment in artificial intelligence and robotics to make the EU the leader in this field, be competitive globally and shape these innovations in line with European values.
- Support the development of the EPP proposal for a new European University Institute 4.0 to respond to the needs of 'Industry 4.0' (the fourth industrial revolution) powered by automation.

IRELAND'S PRESENCE IN THE EU INSTITUTIONS

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Target an increase in the number of young Irish people applying for internship positions in the European institutions through outreach work.
- Highlight the issue of under-representation and the demographic cliff edge facing Irish staff in the institutions. Many Irish staff in the European Commission will be retiring within 15 years and not enough new Irish candidates are being recruited to replace those retiring. We understand that approximately 60% of the 500 or so Irish staff in the European Commission are over 50.
- Work with Irish officials and universities to promote the EU institutions as a career option.
- Raise awareness of Irish language opportunities within the EU institutions. *Feasacht a ardú maidir le deiseanna in institiúidí an AE leis an nGaeilge.*
- Support the continued recognition of Irish as an official language of the European Union. This is a priority for the Government, and we are committed to eliminating the derogation, as circumstances allow. *Tacú leis an aitheantas atá ag an nGaeilge mar theanga oifigiúil agus oibre den Aontas Eorpach. Is tosaíocht é sin ag an Rialtas agus táimid tiomanta deireadh a chur leis an maolú, ag brath ar chúinsí.*
- Work to ensure the Irish Government and the Higher Education Authority provides adequate funding for relevant Irish language third level courses. We need to step up the current recruitment rate of Irish speakers into the EU institutions and increase the number of students graduating with the required skillset. *Oibriú lena chinntiú go gcuirfidh an Rialtas agus an tÚdarás um Ard-Oideachas maoiniú leordhóthanach ar fáil do chúrsaí tríú leibhéal Gaeilge iomchuí. Ní mór dúinn géarú ar an ráta earcaíochta ar chainteoirí Gaeilge in Institiúidí an AE agus cur le líon na mac léinn a mbronntar céimeanna orthu a bhfuil na scileanna riachtanacha acu.*

Brexit and forging new alliances in Europe

The outcome of UK deliberations on Brexit remain uncertain. We are focused on ensuring that any withdrawal of the UK from the EU is orderly and Fine Gael has the best team to make that happen. We are fully committed to protecting the Good Friday Agreement. We are conscious of the concerns of many people throughout Ireland, especially in Northern Ireland, about how Brexit might affect their rights, freedom of movement, and access to certain EU programmes. As our clear stand on the backstop shows, we will continue to work with the British Government and the EU to ensure the best outcomes for people throughout the island of Ireland.

Should Brexit happen, the next European Parliament will have to oversee and ratify negotiations on the future relationship between the EU and the UK. Fine Gael MEPs will work to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement is fully reflected in the new framework of relationships between the EU and the UK. Alongside Irish citizens' chosen and valued place at the heart of the EU, we are committed to harnessing the structures of the Agreement to further develop cooperation on our island and between these islands. We will also work for a close and stable relationship between the EU and the UK over the long term.

Fine Gael will ensure that no matter what happens, Irish citizens in Northern Ireland will continue to be European citizens in all circumstances. That means the right to travel, work and study freely across the EU. The Common Travel Area will also be maintained in all circumstances, meaning Irish and British citizens will continue to move freely, reside and access a range of services in either jurisdiction.

Healthcare arrangements must be maintained to the greatest extent possible post-Brexit. Under the EU Cross Border Healthcare Directive, any Irish citizen has the right to access healthcare in another EU country and to be reimbursed for care abroad by their home country. Up to 2,000 Irish citizens avail of the EU Cross Border Healthcare Directive every year to obtain treatments in other EU Member States. Northern Ireland accounts for as much as 40% of these treatments, so it is vital that existing arrangements are maintained. Fine Gael MEPs will work to protect these arrangements for residents both sides of the border.

In the medium to long term, our MEPs have a key role to play in building new alliances in a post-Brexit world. Apart from the economics and politics of Brexit, the UK's departure will leave a big gap in the corridors and meeting rooms of Brussels and Strasbourg. Ireland has lost a natural ally and we must build new alliances and partnerships in order to maximise our capabilities and influence. This might mean teaming up with one country on a certain policy issue but disagreeing with the same country on other issues. We will use our position in the EPP to work with MEPs from all EU Member States who share our political views. MEPs and Member States

have shown remarkable solidarity with Ireland throughout the Brexit process. Fine Gael MEPs will be active in supporting other MEPs' priorities over the next five-year term, as appropriate.

As part of the Government's *Global Ireland* programme, which aims to double our global footprint by 2025, we are strengthening our permanent representation in Brussels and our embassies in Spain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the Nordic/Baltic countries. Largely protecting our diplomatic footprint throughout the financial downturn has helped immensely during the Brexit process, helping to inform other MEPs and Member States of Ireland's position on Brexit and to feed back vital information to Dublin. We will back up our strong presence on the ground with a strong political presence at Council meetings. Fine Gael in government will always place a premium on ministerial attendance at European meetings, which dropped off during the 2000s.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work with colleagues in the European Parliament and elsewhere to secure an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU, which best protects people and key sectors throughout Ireland, and especially, Northern Ireland.
- Work with the Irish Government and the EU to help raise awareness among businesses about getting Brexit ready. Building on the close engagement with the Commission on these issues, in the event of a no deal, Ireland will be looking for further relaxation of state aid rules and for EU supports for business and agribusiness.
- Work within the European Parliament for a close future relationship between the EU and the UK, including a delegation to link MEPs and Members of the UK Parliament.
- Support the continued implementation of the current PEACE and INTERREG programmes and ensure the implementation of a special new PEACE PLUS programme. These programmes are drivers of regional development in communities both sides of the border.
- Ensure the EU Cross-Border Health Directive is fully implemented by the HSE and that Irish citizens are aware of their healthcare rights as EU citizens.
- Work to ensure that treatments under the EU Cross-Border Health Directive can continue for residents both sides of the border.
- Work with the Irish Government and EU institutions to safeguard Northern Ireland residents' continued access to the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) in the event of a no deal outcome.
- Defend Ireland's financial services industry in the case of a hard Brexit and support the development of the sector through the IFS2025 action plan.
- Complement the Government's work to build new alliances, especially with the Benelux countries, the three Nordic countries and the three Baltic countries.
- Examine the possibility of establishing a structured exchange scheme between the Irish civil and public service and other EU member states. This would build relationships and help share new ideas.
- Work to ensure any proposed changes to EU-wide annual clock changes do not have an adverse impact on the island of Ireland.

A fair Common Agricultural Policy and Fisheries Policy

Agriculture and Fisheries will remain top priorities for Fine Gael MEPs in the next parliamentary term. We played a key leadership role in Europe finalising the existing Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget through the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU and through our strong presence in the European Parliament. Fine Gael has the best team, with the best experience, to deliver the best CAP for the current and next generation of farmers.

We recognise that farm families are the heartbeat of the rural economy and that the new CAP will be vital in securing investment in rural Ireland, for the expansion of the agri-food sector and the livelihoods of our farmers. Fine Gael is ambitious for our agri-food sector and we want to become the world's highest quality food producing country, based on innovation, sustainability and family farming.

Fine Gael is committed to increasing our contribution to the EU budget, but only if it is spent on our key priorities, including CAP. Agriculture and fisheries play a larger role in Ireland than they do in many other EU Member States. Fine Gael will build on the alliances of MEPs and Member States we have already cultivated to protect and strengthen CAP into the future.

We recognise that the farming community is facing challenges, with a potential cut to the budget, the backdrop of Brexit and our ambitions on climate action. However, the CAP negotiations also present opportunities, including rebalancing power in the food chain, supporting generational renewal and vibrant rural areas, an emphasis on knowledge transfer, technology adoption and competitiveness, and new incentives for young farmers.

We are fully aware of the detrimental effects a no-deal Brexit could have on Ireland. Particular sectors such as beef are already under pressure and Fine Gael will ensure that both the EU and the Irish Government will be ready for the worst-case scenario, through supports and state aid flexibilities as needed.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Fight to retain an adequate budget for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2020 that protects our farmers, is distributed fairly and targeted towards active farmers.
- Ensure the distribution of supports to farmers over the lifetime of the CAP is both fair and sustainable.
- Place young farmers – and attracting young people into farming – at the heart of our negotiating approach to the new CAP.
- Promote a new CAP programme that encourages women into the agricultural sector and the opportunities available in agri-tourism and among food producers.

- Help to develop new schemes under Pillar 2 of the next CAP to provide farm gate investment that helps the most vulnerable farmers and meets our climate objectives.
- Defend our high standards for agriculture, fisheries and food quality against low quality imports. Defend our vulnerable sectors in light of any emerging trade proposals on Mercosur, while working to develop new trade deals that are essential for Irish farmers and the wider food industry.
- Work with Commissioner Hogan and the Commission to ensure strong supports for farmers are deployed in the event of a no-deal Brexit and state aid flexibilities are available as needed.
- Fight to secure the €10 billion budget for research and innovation in agriculture and food production under the new *Horizon* programme.
- Work with EU partners and the Irish Government to help reach our ambitious Food Wise 2025 targets of an 85% increase in the value of agri-food exports to €19 billion, a 65% increase in primary production value to €10 billion, a 70% increase in value added in the sector to over €13 billion and the creation of 23,000 additional agri-food jobs.

FISHERIES

During Fine Gael's time in government, the Common Fisheries Policy was reformed to protect fish stocks in the interests of both fishermen and the environment. Funding for the fishing industry under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) was doubled to €240m and the first strategy for the Inshore Fisheries sector was developed. Fine Gael will continue to be strong advocates for fishermen and coastal communities in Brexit negotiations and in the development of the next Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Advocate for a strongly resourced European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support our fishing and coastal communities.
- Ensure Irish fishing interests are robustly defended in Brexit negotiations, working with other like-minded MEPs and Member States.
- Work with EPP colleagues to ensure the next Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) protects our valuable resources and secures the long term viability of Irish fishermen and coastal communities.

Leading on Climate Change

We want Ireland – and the EU – to be world leaders on climate action. We want to support Irish citizens to meet the demands of climate action for a fair and just transition to a low carbon economy. Through the EU's own actions and by working with less developed parts of the world, we will ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are reflected in decisions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

We recognise the urgency involved and we want the EU to lead on implementing the Paris Climate Agreement. We must protect our planet for future generations. This will require bold action - now - and changes to the way people live their lives.

CLIMATE

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to put in place ambitious emissions reduction targets for 2050 in key sectors such as transport, ensuring that difficult decisions are made and that they are made in a fair and inclusive manner for all citizens.
- Work with the Commission and the Council on the EU's long-term climate strategy. We must develop a coherent EU wide policy to support a just transition.
- Support the EU's strategy for low-emission mobility across its three priority areas of (i) increasing the efficiency of the transport system, (ii) speeding up the deployment of low emission alternative energy for transport and (iii) moving towards zero-emission vehicles.
- Take steps to ensure that the EU can facilitate the large-scale transition away from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles towards electric vehicles, including a sufficient boost in the production of electric vehicles by European car manufacturers so that the decarbonisation ambitions of Member States can be reached.
- Work to develop necessary regulation and smart funding to decarbonise the EU transport sector.
- Increase the efficiency of the transport system by making the most of digital technologies, smart pricing and further encouraging the shift to lower emission transport modes.
- Promote the exchange of best practice on sustainable public transport initiatives across urban centres in Europe, such as The Urban Mobility Observatory (ELTIS).
- Build a true Energy Union, where energy flows freely across borders and which brings down citizens' living costs.
- Promote long-term, sustained ambition on renewable energy and energy efficiency policies at EU level, including through enabling frameworks for the enhanced use of Union funds, in order to give certainty to investors and reduce the cost of capital for projects.

- Promote Ireland's Atlantic coastline as a huge source of renewable energy through the utilisation of offshore wind. We will work to increase significantly the amount of renewables in the Irish and EU energy mix through the development of further interconnection between Ireland and other EU Member States.
- Ensure that the Midlands Region is included in the 'Coal Regions in Transition Platform' in the context of a commitment to an accelerated transition out of producing milled peat for power generation. The Platform will enable multi-stakeholder dialogue on how carbon intensive regions can change and facilitate the development of strategies to enable structural transformation, increased jobs and growth.
- Highlight Ireland's work in supporting countries most vulnerable to climate change and in helping to provide a voice for those countries who struggle to attend or to make an impact at international fora. Climate Action is one of four key priorities in the Irish Government's recently launched policy for international development, *A Better World*. We plan to scale up our funding on climate action up to 2030 and explore innovative approaches to climate finance, risk insurance and climate adaptation.

ENVIRONMENT

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Advocate for the adoption of a more sustainable, more circular economy. We will encourage waste prevention – reuse, repair, refurbish and recycle.
- Promote pan-European legislation to ban plastic microbeads, building on our domestic legislation.
- Strongly support the implementation of new EU legislation on Single Use Plastics (SUP), which will ban straws, cotton bud sticks made from plastic, plastic plates and cutlery, plastic coffee stirrers and plastic balloon holders.
- Develop new schemes under Pillar 2 of the next CAP that will meet our climate objectives, but also provide farm gate investment that helps the most vulnerable and disadvantaged farmers across all sectors.
- Combat air pollution, which causes almost 500,000 premature deaths in Europe every year.
- Promote the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU and beyond.

Promoting a safe and compassionate Europe

PROMOTING DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW

The public consultations on the *Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe* showed that Irish people are concerned by the apparent erosion of the rule of law in some EU Member States. If the EU is to promote our fundamental principles of democracy, freedom, equality and respect for human rights, we must ensure we uphold these principles at home. Fine Gael and our MEPs are fully committed to ensuring EU laws are enforced and the key principles of EU membership are upheld.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Re-affirm Fine Gael's values of integrity and openness in our dealings with colleagues in the European Parliament.
- Stand up for the rights of LGBT+ and other groups that face continued discrimination within and outside the EU.
- Support the re-establishment in the next parliament of the LGBTI Intergroup that coordinates the work of MEPs in this area.
- Work to promote tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities who face discrimination and support freedom of religion or belief within and outside the EU.

SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Today's criminals and terrorists are operating across borders more than ever before. Our police, security and intelligence services across Europe must work collaboratively and have access to the most up-to-date technology in order to tackle criminals and terrorists. In the current term, Fine Gael MEPs supported the EU-wide Passenger Name Record (PNR) system which empowers authorities to better track terrorists and serious criminals.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work to further connect European IT databases in the areas of freedom, security and justice, in a balanced and proportionate way that respects people's right to privacy.
- Support a strengthened EU cyber security strategy, and as part of that strategy a cyber security agency if it is aligned with Ireland's national interests.

- Take a lead on counteracting disinformation online, especially in ensuring the integrity of the European elections. We will support the implementation of the recently agreed EU Action Plan on disinformation, which seeks to create a consolidated approach across Member States and establish a Rapid Alert System for national points of contact.
- Support increased cooperation of intelligence services to allow for a better exchange of intelligence on terrorists and potential offenders, whether they are at home or abroad, who may represent a security risk for our citizens.
- Defend the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) system and ensure it is fully implemented by Member States to strengthen security and protect our citizens, while also preserving our freedoms.

Fine Gael is opposed to the creation of an EU army. We support greater cooperation with other MEPs and Member States on security and defence matters to ensure that all our citizens are protected from new global threats such as terrorism, cyber threats and human trafficking. We do not believe that Ireland should stand aside from engaging in international affairs due to our policy of military neutrality. Rather, through active participation we can make an effective contribution to global peace, security and development, whether that is through the EU, the UN or Ireland's own bilateral engagement.

As part of our *Global Ireland* programme, we believe it is right to provide assistance in certain situations and assignments. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy is about promoting peace, democracy and the rule of law and our participation does not undermine our military neutrality. Our active participation in such initiatives helps us to build on our strong reputation for peacekeeping missions and make an impact internationally in keeping with our *Global Ireland* ambitions.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Support Ireland's continued participation in PESCO, This provides a mechanism for developing capabilities that can assist the Defence Forces when undertaking UN-mandated peacekeeping operations and carrying out operations at home.
- Support efforts for increased collaboration and coordination so that EU Member States increase their contributions to UN peacekeeping as endorsed by the EU-UN Strategic Priorities on Peace Operations and Crisis Management (2019-2021).
- Work with European Parliament colleagues to develop an understanding of Ireland's position on defence.

MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

Fine Gael believes that immigration from within the EU and from outside the EU is good for Ireland. Immigration has helped enrich our society, drive economic growth and staff our public services. We also appreciate that Member States need to manage migration in a balanced way to protect EU borders.

From the outset of the migration crisis in Europe, Ireland has sought to play an active role in protecting the most vulnerable and we voluntarily pledged to accept a total of 4,000 people into the State.

Fine Gael believes we should do all in our power to ensure that Operation Sophia's search and rescue and humanitarian mandate is extended. We have real concerns about its change in

mandate and the danger that poses to the lives of vulnerable people. The value of Operation Sophia goes far beyond its formal mandate; with more than 45,000 people rescued with the help of members of the Irish Defence Forces, its value in protecting human life is immeasurable. It is an example of Ireland's and the EU's commitment to disrupting criminal networks, tackling the scourge of people-trafficking and protecting the lives of vulnerable migrants at sea.

Part of the solution to the ongoing migration issues lies in a renewed EU-Africa relationship, described in the next section. Ireland will continue to finance measures to address the root causes of irregular migration through humanitarian and developmental programmes in developing countries.

Fine Gael MEPs will

- Support efforts for a comprehensive approach to migration, based on a systematic, transparent and fair system, rather than the current more ad hoc approach.
- Work to reform the Common European Asylum System.
- Seek to re-establish the search and rescue and humanitarian mandate of Operation Sophia, given Ireland's central role in recent years. Recognising the complexity of migration as a political issue in Europe, we will work to build consensus on a way forward.

MAKING AN IMPACT GLOBALLY

As set out in *Global Ireland 2025*, Ireland will seek to influence the global agenda through our membership of the EU. The EU is an important actor on the world stage and Ireland's voice is amplified within EU structures. In the European Parliament, delegations provide a forum for MEPs to make links with parliamentarians and representatives from across the world. This is an opportunity to promote human rights and democratic values beyond EU borders.

In the past few years, the Irish Government has increased Ireland's contribution to the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa from €3 million to €6 million to €15 million today. This fund addresses the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration in Africa and helps those communities most affected by, but least equipped to tackle, the effects of climate change.

Fine Gael believes a more intensive and meaningful EU-Africa partnership is required if we are to deal effectively with our shared challenges. We want to move beyond our traditional focus on aid towards building new multi-faceted partnerships with a young, fast-growing African continent, encompassing trade, security and education. This relationship must be one based on mutual respect and which, through partnership, helps the two continents deal with the multiple challenges of climate change, the economy, food security, energy security, water security, migration, corruption, and regional conflict.

Ireland's new policy for international development, *A Better World*, outlines how we will help those furthest behind to overcome the challenges they face, including climate change. We spend tens of millions of euro each year on climate action internationally and that work will be strengthened as part of *A Better World*.

Fine Gael MEPs will:

- Work towards a more meaningful and multi-faceted EU-Africa partnership.
- Seek to establish a new political structure to facilitate much closer political cooperation and two-way investment between Africa and the EU, reflecting the breadth of challenges and opportunities - such as rapid population growth – we will face over the coming decades.
- Support the implementation of Ireland's new policy on development aid, *A Better World*, in conjunction with the European Consensus on Development, which aligns our development policy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Advance the *EU Global Strategy*, which sets out how we can contribute to a more peaceful, equal and sustainable world.
- Promote respect for human rights in relations with countries outside the EU.
- Play an active role in EU efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in crisis situations.
- Support further accession to the EU for countries that meet the necessary criteria in line with EU values. We recognise the importance of accession for many countries neighbouring the EU, especially given Ireland's own positive experience of EU membership.
- Oppose any proposals for Qualified Majority Voting on foreign policy.
- Work with fellow MEPs and other Member States towards the creation of a two-state solution as part of a lasting settlement in the Middle East.
- Support the EU strategic approach to international cultural relations and the new 'framework for action' to ensure the role of culture informs all decision-making. The EU can strengthen its effectiveness and the impact of its foreign policy by integrating international cultural relations.



FINE GAEL



National Headquarters, 51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2, D02 W924.
Tel: 01 619 8444 Email: finegael@finegael.ie www.finegael.ie

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