Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review -

Sustainable Development Goals

June 2023

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Contents

Glossary of Acronyms

AIM	Access and Inclusion Model
ALL	Adult Literacy for Life
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
ASviS	Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development
ATU	Atlantic Technological University
BAR	Brexit Adjustment Reserve
BOTP	Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection Status
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CAP	Climate Action Plan
CARO	Climate Action Regional Offices
CDP	Community Development Pilot
CFCR	Controlled Foreign Company Rules
CH4	Methane
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
COP	Conference of Parties
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
D/Education	Department of Education
D/Taoiseach	Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DECC	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DFIN	Department of Finance
DHLGH	Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage
DIRT	Deposit Interest Retention Tax
DIA	Distributional Impact Assessments
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DRS	Deposit Return Scheme
DRSI	Deposit Return Scheme Ireland
DSP	Department of Social Protection
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFRAG	European Financial Reporting Advisory Group
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EPRS	Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes
ERP	Economic Recovery Plan
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
ESG	Environmental Social and Governance
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
EWSS	Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FET	Further Education and Training
GCE	Global Citizenship Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Green House Gas
GP	General Practitioner (Doctor)
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HCI	Human Capital Initiative
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEI	Higher Education Institutes
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HLPF	High Level Political Forum (UN)
HPSU	High Potential Start Ups
HRT	Hormone Related Therapy
HSA	Health and Safety Authority
HSE	Health Service Executive
HTB	Help to Buy Scheme
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
IDA	Industrial Development Authority
IDWG	Inter Departmental Working Group
IHREC	Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission

IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITsim	Indirect Taxes Simulation
iNAP2	One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRC	Irish Research Council
IUA-EPA	Irish Universities Association – Environment Protection Agency
IVF	In-Vitro Fertilisation
LACAP	Local Authority Climate Action Plans
LCDC	Local Community Development Committee
LDC	Local Development Companies
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plans
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plans
LGBTQ+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersexual Asexual
LINC	Leadership for Inclusion
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MaREI	Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre for Energy Climate and Marine
MTU	Munster Technological University
N2O	Nitrous Oxide
NAF	National Adaptation Framework
NCS	National Childcare Scheme
NDICI	Neighbourhood Development and International Co-Operation Instrument
NDP	National Development Plan
NEET	Not in Employment Education or Training
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NIP	National Implementation Plan
NPAP	National Physical Activity Plan
NPHET	National Public Health Emergency Team
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
NTF	National Training Fund
NTUTORR	National Technological University Transformation for Resilience and Recovery
NYAC	National Youth Assembly on Climate

NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
NZEB	Nearly Zero Energy Building
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Co-Operation
OPIOG	Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
PCSD	Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development
PPN	Public Participation Network
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
PUP	Pandemic Unemployment Payment
RIA	Regulatory Impact Analysis
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SATLE	Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals (also UNSDG)
SEAI	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SILC	Survey on Income and Living Conditions
SOLAS	Government Agency for Vocational Education and Training
SPEL	Sensory Processing E-Learning
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TCSP	Trust or Company Service Providers
TU	Technological University
TUD	Technological University Dublin
TWSS	Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme
UCC	University College Cork
UN SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNYD	United Nations Youth Delegates
VAT	Value Added Tax
VIO	Volunteer Involving Organisations
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WFP	World Food Programme

WPEP	Work Placement Experience Programme
WRC	Workplace Relations Commission
YAG	Youth Advisory Group

Message from the Taoiseach

Five years after Ireland's first Voluntary National Review, achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continues to be a priority for Ireland. This second Voluntary National Review report reflects our approach to achieving full implementation of the SDGs at home, and to contribute to their achievement internationally, so that no one is left behind. It recognises that while we still have some way to go, especially to recover ground lost around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, we are making good progress in many areas, especially at home.

Ireland was deeply involved in the setting of the Goals, and we will continue to champion their achievement. We are honoured to play our part as co-facilitator in preparing the political declaration to be adopted at the SDG Summit in September. The Government welcomes the opportunity of this National Review to share our experience of implementing the SDGs with international partners.

Leo Varadkar, T.D.
Taoiseach

Message from the Tánaiste

I warmly welcome the publication of Ireland's second Voluntary National Review. The Sustainable Development Goals are our shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. Ireland is proud to contribute to realising them at home as well as around the world.

Through our whole-of-government international development programme, we provide official development assistance to support the most vulnerable people in more than 130 countries. Together with our partners in civil society, the multilateral system and beyond, we are helping deliver on the central promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

We also support the achievement of the Goals through our diplomatic work. During our term on the UN Security Council, we worked to build peace, strengthen conflict prevention; and ensure accountability, which are all central conditions for sustainable development.

This Voluntary National Review allows us to take stock of Ireland's progress to date, and to reflect on the efforts we still need to make. We welcome the opportunity to share our experience with the international community, and to learn valuable lessons from other UN Member States and partners.

In September 2023, the UN will host the SDG Summit, which marks the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda. Ireland is honoured that we have been appointed, alongside Qatar, to co-facilitate the negotiations on the political declaration of the Summit. We will strive to ensure the declaration gives a clear statement of direction to show that the future envisaged in the 2030 Agenda blueprint is one that we are determined to make a reality.

Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence

Foreword by the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications

Ireland, like every country across the globe, has experienced a time of unprecedented crisis. We are still dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and our world is facing unprecedented pressures from the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss and the global fall-out from Russia's war in Ukraine.

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals set out a bold vision for a safer, fairer, more prosperous and sustainable world by 2030. Ireland's theme for this Voluntary National Review is Building Back Better, while Leaving No One Behind, to reach the furthest behind first.

Ireland has adopted a 'whole-of-government' approach to implementing the SDGs, by embedding a framework into national and local government work to ensure a coherent system-wide approach, as well as greater dialogue and joined-up thinking between policy makers across sectors.

We recognise that action is required at all levels and by all stakeholders to achieve Agenda 2030 and to fulfil the vision and ambition of the SDGs. We have invited every Government department to contribute to the Voluntary National Review which has in turn created further impetus for the level of engagement with the SDGs across government.

This report was also developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and input from two public Forums in 2023. The first Forum was dedicated to the principle of Leaving No One Behind and the second was dedicated solely to the Voluntary National Review. At both Forums, workshops were held to explore related issues which has informed our work. We also invited public submissions which are published as a compendium of stakeholder contributions in Chapter 9 of the report.

This inclusive and transparent approach is further reflected by the stakeholder chapter which highlights both opportunities and challenges for policy makers across all of government on how we progress the SDGs leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. It represents a very significant contribution to our national review which is very much the richer for it.

Youth are a very important part of Agenda 2030 and we have a dedicated Youth Chapter which assesses Ireland's progress towards the implementation of the SDGs informed by a youth-led consultation process specifically designed to address the Voluntary National Review.

We are more determined than ever to to play a leading role in promoting Agenda 2030, advancing into this decade of action collectively in our efforts to realise the SDGs, by thinking global while acting local, understanding that universal challenges can be met by local action as part of the framework for achieving the SDGs.

We welcome the opportunity that this Voluntary National Review provides us with to reflect on Ireland's progress to date, and to renew our focus on the efforts that we need to continue to make. Now is the time to accelerate action towards achieving the Goals, to build back better, determined to not settle for surviving in this time of global crisis, but thriving despite it.

Through this VNR we are reaffirming our committment to the SDGs, recognising that they offer us a pathway and opportunity to create a better, greener, and safer world, and a just transition that transforms every sector of our society, while leaving no one behind.

Ireland stands ready to work nationally and internationally to accelerate Agenda 2030 and to create a better future for all.

Eamon Ryan, T.D.,
Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications.

1 | Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

This report represents the second time that Ireland has reported on progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. We welcome this opportunity to evaluate progress to-date and to build further momentum among all actors towards the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

Ireland is proud to have played a significant role in the development and adoption of the 2030 Agenda as co-facilitator, together with Kenya, of the 2030 intergovernmental negotiations. As a country we strive to continue to show leadership and are honoured that Ireland's Permanent Representative to the UN has been chosen as co-facilitator, together with the Permanent Representative of Qatar, of the negotiations on the political declaration of the SDG Summit in September 2023. The SDG Summit marks the mid-way point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and will provide a valuable opportunity for Heads of State and Government to comprehensively review progress and provide political guidance for the way forward.

Ireland recognises the transformative ambition of the SDGs and remains firmly committed to playing our part to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. The blueprint provided by the 2030 Agenda is of particular importance globally as we live through a period of significant international change.

We are still dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reversed hard-won development gains, and put the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at risk. However the Goals were already off-track before the pandemic. We are also facing record-breaking pressures on our planet from climate change and biodiversity loss. The fall-out of Russia's war on Ukraine has devastated the people of Ukraine and put global peace, security and development in jeopardy.

No country is untouched, and we must work together to forge a more united and coherent way forward.

Our national vision, as set out in Ireland's recently published Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals is set out below:

Vision

Our vision is for Ireland to fully implement the Sustainable Development Goals at home, and to contribute to their achievement internationally so that no one is left behind.

1.1 Development of this Report

The principle of Leaving No One Behind and what it means in an Irish context is currently a focal point of Ireland's 2023 SDG objectives. Leaving No One Behind along with the main theme of the 2023 HLPF[1] have been used as the inspiration for the development of this VNR report which focuses on Building Back Better from the COVID-19 Pandemic while Leaving No One Behind.

This focus runs throughout the entire report as we reflect as a country on what we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic; areas where we are doing well; areas where improvement is required; and our progress in implementing the SDG targets for all people and ensuring that no one is left behind.

This report was developed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC), in collaboration with all Government Departments and with input and feedback from national stakeholders across a wide range of sectors.

The SDG Inter-Departmental Working Group and SDG Senior Officials Group have played a key role in determining the overarching direction of the report, providing relevant input from their respective Government Departments and considering draft versions of the report prior to to Government approval.

1.1.1 National Stakeholder Engagement

Ireland strongly supports stakeholder participation in the 2030 Agenda process and a collaborative and participatory approach has been taken to developing this report. A number of key initiatives have been progressed to provide national stakeholders with the opportunity to input into Ireland's 2023 VNR process and to have their voice and assessments captured in the report, including through:

- Two SDG National Stakeholder Forum meetings, attendance of which was open to all;

- A specific youth consultation process;

- The invitation to key stakeholder groups to submit a chapter for inclusion in this report;

- The invitation for public submissions for inclusion in the compendium of stakeholder contributions in Chapter 9 of this report; and

- An SDG Junior Art Competition.

SDG National Stakeholder Forum meetings

In January 2023, an SDG National Stakeholder Forum was held which focused on the theme of Leaving No One Behind. The discussions and outputs from the event have helped to inform and shape this report. Please see Chapter 4 for more detail. In April 2023, a second SDG National

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1   "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels".

Stakeholder Forum was held specifically to provide national stakeholders with the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft VNR and their assessment is included for each thematic area Chapter 7.

Youth Consultation process

Ireland's Second SDG National Implementation Plan 2022-2024 recognises young people as 'active global citizens and shapers of society, are key and equal stakeholders of Agenda 2030'. The Plan committed to holding a bespoke and inclusive youth consultation process which informed the development of Ireland's 2023 VNR.

In November 2022, the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth along with the National Youth Council of Ireland and Ireland's UN Youth Delegates Jessica Gill and David Giles, commenced work on developing a youth consultation process to inform the VNR.

The consultation process was developed with significant input from a Youth Advisory Group made up of nine young people who were selected by the Comhairle na nÓg network (local youth councils from 31 locations across Ireland) and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI).

The consultation took the form of a full-day event on 4 February 2023 and it was chaired and facilitated by the NYCI and Ireland's UN youth delegates. Eighty-five young people with a variety of backgrounds and identities from across Ireland, ranging in age from 13-24, were in attendance and the outputs from the day are captured in Chapter Five. Ireland's UN Youth Delegates and NYCI drafted Chapter Five of this report detailing the outputs and recommendations arising from the day.

Inclusion of stakeholder assessments

Operating on the principle of 'open drafting[2]', key national stakeholder groups, representing a variety of sectors were invited to contribute a chapter for inclusion in the VNR report. Public submissions of up to 800 words were also invited from national stakeholders to form part of a compendium of stakeholder contributions to this report. Each of these contributions are set out in Chapter 9 of this report. Contributions have not been edited, and demonstrate inclusivity and transparency in reporting on Agenda 2030.

As parallel reports by National Human Rights Institutions ('NHRIs') cannot be independently submitted to the UN for formal consideration as part of the Voluntary National Review process, the independent observations of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission are included as a separate chapter in this report. The Commission is the A status NHRI for Ireland, and demonstrates the highest standards with regard to independence. The State welcomes its participation in this process and has put protections in place to ensure that the real and perceived independent status of the Commission has not been impacted, in line with SDG 16 and the UN Paris Principles'.

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2   As per the 'Operational Common Approach Guidance Note', developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the UN Development Coordination Office in June 2022, Ireland has taken an 'open drafting' approach to the report. The 'open drafting' approach allows non-governmental participants to review and contribute to the VNR Report.

SDG Junior art competition

Following on from the success of the 2022 SDG Junior Art Competition - which provided the artwork and design for Ireland's Second SDG National Implementation Plan, a 2023 SDG Junior Art Competition was held to design the cover of Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review and to provide the art work contained throughout. Young people aged 18 and under, were invited to take part and to submit a drawing or painting based on what the SDGs or Leaving No One Behind means to them.

1.1.2 Peer learning with other countries

DECC attended the UN Global Preparatory workshops on the Voluntary National Review, which were attended by countries going forward this year to the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF). Peer learning has facilitated our learning by helping us determine if we are on the right track and has strengthened international relationships with other countries, allowing access to rich experience, as well as strengthening the role of the HLPF as a platform for exchange of experiences.

1.1.3 Report Structure

This report includes 10 overall Chapters.

CHAPTER 1 sets out the introduction and methodology used for the development of this report.

CHAPTER 2 provides a high-level overview of Ireland's approach to ensuring a balanced and inclusive economic recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic in line with the principle of Leaving No One Behind.

CHAPTER 3 sets out Ireland's national implementation and governance structures, including the development and improvement of these structures since the 2018 VNR. It provides a summary of Ireland's key strategic objectives for the next two years, as set out in our Second SDG National Implementation Plan, including greater policy coherence for sustainable development and partnerships for the goals.

CHAPTER 4 provides an overview of how Ireland has commenced a national dialogue on the principle of Leaving No One Behind and what the principle means in an Irish context. The chapter details initial discussions and outputs, and how they will be used.

CHAPTER 5 sets out the findings and outputs of the VNR youth consultation process. The chapter has been written by Ireland's UN Youth Delegates Jessica Gill and David Giles.

CHAPTER 6 sets out what the data shows, including a dashboard summary of Ireland's progress towards achieving the SDG targets and an infographic per SDG, highlighting key figures and statistics.

CHAPTER 7 includes a thematic review of specific areas of national importance under the overall theme of Ireland's 2023 VNR Building Back Better while Leaving No One Behind, including:

- Education

- Employment and Social Protection

- Health

- Community Engagement and Inclusion

- Housing

- Climate Action and Circular Economy

CHAPTER 8 outlines how Ireland continues to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda internationally, in particular through Ireland's international development programme, targeting the most vulnerable individuals and communities across the globe.

CHAPTER 9 includes assessments from seven key national stakeholder groups from a variety of sectors. Public submissions of up to 800 words were also invited from national stakeholders to form part of a compendium of stakeholder contributions to this report. Thirty-four submissions were received from a variety of organisations.

Contributions have been included verbatim as provided by stakeholders and have not been edited by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications which is the Government Department with responsibility for developing and drafting the report.

CHAPTER 10 constitutes the conclusion of the report which provides a summary of main findings from the VNR and sets out next steps in respect of accelerating Ireland's implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In addition, twelve key national policies and strategies have been retrospectively assessed against the SDG targets. The outcomes of these assessments can be found at the end of relevant chapters. It is intended that these assessments will be carried out prospectively going forward as was the case for Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023.

Taking part in the VNR process has provided Ireland with an opportunity to take stock of the progress we, as a country, are making towards achieving the SDGs and to further re-affirm our commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

2 | Building Back Better
and the Economic
Recovery from
the COVID-19
Pandemic

Chapter 2: Building Back Better and the Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic

2.1 Background

As in every country around the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an extraordinary impact on Irish people's lives and brought unprecedented disruption to society and economy. The most obvious and tragic impact of the pandemic has been in terms of lost lives and ill health. However, the pandemic has also had detrimental effects on people's jobs, families' incomes, children and young people's education and everyone's ability to participate in social, cultural and sporting activities. The scale of disruption caused by the pandemic was considerable and asymmetric. COVID-19 adjusted unemployment peaked at 31.5% in April 2020. Some sections of the Irish economy, in particular hospitality, retail, and construction, as well as transport and aviation, were significantly affected by public health measures. As young workers accounted for a significant share of employment in these sectors, they were disproportionately impacted as the COVID-19 adjusted youth unemployment rate peaked at 69.6% in May 2020.

Given the severity and the widespread nature of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all aspects of society, a Cabinet-led approach operated to ensure a whole-of-government response. A sub-group of members of Cabinet (the Cabinet Committee on COVID-19) was established to assess the social and economic impacts of the potential spread of COVID-19 and to oversee the cross-government response, supported by working groups of senior officials from all Government departments.

From the outset Government was guided by public health in terms of what restrictions might be necessary to manage or suppress the disease. Economic and social impact assessments were also undertaken on an ongoing basis with inputs from across Government to understand and assess both the impacts of the pandemic and the impacts of the restrictions imposed to manage it. These were provided to the Government to inform regular assessment and decision-making on the modification of restrictions. Extraordinary measures were introduced to protect public health and the most vulnerable in our society. These were difficult and challenging decisions in a crisis scenario, with a developing understanding of the disease, its impact, how best to manage it, what vaccines might offer and what variants might do to undermine response plans.

The Government sought to protect families, jobs and the wider economy during the height of the pandemic by providing significant direct interventions to support incomes, cushion the impact of the pandemic on the economy and ramp-up healthcare capacity. Over the last few years, some €37 billion has been allocated for policy measures mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. These supports were deployed through a variety of different modalities including enhanced unemployment payments to workers who had lost their jobs (the Pandemic Unemployment Payment), job subsidy schemes to support employment (the Wage Subsidy Scheme), and through a variety of grants, loan guarantees, reliefs, and tax warehousing arrangements. The economic response to the pandemic was informed by social dialogue with trade union and employers representatives, in particular through the Labour Employer

Economic Forum. This Forum also oversaw development of guidance for safe working during the pandemic.

The Government also supported a robust international response to the pandemic through our international development programme (see Chapter 8).

De-escalation of public health measures and the re-opening of society and the economy was cautious, gradual and phased with sufficient time between phases to assess the impact. From April 2021, the Irish Government began to introduce a phased easing of public health restrictions. During the second half of 2021, relaxation of COVID-19 related restrictions saw strong positive economic momentum take hold. The labour market situation improved significantly with the COVID-19 adjusted unemployment rate falling to 7% in February 2022. By Q4 2021, headline employment had surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Modified Domestic Demand grew by 6.5% over the year (to Q4 2021), reflecting a faster than anticipated rebound in consumption. In January 2022, the Irish Government announced the removal of most of the remaining public health measures.

The national response to the pandemic has now evolved from an emergency approach to one which is appropriately mainstreamed and targeted at mitigating severe impacts of COVID-19 on the population. As part of the recovery process, Government departments are continuing to learn from pandemic experiences, taking advantage of any opportunities that arose throughout, including mainstreaming of innovative practices such as digital delivery and fostering and mainstreaming collaborative policy development and any novel delivery models that may have been utilised over the course of the pandemic. Actions are also being taken to address backlogs, pent-up demand and unmet need arising from the pandemic and associated public health responses.

The public policy environment in Ireland supporting the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic has been shaped by a number of overarching national framework policies. These were intended to not only guide Ireland's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic but to do so in a way that addresses longstanding challenges and needs while also preparing the economy and labour market for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

The June 2021 Economic Recovery Plan sought to drive a sustainable recovery in economic activity and employment, while investing in the transition towards a decarbonised and digital economy. The Plan was based on four key pillars: helping people back into work (SDG 8); rebuilding sustainable enterprise (SDG 8, SDG 9); a balanced and inclusive recovery that was cognisant of the underlying challenges highlighted by the crisis and the potential for positive change in many areas (SDG 10, SDG 11); and ensuring sustainable public finances and macroeconomic stability as the foundation for a lasting recovery (SDG 8). A Progress Report published in June 2022 highlighted robust employment growth since the launch of the Plan, and the significant progress achieved, with important initiatives and policies towards sustainable economic recovery and renewal delivered. The Economic Recovery Plan was developed in alignment with Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), which is part of the European Union's NextGenerationEU (a €750 billion recovery package for the European Union). The aim of this shared recovery and resilience initiative is to address the economic and social impact of the pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

The overall objective of Ireland's NRRP is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery effort in a manner that complements and supports the Government's broader recovery effort set out in the Economic Recovery Plan. The NRRP is based on 16 investment projects and nine reform measures that encompass three priority areas:

- Advancing the Green Transition – a first step to significantly reform and direct relevant funding towards decarbonising projects and to strengthen the overall governance framework by enshrining key environmental policies in national legislation to ensure that our environmental policy efforts are on a sustainable footing and that momentum is maintained into the medium- and long-term;

- Accelerating and Expanding Digital Reforms and Transformation – to support Irish business and citizens to adapt to, and reap the benefits from digitalisation; and

- Social and Economic Recovery and Job Creation – to support the return to work and prepare people for the challenges of the future as well as contribute to strengthening the overall social and economic policy framework in Ireland.

REPowerEU is the EU's response to the global energy market disruption caused by Russia's war on Ukraine and provides the potential for further funding via the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Ireland expects to receive almost €90m in grants for REPowerEU projects, and the Government has recently transferred €150 million of Brexit Adjustment Reserve Funding to REPower EU. This will require the inclusion of a new chapter within the NRRP, which will be subject to negotiation and assessment by the Commission. The NRRP Implementing Body has begun the process of developing a REPowerEU chapter.

More generally, these policy responses are located within a policy context shaped by the Government's Programme for Government commitment to a 51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 compared to 2018 levels, and carbon neutrality by no later than 2050.

2.2 Building Back Better

Milestones and Progress achieved

Significant milestones and progress achieved since the launch of the 2021 Economic Recovery Plan include:

- Implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) 2018, which is Ireland's National Spatial Development Strategy and together with the National Development Plan (NDP), forms Project Ireland 2040. The NPF is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland and sets out high-level national policies and objectives, which are essential to achieving proper planning and sustainable development (SDG11). The NPF set out to achieve a new region-focused strategy for managing Ireland's growth, linking it to the NDP, supported by stronger and more environmentally focused planning at local level, with a clear vision to guide future development and investment decisions. The NPF strategy is at an early stage in its implementation and embeds a spatial hierarchy of

plans that cascades to regional and local levels, with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for the 3 regional assembly areas in place and the review of city and county development plans by each of the 31 local authorities in Ireland nearing completion.

- Delivery of Pathways to Work 2021-2025, the overall framework for activation and employment support policy, which is being put into action (SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10). Key elements of this, and the broader skills agenda include expanding the capacity of the Public Employment Services; additional places on State Employment Schemes, including a focus on young people and disadvantaged groups; 8,000 Jobs Plus employer inventive places; the accelerated rollout of additional education and training places with a focus on essential skills for the modern workplace and digital skills; and further work to strengthen the provision of apprenticeship options under the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025.

- The Climate Action Plan 2023, launched in December 2022, is the second annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2019 (SDG 2, SDG 7, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13). This plan is the first to be prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 which was approved by Government in July 2021 and following the introduction, in 2022, of economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. Together, these set a legally binding framework for national climate targets and commitments, and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to achieve our obligations in the near and long term.

- Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework, reflecting Ireland's ambition to continue to be a digital leader, at the heart of European and global digital developments (SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10, and SDG 13). It sets out a pathway to drive and enable the digital transformation of the economy and society, with a focus on enterprise, skills, infrastructure, and public services. Progress to date includes a new Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum; an €85 million Digital Transition Fund to support companies to digitalise; a new Digital Strategy for Schools; new Digital Connectivity Strategy to 2030; and the development of a new Digital Healthcare Framework 2023-2030.

- The development of the Well-being Framework for Ireland was a key action in the Economic Recovery Plan and acknowledges the need to do things differently in a post-pandemic world. It is a cross-government initiative to move to a multi-dimensional way of measuring Ireland's progress across economic, societal and environmental outcomes simultaneously rather than sequentially or in isolation – an important learning for policymaking from the experience of the pandemic.

- Renewed National Development Plan 2021-2030, the largest ever delivered in the history of the State at €165 billion, a vital enabling mechanism for climate change, housing and broader infrastructure ambitions (SDG 9, SDG 11). Delivering it will boost long-term productivity, while providing a strong jobs multiplier effect. Progression of the SDGs is inherent in the Government priorities set out in the NDP. In 2023, €12.1 billion is being invested in much needed infrastructure to deliver economic, social and climate action objectives.

Since the launch of Project Ireland 2040 there has been a wide range of infrastructure projects delivered and will continue to be delivered throughout the country and this is of vital importance for the development of our regional areas. For example:

- Better transport links have been delivered through the opening in 2020 of the N25 New Ross Bypass and the on-going development of the M20 Cork to Limerick route;

- Better health delivering outcomes has also been achieved through new acute ward blocks, rehabilitation hospitals, a forensic mental hospital and new community nursing homes;

- Better education facilities are being delivered, such as at the new T.U. Dublin Grangegorman campus; and

- Cleaner water has been delivered through significant investment in new and upgraded wastewater treatment plants and infrastructure such as the Upper Liffey Valley sewerage scheme in Kildare and the Cork Lower Harbour Main Drainage project

In 2023, the Irish Government has sharpened its focus on delivery of the NDP, not only the ongoing focus on ensuring that projects are completed on time and on budget, but also how the support structures and levers at Government's disposal can be used to drive delivery, in support of the Government departments and offices who are the key players in the management and delivery of all our NDP projects (as reflected in the renamed Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform). In March 2023 the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform outlined six priority actions to improve delivery and ensure capital allocations are best utilised. These reforms underline the Government's renewed focus on securing the delivery of better outcomes for the people of this country.

- In December 2022, the Government published a White Paper on Enterprise Policy, which sets out an ambitious economic vision, to ensure that our future success is founded on sustainability, innovation and productivity (SDG 8, SDG 9).

- Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland, the Government's housing policy to 2030, is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan to increase the supply of housing and fundamentally reform Ireland's housing system (SDG 1, SDG 9, SDG 11). CSO figures for 2022 showed record numbers of new homes completed, with 29,851 new dwelling completions, the highest annual total since the since the data series began in 2011 and 21% above the 2022 target set out in Housing for All.

- Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy, which aims to advance Ireland's research and innovation ecosystem and maximise its impact in responding to the challenges of climate action and digitalisation, and other national priorities such as competitiveness, health, food security, biodiversity, equality and inclusion (SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 13, SDG 14). Under Ireland's NRRP, the National Grand Challenges Programme will see €65 million invested in R&I to enhance Ireland's future sustainability and resilience and an additional €6 million for programme operations (SDG 9).

- Ireland's new Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026, Value for Ireland, Values for the world, adopted by Government and overseen by the Trade and Investment Council to protect and grow our trade in a changing global landscape (SDG 8).

Twin Transition – Green & Digital transformation

The Economic Recovery Plan included a particular focus on advancing the twin green and digital transitions, and significant policies and work programmes are being advanced to drive progress in these areas. For example, Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan sets out a range of investments and reforms that are intended to **advance the Green Transition** in ways that will, for instance:

- Increase the volume of retrofit activity in Ireland and contribute to more energy efficient homes (SDG 7, SDG 13) by setting up of a low-cost residential retrofit loan scheme based on a loan guarantee. Negotiations are continuing with key European Institutions and the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications and the Department of Finance to develop a loan guarantee scheme;

- Accelerate the decarbonisation of the Enterprise Sector (SDG 9, SDG 13) by incentivising the installation of Energy Metering and Monitoring Control Systems and increasing the uptake of carbon neutral low/medium temperature heating in the manufacturing industry. An awareness campaign has commenced, together with a launch of calls for proposals to participate in a grant scheme;

- Improve condition and performance of portfolio of public service premises (SDG 9, SDG 11, SDG 13) by undertaking a pathfinder deep retrofit, refurbishment and redevelopment of a public service premise. Retrofit works are underway on a public services premises in Dublin;

- Expand sustainable mobility capacity and enable sustainable urban development (SDG 11, SDG 13) by accelerating investment to support the longer-term provision of electrified rail services in the Cork metropolitan area;

- Coordinate national research and innovation capacity to embrace trans-disciplinary, agility and acceptance of risk in order to address complex problems in the areas of climate and digital, including agriculture and health (SDG 3, SDG 9, SDG 13, SDG 15, SDG 16, SDG 17) by using a National Grand Challenges Programme to support outcome-focussed opportunities for research translation. The milestones within the NRRP for this project are scheduled for achievement in 2025 and 2026, nevertheless the project is proceeding well and is on track to deliver on its eight milestones;

- Reduce carbon emissions, transition lands towards carbon sequestration and enhance carbon storage potential as well as increase biodiversity, support peatland amenity and improve water quality and attenuation (SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 15) by rehabilitating approximately 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna peatlands previously used for energy production. The preliminary study on peatlands rehabilitation has been completed and work is already underway on the first bogs;

- Uisce Éireann's River Basin Management Plan – Enhanced Ambition Programme funded by the EU commission under the NRRP will deliver at least 10 wastewater treatment plant upgrades not funded under the current investment plan where discharges have been identified as being significant pressures on water bodies and impacting on Water Framework Directive objectives (SDG 6);

- Progress the deep retrofit of public office accommodation, with the public sector taking a leadership role, via a Public Sector Retrofit Pathfinder Project; and

- Encourage a move away from heavily pollutant fossil fuels to greener fuels and support Ireland's transition to a carbon neutral economy (SDG 13) through setting out a trajectory of rate increases to the Carbon Tax. The Carbon tax rate trajectory legislation has been published. Budget 2020 announced carbon tax rate increase for 2021, Budget 2021 announced the carbon tax rate increase for 2022 and Budget 2022 announced the increase for 2023.

As mentioned above, a new national digital strategy, Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework, was launched in February 2022 to drive and enable the digital transformation of the economy and society, re-enforcing work towards achieving Ireland's climate targets. Harnessing Digital was developed in line with Ireland's NRRP and, in addition to the progress delivered under Harnessing Digital, mentioned above, the NRRP includes a range of investments and reforms that are intended to accelerate and expand digital reforms and transformation and that will, for instance:

- Enable effective and responsive public services, boost the efficiency of public services including increasing digital data collection and enabling more timely provision of data to inform policy making, speed up processes of engagement between the private and public sectors (SDG 16) by building a new purpose-built Government Data Centre to replace four of the State's most essential data centres, developing an online platform for the 2026 Census of Population and maximising the benefits from 5G technologies. Work has commenced on the building of data centres, the census project is progressing, a pilot for online data collection is being tested, and the NRRP 5G project is progressing well.

- Accelerate the digital transformation of enterprises and maximise opportunities from digitalisation to effect lasting, positive impacts on the economy and society (SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 16) by investing in a programme that supports the digital transformation of companies, drives increased adoption and diffusion of digital technology (including innovation and clustering) and is underpinned by a strong regulatory environment. A call for proposals for this programme and the development of European Digital Innovation Hubs is underway.

- Provide equal access to all the necessary tools required for digital access and upskilling and strengthen the sustainable growth potential, employment opportunities and resilience of young people (SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10) by providing high speed broadband connectivity to primary schools ensuring that they have parity of services and supporting learners through the provision of connectivity, devices and software in a way that enables schools to support their most vulnerable learners. Funding has issued to primary and post-primary schools in order to enable them connect to the

schools broadband network, currently 680 schools are connected with a further 70 expected to come on stream by end Q1 2023;

- Enable integrated care by managing client pathways within health and social care (SDG 3) by investing in ePharmacy and ePrescribing tools as well as Community eHealth solutions. The development of the ePharmacy system as part of the wider ehealth agenda in Ireland as well as a revised Digital Health Strategy incorporating a roadmap to progress electronic health records is underway.

- Improve the transparency of financial management within health system (SDG 16) by unifying the existing financial management systems in the HSE and work is underway on the building and configuration of the integrated financial management system.

- Improve the share of the population with basic digital skills, tackle the digital divide and enable greater access to digital services as well as ensure a sufficient supply of learners graduating with high-level ICT skills (SDG 4, SDG 9, SDG 10) by supporting the digital transformation of Irish education at all levels in order to mainstream essential digital skills across all settings. The Digital Strategy for Schools and the 10 Year Strategy for Adults have been published, and disadvantaged students have been equipped with ICT devices. Work is also continuing on increasing the number of graduates with high level ICT skills.

Advancing social and economic recovery and job recovery

A range of investments and reforms intended to **advance social and economic recovery and job creation** were reflected in both the Economic Recovery Plan, and Ireland's NRRP, including measures to, for instance:

- Improve employability skills and increase the likelihood of a return to full employment of people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10) by keeping people close to the labour market, providing them with quality work experience and a range of additional educational and training programmes that focus on digital skills, transversal skills and sector specific skills. The Work Placement Experience Programme is underway with an IT tool tracking progress on participants who have enrolled on the programme, and DFHERIS are increasing the numbers of graduates with high level ICT skills.

- Progress the green transition and support climate action (SDG 4, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13) by developing green skills and focusing on Near Zero Energy Building and Retrofitting as part of the SOLAS Green Skills Action Programme.

- Strengthen effective labour market policies, renew and reform academic programme provision, develop appropriate upskilling course provision to address regional skills needs and ensure learner access in context of digital connectivity and meeting the needs of vulnerable persons (SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11) by building capacity of Technological Universities and accelerate plans in the area of co-creation of research-informed teaching and learning through dynamic collaboration and open engagement between students, Technological Universities and partners from industry, the professions and civic society. Project grants have been awarded under the Education

and Reform programme, and further targets will be delivered as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Programme (NRRP).

- Remove any unnecessary regulatory obstacles for SMEs when it comes to starting, establishing and growing their business. (SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 16) The Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021, which was recommended in December 2021, is part of a suite of measures to provide a sustainable regulatory response to the challenges facing SMEs (SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 16).

- Enhance the supervision and enforcement of the anti-money-laundering framework (SDG 16) by publishing a sectoral anti-money laundering / counter financing of terrorism risk assessment of Trust or Company Service Providers (TCSP) and conducting a greater number of inspections of TCSPs. A sustained increased number of inspections of Trust or Company Service Providers have been carried out by the Anti Money Laundering Compliance Unit since the publication of the NRRP. A review of the regulatory enforcement toolkit under the Criminal Justice Act 2021 has been completed and an anti-money laundering/counter financing of terrorism Sectoral Risk Assessment of Trust or Company Service Providers has been published Sept 2022.

- Copper fasten recent actions to modernise the corporate tax code to align with new international norms (SDG 9, SDG 16) by enhancing Controlled Foreign Company Rules, amending capital allowances on intangible assets, completion of corporate tax residency reform and a public consultation and subsequent legislation on the introduction of measures regarding outbound payments to listed and no-tax jurisdictions. Capital allowances on intangible assets has been amended. The Corporate Tax residency reform and enhanced controlled foreign companies rules, that apply to the list of non co-operative jursidictions has come into force.

- Address the expected increase in age-related expenditure (SDG 1, SDG 10, SDG 16) by implementing pension reform plans which will facilitate individuals in moving from a public pension scheme to a private pension scheme, support the harmonisation of the tax treatment of employer contributions to an employee's pension and help simplify the drawdown process. The report on the supplementary pension landscape has been published.

- Transform the framework for the provision of social and affordable housing in Ireland (SDG 11) by enabling the Affordable Purchase Scheme and Cost Rental Scheme and establishing the Land Development Agency with a remit to increase the supply of housing in the State, in particular social and affordable housing. The Land Development Agency is operating as a commercial state agency. Homes have been delivered under the new Affordable Purchase scheme, the cost rental scheme and the equity support scheme.

- Improve access to healthcare and increase the cost-efficiency of the healthcare system (SDG 3, SDG 16) by implementing the Sláintecare public practice only consultant contract, the 2019 GP agreement to develop and expand community care and the Enhanced Community Care Programme, specifically the operationalisation of community healthcare networks, and the Sláintecare Consultants Contract is in place.

2.3 Leaving No One Behind

The Economic Recovery Plan included an overarching aim of ensuring a **balanced and inclusive recovery**, driven through strategic investment in infrastructure across all regions, reforms that enhance our long-term capacity for sustainable growth, and by improving living standards. Ireland is committed to the advancement of gender equality and equal opportunities for all. Equality is promoted through a range of cross-government equality strategies which aim to address the particular needs of specific groups:

- National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 – Creating a Better Society for All;

- National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021;

- National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021;

- National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy;

- The Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future.

In terms of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government will ensure that policies to encourage employment and economic growth are complemented by those that reduce inequality, promote sustainability, inclusivity, and improve living standards. Ireland's recovery plan is focussed on:

- Affordable housing, in particular, improving the provision of social and affordable housing by accelerating the development of public land for the provision of social and affordable housing and introducing schemes that could increase housing affordability for low-income households as set out in Housing for All.

- Healthcare, in particular, helping to ensure timely access to affordable healthcare through the potential of eHealth investments to improve accessibility as well as creating healthcare networks based on the needs of local populations.

- Ageing Population, in particular, simplifying and harmonising the supplementary pension system in order to support the long-term sustainability of the welfare system.

- Young adults, in particular, supporting them in gaining or regaining their footing in the labour market. The young unemployed have been identified as a group that are intended to benefit from reskilling and upskilling measures as these were overrepresented in the sectors that had been most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are seen as especially likely to benefit from work placement opportunities, allowances and training opportunities.

- Unemployed, in particular, the Work Placement Experience Programme (WPEP) targets jobseekers who have been unemployed for 6 months or more, supporting them with work placement, training and an allowance. The WPEP has been designed so that those in receipt of One-Parent Family Payment and the related Jobseeker Transition Payment, Disability Allowance and Blind Person's Pension, are eligible. These cohorts

tend to be more at risk of poverty and have lower average rates of participation in the workforce. The development of additional options for these cohorts to access new opportunities for career development is an important element of the WPEP.

- New skills, in particular, the SOLAS Green Skills Action Programme seeks to provide workers impacted by the pandemic the opportunity to gain experience, reskill or upskill to new areas that are experiencing growth and skills shortages, in particular green skills.

- Improving living standards in general, including through the introduction of a national living wage for employees, which was announced in November 2022. It will be introduced over a four-year period and will be in place by 2026, at which point it will replace the National Minimum Wage, and it will be set at 60% of hourly median wages, in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission (SDG 8, SDG 10). In addition, the Sick Leave Act 2022 was commenced in November 2022 (SDG 8, SDG 10), and provides for an entitlement to a minimum period of paid sick leave for all employees.

- Just transition, we have made just transition central to our climate policy, in particular, the rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of peatlands is expected to contribute to just transition in the economy of a region of Ireland that has been hit by the exit from peat for electricity generation, and this year will see the establishment of the Just Transition Commission to ensure that no community, no sector and no person gets left behind.

- Regional disparities, in particular, by building capacity in education and training in regionally based higher education, and building on local strengths through strong links with regionally based stakeholders.

- Regional divide, in particular, by ensuring that all learners have equal access to appropriate digital infrastructure as well as bringing connectivity into schools in rural areas and creating opportunities and supporting companies in less productive regions as well as across the country through a scheme that aims at the digital transformation of enterprise in Ireland.

- Digital divide, with a focus on ensuring all groups, and enterprises, are empowered to benefit from digital opportunities, in particular, by helping the next generation to develop the necessary digital skills, and ensuring that learners, at all levels, develop foundational skills to enable them to take part in the digital economy.

- Gender equality and equal rights, in particular, the development and implementation of the Programme to Drive Digital Transformation of Enterprise includes a competitive fund which incorporates a social sustainability proofing scoreboard to ensure consideration of gender equality and equal rights and opportunities for all in financing decisions.

From a broader consideration of "Leaving No One Behind", Ireland has continued to develop reform initiatives to enhance its performance framework. The development of the green budgeting, equality budgeting and well-being initiatives are part of an ongoing process of

reform that has been associated with the development of Ireland's performance framework and, as such, is part of an overall structure that is seeking to improve how public money is best used to enhance the lives of people living in Ireland.

In particular, over the last few years, the development of the performance framework has placed an increasing focus on policy goals and the impact of public policy on people's lives. These initiatives are concerned with questions around the intention of government policy, and progress toward achieving policy goals, within the broader context of limited public resources. These recent goal-focussed initiatives have an explicit focus on how people's experiences differ from one another and how the impact of public policy can differ between groups of people. These approaches can contribute to better public policy by supporting the development of more refined descriptions of policy challenges, the articulation of clearer policy goals and identification of people who may benefit from more targeted policy interventions.

- The Well-being Framework is a Programme for Government commitment to develop a new way of thinking about how we are doing as a country. The Well-being Framework for Ireland is composed of 11 dimensions of well-being, and an accompanying dashboard that covers 35 indicators. Cross-cutting themes of equality and sustainability are represented across the Framework. It provides an overarching structure that can contribute to the development of a shared understanding within policy communities and society more generally of what makes for better lives. As part of the Framework's development, the 11 dimensions were mapped to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which showed the commonalities across both initiatives. Embedding the Well-being Framework into the policy-making process will support progress towards the SDGs. The Well-being Framework, its development and associated reports are detailed on the Government's well-being portal.

- Work across Government is ongoing to integrate this new approach into decision-making. In 2022 the Well-being Framework and the dashboard analysis fed into the Budgetary process. The Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform chaired a breakout discussion that centred on the Framework at the National Economic Dialogue. The Framework also featured in the Summer Economic Statement, Expenditure Reports and as part of a new Budget Day document entitled "Budget 2023: Beyond GDP - Quality of Life Assessment". The Framework will be an annual contribution to the Budget process. Further implementation of the new approach is continuing across Government.

- Green Budgeting. Green budgeting is the use of the budgetary system itself to promote and achieve improved environmental outcomes. Ireland committed to the implementation of a series of progressive green budgeting reforms in Budget 2019. The purpose of these reforms is to better embed climate and environmental goals within the budgetary process, with a view to improving outcomes.

Equality Budgeting. Equality budgeting provides a specific perspective on how evidence can be used to inform the budgetary process. By drawing on the approach set out by the performance budgeting initiative, equality budgeting can enhance budgetary processes and policy proofing by focusing attention on questions of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. In particular, these questions enhance budgetary decision-making by bringing to the fore evidence about the likely impact of budgetary options and decisions,

facilitating the integration of equality concerns into the budgetary process and highlighting the risk of unintended consequences. Since equality budgeting was introduced as a pilot initiative as part of the 2018 budgetary cycle, it has progressed from an initial focus on gender to include socio-economic inequality, disability, minority groups and other equality dimensions.

2.4 Conclusion

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic inflicted significant damage on people's lives and Ireland's society and economy. However, overarching strategic policy frameworks, such as the Economic Recovery Plan, Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan and related strategies have supported Ireland's recovery, enabling Ireland to build back society and the economy in a manner that is sustainable and that will see us make progress towards implementation of the SDGs. Indeed, the pandemic itself has accelerated the digital transformation of our economies and societies. Since the Economic Recovery Plan 2021 was launched in mid-2021, and despite a backdrop of recurring pandemic impacts and wider uncertainties, including a new set of complex and inter-related challenges, Ireland has seen robust employment growth and a strong recovery. Significant policies have been delivered, with important initiatives towards sustainable and inclusive economic recovery and renewal.

SDG Assessment 1: Economic Recovery Plan 2021
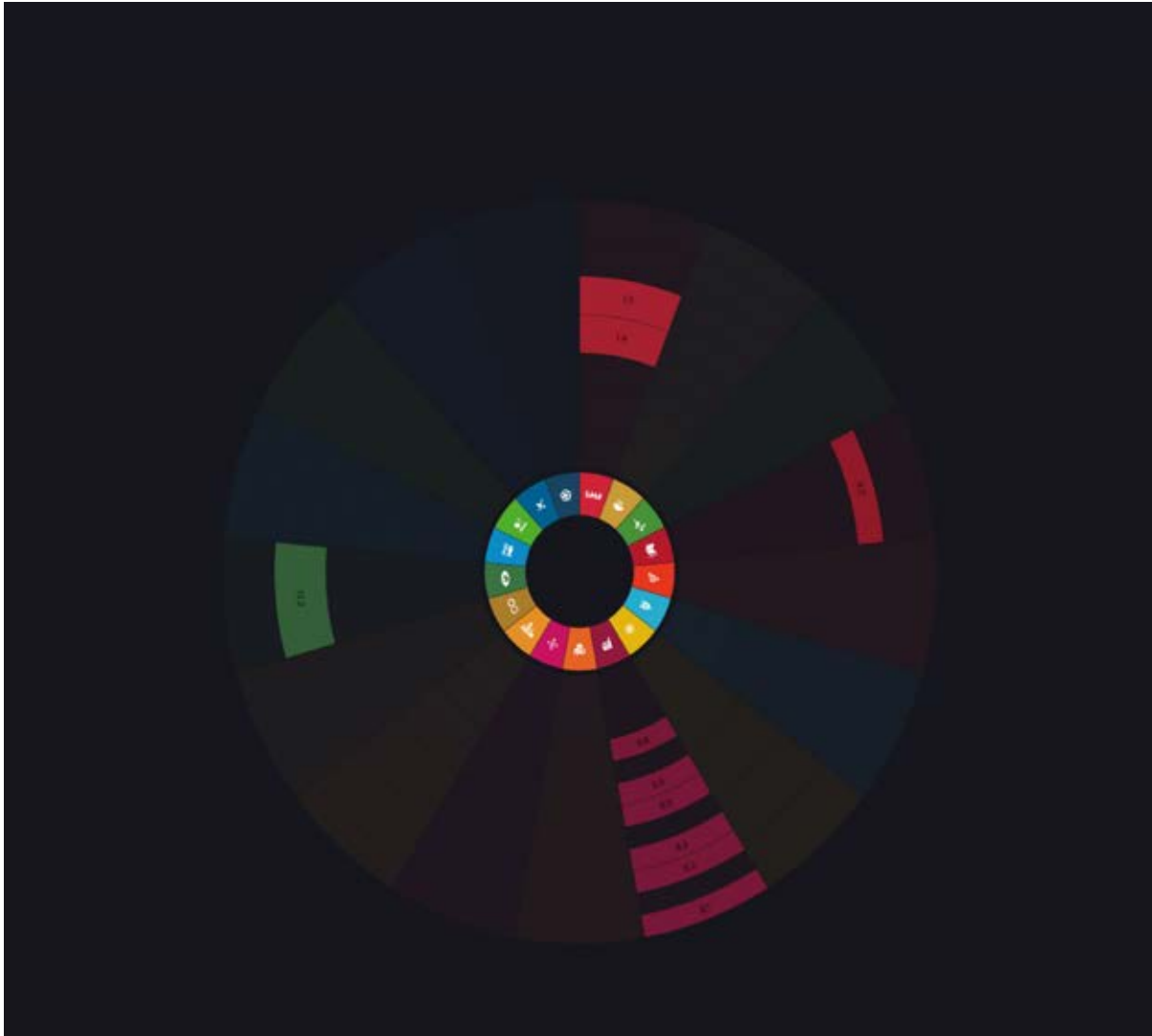
Economic Recovery Plan 2021 contributes to the progression of 10 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 13 Climate Action.

SDG Assessment 2: Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework
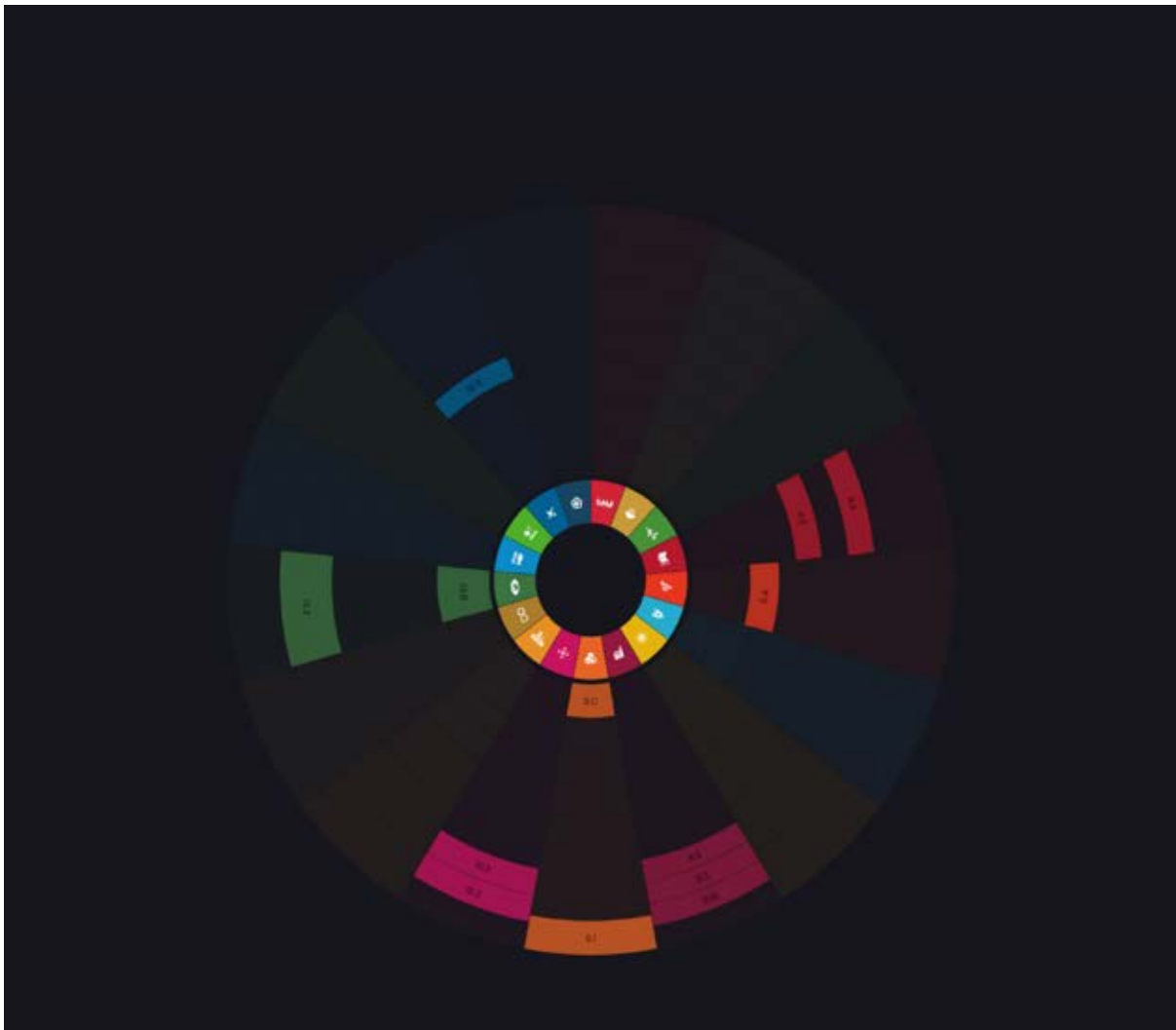
Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework contributes to the progression of 13 SDG targets under SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

3 | National Implementation and Governance Structures

Chapter 3: National Implementation and Governance Structures

Ireland has adopted a whole-of-government approach to SDG implementation, with each Minister having specific responsibility for implementing individual SDG targets related to their Ministerial functions. The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications has responsibility for promoting the SDGs, and for overseeing their coherent implementation across Government.

3.1 Governance Structures

In order to support an effective whole-of-Government approach to SDG implementation in Ireland, a number of cross-government structures and mechanisms have been put in place:

3.1.1 Senior Officials' Group on the Sustainable Development Goals

The SDG Senior Officials Group provides strategic overview of SDG Implementation, monitoring performance and reporting on progress at political level. The group is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and is supported by high-level representatives from each Government Department. The Group meets as required, and directly supports the development of Ireland's National Implementation Plans and Voluntary National Reviews.

3.1.2 SDG Inter-Departmental Working Group

The SDG Inter-Departmental Working Group is comprised of representatives from each Government Department and was established to complement the work of the Senior Officials' Group and facilitate effective Cross-Government SDG engagement and Implementation.

Members play a crucial role in ensuring the SDGs are kept at the forefront of each organisation's work. Members are responsible for considering detailed proposals for meeting the strategic goals of the Implementation Plan; coordinating strategic communication on the SDGs and Ireland's implementation; preparing national SDG progress reports; and developing the national implementation plans.

3.1.3 Departmental Point of Contacts

In order to promote greater transparency and accessibility, each Government Department has appointed an SDG point of contact and this list is made publicly available on www.gov.ie/sdgs.

3.1.4 SDG Data Governance Board

The identification and management of national data needed to meet Ireland's SDG reporting requirements is undertaken by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO has direct responsibility for sourcing, developing and quality assuring the data for the Irish SDG Indicator set. To be effective in this role, the CSO assesses the availability of data for global indicators within Ireland, namely to:

- identify data providers and data sources for SDG indicators

- identify data and methodological gaps

- consider data disaggregation requirements

Due to their cross-cutting nature, the monitoring and reporting of SDG progress requires close collaboration between the CSO and national policy makers and an SDG data governance board was established to source, develop, and report on the statistical data for the indicators in each of the SDGs and interlinked targets.

The SDG data governance board is chaired by the CSO, and membership comprises of representatives from each of the Government Departments and Agencies.

The CSO has also published a series of individual SDG statistical data reports on UN SDG indicators data for Ireland. It is intended that these reports will be updated annually.

3.1.5 Monitoring role of Parliamentarians

In Ireland, each Oireachtas Committee (parliamentary committee) has a role in monitoring and overseeing the progress on the SDGs as underpinned by Standing Order 100(4) relating to the work programme of committees which states each Committee's annual work programme include:

> "(c) progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as are within the scope of the Committee's orders of reference as set out in Standing Order"

Regular and ongoing engagement with Oireachtas Committees is envisaged on SDG implementation as part of the delivery of the SDG National Implementation Plan.

3.2 Ireland's second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-24

Ireland's second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 was published on the 5 October 2022. The plan was developed in collaboration with all Government Departments, key stakeholders, and based on input from two public consultation processes.

The plan sets out Ireland's SDG governance and implementation strategy for 2022-2024 and is the second in a series of consecutive Implementation Plans, each building on the previous iteration, to work towards achieving the SDGs. The plans set out the overarching national governance, coordination and monitoring framework for the SDGs. The detailed policy approaches to progress individual SDGs and targets are addressed in relevant national policies as set out in Ireland's SDG Policy Map.

Ireland's first National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals was published in 2018. The new plan aims to build on the structures and mechanisms from the first plan and to develop and integrate additional approaches in areas identified through review and consultation as requiring further action.

Two public consultation processes were held during the development of the Second National Implementation Plan. The initial consultation process was held during the summer of 2021 and reached over 5,000 individuals. The actions set out in the new plan were developed in direct response to the input received as part of that consultation process. A final round of consultation was subsequently launched in May 2022 to provide an opportunity for feedback on the draft plan. A meeting of the SDG National Stakeholder Forum was also held on 2 June 2022 to provide an additional mechanism for input.

The final version of the Second National Implementation Plan sets out five strategic objectives and 51 actions with 119 individual measures to increase Ireland's ambition and strengthen implementation structures to achieve the SDGs.

1. **To embed the SDG framework into the work of Government Departments to achieve greater Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development**

The the Second National Implementation Plan intends to build on existing structures and raise the profile of the SDGs, better mainstream Agenda 2030 across Government Departments and enhance cooperation and coordination between national policy makers. A number of steps and related actions are included in this Implementation Plan to move Ireland into a position where national policies are being fully informed by Agenda 2030, including:

- Integration of the SDGs into public administration, including incorporation into administrative, planning and accountability frameworks;

- Capacity-building across Government Departments; and

- Research, dialogue and partnerships at both national and international level to progress Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (SDG target 17.14)

2. **To integrate the SDGs into Local Authority work to better support the localisation of the SDGs**

The Second National Implementation Plan intends to raise capacity and build on the role of local government in respect of the SDGs, including embedding the SDGs in governance, reporting and local planning frameworks and through community engagement.

3. **Greater partnerships for the Goals**

The plan also places a large emphasis on partnerships for the goals. This reflects the fact that the SDGs belong to us all and the Government will work in partnership with society to achieve these goals. Work towards achieving the SDGs will be carried out through international partnerships, partnerships across national and local government, with civil society and

communities and with key sectors and groups. Existing partnerships will be further developed, and new partnerships formed. The Second National Implementation Plan sets out actions to establish new national stakeholder engagement mechanisms and the further development of existing mechanisms. A new chapter included in the latest plan reflects the contributions of key stakeholder groups to the SDGs and identifies opportunities for greater partnerships. It is intended that this chapter and the groups included therein will be further developed in subsequent iterations of the Implementation Plan. Twenty-two case studies have been included in the plan; these showcase valuable initiatives and examples of best practice projects and programmes being progressed by organisations and sectors across the country.

4. **To further incorporate the principle of Leave No One Behind into Ireland's Agenda 2030 implementation and reporting mechanisms**

Opening a collaborative and inclusive dialogue to explore the concept of Leave No One Behind, a core commitment of Agenda 2030, and what it means in an Irish context, is a key objective of the Plan. Outcomes from this dialogue will inform the design of future implementation and reporting structures for Agenda 2030 in Ireland.

5. **Strong reporting mechanisms**

The Second National Implementation Plan includes actions to introduce robust reporting mechanisms to monitor progress on the SDGs and SDG targets as well as on the status of the actions set out in the Plan.

3.2.1 Supporting documents

Two supporting documents were published alongside the SDG National Implementation Plan 2022-2024, including:

I. **Policy update on Ireland's Implementation of SDG targets** – this document centrally captures Government initiatives being taken which progress the SDGs. It provides an update from all Government departments on the policies, actions and initiatives being undertaken to progress each of the 169 SDG targets. It is intended that this document be updated annually and be complemented by annual statistical progress reports produced by the Central Statistics Office for the SDGs.

II. **Policy Map 2022** – this document identifies lead Government departments for each of the 17 Goals and 169 targets, maps all SDG targets against national policies and identifies contact details for each relevant policy area. It is intended that this document be updated annually.

Photo from the cross-Government launch of the SDG National Implementation Plan in Government Buildings on 5 October 2022

3.3 Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

As set out above, strategic objective 1 of Ireland's National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 is "to embed the SDG framework into the work of Government Departments to achieve greater Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD)".

A number of actions are being prioritised for delivery over 2023-2024 in order to progress this objective:

3.3.1 Incorporation of the SDGs into the budgetary process, Memoranda to Government and Regulatory Impact Assessments

Ireland is currently in the process of carrying out research of international best practice for incorporating the SDGs into the budgetary process, Regulatory Impact Analysis process and Memoranda to Government. The findings of this research will facilitate the identification of the most suitable approach to be applied in an Irish context which best fits existing mechanisms and structures. A set of recommendations will be developed by Quarter 3 2023 which will subsequently be brought to Government for review and decision.

3.3.2 Capacity-building across national and local Government

It is evident that in order for officers to engage meaningfully with and take ownership of the SDGs, as is required by a whole-of-government approach, knowledge and understanding of the 2030 Agenda and how it relates to the work of national and local government must be ensured. An immediate priority within Ireland is to increase the capacity of officers within national and local government so that they can situate their work within the framework provided by the 2030 Agenda and be informed by it.

Developing training and guidance, specifically relevant to the Civil Service, State Agencies, and Local Authorities is a key priority for delivery. Training will be complemented by the development of Civil Service and Local Authority SDG toolkits.

3.3.3 Multi-country PCSD project with the OECD and DG Reform

Ireland's application to the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG Reform) within the European Commission to take part in a multi-country PCSD project has been successful. The project is due to commence in Q3 2023 with the support of the OECD. The OECD will support with forward-looking analysis, capacity building and peer-to-peer exchanges to consistently align policies across the government at all levels with the SDGs and measure progress. The multi-country project will include Portugal, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Ireland.

A number of work packages will be progressed to address the country-specific implementation requirements in Ireland, including support towards developing a National Action Plan for PCSD which will form part of Ireland's third National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, multi-country dialogues and activities will address policy coherence priorities common to all participating countries.

3.4 SDG National Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms

A fundamental feature of Agenda 2030 is the inclusion and active voices of stakeholders and Ireland strongly believes that partnerships between governments, civil society organisations, businesses and communities will be essential to achieving the SDGs. A number of national stakeholder engagement mechanisms are currently in place in respect of the SDGs. The ambitious and interconnected nature of the SDGs requires an unprecedented level of collaboration across different stakeholder groups, and appropriate methods of engagement are essential in ensuring all aspects of society have an opportunity to contribute.

3.4.1 SDG National Stakeholder Forum

The SDG National Stakeholder Forum was established to provide a mechanism for stakeholders to discuss innovative ideas and solutions to further development of the national SDG framework. Including representatives from civil society, NGOs, academia, business, community groups and Government, the Forum aims to facilitate open and inclusive engagement, and develop collaborative partnerships in support of Agenda 2030.

An action for delivery under the second National Implementation Plan was the establishment of an SDG Forum Committee to redesign an improved Forum format based on stakeholder feedback. The first SDG National Stakeholder Forum Committee was appointed in November 2022 and a new Committee will be appointed each year. The 12 members of the Committee represent a variety of key stakeholder groups and are working with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to design a well-publicised, accessible, inclusive and improved National Stakeholder Forum format for 2023. Information on the Forum meetings held to-date in 2023 can be found in Chapter 4 and throughout this report.

January 2023 SDG National Stakeholder Forum: Dr Mary Smyth from the Central Statistics Office presenting on Ireland's SDG Statistical data reports

3.4.2 SDG Champions Programme

The SDG Champions Programme was developed to raise public awareness of the SDGs and to demonstrate, through the examples provided by the SDG Champions, that everyone in society can make a contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The role of an SDG Champion is to act as an advocate and promoter of the SDGs and a good practice example of how an organisation can contribute to the SDGs and integrate the SDGs into their work and activities. The key message of the SDG Champions Programme is that the SDGs are for everyone in society and that everyone can make a contribution to their success. Twenty two SDG Champions have now been appointed for the 2022-2023 programme and four prior SDG Champions are remaining on in their tenure[3].

3.4.3 SDG GeoHive

The SDG Data Hub (hosted on the GeoHive) was developed as Ireland's official platform to collect, analyse and present data on Ireland's SDG implementation progress. The GeoHive

3   This is due to their original tenure being impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

is managed by Tailte Éireann, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. It is a valuable knowledge sharing resource which supports the dissemination of Ireland's SDG related data.

The SDG GeoHive is currently under development and a revamped website will be made available in Q2 2023. The new site will provide a central repository to map, track and showcase SDG activities taking place across the country and a more collaborative information-sharing platform.

3.4.4 SDG Week

Ireland held its first annual SDG week from 20-26 September 2022 to celebrate and raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. In total, 112 events were organised across the country and it is intended that this initiative is expanded and built on in 2023.

SDG week formed part of the wider European Sustainable Development Week which saw 7091 initiatives promoting sustainable development held across 24 countries.

A wide range of initiatives were held across Ireland in 2022 to celebrate SDG week, below are a number of examples:

- **Compost building workshop**: Reimagining Enniscorthy

- **SDG Social Media Campaigns**: Mayo County Council, Sligo Country Council, Adare Tidy Town Group

- **Cake sale in support of Domestic Violence Shelters**: Women's Aid Carlow

- **Pilot Period Poverty Programme:** Cork County Libraries

- **Kinsale Harvest Picnic:** Transition Town Kinsale

- **An Outdoor Reading Experience:** DLR libraries

- **ReLove Paint – Circular Economy Campaign**: Cork County Council

- **Recycling Exhibition** – Carlow Mens Shed

- **The ABCs of LGBTQ+** - Newbridge Library

- **Reusable Cup Campaign** – SETU Waterford

- **Healthy Seals, Healthy Seas** – Seal Rescue Ireland and Gorey Library

- **Highlighting the role of the SDGs in SMEs** – Green Offaly and Offaly Local Development Company

The University of Galway's Student Union held a panel discussion on SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Offaly County Council Climate Action Team ran a Bulbs 4 Bulbs initiative to help promote recycling of old light bulbs in exchange for pollinator friendly flower bulbs

Launch of Aclú, an MTU and Health Service Executive initiative, addresses enduring mental illness recovery using physical activity, nutrition and digital technology.

Cork College of FET hosted two presentations on "Native Tree Identification & Seed Harvesting", and "The Delights of Food Foraging".

A Morning of Reminiscing with the People of Killeigh and Beyond took place in Tullamore Library, celebrating Positive Ageing.

Inspiring women of STEM visit schools across the county of Carlow to inspire a younger generation of Carlow girls to follow in their footsteps.

Name Joey age 7

Not wat we want.

4 | Leaving No One Behind

Chapter 4: Leaving No One Behind

4.1 Background

As part of Ireland's 2021 SDG consultation process respondents called for a national dialogue on what Leaving No One Behind means for Ireland and for steps to be taken to ensure that marginalised and under-represented groups or communities are prioritised in their participation and ownership of SDG implementation in Ireland.

In response to the consultation feedback a number of measures were committed to under the National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024, including to:

- Hold an accessible and inclusive recruitment campaign to attract a diverse range of SDG Champions for the 2023-2024 Programme. [See section 3.3.2 for more detail]

- Establish an SDG Forum Committee to design an improved, accessible and inclusive format for the SDG National Stakeholder Forum. [See section 3.3.1 for more detail]

- Hold an SDG National Stakeholder Forum dedicated to the topic of Leaving no one behind, in order to better explore the concept and what it means in an Irish context.

- Develop guidance on the principle of Leaving No One Behind based on the outcomes of the National Stakeholder Forum, research and existing relevant tools and resources which is incorporated into the training and toolkits being developed for civil servants and local authorities over 2023.

- Incorporate the principle of Leaving No One Behind into Ireland's 2023 VNR.

4.2 Beginning Ireland's Dialogue on Leaving No One Behind

On 17 January 2023, an SDG National Stakeholder Forum was held focusing on the principle of Leaving No One Behind. The intention was to begin a broad and inclusive dialogue including a wide representation of groups and communities to develop a shared understanding of Leaving No One Behind in an Irish context and to ensure its further incorporation into policy and national SDG structures.

The Forum meeting was collaboratively designed with the newly appointed Forum Committee [See Section 3.3.1] which includes 12 representatives from a variety of sectors and backgrounds. The intention of the Committee was to ensure that the promotion of the forum meeting, the format of the meeting and participation at the meeting was as inclusive and accessible as possible for all participants.

The objectives of the meeting were:

    I.   To develop a shared understanding of the principle of Leave No One Behind and what it means in an Irish context.

    II.   To develop key messages that stakeholders want to convey to policy makers and for policy makers to take account of when developing policy.

    III.   To inform SDG National Stakeholder engagement going forward.

The outputs from the workshops are to form part of the SDG training and toolkit which will be developed over 2023 for Civil Servants and Local Authority Officers.

Lived Experience Speakers

Mavis Ramazani: Project Officer, Irish Refugee Council

Fiona Ferris: Deputy CEO, ASIAM, Ireland's National Autism Charity

Sineád Harris: Manager, Crosscare Ronanstown Youth Service

Mary Brigid Collins: Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Linda O'Sullivan: Advocate on behalf of One Family, Ireland's organisation for people parenting alone and sharing parenting

Panel discussion with Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications; Eamon Ryan, Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure; Ossian Smyth, Former Ambassador David Donoghue and Diversity & Race Relations Consultant Dr Ebun Joseph

Ireland's UN Youth delegates Jessica Gill and David Giles who provided the final remarks for the Forum

Two workshops were held for both online and in-person participants. The first workshop explored what Leaving No One Behind means in an Irish context with the aim of developing a shared understanding and definition of the principle. The second workshop focused on consolidating key messages and recommendations to national and local policy makers in respect of Leaving No One Behind.

Discussions during the workshops at the SDG National Stakeholder Forum January 2023

4.2.1 Developing a shared understanding of Leaving No One Behind

Participants were initially asked what if feels like or what it might feel or look like to be left behind. The majority of responses highlighted the themes and feelings of loneliness, isolation, abandonment and being forgotten.

Figure 1: How being left behind feels

Participants were asked why some people are left behind and others are not. The results of these discussions are captured in the below two tables:

Table 1: Reasons for being left behind

Short-term targets	Discrimination	Socioeconomic disadvantage
Language barriers	Lack of early intervention	Lack of accessible transport
"Can't see it, can't be it"	Impact of legislation/policy	Poor targeting
Short-term political cycle	Lack of funding for community resources	Lack of access to equitable opportunities
Poverty	Representation (or lack of)	Geographic location
How one behaves (acts), sounds (accent), looks (colour)	Lack of voice/power/influence	On the margins of communities – lack of contact with others

Table 2: Reasons for not being left behind

Luck! Where born	Impact of a progressive policy	Good access to education
Good opportunities	Good health	Capitalism
Geographic location	Financial/networking resources	Wealth/white privilege
Culturally living within acceptable norms	"He who shouts loudest"	Stable home environment
Family name	Nepotism	Gender
Self-belief	Financially secure/financial education	Access to good nutrition

Participants considered the list of groups provided in the 2030 Agenda which the 2030 Agenda calls for the empowerment of, including:

- Children

- Youth

- Persons with disabilities

- People living with HIV/AIDS

- Older persons

- Indigenous peoples

- Refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants[4]

Participants believed that this list is relevant for Ireland, however they felt that a number of amendments could be made to the language used, and that additions to the groups included could be made to fit the Irish context.

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4   https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda: "People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80% live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants."

Table 3: Groups to be empowered in Ireland*

Everyone living in Ireland should be empowered. Groups at particular risk of being left behind and whose needs should be specifically considered when developing policy include:

- Children and young people
- Disabled people
- People living with long-term health issues, including HIV and AIDS
- Older people
- The Travelling community
- Refugees, internally displaced people and migrants
- People who are homeless
- People with mental health issues and/or affected by addiction
- People living in rural Ireland
- LGBTQI+ community
- People who are socio-economically disadvantaged; the working poor and those below the poverty line
- Ethnic minorities
- Disconnected Communities
- Single parent families and carers
- Victims of human trafficking

*Developed by the SDG National Stakeholder Forum 17 January 2023

Figure 2: What does Leave No One Behind mean?

The discussion on defining Leave No One Behind (LNOB) in an Irish context raised the following insights.

For many participants, it means we embrace diversity by being more actively inclusive. They believe that while openness to diversity may enable those on the margins to be seen, this is not sufficient for Leaving No One Behind in Ireland. We need inclusiveness where diversity has a seat and a voice. The journey from diversity to inclusiveness might be described as moving from allowing space in the room for others to actually changing the room. Leaving No One Behind means changing the room.

As with diversity and inclusion – ideas around equality and equity were prominent in the discussion. Equality means that everyone should receive the same treatment and have access to the same life chances, and the same resources. The discussion aligned equality to the concept of fairness.

While fairness was identified as fundamental to Leaving No One Behind in Ireland, equity was also emphasised. Equity was defined as everyone getting what they need to succeed. Therefore, while equality aligns with fairness, equity aligns with justice. And Leaving No One Behind in Ireland is a matter of **justice**.

The narrative of the day – shared through stories of lived experience – is that to be equitable and to have justice, the reality of peoples' situations must be considered. For Leaving No One Behind in Ireland, it is not just about treating other people as we would like to be treated ourselves. The Forum called upon all of us to go further and treat other people the way **they** want to be treated.

Enabling people to have a real opportunity to succeed means acknowledging that we all start from different places on the "inclusion map". The Forum recognised that our starting points are not based on individual skill or motivation. Instead, our starting points correlate to categories of privilege and marginalisation on a scale that are based on ethnicity, poverty, gender, age, displacement, disability, socioeconomic status, family situation, and other aspects of identity.

The Forum took on the challenge of finding a definition of Leaving No One Behind that actively questions and has the power to disrupt the systems that created and maintain these different starting points, thereby supporting equity. A synthesis of the Forum's definition of LNOB is as follows:

> "An inclusive and empathetic society that empowers everyone to engage with and be represented in decision-making, accelerating dignity and enabling equal opportunities and equitable outcomes."
> Definition of Leaving No One Behind developed by the
> SDG National Stakeholder Forum
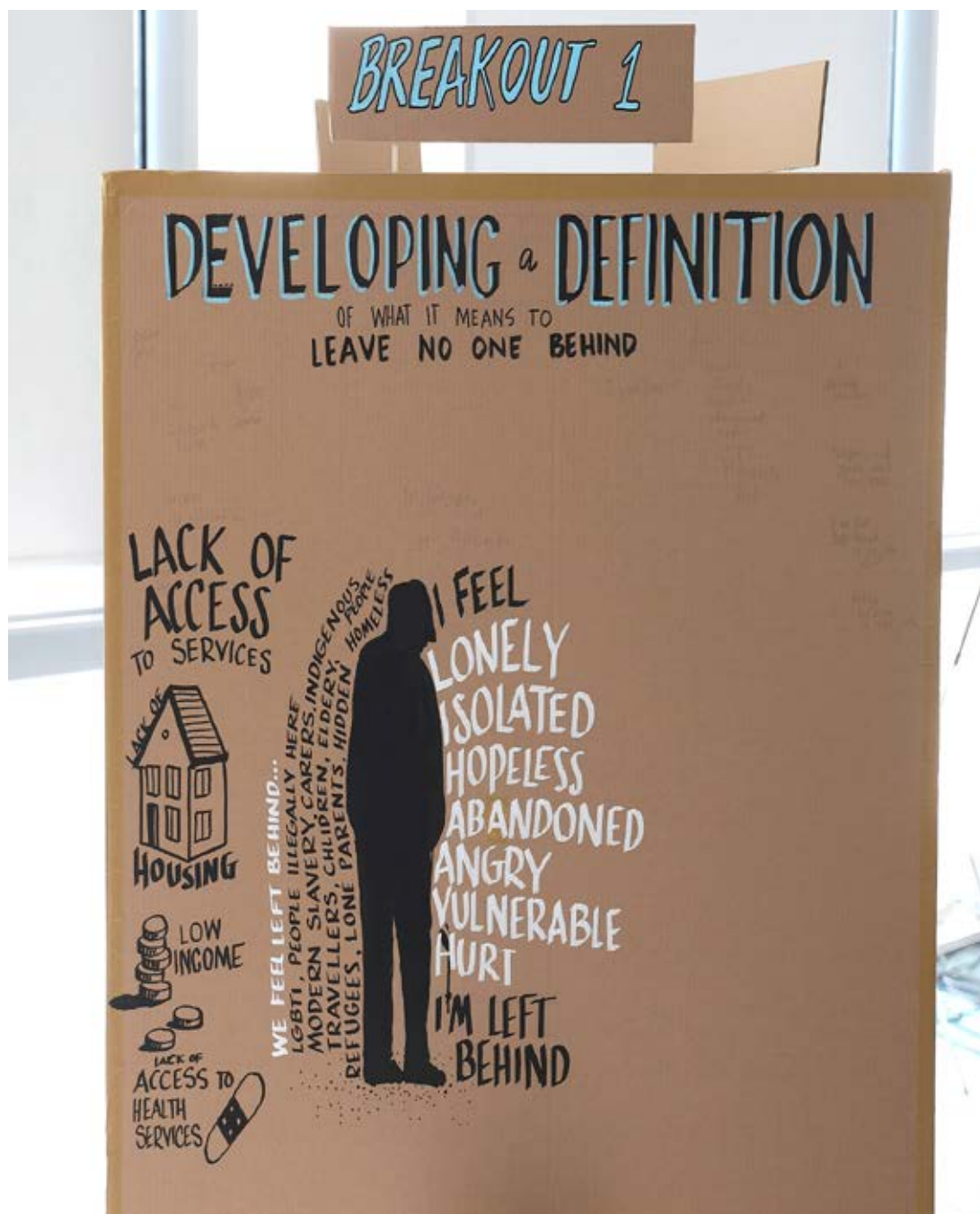
4.2.2 Case Studies

Case Study: Engagement of Marginalised Communities in Local Planning and Decision Making (Leaving No-One Behind)

In order for Ireland to successfully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and adhere to the principle of Leaving No One Behind, inclusive and meaningful participation must be ensured for marginalised groups and those in vulnerable situations. In late 2021, as part of the work to implement the objectives and commitments of Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year

strategy to support the community and voluntary sector, the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) initiated a project to support the engagement of marginalised communities in consultation and decision-making processes. This work seeks to build capacity, as well as providing resources and toolkits at a local level to enable meaningful participation, breaking down barriers and empowering people and communities to engage in the decisions which affect them.

With support from the Dormant Accounts Fund and assistance from Pobal, DRCD assembled a cross-sectoral steering group of national community and voluntary stakeholders to oversee the work. There are a number of elements to this project, including training and development of accessible resources and toolkits. Perhaps most significant has been the development of a resource guide, entitled **'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making.'** The guide is co-written with civil society organisations and designed to be user-friendly, with quick reference checklists and pointers. Whilst the overall project is focussed on the local authority level, the guide is designed to be used by any group or body that wants to undertake inclusive and meaningful consultation.

It condenses a significant amount of information on policy and statutory obligations and good practices, building on SDG commitments to the principle of 'Leave No One Behind', and Public Sector Duty approaches, while also providing signposting to further resources that compliment and inform this work. It is intended to review the guide later this year, to incorporate lessons learned from ongoing related pilot projects.

In addition to contributing to the principles of inclusion and empowerment which run throughout the 2030 Agenda, this Guide also contributes specifically to a number of SDGs and SDG targets, particularly around ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making at all levels (SDG target 16.7). It may also contribute to increasing participation of women from marginalised communities which supports the achievement of SDG 5.5 and to reducing inequalities in terms of social and political inclusion and inequalities of outcome in support of SDGs 10.2 and 10.3. This project is just one of a range of initiatives undertaken as part of the implementation of Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.

(The Resource Guide is available on Gov.ie : A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making .)

4.3 Conclusion

The January SDG National Stakeholder Forum represents the beginning of the conversation on Leaving No One Behind in Ireland and not the end.

The complexity of Leaving No One Behind from a policy makers' perspective was summed up by one of the participants and panel speakers Dr Ebun Joseph when she observed:

"Every new policy marginalises a group of people. You've just come up with a fantastic new policy, but that new policy […] has marginalised a new set of people. You have put a new set of people on the danger line! So, the question is, when we create new policy, how do we mitigate for those people [on the danger line] so that they don't become the new poor, or the new crazy, or the new impacted?"
Dr. Ebun Joseph (Director of the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies)

The Forum's response was clear - if we are to do better in implementing the SDGs in Ireland, we need to adopt a different approach. Doing better calls for a deeper, better informed, joined up and more inclusive form of engagement.

The Forum identified doing better as a necessity because the effective implementation of policies that align with the SDGs depends on the cooperation and responsiveness of citizens and communities. If citizens and communities feel excluded, have not been properly engaged, or feel powerless to affect decisions that impact their lives, they will not be part of the journey towards implementing the SDGs and will have been left behind.

Addressing Leaving No One Behind requires policies that promote inclusive and resilient communities that can tackle challenges and seize opportunities head-on.

Some specific recommendations and messages arising out of the Forum included:

- Build capacity for systems thinking across the civil and public service sector. Identify skills gaps and develop a programme of systems thinking, where there is a culture that can address systemic issues and intersectional complexity.

- Undertake a risk assessment of policies and resource allocation so that geographic, educational, financial, discriminatory, generational, and environmental challenges that can cause people to be left behind are understood and targeted.

- Promote local and national participatory engagement across all phases of policy and planning processes that adapts to a strengths-based view of the participants to achieve connective community empowerment and meaningful inclusion.

- Information across all public services must be inclusive of those without access to online services and presented in plain language, allowing people to understand what they are entitled to.

- School curricula should address structural and systemic issues that may obstruct inclusiveness, such as cultural blindness, inherited privilege, racism, neuro-divergence, and inter-generational disadvantage.

- Every new policy should have an SDG indicator or score that is monitored and measured.

- Create a Ministry for the Sustainable Development Goals so that the SDGs are mainstreamed across Government policy.

- Align national spending to the SDGs.

- Improve the collection, use & transparent publication of disaggregated data with reliable indicators to inform policy development and monitor its impact.

"If you read the declaration (Agenda 2030) it really instils hope in a world that sometimes feels like it's falling apart a little bit. But really, the impact of this on the ordinary people, on the normal people as we heard earlier, the people living in communities across Ireland, it's going to be the way we can translate these 17 goals and 169 targets into policies that affect these very fundamental things like hunger, education, poverty, and access."
David Giles and Jessica Gill (Ireland's UN Youth Delegates)

The shared understandings and messages developed as part of the January SDG National Stakeholder Forum will be used to inform the development of over-arching guidance on the principle of Leave No One Behind which will be incorporated as part of the SDG training course and toolkits for civil servants and local authority officers and considered as part of progressing policy coherence for sustainable development.

5 | Youth Consultation for the VNR

Chapter 5: Youth Consultation for the VNR

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a youth assessment of Ireland's progress towards the implementation of the SDGs. With support from the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), it has been written by the 2022-23 United Nations Youth Delegates (UNYD), David Giles and Jessica Gill, drawing from their own experience as young people and expertise as representatives of the youth of Ireland.

This chapter is informed by a youth-led consultation specifically designed to address the VNR, desk research involving youth-focused surveys, youth assemblies, and publications that focus on issues of importance to young people of Ireland. The youth-led consultation centred on the themes of 'Building Back Better while Leaving No One Behind', and was organised for 85 young people, from 10-24 years old, where 49% of participants identified as female, 47% as male, and 4% as non-binary. A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was established, with nine young people selected by Comhairle na nÓg and NYCI's Young Voices – EU Youth Dialogue Programme, to ensure the chosen consultation methodologies were meaningful.[5] A conscious effort was made to include minority groups in the consultation.[6] The sample population size disallows broad observations but nevertheless provides an important insight into Ireland's Sustainable Development Goal progress from a key demographic of society.

Based on the VNR consultation and desk research, this chapter will focus on the seven SDGs which were identified as most pressing for young people in Ireland in 2023.

Throughout this chapter, we have included quotes directly from young people. Some young people wished to remain anonymous, and thus we have not attributed names to the quotes in these instances.

5   - The Comhairle network comprises 31 local youth councils, while Young Voices EU Youth Dialogue programme
     provides opportunities for youth who are most often excluded from decision-making processes.
6   - 24% of participants were part of an ethnic minority group, 10% were persons with disabilities, 10% were refugees
     or asylum seekers, and 35% experienced socio-economic disadvantage.

5.2 Leaving No One Behind

Ireland's theme for the 2023 VNR is 'Building Back Better while Leaving No One Behind'. The consultation assessed youth perspectives on the two aspects of this theme separately. Of the five factors that map the disadvantages that contribute to someone being left behind listed by Agenda 2030[7], the participants felt that discrimination was the most significant factor in the Irish context. In listing those who may be discriminated against, the Agenda mentions youth. In the Irish context, the participants identified groups as being left behind, which included those living in Direction Provision, persons with disabilities, and those living in poverty.

In response to a follow-up question on how young people can be left behind, lack of political consultation/inclusion was the main issue highlighted. In the context of youth participation in politics, one young person stated: "Engagement is made to feel as if it is being done to tick a box".

Lack of access to services and opportunities (particularly in rural areas) and lack of empathy for the stresses faced were highlighted. Feeling 'left behind' is also a common sentiment among the 7 in 10 young people aged 18-24 that are considering moving abroad for a better quality of life elsewhere. This is a testament to the severe impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people with almost 1 in 2 of those surveyed saying they are struggling to make ends meet.[8] The costs of rising accommodation prices, groceries, and tuition fees can prove particularly challenging for those from a low socio-economic background.

5.3 Building Back Better

Reflecting on the theme of building back better after the pandemic, the young people spoke about their personal experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. 45% of participants spoke about the impact of lockdowns on their mental health and the challenges of online schooling.

7   https://unsdg.un.org/resources/leaving-no-one-behind-unsdg-operational-guide-un-country-teams
8   https://www.youth.ie/articles/young-people-considering-emigration-for-better-quality-of-life-than-in-ireland/

"The pandemic stripped so many 'normal' teenage experiences from us and now some people don't know how to deal with these experiences when they arise". - Caoimhe, 16

"Since the pandemic started, school has become a lot harder. Not just the schoolwork, but getting up each day and socialising. I started secondary school right in the midst of the pandemic and it was incredibly difficult to try and make friends because of the masks, pods, distancing, etc". - Lauren, 14

"I was 14 when the pandemic began and I am 17 now, so I spent some of the most important social developing years of my life in isolation. I feel I have missed out on my chance to make mistakes". - Emma, 17

Missed milestones in education and opportunities for engagement with peers led to social isolation and loneliness. Research into the youth sector has found that young people who were already deemed 'most at risk' became the most disconnected from youth services and supports as a result of the lockdowns. The negative impact on physical health and financial inequality also featured across participant reflections.

"Any trust I had for the government was lost when I saw how they handled schools coming back. It was like we were left behind. In our time of need, basic needs/household items were not accessible and my mental health hit an all-time low. I felt isolated from everyone even though my neighbours were still close by. It seemed like it was a big thing everyone was going through by themselves, despite this being a global issue". – Rebecca, 13

"I would rather stay at home [...] people have gotten into the habit of being alone (isolation). That's why teens are in their [bed]rooms much more".

Against this backdrop, one of the learnings to come from the experience was the importance of the youth sector at the time. Participants spoke about a greater feeling of interconnectedness with their locality, country, and planet. With this came a sense of collective responsibility, particularly to protect the most vulnerable. In the absence of social interactions, appreciating the value of relationships was also a common experience for many.

"I think COVID-19 was a unique, globally shared experience which connected people in a way like never before". - Holly, 25

Anxiety and concern led me to youth work. An incredible youth worker engaged with me and helped me to bounce into a new space I hadn't considered".

We asked participants what Ireland should prioritise in order to build back better after the pandemic. Service provision was mentioned by every group, spanning healthcare and mental health services, transport links, and working conditions. Reflecting on their time confined to their locality, it was unsurprising that greater community support from governments and local authorities were mentioned by many too. This included small business grants, amenities in underserved communities, and spaces for young people.

"Less youth groups around counties because lack of funding during and after COVID-19 [...] this affects the young people around the country as they have nowhere to go or socialise and feel isolated and distant. This lack of facilities for young people has caused them to rely more on their phones to socialise with others, but phones and social media can be damaging to young people's mental health". - Gabrielle, 16

In the post-pandemic recovery, young people want to be part of an intergenerational process to create more sustainable, resilient communities.

"It gave me a whole new perspective on how different life during the pandemic was, especially for older people who might not have been able to connect with people or to see their families". – Oisin, 16

"I hope we recognise the need of community building as a source of resiliency for a future we can build with more compassion".

5.4 Young People's Knowledge of The Sustainable Development Goals

One quarter of consultation participants had never heard about the SDGs before, which emphasises the necessity for more focused mechanisms of introducing the SDGs to young people through formal, non-formal, and informal education. Twenty per cent of the consultation participants learned about the SDGs through formal education, and other common sources included youth work organisations and social media. Of all stakeholders who bear responsibility for Agenda 2030, the government was identified as the most responsible, and it was apparent that young people are frustrated at perceived inaction domestically on achieving the SDGs. The lack of awareness and resulting frustration among many young people as to the initiatives undertaken by government departments highlights a need for greater youth-friendly communication and inclusion efforts to ensure everyone is brought along in Ireland's journey to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Raising awareness about the government's

work is essential to building back better (BBB) while leaving no one behind (LNOB) because of the simultaneous benefit of increasing meaningful engagement with young people.

"I learnt first in my secondary school and later in more detail in university".- David, 22

"I never learned about it".

We presented participants with 10 stakeholders and asked, 'Who is most responsible for achieving the SDGs?'. The results were as follows:

Rank	Stakeholder
1st	Governments
2nd	Civil society (you and me)
3rd	The United Nations
4th	The European Union
5th	Companies/Corporations
6th	Schools and Educational Institutions
7th	The 1% (Millionaires & Billionaires)
8th	Young people
9th	Older people
10th	Other (we will ask you who your 'other' is next)
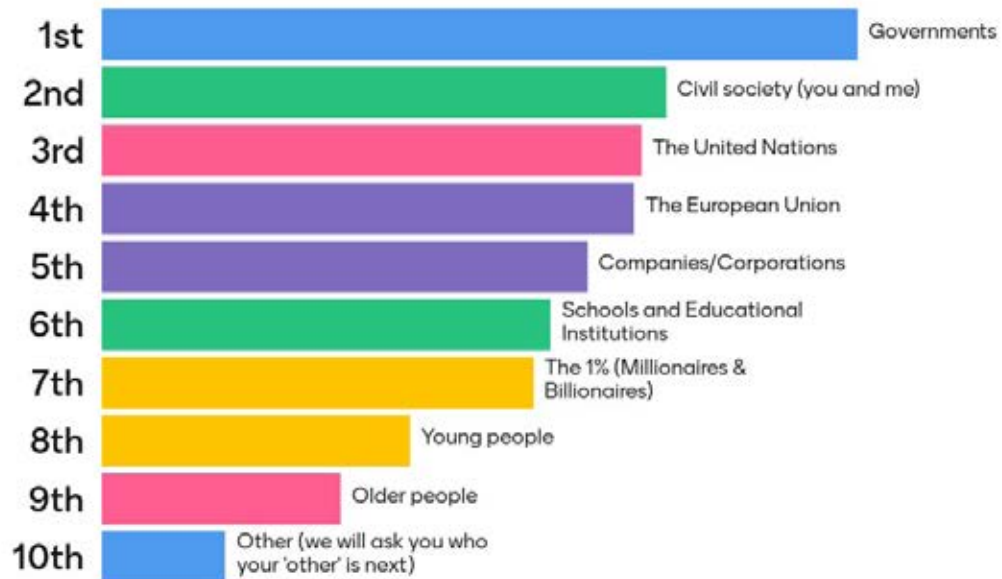
5.5 SDGs in Focus

Across a number of exercises, discussions and group work, participants were asked to prioritise the SDGs they thought needed the most action in an Irish context. Seven SDGs focussed most prominently: **SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace and Strong Institutions).**

All seven of the SDGs in focus for this chapter featured within the top ten identified as most important to young people in the shadow report prepared by NYCI and the 2018 UNYDs, which accompanied Ireland's first VNR.[9]

For each of the aforementioned SDGs, we gave the participants an opportunity to share their experiences and what they deemed as the priority areas for government action.

SDG 1: No Poverty

Various experiences of poverty are acknowledged by young people. The effects of the cost-of-living crisis are widespread and long-term. A lack of affordable housing (including accommodation in major cities and near higher education institutions), and an inability to meet rising household bills such as heating and electricity (and the resultant poor quality of life) are worries at the forefront of young people's minds. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, a recent survey shows that seven in ten young people aged 18-24 are considering moving abroad for a better quality of life, and one in two young people are struggling to make ends meet.[10]

Simultaneously, concerns over levels of youth homelessness and rates of homelessness generally, feature as the top priority for the government to address. Proposed solutions include greater supports such as increased availability of social housing, assessing and addressing rapidly increasing rents and the rising percentage of ownership of Irish properties by investment funds, which commercialise the basic human right to housing. These supports would not only enable young people to rent within their means, but also begin saving for a mortgage. An assessment of the disparities between living and minimum wages should also be undertaken and the necessary changes implemented, coupled with increasing investment in services for homeless people that are non-judgmental, free, and rehabilitative where required.

"Increase tax on uninhabited homes and limit the number of homes owned".

"Subsidised rent, rent freeze, support with property ownership for vulnerable groups, affordable living, nature zones".

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9 - National Youth Council of Ireland (2018) 'Generation for Change'https://www.youth.ie/documents/generatio-forchange-un-dels-report/.

10 - National Youth Council of Ireland (2022) "Young people considering emigration for better quality of life than in Ireland" https://www.youth.ie/articles/young-people-considering-emigration-for-better-quality-of-life-than-in-ire-land/

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

Forty-five per cent of the VNR consultation participants noted the damaging impact of COVID-19 on their mental health. The waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services need urgent improvement, and healthcare facilities need to be established in rural areas and in disadvantaged communities to meet the growing needs of young people. Community-based primary care needs to become a priority, to reach those most vulnerable, who might be scared to speak about their struggles or to approach a healthcare practitioner in the first instance. It is noted that educators and youth workers cannot and should not be everything to every young person, but having the necessary tools to ensure the immediate safety of the young person, and being able to signpost them to reliable, effective, and non-judgmental services is essential.

Increasing and improving existing service provision is a necessity to BBB while LNOB. This spans healthcare and mental health services, transport links, and working conditions. The adequacy of services provided by local government during the pandemic, compared to during our recovery is problematic for young people. Small business grants, amenities in underserved communities, and clean green spaces were all welcome advancements as a result of COVID-19-19, but they seem to have decreased in importance for the government since the lockdowns were lifted. Gabrielle, 16, notes that not all youth groups were able to function because of funding cuts both during and after the pandemic: "This affects young people around the country as they have nowhere to go to socialise and feel isolated and distant. This lack of facilities for young people has caused them to rely more on their phones to socialise with others, but phones and social media can be damaging to young people's mental health".

Along with capacity, skills, and confidence building, youth services evoke a sense of collective responsibility, especially amongst young people considered most vulnerable. It is for these reasons that prior to the 2022 National Budget, NYCI presented over 3,000 signatures of

young people to the government, calling for increased, fundamental investment.[11] 73% of NYCI's member organisations reported increased deprivation in their communities as a direct result of living costs, and challenges remain in terms of electricity, shelter, and food. Increasing governmental financial support for youth work organisations would enable underserved communities to benefit from their life-changing and life-saving services, ensuring that no one is left behind.

> "My mental health went downhill during the pandemic, and I fell into an extremely dark place. Over the course of the lockdown, I was placed on an urgent waiting list for multiple public mental health services. These waiting lists were too long and I was waiting over a year, or have yet to be called for some of them. I am still feeling the effects of this after the pandemic. My self-image, confidence and social skills have been ripped apart" – Emma, 17

SDG 4: Quality Education

Education in Ireland is highly regarded by young people, both in the strengths it possesses and in the positive reforms seen in recent years. Aligning our formal, non-formal, and informal education systems with SDG4 would involve curriculum reform, better and more inclusive Relationships and Sexuality Education, better access for those with lower financial means, the integration of Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all levels/sectors of education, and accessibility of lifelong learning.

During the pandemic, every young person experienced social isolation and loneliness due to missed milestones in education and opportunities for engagement with peers. One particularly vulnerable group in this regard is young Travellers. During NYCI's 2022 One World Week event on LNOB, young Traveller boys recounted how their teachers prejudicially expected them not to complete their homework resulting in a failure to assign any homework to them at all, and how they were placed into special education classes when no such needs existed meaning that they missed out on critical in-class learning.[5] While the education system is singled-out in the lived experience of these Traveller boys, it is important to note that racism towards Travellers is broad, across all facets of Irish society, and systemic. Fundamental institutional reform and funding to youth services which engage with young travellers are essential to overcome such societal biases and barriers and ensure that everyone, irrespective of background, has the same opportunities to succeed in life.

Given our ever-changing world and escalating global crises, the Second National Strategy on ESD to 2030 and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) Strategy should both be incorporated into all levels of policy, practice, and curriculum development across relevant government departments with particular focus on formal schooling and non-formal youth work settings. [12, 13]

11   - National Youth Council of Ireland (2022) "Youth Council calls for €12 million investment in young people in next week's budget" https://www.youth.ie/articles/youth-council-calls-for-e12-million-investment-in-young-people-in-next-weeks-budget/#:~:text=.

12   - Department of Education Ireland (2022) "Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development" https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8c8bb-esd-to-2030-second-national-strategy-on-education-for-sustainable-development/>.

13   - Irish Aid (2021) "Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025" https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/what-

Young people must be at the core of planning, implementation, and review of all such important education reforms.

We live in an increasingly diverse and globalised world where issues of large-scale migration, increasing inequality and poverty, human rights abuses and the impacts of climate change dominate public discourse. Global youth work engages young people in addressing these issues and aims to support young people and those working with them to increase their awareness and understanding of the interdependent and unequal world in which we/they live, through interactive learning and education, debate, action and reflection. [14] It challenges perceptions of the world and encourages people to act for a more just and equal society at a personal, local, national and international level, for current and future generations of children and young people.

A global framing of issues young people can identify with at a local level can help to build a sense of solidarity on global issues we collectively face, such as climate change, peace and justice, and food insecurity. In the pursuit of this objective, we welcome the addition of Climate Action and Sustainable Development as a second-level subject for penultimate year students in 2024. We hope this will be expanded beyond the initial piloting in 'network schools' in the near future.[15]

Lastly, the socio-economic status of a family or community should no longer present barriers to accessing quality education. A further sustainable reduction of fees should be implemented, especially given that Ireland has the highest third-level education fees in Europe.[16]

"Ensure free education for all".

"Senior cycle reform - restructuring [of the current] grading system".

SDG 5: Gender Equality

Gender inequality continues to affect young people in Ireland. In order to include young people in all their diversity, gender equality should be expanded to include all genders, given its socially constructed nature. One manifestation of gender inequality is gender-based violence (GBV) which is experienced both physically and online. A national survey of girls and young women, who are disproportionately affected by GBV, found that 67% of respondents had experienced online harassment.[17] The subsequent psychological impacts can result in women being silenced and, for those involved in careers such as politics, GBV can cause them to withdraw from the

wedo/whoweworkwith/civilsociety/21-024---Global-Citizenship-Education-Strategy_V5.1_Digital.pdf.

14   - National Youth Council of Ireland (2023) "Global Youth Work" https://www.youth.ie/programmes/global-youth-work-and-development-education/.

15   - Government of Ireland (2022) "Minister Foley announces plan for reform of Senior- Cycle education- Equity and Excellence for All" <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/f7bf7-minister-foley-announces-plan-for-reform-of-senior-cycle-education-equity-and-excellence-for-all/>.

16   - Irish Examiner (2019) "Ireland will have highest university fees in Europe post-Brexit, according to student union" <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30912349.html>.

17   - Plan International (2020) "Free to be online?" https://www.plan.ie/campaigns2/free-to-be-online/.

political sphere.[18] This is significant given that many young women are already discouraged to enter the political space. Currently, women only constitute 23% of the Irish parliament.[19]

The National Strategy for Women and Girls' Period Poverty Sub-Committee was established to address the issue of period poverty and stigma in Ireland, which is experienced by many young people who menstruate.[20] To LNOB, it is recommended that the Irish government should provide access to free period products throughout the education sector from primary, post-primary, to higher education institutions and in public buildings such as libraries, hospitals, bus and train stations, churches, post offices, and town halls, to name a few. Currently, free government-provided period products are only available in select further education and training colleges.[21]

SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities

Young people are acutely aware of the inequalities they face and those that are faced by others, across social, political, and economic divides. Of the five factors of LNOB, discrimination based on "assumed or ascribed identity or status" was cited as most significant nationally.[22]

A recent report from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission found that second-generation ethnic minority young people endure racism and discrimination daily.[23] At the VNR consultation Bel, 16, elaborated on her own experience of discrimination: "As a Black person living in today's society and as racially based attacks have increased, I've felt unsafe". In order to empower young people from ethnic minorities and create an inclusive society for all, racism in all of its forms must be addressed. The recently published and long overdue National Action Plan Against Racism (2023-2027) is a welcome development.[24] However, a fully funded implementation plan will be required to ensure Ireland meaningfully tackles racism issues across all areas of Irish society.[25]

Individuals can face increased discrimination due to a range of intersecting factors including gender, religion, age, disability and ethnicity. This is exemplified by the experience of a Black migrant girl living in Direct Provision (DP). A 2023 youth-authored publication entitled "Tight Spaces", funded by Concern Worldwide and Irish Aid, explored this reality.[26]

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18   - Irish Consortium of Gender Based Violence (2023) "Technology and Gender Based Violence: Risks and Opportunities" <https://www.gbv.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CSW67-Technology-and-Gender-Based-Violence-Risks-and-Opportunities.pdf>.

19   - The World Bank (2021) "Proportion of seats held by women in National Parliaments (%)" <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>.

20   - National Strategy for Women and Girls (2021) "Period Poverty in Ireland Discussion Paper" Period Poverty Sub-Committee <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/264f4-period-poverty-in-ireland-discussion-paper-period-poverty-sub-committee-national-strategy-for-women-and-girls-20172020-february-2021/>.

21   - Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (2022) "" Minister Harris and Collins announce roll out of free period products in further education and training sector" <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/cea1f-minister-harris-and-collins-announce-roll-out-of-free-period-products-in-further-education-and-training-sector/>.

22   Human Rights Mainstreaming Fund (2022) "Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind" <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Operationalizing%20LNOB%20-%20final%20with%20Annexes%20090422.pdf>.

23   Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2023) "Ever-Present Racism has Devastating Effect on Second Generations Ethnic Minority Youth" <https://www.ihrec.ie/ever-present-racism-has-devastating-effect-on-second-generation-ethnic-minority-youth/>.

24   Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (2023) "National Action Plan Against Racism" <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/14d79-national-action-plan-against-racism/?referrer=http://www.gov.ie/anti-racism/>.

25   National Youth Council of Ireland (2021) "Submission on the National Action Plan Against Racism" <https://www.youth.ie/documents/submission-on-the-national-action-plan-against-racism-2021/>.

26   - Irish Refugee Council (2023) "Tight Spaces: An Educational Resource on Ireland's Direct Provision System by Young People" <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/tight-spaces>.

Direct Provision was introduced in 2000 as a temporary measure to accommodate individuals in the International Protection system. Life in DP in 2023 involves communal housing, the provision of food, and a weekly allowance of €38.80 per adult, and €29.90 per child. This is substantially less than the weekly minimum wage of a single adult not in DP, at approximately €440. There are long-term detrimental impacts on young people living in DP, with overcrowding, physical safety concerns, and barriers to education and employment due to this disparity. This reality demonstrates the importance of responding to the needs of those surviving at the intersection of the issues that the SDGs seek to address. Ada, aged 18, recalled how "staying alone without a family is a different ball game, because sometimes I will just be in my room alone without anybody to talk to. I cry myself to sleep sometimes because it is really, really hard", showing the effect that inequality has on mental health.[27]

The majority of DP centres are currently owned and run by private companies. The outsourcing of DP to private companies places the importance on profit and not on respecting human dignity. While we are aware that there is a planned phasing-out of DP, it is important to ensure that any adjustments or substitutions to DP should uphold the human rights of people seeking asylum, refugees, and migrants. Better planning is required and a commitment to regularise status and facilitate integration into society as quickly as possible should be paramount.

Those living in rural areas enjoy fewer opportunities for recreation and leisure and are required to take long commutes to access healthcare services. Despite the digital dependency of the general population during the pandemic, poor internet connection remains challenging for work and education in rural areas. This forces young people to move to urban areas and cities which they are repeatedly pushed out of due to the aforementioned rising costs of rent. To Build Back Better, regional development initiatives should be created and implemented, in consultation with local communities, to ensure that everyone has equal access to the basic services needed to ensure a good quality of life.

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27   - Irish Refugee Council (2023) "Tight Spaces: An Educational Resource on Ireland's Direct Provision System by Young People" <https://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/tight-spaces>.

SDG 13: Climate Action

In the movement to encourage urgent action to address climate change, young people have been central actors. Large-scale climate protests led by the Fridays for Future youth movement and more frequent calls to action have increased exponentially in recent years based on the scientific projections of the IPCC, including in their March 2023 Synthesis Report.[28] National opportunities including the Youth Assembly on Climate, the and the Youth Climate Justice funding to youth organisations, are positive steps to inform and educate young people, as well as providing opportunities to engage with policy and to take informed action.[29], [30] However, with Ireland ranking 9th out of 14 comparable EU countries in meeting environmental targets as part of this year's Sustainable Progress Index, it is evident that more work still needs to be done.[31] Young people have identified a lack of political will to challenge large corporations, irresponsible production and consumption, and a lack of nature protection as ways in which working-class communities especially, are being left behind in this regard.

As evidenced by the climate protests, the VNR youth consultation and the voices of young people in the Youth Climate Justice Charter, action to address climate change is a priority issue for young generations. [32] Given that it is young people who will face the most extreme impacts of climate change during our lifetimes, it is young people who seek to be part of the solutions at every level. We hope that consistent youth activism will motivate political leaders to have the courage to take difficult decisions that transcend the 'party politics' and the election cycle. A welcome example of this is the appointment of a new Climate Youth Delegate Programme, which enables one young person per annum to travel as part of the Irish Delegation to high-level climate conferences and negotiations, such as the COP. More initiatives that directly involve young people in the local, national, regional, and international climate policy and decision-making agenda are imperative to achieving meaningful youth engagement in the climate discourse.

Similarly, climate change and social justice are intrinsically linked. Climate Justice; Loss and Damage; and the Just Transition framework provide a lens of analysis under which to explore climate change as a human rights issue. This makes the climate-induced adversities faced by young people in Ireland more relatable and understandable, as well as introduces young people to the disproportionate negative effects already being experienced by people and peers living in the Global South.

> "We are weak on environmental solutions [such as] tackling massive corporations. The government has failed working-class communities".

28   - IPCC (2023) "AR6 Synthesis Report - Climate Change" <https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf>.

29   - Comhairle na nÓg (2022) "National Youth Assembly on Climate" <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/national-youth-climate-assembly/>; Government of Ireland (2021) "Minister O Gorman Approves Funding for Youth Climate Justice Projects" <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/48f83-minister-ogorman-approves-funding-for-youth-climate-justice-projects/>.

30   - Government of Ireland (2021) "Minister O Gorman Approves Funding for Youth Climate Justice Projects" <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/48f83-minister-ogorman-approves-funding-for-youth-climate-justice-projects/>.

31   - Social Justice Ireland (2022) "Measuring Progress: Economy, Society and Environment in Ireland" <https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-02/2022-02-16-sustainable-progress-index-2022-web-final_0.pdf>.

32   - National Youth Council of Ireland (2022) "Youth Climate Justice Charter" https://www.youth.ie/climatejusticecharter/.

"Irresponsible production and consumption. Lack of nature protection".

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

People everywhere need to be free of fear from all forms of violence and feel safe as they go about their lives irrespective of their ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, class, age, disability, faith, gender, or sexual orientation. To create inclusive, trusted institutions and to achieve peace and justice, it is important that governments, civil society, and grassroots community leaders work together to implement sustainable solutions.

In 2023, Ireland is marking 25 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. More than ever, north/south cooperation is vital if we are to live and work peacefully together on the one island. There have been a number of welcome cross-border initiatives including the most recent Shared Island initiative as well as peace conferences and events, including the Peace Summit 2023, which focused on 'The Unfinished Business of Peace and Reconciliation' in Northern Ireland. SDG 16 is of particular relevance and importance to young people on our shared island and particularly those living in the border communities and in Northern Ireland. Enhancing youth participation across all communities in political and social processes, is vital to ensure that the Good Friday Agreement lives on through the generations that did not experience the Troubles first-hand. Continued positive cross-border relationship building with and between younger generations is vital to build trust, understanding, and relationships.

Furthermore, it is important that Ireland continues to address ongoing youth, peace and security challenges and opportunities on the island of Ireland in line with UN Resolution 2535. In addition, the other UN Resolutions focusing on Youth, Peace and Security should be implemented. Given that Ireland has been a strong voice for Youth, Peace and Security during the term on the Security Council, we would welcome enhanced national focus on Youth, Peace and Security in cross-departmental youth policy and practice.

5.6 Including Youth in Solutions

Having identified youth solutions to achieve the SDGs, we asked the participants about the challenges that prevent young people and those left behind from implementing these solutions. The main barrier to participation is the lack of representation for young people via the absence of voting rights for youth. Another key issue highlighted was a lack of resources to empower them to participate, such as funding, transport, and quality civic education. They also drew attention to the lack of awareness of opportunities to engage:

> "Young people in disadvantaged areas are not told about opportunities [...] they have to actively seek them out".

For another young person, participation in society was seen as a privilege:

> "We are trying to survive and meet our basic needs. Being active in society isn't a privilege I can afford".

Recognising these challenges, how can the government bring young people and those left behind into the solutions? The participants identified the organisation of youth consultations and engagement with more youth organisations as two ways of empowering youth to create change. One young person stressed that for youth inclusion to be meaningful, it must be present at all stages of the process:

> "Active participation from consultation process through to implementation".

The participants also stressed the importance of listening and engaging with youth directly. Lowering the voting age to 16 years old was recognised as a way to empower young people politically. There are movements to achieve this change in Ireland as well as across Europe with the European Youth Forum actively promoting a 'Vote at 16' campaign to bridge the gap between younger generations and elected politicians.

5.7 Value of International Cooperation

While this report has highlighted areas where further improvement is needed, Ireland has also given its youth much to be proud of - from co-chairing the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda to Ireland's human rights promotion during its recent term on the Security Council.

In speaking to participants at the youth consultation, many felt that youth activists and other young people were a source of innovation that has yet to be utilised. For those who have been involved in the work of the National Youth Council of Ireland, Comhairle na nÓg, and other youth consultations, it made them feel like their voice could make a genuine difference. They were motivated by witnessing their opinions and expertise rise to meaningful action and change, particularly when these actions were in partnership with high-level decision-makers.

The importance of meaningful youth participation for effective international cooperation and decision-making is echoed through Agenda 2030: "The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations. We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible".

It is apparent from the consultation that participants see the immense benefit that taking local/national issues to a global scale can have. To best ensure that all young people's needs are met - without discrimination - it is vital to include a global lens when looking at any issues that impact youth.

Young people recognise the place of Ireland as a global island and it is clear that youth see the value in partnership to achieve the SDGs from a local level all the way to multilateral partnership as "We are all interdependent, working alone is next to redundant". The COVID-19 pandemic has fostered an increased awareness of our collective responsibility to ensure that no one is left behind. We must continue to uphold this principle as we strive to achieve SDGs at the local, national, and global levels.

> "I have learned that we are all on the same boat and that we all need to take our part in making the boat sail easier". - James, 20

5.8 Closing Remarks

As per Agenda 2030, 'The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations.'[33]

In order to achieve any and all of the above SDGs, ongoing, meaningful engagement with younger generations is essential to ensure that momentum is maintained to 2030 and beyond. Barriers to youth participation need to be addressed both in Ireland and internationally. The absence of voting rights for those below the age of 18 despite many years of the Vote at 16 movement was identified by participants as one such barrier. [34]

It was also noted that many opportunities for young people to get involved in activism tend to be 'Dublin-centric', which proves challenging for those in more rural and remote areas of Ireland. Those who can access these spaces often must pay their own way to attend events and the quality of formal civic education as it currently stands does nothing to show young people the value of meaningful democratic participation. For the Irish Government to truly commit to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, such challenges need to be addressed cross-departmentally.

We live in a world where 1.8 billion people, or one-quarter of the world's population, are aged 10-24 years. This brings many opportunities for an increasingly globalised world and a strained planet. The only solution, to ensure the needs of people today and in the future can align in equilibrium with the needs of the planet, is to work together. Our hope for the future is that young people in Ireland are taken seriously as stakeholders in achieving the SDGs and that leaders on a local, regional, national, and international level can come together to work intergenerationally for a safer and fairer world. Investment in and prioritisation of young people today, and those that will inhabit this world in decades to come, is paramount. To give adequate weight to the scale of the challenges highlighted within this youth chapter, we call upon the government of Ireland to officially establish a Commissioner for Future Generations who can work on a collaborative basis to ensure that Ireland is a country that young people can continue to be proud of.

33   - UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" para 53, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.
34   - National Youth Council of Ireland (2019) "Vote at 16" https://www.youth.ie/get-involved/campaigns/vote-at-16/>.

6 | What does the data show?

Chapter 6: What does the data show?

6.1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership.

- GOAL 1: No Poverty
- GOAL 2: Zero Hunger
- GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being
- GOAL 4: Quality Education
- GOAL 5: Gender Equality
- GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
- GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- GOAL 13: Climate Action
- GOAL 14: Life Below Water
- GOAL 15: Life on Land
- GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- GOAL 17: Partnerships for the Goals

They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.
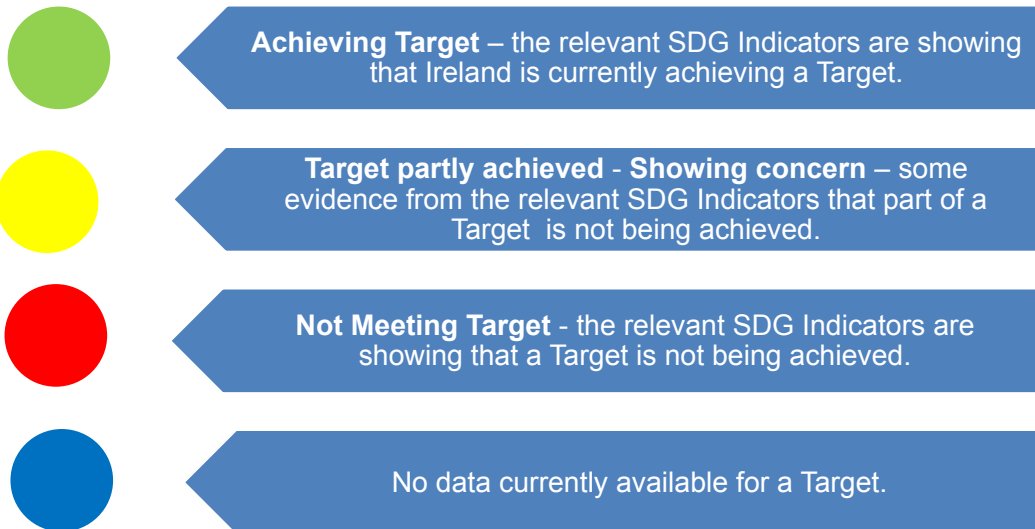
6.2 Methodology

The 17 SDGs are defined in a list of 169 SDG Targets and progress towards these Targets is tracked by 232 unique UN SDG Indicators. These Indicators were agreed at the UN for monitoring progress towards the goals globally facilitating comparison across countries.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) has sourced data for 211 (91%) of these indicators, and published information on each of the 17 SDG Goals, over the period February 2020 to April 2023. These publications provide detailed data on the Indicators associated with the Goals and this information is used to carry out the analysis of Ireland's progress toward the SDG Targets[35].

The CSO, Government Departments and organisations collaborate to bring together data required in these reports for Ireland's SDGs. This collaboration is formalised under the SDG Data Governance Board, which meets on a quarterly basis.

Progress towards the SDG Targets is measured through a traffic light approach using the following classification:

Achieving Target – the relevant SDG Indicators are showing that Ireland is currently achieving a Target.

Target partly achieved - **Showing concern** – some evidence from the relevant SDG Indicators that part of a Target is not being achieved.

Not Meeting Target - the relevant SDG Indicators are showing that a Target is not being achieved.

No data currently available for a Target.

35   https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/unsustainabledevelopmentgoals/

6.3 Assessment

The main results of this analysis are that:

- 81% of the Targets (136) are being fully achieved

- 11% of the Targets (19) are being partly achieved – showing concern.

- 5% of the Targets (9) are not being achieved.

- There is no data available for 3% of the Targets (5).

Measuring Ireland's Progress towards the SDG Targets - 2023
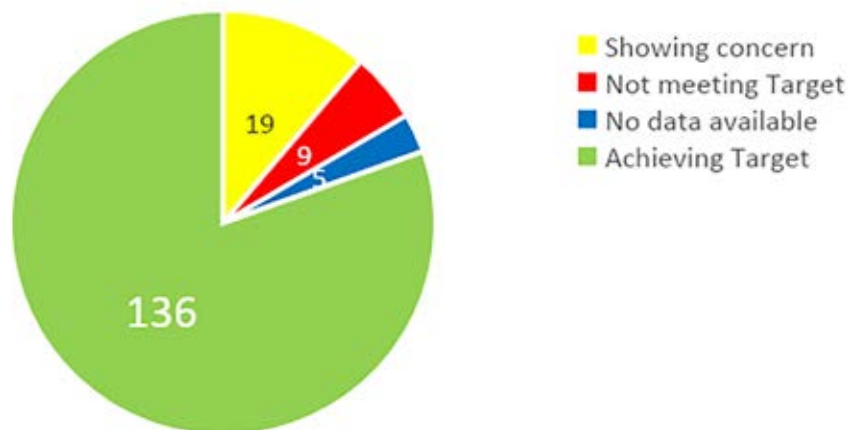
The nine Targets which are not being achieved are associated with the following Goals:

- GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation – one Target relating to water quality.

- GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy – one Target relating to renewable energy targets.

- GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – two Targets relating to municipal waste and sexual offences.

- GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production – three Targets relating to material footprint & consumption and fossil-fuel subsidies.

- GOAL 13: Climate Action – one Target relating to Green House Gas emissions.

- GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal – one target relating to official development assistance.

Achieving 🟢 Not Achieving 🔴
Showing Concern 🟡 No Data Available 🔵

SDG Targets – Traffic Light Summary 2023

Goal	Traffic Light	Goal	Traffic Light
GOAL 1: No Poverty	🟢	GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality	🟢🟡
GOAL 2: Zero Hunger	🟢	GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	🟢🟡🔴
GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being	🟢	GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	🟢🔴
GOAL 4: Quality Education	🟢	GOAL 13: Climate Action	🟢🔴
GOAL 5: Gender Equality	🟢🟡🔵	GOAL 14: Life Below Water	🟢🟡
GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	🟢🟡🔴	GOAL 15: Life on Land	🟢🔵
GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	🟢🟡🔴	GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions	🟢🟡🔵
GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	🟢🟡	GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal	🟢🔴🔵
GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure	🟢🟡	Overall	🟢🟡🔴🔵

No. of Targets		Traffic Light	Observations
Total	For which data sourced	Achieving 🟢 Showing Concern 🟡 Not Achieving 🔴 No Data Available 🔵	
Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere			
7	7	🟢	• Data sourced for all targets • All Targets are being achieved
Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture			
8	8	🟢	• Data sourced for all targets • All Targets are being achieved
Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages			
13	13	🟢	• Data sourced for all targets • All Targets are being achieved
Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all			
10	10	🟢	• Data sourced for all targets • All Targets are being achieved
Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls			
9	8	🟢🟡🔵	• Data is not available for Target 5.2 - violence against women and girls. • It is difficult to accurately measure Target 5.3 -Elimination of harmful practices. • Achieving remaining 7 targets.

No. of Targets		Traffic Light	Observations
		Achieving ● (green)	
		Showing Concern ● (yellow)	
Total	For which data sourced	Not Achieving ● (red)	
		No Data Available ● (blue)	

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

8	8	(pie chart)	• Not achieving Target 6.3 – water quality. • Concern for Target 6.4 - water stress levels are increasing. • Concern for Target 6.a - fiscal support for international cooperation and capacity-building is reducing. • Achieving remaining 5 targets.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

5	5	(pie chart)	• Not on track to achieve renewable energy targets – Target 7.2. • Fiscal support reducing for Targets 7.a & 7.b in the areas of international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research: and technology & infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services. • Achieving remaining 2 targets.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

12	12	(pie chart)	• Slight increase in material footprint and domestic material consumption. • Gender pay gap noted. • Achieving remaining10 targets

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

8	8	(pie chart)	• Slight increase in CO_2 emissions post COVID-19 – Target 9.4. • Achieving remaining 7 targets.

No. of Targets		Traffic Light	Observations
Total	For which data sourced	Achieving 🟢 Showing Concern 🟡 Not Achieving 🔴 No Data Available 🔵	

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

| 10 | 10 | | • Social, economic, and political inclusion challenges identified for unemployed & retired – Target 10.2.
• Equal opportunity and inequalities identified – Target 10.3.
• Gini coefficient not reducing – Target 10.4.
• Transaction costs of migrant remittances reducing slowly – Target 10.c.
• Achieving remaining 6 targets. |

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

| 10 | 10 | | • Challenges identified for housing certain groups – Target 11.1.
• Land consumption increasing – Target 11.3.
• Municipal waste increasing – Target 11.6.
• Sexual Offences increasing - Target – 11.7.
• Achieving remaining 6 targets. |

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

| 11 | 11 | | • Material Footprint and Consumption increasing – Target 12.2.
• Municipal waste increasing – Target 12.5.
• Fossil-fuel subsidies increasing – Target 12.c.
• Achieving remaining 8 targets. |

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

| 5 | 5 | | • Green House Gas emissions increasing – Target 13.2.
• Achieving remaining 4 targets |

No. of Targets		Traffic Light	Observations
		Achieving 🟢	
		Showing Concern 🟡	
Total	For which data sourced	Not Achieving 🔴	
		No Data Available 🔵	

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, Seas and marine resources for sustainable development			
10	10		• OSPAR - concern for Eutrophication & seafloor litter – Target 14.1. • Achieving remaining 9 targets
Goal 15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss			
12	11		• No data for Target 15.b - Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries. • Achieving remaining 11 targets.
Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels			
12	11		• Incidences of crime increasing, and bribery identified , Targets 16.2, 16.3 & 16.5. • Issues around satisfaction with health care identified – Target 16.6. • No data for Target 16.4 - illicit financial and arms flows. • Achieving remaining 4 targets.
Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development			
19	15		• Not meeting ODA commitment – Target 17.2. • No data for Targets - 17.7 & 17.9. • Achieving remaining 14 targets.
Overall Summary			
169	161		• Concern on 19 targets (11%). • No data for 5 targets (3%). • Not meeting 9 targets (5%). • Achieving 136 targets (81%).

6.4 SDG Publications – Goals 1 to 17

The 17 publications in 'Ireland's UN SDGs Indicator Reports' is a series from the CSO, which publishes UN SDG indicators data for Ireland. These publications monitor and report on how Ireland is progressing towards meeting its targets under the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The 17 publications include data for Ireland for each of the SDG indicators selected by the UN to measure the SDGs. Data is available at various levels of detail which include geography, gender, age group and other categories, where applicable.

To date, the CSO has published detailed indicator reports on all 17 Goals and these reports are available on the CSO website at:

https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/unsustainabledevelopmentgoals

The following infographics summarize topics relating to data on a particular goal. All of the statistical publications relating to each goal are available on CSO_SDGs where infographics, commentary, and explanatory notes, as well as more detailed interactive tables are available. These inforgraphics list key data relating to targets on each goal and is a useful way of finding statistics at a glance. The infographic also includes a map with data at county level (or region), which emphasises the regional dimension to the SDGs.
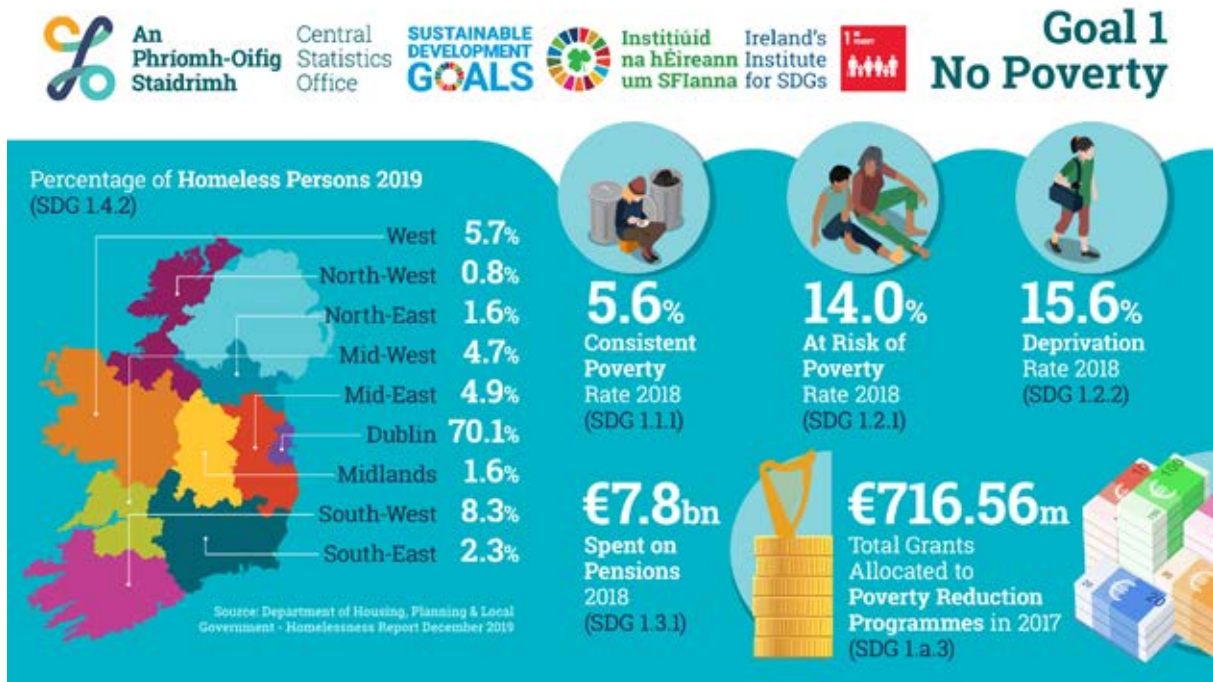
Ireland's UN SDGs 2019 - Report on Indicators for Goal 1 No Poverty - CSO - Central Statistics Office
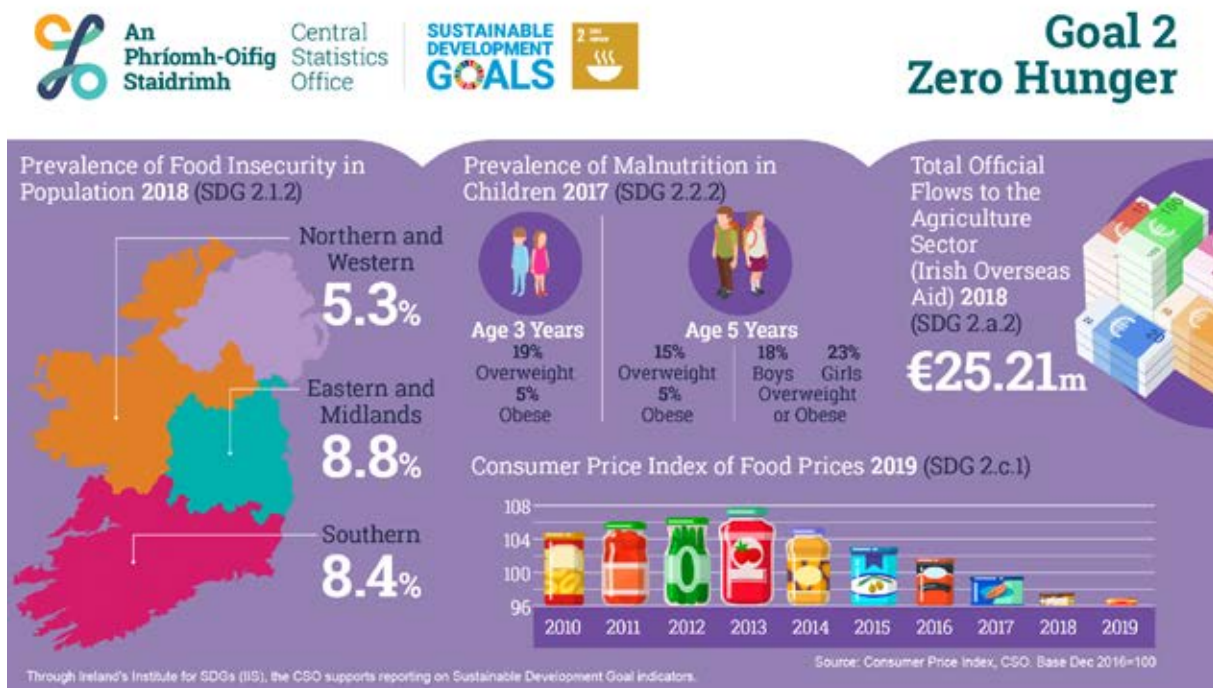
UN SDG's Goal 2 - Zero Hunger - CSO - Central Statistics Office
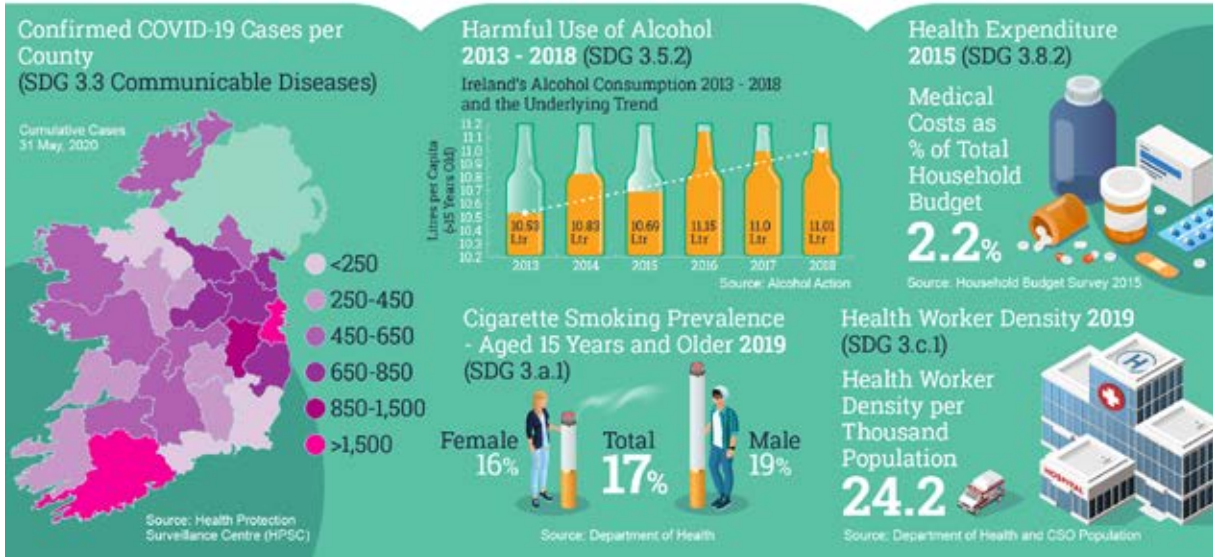
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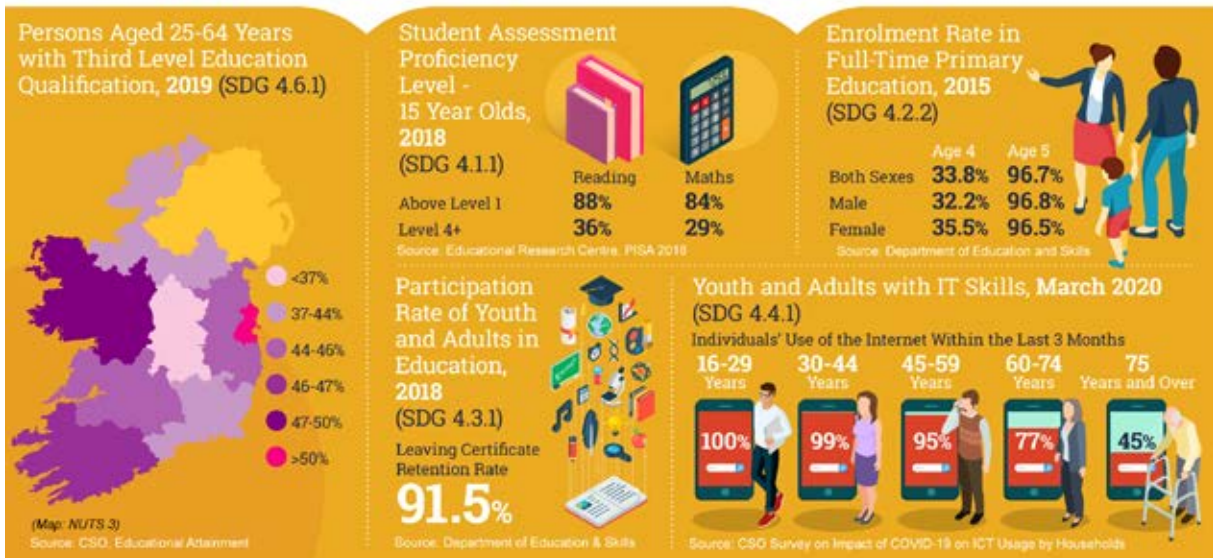
UN SDG's Goal 4 - Quality Education - CSO - Central Statistics Office
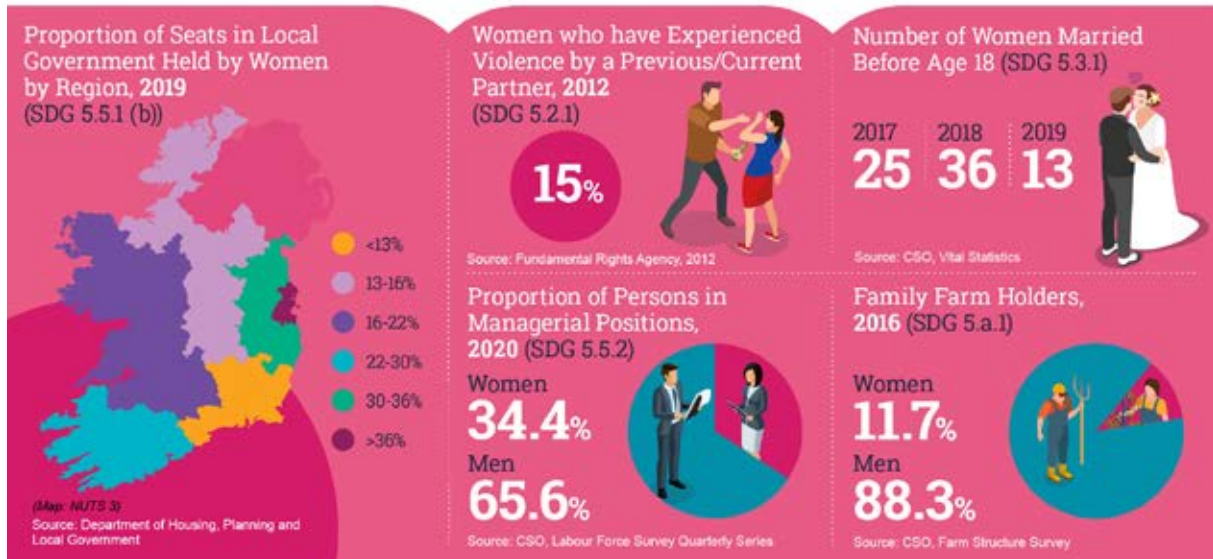
UN SDG's Goal 5 - Gender Equality - CSO - Central Statistics Office
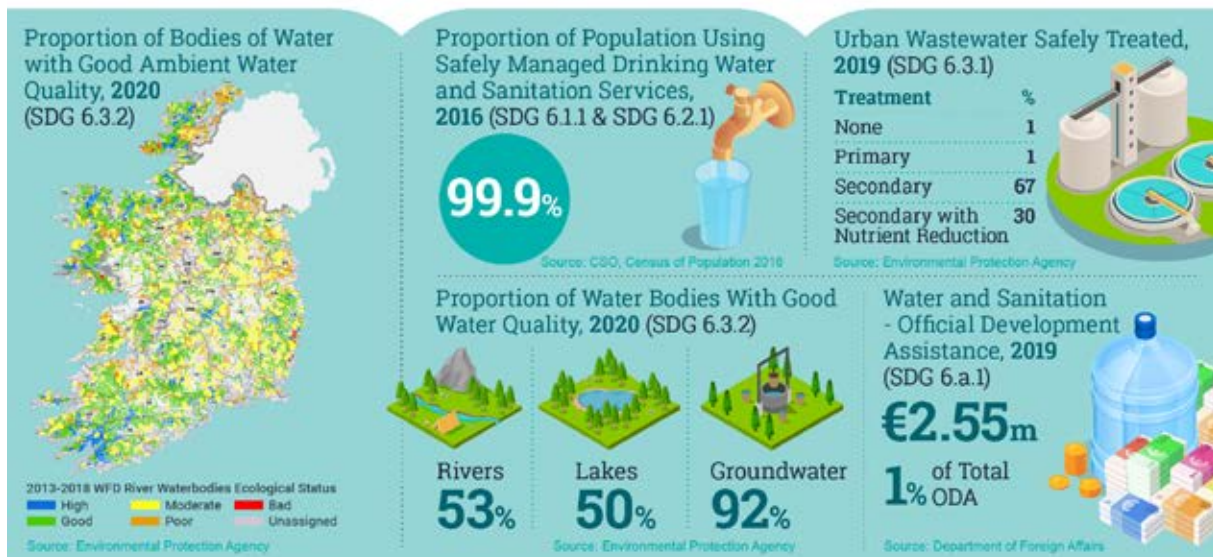
UN SDG's Goal 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation - CSO - Central Statistics Office
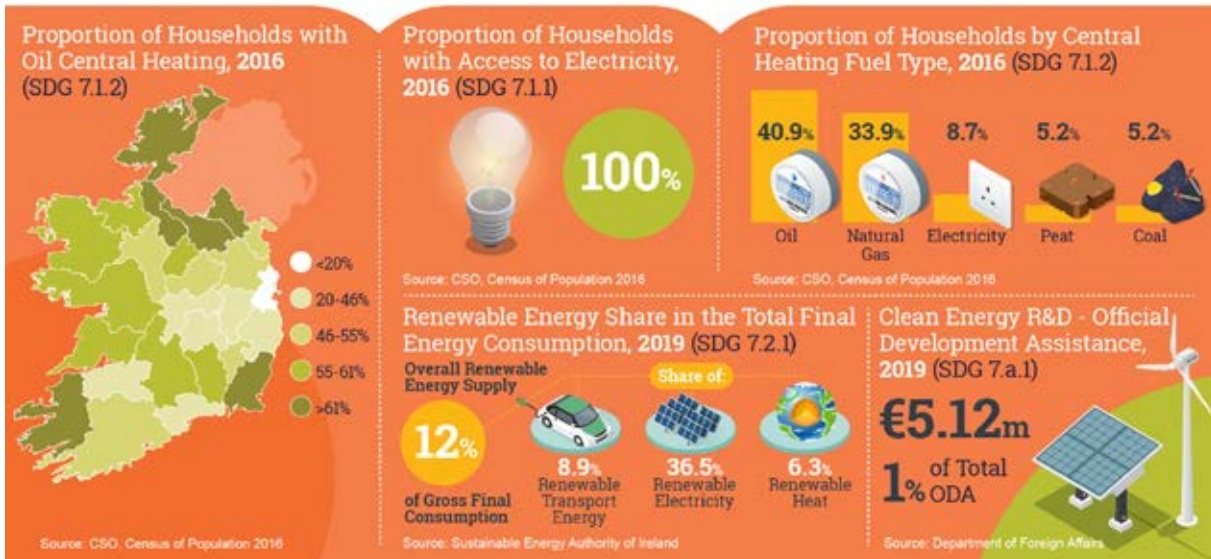
UN SDG's Goal 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy - CSO - Central Statistics Office
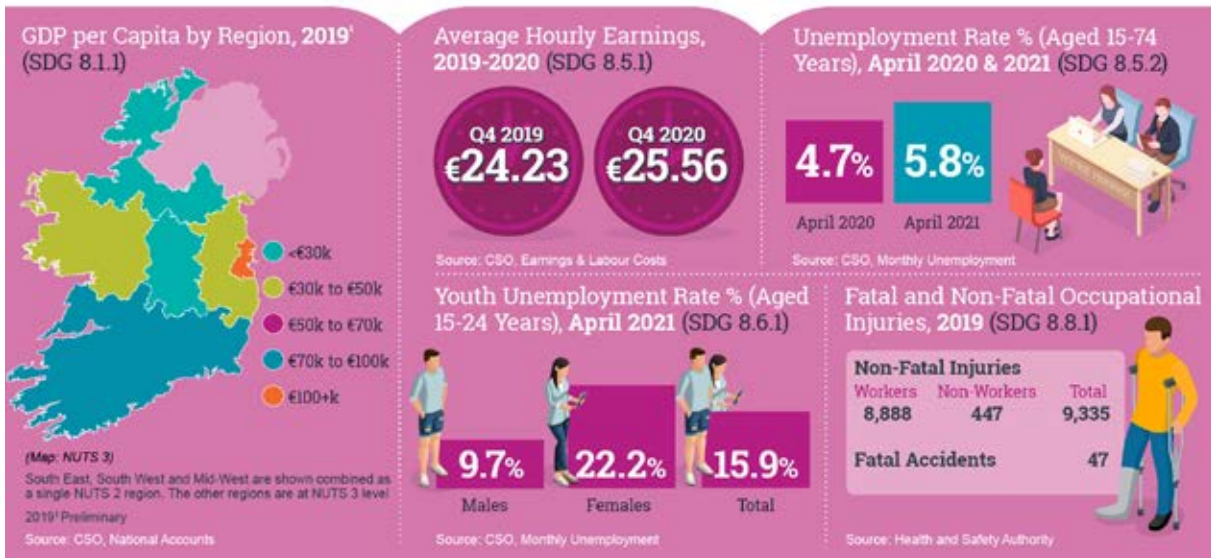
UN SDG's Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth -2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

UN SDG's Goal 9 - Industry Innovation and Infrastructure 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
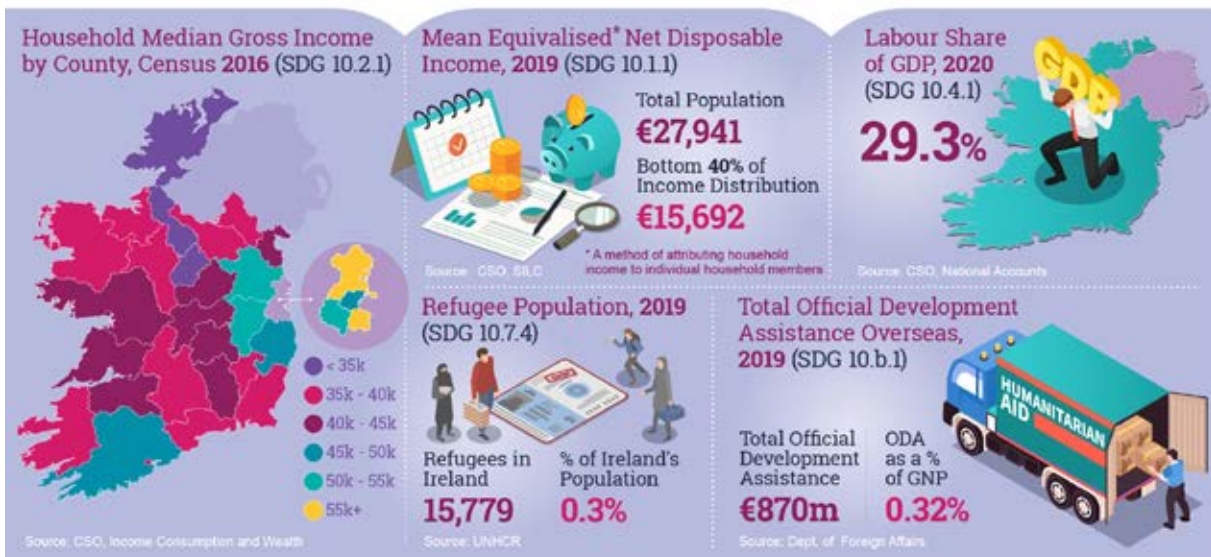
UN SDG's Goal 10 - Reduced Inequalities 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
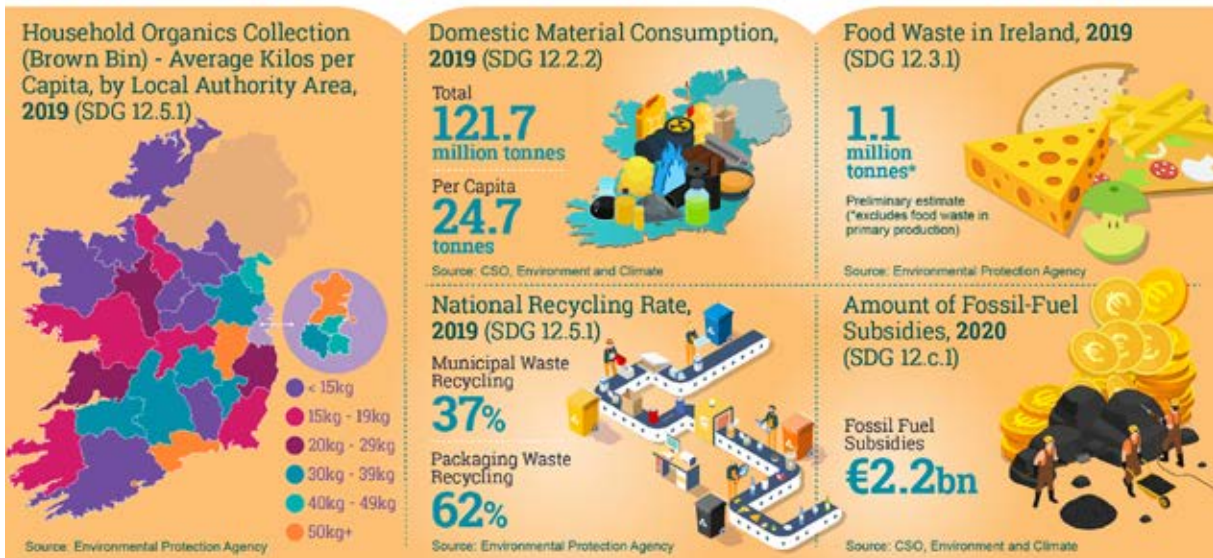
Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
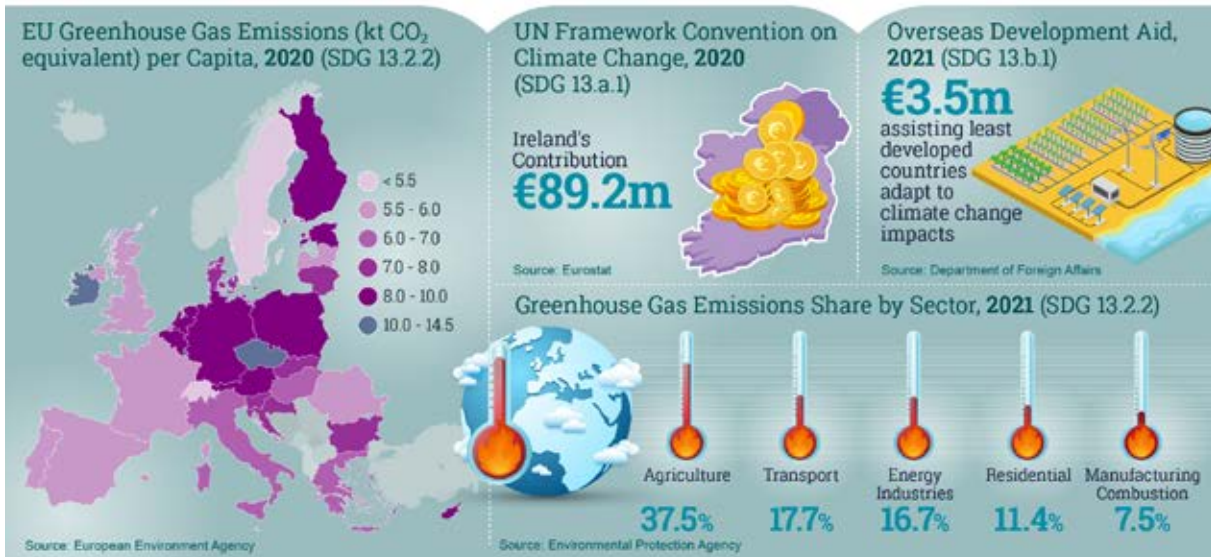
Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 13 Climate Action 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
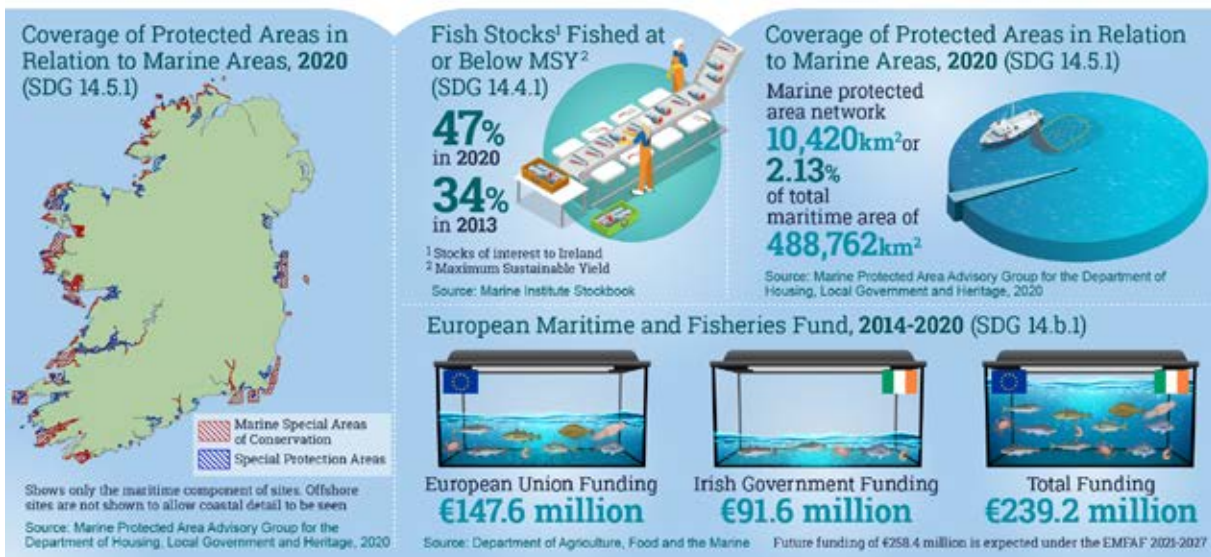
Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 14 Life Below Water 2021 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
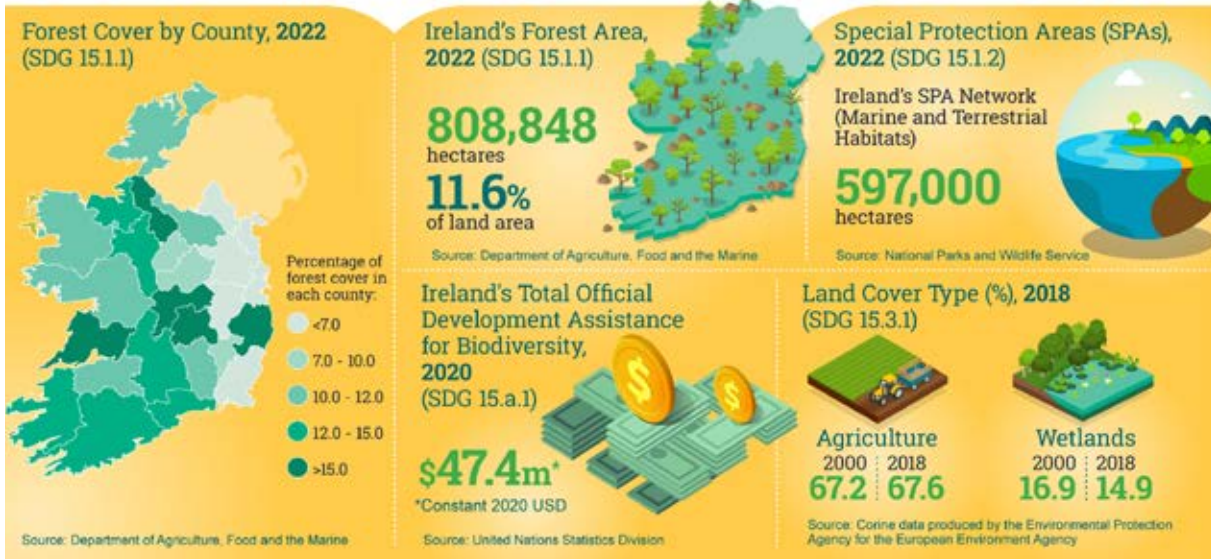
Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 15 Life on Land 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office
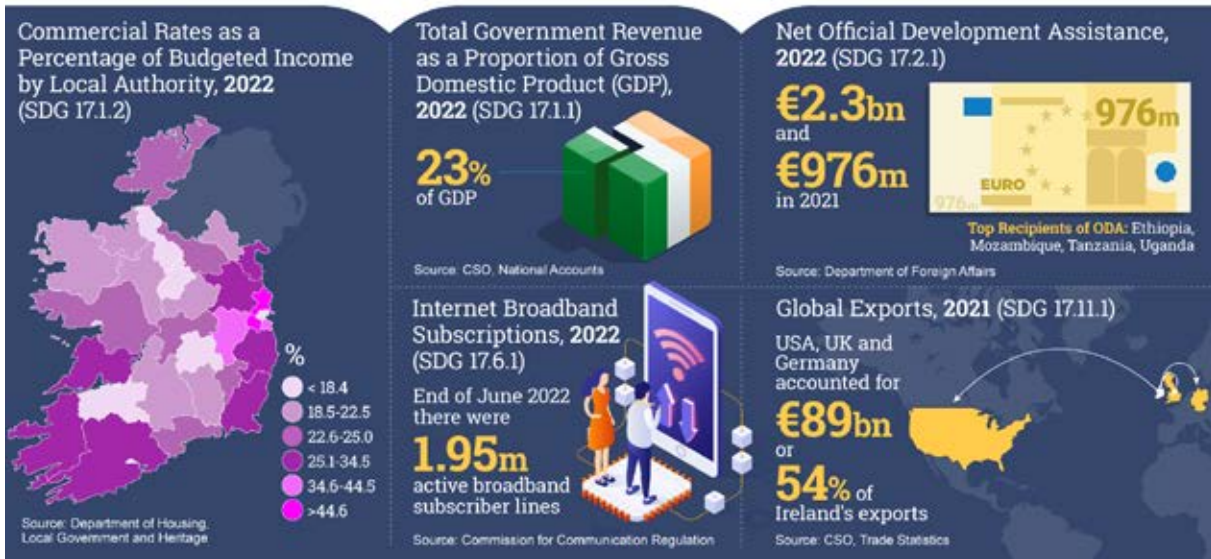
Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals 2022 - CSO - Central Statistics Office

7 | A Thematic Review Of Building Back Better While Leaving No One Behind

Chapter 7: A Thematic Review Of Building Back Better While Leaving No One Behind

This chapter considers specific areas of importance nationally for the achievement of the SDGs under the overall theme of this VNR, which is Building Back Better while Leaving No One Behind, and encompasses:

- Education

- Employment and Social Protection

- Health

- Community Engagement and Inclusion

- Housing

- Climate Action and Circular Economy

Civil Society Assessment

Our national stakeholder Forum in April 2023 focused specifically on the VNR and all of the themes were discussed in workshops by civil society.

We asked our civil society participants three questions as follows:-

- What Ireland has done well;

- What Ireland needs to do better;

- What messages would civil society like to convey to the international community.

At the end of each of the following chapters there is an overview of the outcome of these workshops.

7.1 Education

7.1.1 Introduction

In keeping with Ireland's whole-of-Government approach to the SDGs, the Department of Education (DoE), the Department of Further and Higher Education, Innovation, Research and Science (DFHERIS) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), lead and progress delivery of SDG 4 on Quality Education through a lifelong learning approach.

Through their unique positions in society, early learning and care settings, schools, further and higher education institutions can foster student leadership and workplace knowledge and skills

supporting implementation of the SDGs in society. This can have a far-reaching and positive influence and impact on the students and their surrounding communities, partnerships, and work.

Ireland performs well overall on SDG 4 [See Chapter 6 for CSO data]. The Irish government is deeply committed to quality education and the value of inclusion and works to continually improve this performance to ensure that no one is left behind by the education system.

In Budget 2023, €9.6 billion has been allocated to continue investment in our education system at primary and post-primary levels. The total allocation for further and higher education in Budget 2023 is €4.1 billion. This is an increase of 14% in 2023. To note, 2023 includes temporary funding allocation of Brexit Adjustment Reserve (BAR), Ukraine, National Recovery and Resilience Plan and COVID-19 measures.

In May 2022, Funding the Future, a landmark policy roadmap on the future of higher education, was published. A core funding gap of €307 million was identified with €40m being initially provided towards it in Budget 2023. Additional funding through the annual budgetary process will enable a number of key reforms in the delivery of higher education.

The following national policies drive the achievement of SDG 4 Quality Education in Ireland:

- **Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development: ESD to 2030** [SDG target 4.7]

Ireland's Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development: ESD to 2030 was launched in June 2022 and is accompanied by an Implementation Plan for the years 2022 – 2026. The strategy adopts a lifelong learning approach, from early learning and care to third level education and research and extending beyond to engage with local communities and enterprise. As well as supporting the achievement of SDG Target 4.7, ESD to 2030 will be an enabler for the achievement of all of the SDGs.

ESD to 2030 sets out five key priority areas: 1) Advancing policy; 2) Transforming learning environments 3) Building capacities of educators 4) Empowering and mobilising young people and 5) Accelerating local level actions. At the heart of the strategy is a whole of institution approach to ESD, transforming educational spaces into places and spaces for sustainability and inclusion and embedding ESD across teaching and learning, research and operational environments. Actions set out in the strategy are aligned with and support the achievement of objectives in the SDG National Implementation Plan and Climate Action Plan.

- **Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-2025)** (SDG target 4.7)

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) is contributing to the implementation of SDG 4.7 through their work in support of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Ireland. The Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-2025) defines GCE as a life-long educational process, which aims to increase public awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, inter-dependent and unequal world in which we live. DFA works closely with other Government departments in particular the Department of Education to ensure coherence with the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development which is also contributing to indicator 4.7. The agreement of the Dublin Declaration on Global Education in November

2022 which is a strategy for improving Global Education in Europe to 2050, has also been an important step in strengthening policy coherence on this issue.

- **First 5: A whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028**

First 5 - a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families is a ten-year plan. It seeks to help make sure all children have positive early experiences and get a great start in life.

- **Literacy and Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2011-2020** – (SDG target 4.6)

The Literacy and Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2011-2020 has now expired and development of a follow on strategy is underway. Research was commissioned to include the identification of achievements, gaps, best practice and possible areas for action for the new 10 year strategy. Feedback from a stakeholder engagement and public consultation will also feed into the development of the new strategy.

- **Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy** – (SDG target 4.6)

The Adult Literacy for Life (ALL) Strategy, sets out a cross-government, cross-economy and cross-society approach to achieve the vision of an Ireland, where every adult has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to engage in society and realise their potential.

7.1.2 Building Back Better

A variety of projects, at all levels of education, are supporting efforts to Build Back Better, as detailed below.

World Wise Global Schools Programme

The World Wise Global Schools Programme supports the embedding of Global Citizenship Education in post-primary schools across the country, reaching close to 70% of schools and a new partnership is working to strengthen GCE in early years and primary education. Support for Youth 2030 and the Saolta programme in recent years is strengthening GCE in the non-formal education sector and the adult and community sector – (SDG target 4.7). Youth 2030 is led by the National Youth Council of Ireland in partnership with Maynooth University, Concern and Trocaire. Saolta is led by the NGO Development Perspectives in partnership with Aontas, Irish Rural Link, Concern and Maynooth University. Both programmes were established in 2019 and aim to build the capacity of youth workers and people working in the adult and community sector to integrate GCE into their practice as well as supporting whole – of- organisation approaches, resource development, research and policy dialogue. Both programmes are supported by Irish Aid/DFA.

Early Childhood Care [SDG target 4.2]

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, which was introduced in 2010, now provides all children between 2 years and 8 months and 5 years and 6 months with two

years of State funded pre-school education for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week. In March 2023 107,000 children i.e. 97% of all children in the age cohort now avail of ECCE.

In addition, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), introduced in 2019, provides a combination of universal and targeted subsidies, as well as free places for vulnerable children. More than 110,000 children were benefitting from this Scheme as of January 2023 – twice the number of children in January 2022. OECD data shows Ireland's performance in supporting families, and particularly lone parent families, with the cost of early learning and childcare is markedly improving - with Ireland having the highest decrease in early learning and childcare costs to families across the EU over the period 2019-2021 and in 2021. Net childcare costs as a share of the household's net income for lone parents on low income are now below the EU average.

Progressing a more unified tertiary education and skills system

In 2022, the Government published a policy platform paper detailing the vision and objectives of the policy "Progressing a Unified Tertiary System for Learning, Skills and Knowledge". The new policy direction aims to progress the development of a more seamless and cohesive tertiary system capable of meeting the diverse needs of all learners throughout their lifelong pursuit for knowledge and skills, more closely aligning research and innovation to higher and further education and training and strategically positioning the system to better address the future knowledge and skills needs of learners and researchers, economy, environment and society – (SDG target 4.4).

Upskilling and reskilling provision

Further Education and Training (FET) provision includes both labour market focused programmes and programmes with a strong social inclusion dimension. These programmes at levels 1-6 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), focus on providing skills that enable direct progression to the workplace, while also enabling pathways into higher education, and typically have a strong work-based component. They include:

- Skills to Advance - an employee development policy framework, which provides support for vulnerable groups in the Irish workforce who have lower skills levels and who need more opportunities to avoid displacement or to avail of emerging job opportunities. It allows employers to develop their workforce to adapt to changes in work practices, technology and markets. To date over 39,500 employees have started Skills to Advance training.

- The Skills to Compete initiative, launched in 2020, forms part of the SOLAS Recovery Skills Response Programme, which is part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). To date, over 29,000 learners have enrolled in Skills to Compete Courses.

In Higher Education, upskilling and reskilling provision is available through Springboard+ and Human Capital Initiative (HCI), with funding from the National Training Fund.

- Springboard+ complements the core State-funded education and training system and provides free and subsidised upskilling and reskilling higher education opportunities in areas of identified skills need, with a particular focus on unemployed people with a previous history of employment and those returning to the workforce.

- Since 2011, over €330m has been spent on Springboard+ and over 90,000 people have benefited from the programme to date. Springboard+ 2022 is providing over 11,000 places on 310 courses, from Level 6 - 9 on the NFQ. All courses provide job-readiness training and most offer the opportunity for work placement, project-based learning or industry site visits where appropriate.

- The Human Capital Initiative forms a key part of the strategic response to a changing world of work and consists of 3 main pillars - graduate conversion and specialisation courses, additional places on undergraduate provision, and an innovation and agility fund. Pillar 3 will deliver 24 projects in higher education institutions, a number of which will directly contribute to the SDG goals.

Improving energy efficiency and reducing emissions across the education sector – (SDG Target 4a).

In September 2022, the Government announced the Building Blocks – Improvement Grant, a €9m Capital Grant for the Early Learning and Childcare Sector. Grants will range from €35,000 to €75,000 across two separate strands: Green Energy and Retrofit.

The Schools Energy Retrofit Pathfinder programme targeting a reduction in energy usage and CO2 emissions by 51% has to date retrofitted 41 schools with work on a further 15 schools underway. The 2023/24 pathfinder has a budget of €35 million.

The Higher Education Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Pathfinder Programme (EEDPP) is supporting higher education institutions in making progress towards 2030 targets of a 50% improvement in energy efficiency and 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. There are 16 projects currently at various stages of design, procurement and construction. A third call has been issued with a budget of €26 million.

Work has commenced on a governance structure for an Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Pathfinder Programme in the Further Education and Training (FET) sector. The main objective of the Programme is to implement a range of energy retrofit and renewable heating solutions in FET buildings, test approaches, build capacity and develop a replicable scalable energy retrofit model. This will help deliver on the sectors energy and decarbonisation targets. It is planned that design will commence on identified projects in 2023 subject to approval of funding.

A review of the School Transport Scheme is underway and is examining options to reduce car journeys, commitments in respect of climate action and the potential of the School Transport Scheme to promote sustainability in transport. Initiatives that encourage walking and cycling to school, including the Safe Routes to Schools Programme which is operated by Green-Schools in partnership with the National Transport Authority and the local authorities, are also being reviewed.

7.1.3 Leaving No One Behind

Leaving No One Behind is supported by a number of projects across all levels of the education sector, which are listed below.

Accessibility and inclusion in Early Learning and Care

Access and Inclusion Model

Children with disabilities are supported to meaningfully engage with ECCE, the free school scheme, through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). The goal of AIM is to empower providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience for children in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early learning and care. AIM offers tailored, practical supports based on need and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability. This support can include specialist advice, equipment or extra staffing where more intensive intervention is required.

AIM has recently been evaluated and potential extensions to AIM beyond children in the ECCE programme will be considered to further support the access and inclusion of children with additional needs.

The National Childcare Scheme

The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) introduced in 2019 provides a combination of universal and targeted subsidies to support access for all income levels. NCS makes early learning and childcare more affordable, and in some instances free, to these families - with those on lowest incomes receiving the greatest level of support.

The NCS includes sponsorship arrangements that allows for additional support for vulnerable families where there is an identified need for early learning and childcare on the grounds of child development or child welfare, for programme refugees or where the family are experiencing homelessness. In addition, a new strand of funding is under development, whereby services will be provided with a proportionate mix of universal and targeted supports to support children and families accessing their services who are experiencing disadvantage.

More than 110,000 were benefitting as of January 2023 – twice the number of children in January 2022. OECD data shows Ireland's performance in supporting families, and particularly lone parent families, with the cost of early learning and childcare is markedly improving - with Ireland having the highest decrease in early learning and childcare costs to families across the EU over the period 2019-2021 and in 2021. Net childcare costs as a share of the household's net income for lone parents on low income are now below the EU average.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

The concept of Leaving No One Behind is captured in the DEIS Plan 2017, a key policy initiative to address educational disadvantage at school level, providing pathways to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion.

A wide range of supports are provided to all schools to support the inclusion of all students and address barriers to students achieving their potential. Supplementing these universal supports, the DEIS programme provides a targeted and equitable way to address concentrated educational disadvantage at school level that promotes equity across the primary and post-primary sector. Schools in the DEIS programme avail of a range of targeted supports including additional classroom teaching posts, home school community liaison coordinator posts, DEIS grant funding, enhanced book grants, curriculum supports, priority access to Continuing Professional Development and access to the School Completion Programme. All DEIS schools also have priority access to the School Meals programme which has funding of approximately €90m.

In March 2022, access to the scheme was increased to an additional 322 schools with additional levels of support to 39 existing DEIS schools at an additional cost of €32m. This means that the DEIS programme now supports over 240,000 students in over 1,200 schools, over 30% of all schools. The increase is supported by a 20% increase in funding for the programme from €150m in 2021 to over €180m from 2023.

The success of the DEIS programme is recognised internationally with Ireland found to have one of the lowest rates of early school leaving and international assessments finding an educational system that is both high performing and comparatively equitable.

Enhanced Summer Programme

The 2023 Summer Programme ensures all schools in Ireland have an opportunity to run a programme for those children that need it the most, so that they can be supported, nurtured and encouraged to continue to engage in a fun and inclusive educational setting.

The enhanced summer programme is designed and developed to ensure supports are targeted to increase the availability of a school based programme for children with special   educational needs and to provide expanded literacy and numeracy summer camps for students in DEIS schools. The total funding for the programme in 2023 is €40 million.

Accommodation of Ukrainian refugees

As of 1st March 2023, 14,931 pupils from Ukraine have formally enrolled in schools across 26 counties. The Department of Education continues to support schools in their immediate responses to children and young people from Ukraine, especially through the Regional Education and Language Teams (REALT). The primary role of the REALT is to assist in finding school places for these children and to support schools to meet their needs.

Accessibility and inclusion in Higher Education

The fourth National Access Plan – A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education (2022 – 2028) was launched in August 2022. The vision of the Plan is to ensure that the student body entering into, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

The Plan seeks to target vulnerable students or students who have experienced disadvantage and therefore face challenges in accessing higher education and experiencing belonging in higher education. The three main priority groups are: students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; students who are members of Irish Traveller and Roma communities, and students with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. The Plan includes national targets for each of these priority groups.

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) is a dedicated fund, committed to increasing participation by under-represented groups in higher education. In 2022, the PATH fund was increased by €5m to support the implementation of the new Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022 – 2028 for PATH funded measures bringing the annual PATH funding to €14.3m in 2022.

Promoting accessibility and inclusion in Further Education and Training

FET provision in Ireland is largely free or heavily subsidised. There are allowance schemes available for those wishing to re-enter further education and training and or higher education including the Student Grant Scheme (SUSI) and the FET training allowance.

A key pillar of the Further Education and Training Strategy is 'Fostering Inclusion'. As part of this, SOLAS published A Conceptual Framework of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for the Irish Further Education and Training Sector in 2020, and an accompanying guide UDL for FET Practitioners: Guidance for Implementing UDL in Irish Further Education and Training in 2021.

The FET sector in Ireland is diverse, with over 197 different nationalities enrolled in FET (SOLAS, 2020). English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is one of the most popular courses across FET for non-Irish learners. ESOL is currently being delivered by the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs) across the country to migrants, refugees, and Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection Status (BOTP), displaced due to the war in Ukraine.

FET plays a critical role in supporting refugees and asylum seekers who may be distant from the labour market and/or lacking core skills necessary to progress into other educational options or employment. It also plays a critical role in supporting community integration, as classes offer a valuable opportunity to engage with other learners and ETB staff.

Funding for community education

The Reach Fund aims to provide funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners in accessing and participating in community education. The Fund focuses on building the digital infrastructure of providers, including providing devices and software, and increasing their capacity to deliver online learning/blended learning to meet the needs of learners. Over 500 projects were supported in 2020, and over 600 projects in 2021. Provision has continued into 2022 and 2023. Community Education providers can apply for funding across several categories including learner assistance, green projects, support for refugee groups and digital support.

7.1.4 Case studies

Case study: The Access and Inclusion Model in Early Childhood Care and Education

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) provides a range of universal and targeted measures to support children with disabilities take part in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school programme in mainstream settings, and to help make pre-school services more accessible and inclusive – benefitting all children in those services.

AIM has 7 levels of universal and targeted supports based on the needs of the child and the pre-school setting they are attending.

Universal supports under AIM include:	
Level 1:	An inclusive culture within services through the National Inclusion policy, guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), provision of funding for Leadership for Inclusion (LINC) training and employment of Inclusion Co-Ordinator positions in ECCE sessions.
Level 2:	Provision of information on AIM for parents and providers through www.aim.gov.ie and local County Childcare Committees.
Level 3:	Continued development of a qualified and confident workforce through the provision of ongoing training courses such as Hanen and Sensory Processing E-Learning programme (SPEL)
Targeted supports under AIM include:	
Level 4:	Access to expert early year's educational advice and support from a team of dedicated Early Years Specialists.
Level 5:	A programme of capital grants for specialised equipment, appliances, assistive technology and/or minor alterations for pre-school settings.
Level 6:	Access to therapeutic services where they are critical to enable a child to be enrolled and to meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme.
Level 7:	Additional assistance in the preschool room to ensure a child's participation in the ECCE programme. AIM provides financial support to the pre-school provider where needed, which can be used either to reduce the adult to child ratio in the pre-school room or to buy in additional assistance. Level 7 assistance is a shared resource for the preschool setting.

Since its foundation in 2016, over 24,000 children have received approximately 54,000 targeted supports in more than 4,000 early years' settings nationally under AIM. The model has been recognised internationally and has won awards for both excellence in practice, and inclusive policy.

Case study: Human Capital Initiative – Resilient Design Curricula for 21st century professionals

The Built Environment accounts for 39% of global greenhouse gas emissions, with operational emissions accounting for 28%, and embodied emissions, associated with the construction of new buildings, accounting for the remaining 11%. To enable the global efforts to reduce carbon emissions, the Architecture, Engineering and Construction (AEC) industry requires graduates equipped to address the challenges that the industry, and society, face.

Under the auspices of the Human Capital Initiative, administered by the Higher Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the six Schools of Architecture in Ireland have formed a national strategic partnership to deliver the Resilient Design Curricula for 21st Century Professionals project.

This project is undertaking a transformative process, reconfiguring and revising the professional curricula in architecture to empower future graduates with the knowledge, skills and, most importantly, the mind-set, to help society address the sustainability challenges encapsulated in the SDGs, with particular focus on Climate Action (SDG 13.3) and Affordable Sustainable Housing (SDG 11.1). It also reflects Irish government policies in Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan, and contextualised within the Places for People, National Policy on Architecture. Project participants from the Schools of Architecture include over 700 students and 70 academic staff. Each of the six academic partners are working closely within their local ecosystem to engage with a range of external stakeholders to share, build capacity, and enhance best-practice through co-creating solutions as joint partners to tackle climate change and the housing crisis.

The project methodology incorporates a number of interconnected facets. A critical needs analysis is determining key skills and knowledge areas needed for future professionals and the prioritisation of these in the specific context of the projects' focus on UN SDGs 11.1 and 13.3. The project is working with key stakeholders across industry, the community, local and national government and the professional bodies, to identify key skills to incorporate into the curriculum, which in turn will imbue future architecture graduates with the capabilities to meet the challenges of Climate Action and Sustainable Housing. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) plays a central role in the project through the upskilling of academic staff to enhance their ability to contribute to the formation and delivery of the Resilient Curriculum, and through the upgrading of the skills and qualifications of graduates and practising architects and professionals in related fields. The project aims to develop a portfolio of new nationally relevant CPDs from each partner, whereby mutual recognition across institutions enables the formation of a joint national award offered jointly at level 9 in Architecture & Climate.

Working closely with architecture students, the project is piloting the reimagining of Architecture Design Studio curriculum towards a problem and design based methodology of projects that confront students with Climate Action and the Housing Crisis within both their regional areas and more broader nationally. A key related goal is to engage with the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland towards the revision of their accreditation requirements for architecture degree programmes, such that they incorporate the necessary sustainability concepts and requirements. Although less than one year into its three-year duration, the project has already made significant progress towards its goals, supported by enthusiastic staff, and students, who recognise its importance for the future of their profession and our planet.

Case study: 5*S: Space, Surveyors and Students - STEM and the Sustainable Development Goals

The 5*S Programme empowers schools and teachers across Ireland to take action on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by providing additional capacity and content through interactive teaching tools on topics such as climate change, gender equality and social justice.

The Departments of Geography/Education in Maynooth University are leading the collaboration with Tailte Éireann's National Mapping Division, the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI), Esri Ireland/ArcGIS For Schools and Technological University Dublin to showcase satellites and survey data to students. **5*S: Space, Surveyors and Students – STEM and the Sustainable Development Goals** is a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) outreach project that builds on two existing national school-based programmes to target a national audience. A collaboration between Esri Ireland's award winning, ArcGIS for Schools programme and the SCSI Day in the Life recruitment programme offers the opportunity to combine a national network of volunteers with an existing data/training infrastructure. 5*S is funded by Science Foundation Ireland and is now entering its fourth year with demonstrations carried out to over 15,000 students, 250 teachers and student teachers and almost 4000 App downloads. 5*S has two main work packages (WP), see figure 1:

WP 1 - Top Down: The top down approach develops and delivers satellite focussed content to students, with content tailored for students aged 13 – 16. Satellite themed content has been developed and delivered for Science, Geography and History. All content is made available to students through ArcGIS StoryMaps (Fig. 1a) with interactive components throughout to interest the students and keep them engaged. The 5*S partnership with the Department of Education in Maynooth University also opens the initiative to teachers and student teachers on both under/postgraduate teaching degrees there and enables co-creation of lesson plans tailored for different age-groups focussed on individual SDGs.

WP 2 - Bottom up: This WP has been designed to promote active, student-lead learning. Encouraged by the success of augmented reality (AR) in apps such as Pokemon Go, the 5*S team have developed a free AR app entitled SatelliteSkill5 (Fig. 1b). SatelliteSkill5 leads the students through a series of interactive challenges using a phone or tablet, introduces them to satellite data and demonstrates the importance of this data and other survey related datasets in tackling the Sustainable Development Goals. 5*S partner Tailte Éireann's National Mapping Division has played an active role on the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) Committee of Experts since 2012 and the UN-GGIM fundamental geospatial data themes are also introduced in this app.

Figure 1: 5*S structure (a) WP1 entails school visits and 'Train the Trainer' events, while WP2 (b) encourages self-directed learning through AR in the SatelliteSkill5 app - Available for free on PlayStore and AppStore https://5sdiscover.maynoothuniversity.ie/downloads/

SDG Assessment 3: 2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development - ESD to 2030
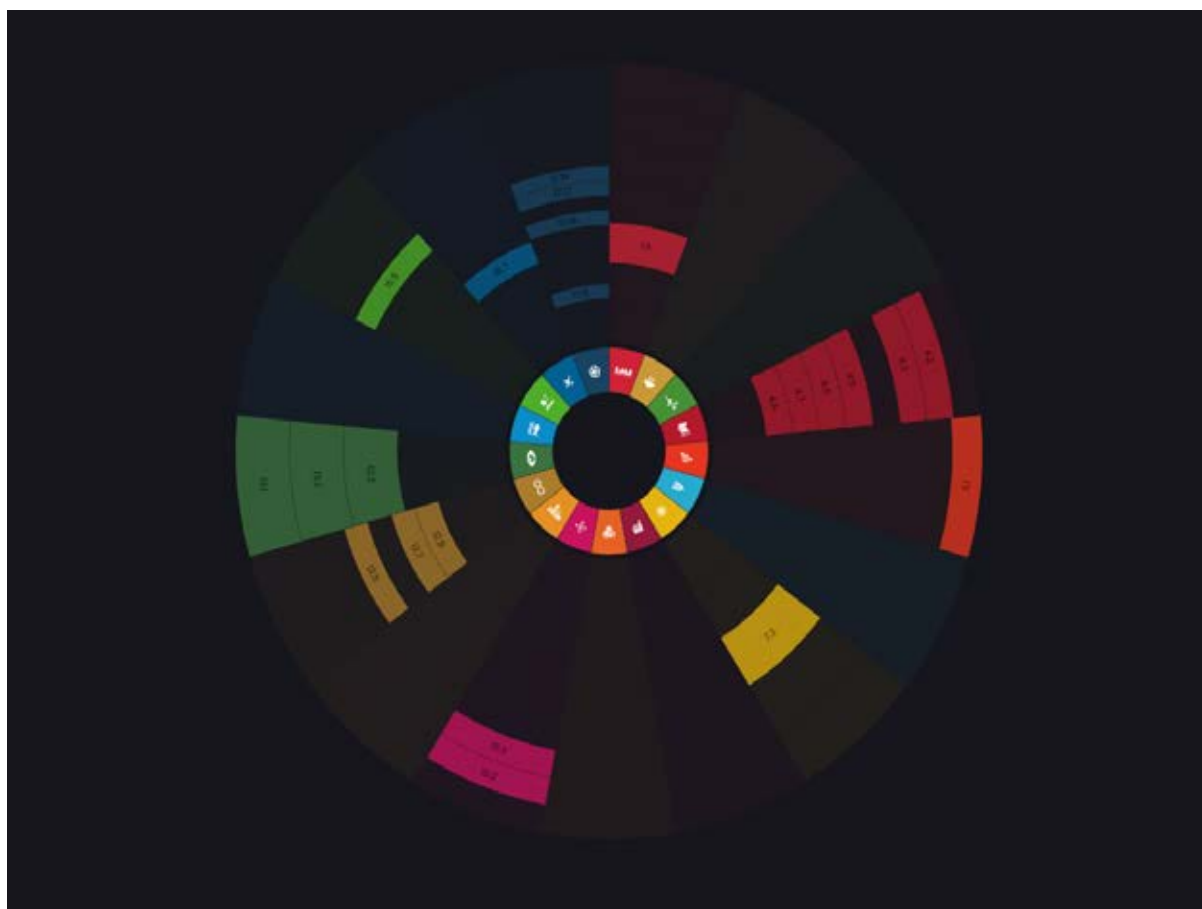
2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development - ESD to 2030 contributes to the progression of 23 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13 Action Climate, SDG 15 Life on Land, SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

SDG Assessment 4: Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
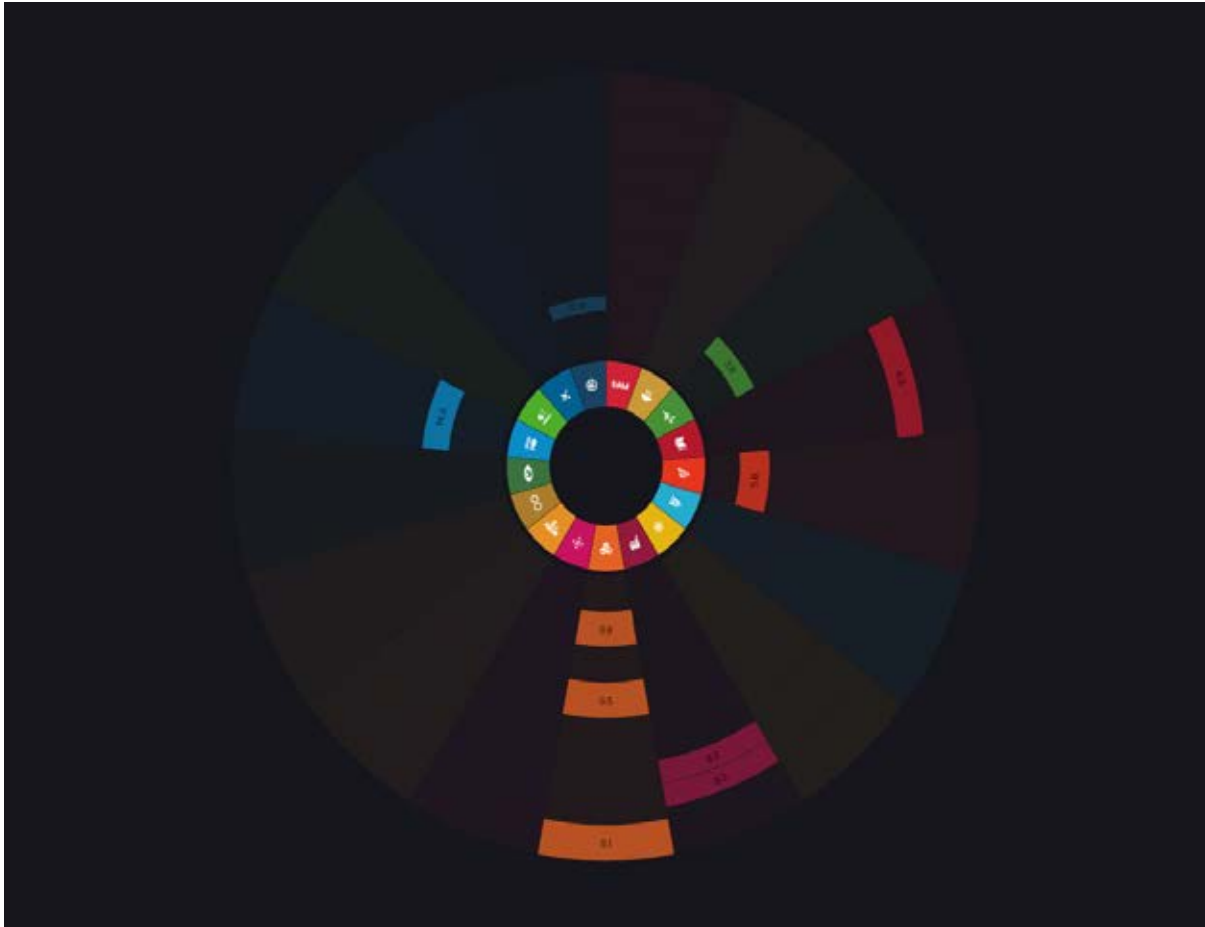
[Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy](#) contributes to the progression of 10 SDG targets under SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 14 Life Below Water and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

Civil Society Assessment – Education

Ireland has done well by:

- Making general education accessible, affordable, and inclusive by committing to universal provision.

- Implementing a robust policy infrastructure across all levels of education.

- Adding the SDGs to educational programmes, thereby raising awareness of the targets that need to be reached.

Ireland could do better by:

- Making third-level education more affordable to those in at-risk groups.

- Embedding and mainstreaming the SDGs and sustainability awareness across all educational curricula.

- Supporting climate consciousness and circular economy jobs by giving more equitable support and recognition to non-formal education and apprenticeships.

Messages to the international community:

- Education is a vital platform for communicating the SDGs and is crucial to their achievement.

- Education is a lifelong learning journey, encompassing much more than formal schooling. Integrating the SDGs and education requires a whole-of-government endeavour.

- Education must be universally affordable and accessible to all, in particular by adapting to the diversity of needs and starting points of individuals within at-risk groups.

7.2 Employment and Social Protection

7.2.1 Introduction

Ireland has been the fastest growing economy in Europe over the past decade and the economy is forecast to outperform global GDP growth over the next two years. We have more people at work than ever before, low youth unemployment, and female labour market participation is at an all-time high. Ireland also continues to be at the forefront of the post-pandemic recovery in Europe, demonstrating strong employment growth, an adaptive enterprise/workforce environment, and strong economic growth indicators.

On the labour market recovery, employment is now at a record high, and the 2.5 million target for employment (i.e. recovering all of the employment lost during the pandemic, and further employment creation), set in the Economic Recovery Plan in mid-2021, was effectively met by the end of 2021 and has now been exceeded - such has been the extent of the recovery.

Part of the jobs growth – mainly employment growth in 2021- has been a simple recovery or reactivation of jobs that were furloughed during the pandemic. Businesses were supported and workers furloughed, but kept close to their employment - so once the vaccination programme was rolled out in 2021 and public health restrictions eased, much of this employment was simply taken out of 'deep freeze' (especially in those sectors impacted by public health restrictions and resulting sectoral closures). We were, however, approaching full employment just before the pandemic, so early 2020 to mid-2021 represents in a way a pause in a strong momentum of economic and employment growth.

By the end of 2021, employment figures were well above pre-pandemic levels.

The target of 2.5 million people at work, set out in the National Economic Recovery Plan, was achieved by the end of 2021 and now stands at 2.574 million. This is an increase of approximately 10 percent since the pre-pandemic Q1 2020 levels of 2,347,200. Notably, female employment has increased 12 percent (+126,700) whereas male employment increased 8 percent (+100,700), since Q1 2020.

There have also been improvements in the unemployment rate. As of April 2023, the standard measure of monthly unemployment (for persons aged 15-74 years) stands at 3.9%, while the quarterly unemployment rate is 4.2 percent (as of Q4 2022), equivalent to 112,000 unemployed people. This is below the Q1 2020 level of 4.7 percent.

Ireland continues to have one of the most effective systems of social transfers in the EU in terms of poverty prevention reducing income inequality – (SDG target 1.3). Social Transfers are made up of cash benefits from local and State government. In the 2022 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey, the at risk of poverty rate before social transfers would have been 36.5 percent. After social transfers, it was 13.1 percent, which is a poverty reduction impact of 64 percent. It is important to note that the at risk of poverty rate was broadly the same in 2021, as in 2019 despite the significant adverse impacts of the pandemic and the consequent large-scale disruptions to businesses and employment.

The national social target for poverty reduction in Ireland is to reduce consistent poverty to 2 percent or less. Consistent poverty is a measure that combines those who are both at risk of

poverty and experiencing material deprivation. In the 2020 SILC survey, the rate of consistent poverty was 4.7 percent. This reduced to 4 percent in the 2021 survey and increased to 5.3 percent in the 2022 survey.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE) leads in the creation and maintenance of high-quality employment across the country and the Department of Social Protection (DSP) promotes active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services. The following national policies drive progress and set national targets in respect of employment and social protection in Ireland:

- **White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030**

Ireland's White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030, published in December of 2022, sets out Ireland's industrial policy for the medium to long-term, to realise the vision of a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable enterprise growth model for Ireland in the future.

The White Paper aspires to generate positive outcomes in terms of high-quality jobs, strong employment rights, equitable labour market participation, and improved living standards. Policy targets include maintaining full employment (i.e., unemployment below 5%); and limiting regional unemployment deviations from the national average (i.e., within 1% of national average). The White Paper highlights the importance of skills and workforce development policies which aim to activate groups currently underrepresented or underemployed in the labour market, including on pay, flexible working and reducing barriers to workforce participation. The White Paper further notes the importance of embedding SDGs into enterprise policy and supporting firms to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. This includes highlighting the importance of resource circularity, responsible business and corporate sustainability best-practices, to enable enterprises based in Ireland to compete on quality, reliability, value-added and customer service in a more sustainable manner.

- **The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 – 2025**

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 is Ireland's national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion. It aims to "reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU". The Roadmap translates this ambition into seven goals underpinned by 66 unique commitments to be taken to help deliver these goals. [SDG target 1.2]

- **Pathways to Work 2021 - 2025**

Pathways to Work 2021-2025 is the government's national employment services strategy; the government's overall framework for activation and employment support policy. The aim of the strategy is to assist people back to work as the economy and labour market recovers from COVID-19. This strategy is a key part of the national Economic Recovery Plan, in particular for its second Pillar on 'Helping people back into work'. Pathways to Work's goal is to ensure that as many job opportunities as possible are filled by people who are unemployed (SDG goal 8.5).

7.2.2 Building Back Better

Supports provided to those in the labour market during the COVID-19 pandemic

Government responded to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing a number of temporary measures, including the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), which was later replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS). These were designed to support incomes and wages for those in the labour market who were affected by the public health restrictions. Jointly, the PUP and T/EWSS have supported over 1.48m individuals over the lifecycle of the schemes, with a total net expenditure of €18.4bn. The 2022 SILC survey found that the COVID-19 related income supports reduced the rate of people at risk of poverty from 20.5 per to 13.1 percent.

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and Labour Court continued to provide their services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, developing new remote processes and hearings.

Support to businesses from the impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic

Businesses were helped to respond to the economic impacts of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic through a range of services, grants and loan schemes. These measures were provided using a variety of national and EU funds and guarantees:

- A total of €650 million were made available to companies through the Restart Grant and Restart Grant Plus to contribute towards the cost of reopening/keeping businesses operational and retaining employment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A €800 million Future Growth Loan Scheme was launched in 2019 to assist enterprises in growing and retraining jobs.

- The €90 million Innovation Seed Fund was launched in January 2022 to provide vital capital to innovative Irish companies at the crucial seed stage.

- The Brexit Impact Loan Scheme was launched in October 2021 andto the end of 2022. It made up to €330 million available to SMEs that have been impacted by Brexit and COVID-19.

- Some €700 million of the €2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme was used to provide low-cost lending to almost 10,000 businesses negatively impacted by the pandemic.

- More than 5,500 businesses were assisted by the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID-19. Over €185 million was made available to SMEs under the Sustaining Enterprise Fund and the Accelerated Recovery Fund.

- A range of options have also been provided for SMEs to continue to have access to finance through Microfinance Ireland loans.

- The **Ukraine Credit Guarantee** scheme was launched on 30 January 2023 to provide low-cost loans to businesses experiencing higher costs arising from Russian aggression in Ukraine. Loans of up to €1 million are available for working capital or investment purposes.

- The **Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme** (GSLS) is a new long-term loan guarantee scheme which will be launched in the Market in mid-2023. When implemented, the GSLS will make up to €500 million in longer-term lending available to SMEs, including farmers and fishers and small mid-caps. Up to 70% of lending will be for strategic investments with a view to increasing productivity and competitiveness and thus underpinning future business sustainability and growth. The GSLS will also target a minimum of 30% of the lending volume towards **environmental sustainability** purposes with the aim of encouraging SMEs to take positive actions in support of the climate change agenda.

Also, to enhance enterprises' access to finance, DETE progressed legislative amendments to the Credit Guarantee Act, the Loan Guarantee Schemes Agreement Act and the Microenterprise Loan Fund Act.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment helped businesses to cope with economic pressures and challenges triggered by Brexit and the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Department responded from an early stage of the pandemic to sustain enterprises and jobs and give companies extra assistance to stay open and to reopen. This included sectors in which the Department had not traditionally been involved in; for example, the COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme provided over €18 million to Irish based retailers to strengthen their online offering, increase their customer base, and build more resilient businesses.

During pandemic, DETE led on the development of the Work Safely Protocol, working across government and with employer and employee stakeholders. The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) acted as the lead agency in coordinating compliance with the measures set out in the protocol. The HSA established a new Occupational Health Division, to provide a more strategic long-term focus on occupational health hazards through visible inspections across all sectors.

Learnings taken on board from the COVID-19 pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant knowledge has been gained on the measures required to reduce the risk from the spread of COVID-19, or any similar risk in the workplace. The recently published White Paper on Enterprise has considered key domestic and international trends relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to improve Ireland's response and embed resilience in the enterprise sector; this includes: pre-existing trends and shifts accelerated by the pandemic, Ireland's particular sensitivities to developments in global value chains, and the importance of the twin green and digital transitions in national and EU policy as a driver of economic resilience and growth which has also been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Careful consideration has been made to ensure that Ireland's enterprise policy promotes inclusive and equitable economic growth across the economy and society; this includes focusing on sectors which have lagged during the post-pandemic recovery, in particular the less digital intensive sectors and our SME sectors. The SDGs have informed many of the enterprise sector policy priorities outlined in the White Paper on Enterprise against the post-pandemic recovery, including promoting high quality and high value employment, addressing barriers to workforce participation as well as embedding decarbonisation commitments at the heart of Ireland's enterprise policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of utilising strategic foresight as a mechanism to proactively identify, evaluate and respond to both existing and emerging threats that impact industry. In this regard, the White Paper commits to assessing a strengthened process for horizon scanning and strategic foresight during 2023.

In addition, a number of strategies and investments have been made, including:

- The National AI Strategy was launched in July 2021. The strategy sets out a roadmap for Ireland to become an international leader in using AI to the benefit of Ireland's population, through a people-centred, ethical approach to AI development, adoption and use.

- The National Remote Work Strategy was launched in January 2021 to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits that remote working can bring, and to provide opportunities for balanced regional development. The majority of the 15 actions identified in the Strategy were successfully implemented in 2021 and 2022.

- The Government invested in the development and upgrading of innovative technologies targeted at tackling national and global challenges (the €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, and the €85 million Digital Transition Fund).

Promoting youth employment and training [SDG target 8.6]

Young people were among the most negatively affected cohorts following the 2008 Financial Crisis. The crisis reaffirmed that young people can be particularly impacted by labour market shocks, through decreased hiring of new entrants, being made redundant on a "last-in first-out" basis or through stagnant wage growth. The impact of these effects can be long lasting. Consequently, the issue of youth unemployment was of paramount importance to the Government, over the course of the pandemic.

The ambition and scale of supports in place to support young people in the labour market and also in education and training was increased in the wake of COVID-19. Measures include funding 50,000 additional places in further and higher education, increasing the number of apprenticeships via the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025[36,] launching of a Work Placement Experience Programme, increasing funding for recruitment subsidies, and planning job fairs and employer engagement events targeted at younger people.

In January 2021, before the onset of the pandemic, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for young people (those aged under 25) was 11.4 percent. During the pandemic, the 'COVID-19 adjusted' monthly youth unemployment rate – which included all those in receipt of the PUP – increased dramatically, peaking at almost 70 percent in May 2020. Since then, in line with the general labour market recovery, this figure has declined markedly. As of April 2023, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is 7.9 percent, over 3 percent below the pre-pandemic figure.

The employment rate for young people, in Q4 2022, now stands at 46.7 percent, an increase from 41 percent (+5.7 percentage points) in Q1 2020.

There has also been progress in respect of the NEET rate, a measure of those Not in Employment, Education or Training. The proportions of those aged between 15 – 24 and 15 – 29 years olds that are not in employment, education or training is at a very low rate. While this is reflective of a downward movement dating back to 2012, it accelerated sharply from the beginning of 2021, having abruptly increased following the onset of COVID-19, before resuming a downward trend.

With the onset of the pandemic in Q2 2020, Ireland's NEET rates increased to 14.3 percent for 15-24 year olds and 16.8 percent for 15-29 year olds on a seasonally adjusted basis. For each age cohort, Ireland's NEET rate is now well below the European average, according to the most recent data, standing at 6.8 percent and 8.4 percent in Q3 2022 for 15 – 24 years old and 15 – 29-year-olds respectively. The EU NEET rates in Q3 2022 were 9.3 percent for 15-24 year olds and 11.4 percent for 15-29 year olds.

Promoting economic diversity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation

The White Paper on Enterprise recognises the importance of promoting economic productivity through embracing digital advancements, diversifying Ireland's enterprise mix, driving innovation and generating high-quality and sustainable employment. Key priority targets include: ensuring 90% of SMEs at basic digital intensity by 2030; achieving a 2.5% average annual growth in Irish-owned enterprise productivity by 2024; achieving a 1% average annual increase in multifactor productivity growth in domestic sectors of the economy by 2025; and increasing gross (public and private) expenditure on R&D to 2.5% of GNI*[37] by 2030.

The White Paper envisions Irish-based enterprise to succeed through competitive advantage founded on sustainability, innovation and productivity, delivering rewarding jobs and livelihoods. Targets include: a 20% increase in the number of High-Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs) supported by 2024; and ensuring gross (public and private) expenditure on R&D is at 2.5% of GNI* by 2030. Access to finance is highlighted as a priority to support SME growth, in particular regarding green and digital investments – (SDG target 8.3).

Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy, led by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, was published in June 2022. The strategy aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. This will promote broader benefits, including innovation-driven growth in regions

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[37]   GNI* stands for Modified GNI, defined by Central Statistics Office (CSO) as "an indicator designed specifically to measure the size of the Irish economy by excluding Globalisation effects" [definition available at Modified GNI - CSO - Central Statistics Office]

and the promotion of sustainable growth models. Smart Specialisation will guide effective delivery of a range of ERDF funding programmes to strengthen innovation and economic performance across the country. These programmes include Technology Gateways; (industry access to Technical University expertise); Technology Transfer 'KT Boost'; (knowledge transfer support); Innovators' Initiative; (sector focused, needs led innovation training for industry) and Smart Regional Enterprise Innovation (addressing regional innovation ecosystem/ infrastructure gaps).

Business sector engagement

Engagement with business, employer and employee representative groups and stakeholders, through various initiatives such as the National Economic Dialogue, Enterprise Forum, the Retail Forum, the Company Law Review Group, the Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum and the Labour Employer Economic Forum and other groups set up for specific purposes. These groups, working with DETE's Offices and Agencies, and other government departments, provided platforms for direct engagement with the enterprise sectors as they prepared for Brexit and dealt with the impacts of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis.

Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work – (SDG target 8.8).

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA), in cooperation with the Workplace Relations Commission, published the Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work in January 2021[38]. The Code provides practical guidance for employers on identifying and preventing bullying at work arising from their duties under Section 8(2)(b) of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005[39] as regards 'managing and conducting work activities in such a way as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, any improper conduct or behaviour likely to put the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees at risk'.

The HSA engages with employers through the inspection process to ensure that they have a policy in place regarding the prevention of bullying at work. If the lack of an adequate policy on bullying exists in a workplace an employee can register a complaint with Health and Safety Authority Contact Centre which will be followed up by the Authority.

If full utilisation of the range of available internal procedures has not resolved a bullying complaint, the matter may be referred to a WRC Adjudicator under Section 13 of the Industrial Relations Act, 1969.

The Adjudicator will not rehear the substance of the case. A number of outcomes are possible; the Adjudicator may conclude that the investigation was conducted properly and fairly and hence its conclusions should stand. The Adjudicator may, on the other hand, conclude that the investigation process was flawed in some respect and could recommend, for example, that the investigation be reheard.

38   Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2021), Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work. Available at gov.ie - Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work (www.gov.ie)
39   Government of Ireland (2005), Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Available at Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (irishstatutebook.ie)

The WRC's objective at all times is to achieve harmonious working relations between employers and employees. The Commission would always encourage local discussion on, and resolution of, disputes and issues which arise in the workplace including cases of alleged bullying. The Workplace Relations Commission delivers several services which may assist.

The provision of Adjudication services under Section 13 of the Industrial Relations Act 1969 following the exhaustion of internal procedures (note: the grounds of a referral to an Adjudication Officer are around the conduct of an investigation in terms of fairness and adherence to fair process and procedure).

Sustainable business models and policies – (SDG target 9.2)

The White Paper on Enterprise embeds sustainable business models and policies to boost productivity through investment in innovation, digitalisation, and management capacity, leading to increased exports from Irish-owned companies and a more diversified and resilient trade portfolio. SDGs will be embedded in enterprise policy, supporting firms to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. Targets include: 35% emissions reductions from industry by 2030; 45% emissions reductions from Commercial Built Environment by 2030; and over two-thirds (30,000) of new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland assisted firms being outside of Dublin, by the end of 2024.

Enhancements to workers' rights

In the past year the Government has brought forward several important enhancements to workers' rights:

- The Sick Leave Act 2022 ensures that, for the first time, all qualifying employees will have an entitlement to employer-paid sick leave. This progressive Act will commence on 1st January 2023. This progressive Act was commenced on 1st January 2023.

- The Payment of Wages (Amendment) (Tips and Gratuities) Act 2022, which came into effect on 1st December, gives employees legal rights on the protection of workplace tips.

- The Redundancy Payments (Amendment) Act 2022 was commenced in April 2022 and ensured that employees made redundant during COVID-19 will receive the same total payment as if they had not been laid off during the pandemic.

- A right to request remote working has been introduced in the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023. The Act is expected to be commenced following the development of a Code of Practice later in 2023.

- To bring Ireland in line with the European average a new permanent public holiday was introduced in 2022 to mark (Imbolc) St. Brigid's Day.

- A Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2021 came into effect in February 2022 setting the statutory minimum rates of pay and other conditions for persons employed in the construction sector.

- Regulations to transpose the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive into Irish law were signed in December 2022. These regulations will promote more transparent and predictable employment while ensuring labour market adaptability.

- The Report of the High-Level Review Group on Collective Bargaining, established under the auspices of the Government's Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), was published in October 2022 and the recommendations are being considered by the Department.

In addition, the Low Pay Commission recommendations to move to a living wage were announced in November 2022. The national living wage will be set at 60% of hourly median wages. It will be introduced over a four-year period and will be in place by 2026, at which point it will replace the National Minimum Wage – Targets 8.2., 8.3., and 8.5.

7.2.3 Leaving No One Behind

"Working for all – leaving no one behind"

Whilst Ireland's economy has remained strong during the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine, certain sectors and social groups remain lagging. The Irish Government continually seeks to improve its understanding of the issues facing disadvantaged groups and groups facing barriers to labour market integration and to work to alleviate the difficulties and barriers these people face.

Pathways to Work 2021 – 2025 includes a specific strand, "Working for all – leaving no one behind" which includes a wide range of commitments to support groups that are under-represented in the labour market, such as people with disabilities, lone parents, older people, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, and others facing discrimination. Measures targeted towards these groups include providing early access to or higher levels of recruitment subsidies for employers hiring disadvantaged candidates, reserving places on public employment schemes for young people and disadvantaged groups and reviewing disability welfare with a view to removing inconsistencies and anomalies and ensuring that they recognise the continuum of disabilities and support employment.

There is ongoing work to improve the availability of data in respect of these groups, in order to be able to more effectively monitor progress in employment outcomes, for instance.

The White Paper on Enterprise will aim to address challenges around sectors with low digitalisation rates. Ensuring a just transition across Ireland's regions and social groups against decarbonisation and digitalisation challenges will remain a priority moving forward.

The WRC now facilitates in-person hearings and remote hearings in specific circumstances under all types of legislation. During 2022, the WRC has been developing a suite of information animations to assist users of WRC services. These videos will be available in a number of languages and will be rolled-out in early 2023 as part of a broader outreach campaign with a particular focus on hard-to-reach groups. The topics covered in the animations include, 'Dignity in the Workplace', 'How to make a complaint to the WRC and What happens at an Adjudication

Hearing', and 'Pre-Adjudication Mediation'. The WRC has also worked with the National Disability Authority so that the WRC website is fully compliant with accessibility requirements. Information on the website is translated into several languages and interpretation services are available to WRC clients for case hearings and engagements with WRC inspectors.

Distributional impact assessments as part of the budgetary process

Ireland is recognised in the EU as being one of two Euro area member states that carries out distributional impact assessments as part of the Budgetary process. This takes place in advance of the Budget, with the results published in the Department of Finance's Tax Strategy Group papers, and during the budgetary process, with a number of Departments having the capacity to undertake such assessments. On Budget Day, distributional impact assessments are published as part of the Budget Day documentation, and a post-Budget distributional impact assessment is published. These assessments ensure that the poverty impacts of policy decisions are automatically incorporated into the budgetary process.

Ireland uses a national model (SWITCH) developed by the Economic and Social Research Institute in Ireland, which uses the EUROMOD platform, to undertake Distributional Impact Assessments (DIAs). SWITCH is used to model in-year direct tax and welfare changes. In addition, a STATA based model – ITSIM (Indirect Taxes Simulation) – is used to measure in-year indirect taxes.

Increasing the incomes of the bottom 40 percent of the population – (SDG target 10.1)

SDG target 10.1 is to increase the incomes of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a higher rate than the national average. The latest SILC data shows that Ireland is making progress in this regard. The 2020 SILC survey found that the bottom 40 percent of the population had a 22.69 percent share of equivalised income. This increased to a 22.85 percent share in the 2022 survey, which represents an increase in the share of income for this group. The average weekly equivalised income at the 4th decile increased by 8.8 percent from the 2020 survey to 2022, which is higher than the national increase of 7.9 percent for the same period. The Low Pay Commission recommendations for a Living Wage were announced in November 2022. The national living wage will be set at 60% of hourly median wages. It will be introduced over a four-year period and will be iin place by 2026, at which point it will replace the National Minimum Wage.

In addition, post-Budget 2023 analyses by the ESRI found that Budget 2023 (and the once-off cost-of-living measures that were announced at the same time) proportionally benefited those in the lower income deciles the most.

Transposition of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive - Target 12.6

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) – published in December 2022 – enhances the disclosure by companies on climate and environmental data. The Directive introduces mandatory standards where large companies will be expected to report annually in the management/directors' report on environmental, social and governance (ESG) matters including human rights. The first standards shall be adopted by June 2023, and there is separate provision for standards for listed SMEs to be adopted at the latest by June 2024, underscoring the need for proportionality.

The CSRD directive considerably enhances the existing rules for non-financial reporting. Its scope is much wider (ca. 50,000 companies across the EU compared to the current ca. 11,000) and as a result significant cohort of Irish companies will report under the new rules. Furthermore, the new mandatory European Sustainability Reporting Standards that Irish companies will adhere to in their reports are comprehensive and in-depth and in this sense the EU is leading the way and setting a high bar for global sustainability standards.

The framework for disclosures by companies include:

- Own Workforce and Workers in the Value Chain – for example gender equality and equal pay for work of equal value, training and skills development, the employment and inclusion of persons with disabilities, measures against violence and harassment in the workplace, and diversity.

- Affected Communities – for example respect for the human rights of communities, and indigenous peoples specifically; engagement with affected communities; and measures to provide and/or enable remedy for human rights impacts.

A stakeholder webinar was held on the 26 January 2023 with nearly 500 relevant stakeholders in attendance. Attendees heard from experts in the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group (EFRAG), the European Commission, Industry experts and officials in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on what companies will be expected to do and how to prepare for it. A public consultation was also launched recently, seeking views on the Member State options contained within the directive and to provide an opportunity to comment more broadly on matters contained in the directive to inform the policy approach taken in Ireland.

SDG Assessment 5: Roadmap for Social Inclusion

[Roadmap for Social Inclusion](#) contributes to the progression of 24 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

SDG Assessment 6: Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 – 2025

Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 – 2025 contributes to the progression of 28 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

Civil Society Assessment – Employment and Social Protection

Ireland has done well by:

- Introducing new legislation to protect the rights of employees in some low-wage sectors – for example, on the sharing of tips, gratuities and service charges in hospitality services.

- Providing employees with the right to request remote working, which employers cannot unreasonably deny.

- Increasing the statutory minimum wage, making social protection payments easy to access and commencing trials on a Universal Basic Income (in the arts and creative arts sectors).

Ireland could do better by:

- Improving inclusion and accessibility for excluded groups, neurodiverse workers, and people from at-risk socio-economic groups by ensuring they have a seat and a voice when relevant policies are being developed.

- Instituting a more streamlined asylum process that provides equitable access to employment for all incoming migrants regardless of their country of origin.

Messages for the International Community:

- Labour upskilling strategies must align with future skills needs for a Just Transition and in a rapidly developing artificial intelligence context.

- Further developments in remote learning based on universally recognised and portable micro-credentialing can enhance socio-economic inclusion.

- Expanding the regulatory requirement for reporting on gender pay gaps and labour rights across international value chains must continue until it becomes the norm.

7.3 Health

7.3.1 Introduction

Building on the progress outlined during Ireland's first Voluntary National Review in 2018, Ireland continues to make solid progress under SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, notwithstanding the massive challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ireland's approach to the management of COVID-19 has been underpinned by the country's core national priorities of protecting the most vulnerable in society from the severe impacts of the disease, minimising the burden on the healthcare system, and continuing to keep schools and childcare facilities open. Solidarity underpinned the success of measures such as the high levels of public support for public health advice and measures, and for vaccination and booster initiatives.

Through the containment phase of the pandemic and as new threats emerged, the Irish Government, guided by the advice of the National Public Health Emergency Team for COVID-19, acted quickly to introduce public health measures to protect our core priorities. The response then shifted to the mitigation phase, where focus shifted from regulation and population-wide restrictions to public health advice, personal judgement and personal protective behaviours. Since April 2022, the Government has been advised by the COVID-19 Advisory Group which provides professional guidance, informed by the World Health Organization and, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Commission to maximise Ireland's medium to long-term preparedness for future challenges posed by COVID-19.

The following national policies drives the achievement of targets under SDG 3 Good Health and Well Being.

- **A Healthy Weight for Ireland, the Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025**

A Healthy Weight for Ireland, the Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025, (OPAP) aims to reverse obesity trends, prevent health complications and reduce the overall burden for individuals, families, the health system, and the wider society and economy. Childhood obesity and reducing the inequalities seen in obesity rates, where those from disadvantaged groups have higher obesity levels, are key priorities under the Policy. The cross-disciplinary Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group (OPIOG) was established in 2017 and includes representatives from a number of Government Departments and Agencies. Key deliverables under the OPAP include the establishment of a Food Reformulation Task Force, the development of a Model of Care for the Management of Overweight and Obesity and the publication of a suite of Healthy Eating Guidelines. A Review of OPAP was published in November 2022.

- **Creating A Better Future Together: National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026**

Creating A Better Future Together: National Maternity Strategy 2016-2026 adopts a health and wellbeing approach to ensure that babies get the best start in life; mothers and families are supported and empowered to improve their own health and well-being; women have access to safe, high-quality, nationally consistent, woman-centred maternity care; pregnancy and birth is

recognised as a normal physiological process, and insofar as it is safe to do so, a woman's choice is facilitated; maternity services are appropriately resourced, underpinned by strong and effective leadership, management and governance arrangements, and delivered by a skilled and competent workforce, in partnership with women.

- **Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23**

A Women's Health Taskforce was established in September 2019 to improve both health outcomes and experiences of healthcare for women and girls. This Taskforce meets quarterly to monitor progress and consider actions required to achieve and build on the actions set out in the country's first Women's Health Action Plan 2022-23, which was published in March 2022.

- **National Physical Activity Plan**

Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) uses cross-sectoral action to increase physical activity levels across the entire population thereby improving the health and well-being of people living in Ireland, where everybody will be physically active and where everybody lives, works and plays in a society that facilitates, promotes and supports physical activity and an active way of life with less time spent being sedentary. Following an independent review of the Plan, a new NPAP will be developed in 2023.

- **National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020**

Ireland's National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 aims to ensure that everyone in the country will receive comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual health education/information and will have access to appropriate prevention and promotion services; Equitable, accessible and high-quality sexual health services, which are targeted and tailored to need, will be available to everyone; and Robust and high-quality sexual health information will be generated to underpin policy, practice, service planning and strategic monitoring. A review and refresh of the Strategy is planned in 2023, to chart developments over the next five years.

- **One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021-2025**

Ireland's second One Health National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021-2025, known as iNAP2, was published in November 2021 and aims to implement policies and actions to prevent, monitor and combat AMR across the three sectors, health, agricultural and the environment. Reducing the inappropriate use of antimicrobial medicines, as well as preventing the transmission of infections and disease, is vital to stop the development and spread of resistant microorganisms.

- **Ireland's National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026**

Ireland's National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 is focused on preventing cancer across our population, diagnosing cancer early, providing optimal care to patients and maximising their quality of life.

- **Connecting for Life Implementation Plan 2020 -2022**

Connecting for Life Implementation Plan 2020 -2022 is Ireland's national suicide reduction strategy. The Strategy aims to improve the understanding of, and attitudes to, suicidal behaviour, mental health and well-being. It seeks to support local capacity to prevent and respond to suicidal behaviour and targets approaches to reduce suicidal behaviour and

improve mental health among priority groups. The Strategy also seeks to enhance accessibility, consistency and care pathways of services for people vulnerable to suicidal behaviour and to ensure safe and high-quality services for people vulnerable to suicide. It aims to reduce and restrict access to means of suicidal behaviour and seeks to improve surveillance, evaluation and high-quality research relating to suicidal behaviour.

- **Sharing the Vision - A Mental Health Policy for Everyone, 2020-2030**

Sharing the Vision - A Mental Health Policy for Everyone, 2020-2030, is Ireland's 10-year plan for mental health services that addresses the needs of the population through a focus on the requirements of the individual. The key outcomes identified are - promotion, prevention and early intervention; service access, coordination and continuity of care; social inclusion; accountability and continuous improvement.

The first of three implementation plans, Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024, developed in collaboration with key stakeholders provides detailed 3-year plans for each of the policy's 100 recommendations, including setting milestones to be met each year, and detailing the inputs and outputs necessary for implementation.

- **Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025**

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery is Ireland's policy approach to prevent and to reduce the harms caused to individuals, families and communities by the use of drugs and alcohol and to support the rehabilitation and recovery of individuals from problematic drug and alcohol use. In addition, the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 aims to reduce the country's consumption of alcohol to the OECD average of 9.1 litres of pure alcohol, to delay the initiation of alcohol consumption by children and young people, to reduce the harms caused by the misuse of alcohol, and to ensure the supply and price of alcohol is regulated and controlled in order to minimise the possibility and incidence of alcohol related harm.

- **Tobacco Free Ireland 2013-25**

Smoking in Ireland is targeted by the national policy Tobacco Free Ireland 2013-25 – a cross-sectoral strategy aimed at reducing the prevalence rate of smoking in Ireland. Tobacco Free Ireland contains over 60 recommendations relating to the introduction of tobacco control legislation, the provision of supports to people who wish to stop smoking, collaboration at national and international level and the regulation of the retail environment.

- **National Traveller Health Action Plan**

The National Traveller Health Action Plan was developed by the HSE and endorsed by the Department of Health, following a commitment in the Programme for Government and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The Strategy is a comprehensive public health response to the health needs of Travellers, that sets out tailored and affirmative measures to prevent disease, promote health and prolong life, and are delivered in partnership with Travellers.

7.3.2 Building Back Better

A number of important objectives have been achieved or are currently being advanced which progress the targets set out under SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing.

Advancing equitable, accessible and high-quality sexual health services – (SDG target 3.7)

Sexually transmitted infection (STI) services are led by the national network of 23 STI clinics. A new nationwide free home STI testing scheme was launched in October 2022. This new scheme provides online STI testing free of charge to patients within the privacy of their own homes. Work is also being undertaken to progress research regarding sexual health and to improve sexual health education, training and resources. This includes through schools, higher and further education, through www.sexualwellbeing.ie and in partnership with NGOs and wider medical services.

A free contraception scheme for women was launched in September 2022 and is currently open to women ordinarily resident in Ireland aged between 17 and 26 inclusive. The scheme covers the cost of consultations with GPs and family planning centres, prescriptions for the wide range of contraceptive options available on the HSE Re-Imbursement List, long-acting reversible contraceptive fittings (including coils), removals, injections and check-ups, emergency contraception and more.

The scheme will be expanded further, from September 1st, 2023, to include women aged 30 and under.

HIV Prevention – (SDG target 3.3)

Although the number of people living with HIV in Ireland has risen[40], a number of important measures are being taken to reduce HIV risk and which focus on HIV prevention.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above to make sexual health services more accessible and to improve sexual health education, Ireland launched a free Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) programme in 2019. PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis. PrEP is taken by HIV negative people before having sex (pre-exposure) and after sex, to prevent HIV (this is called prophylaxis). PrEP has been shown in many studies to be safe, and when taken correctly, highly effective at preventing HIV. PrEP is the newest HIV prevention tool available and is best used in combination with other HIV prevention measures. PrEP is available through the HSE free of charge to those who are considered to be at substantial risk of contracting HIV through sex.

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is emergency medication that can prevent HIV infection following possible exposure, for example, either sexually or via a needle stick injury. PEP is a 28 day course of anti-HIV medication that can prevent established HIV infection. PEP should be commenced within 72 hours to be effective and is available through Sexual Health/STI clinics, or can be accessed in a number of Hospital Emergency Departments out of hours.

Since 2019, Ireland is also participating in the HIV Fast-Track Cities programme (Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway). The Fast-Track Cities Initiative involves signing the Paris Declaration,

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40   from 4,787 in 2010 to 7,529 in 2019

pledging to place cities on a fast-track to end AIDS by 2030. The Paris Declaration commits to achieving ambitious targets to reduce new HIV infections, end AIDS-related deaths, and eliminate barriers faced by people affected by, and living with, HIV, including stigma and discrimination. Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Galway are on the fast-track to end AIDS by 2030.

Women's health

The Women's Health Taskforce was established in September 2019 to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare. Listening is at the core of the Taskforce, which has listened to, engaged and worked with more than 2,000 individuals and organisations representing women, with feedback forming the foundations of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023. Budget 2022 allocated €31m to women's health, increased to €69.2m in 2023. The Action Plan commits to key deliverables in areas that women have asked us to prioritise, all of which are key to prevention in the context of women's health. These include:

- **Contraception:** A free contraception for women ordinarily resident in Ireland was launched in 2022, is currently open to 17-26 year-olds and will be expanded to women aged 30 and under by September, 2023.

- **Menopause:** 6 Specialist Menopause Clinics to treat complex symptoms of Menopause are being established. A GP Quick Reference Guide on Menopause was launched in 2022, with a campaign and web resources also providing supports to patients.

- **Fertility:** 6 Regional Fertility Hubs are being established to provided tailored, low-level intervention for patients with fertility issues - (5/6 open and operational). €10m has been invested in the first National Advanced AHR Centre, delivering IVF and ICSI through a wholly public clinic, scheduled to open in 2024.

- **Gynaecology:** A network of 20 "see and treat" ambulatory gynaecology clinics are in development, where approx. 70% of general gynaecology referrals are suitable for management. 12/20 Clinics are currently open and operational.

- **Endometriosis:** Delivering two supra-regional specialist Endometriosis centres for complex care – CUH and TUH – and a National Framework for Endometriosis care.

- **Mental Health**: €1.9m invested by the Women's Health Fund in 2022, to support services for women and girls, including digital mental health services access, improving perinatal mental health supports, enhancing specialist eating disorder supports, targeted mental health supports for marginalised women and women in addiction and responding to young girls at risk of psychosis.

- **The Women's Health Fund** (€5m in 2021, €10m in 2022) has invested in a range of service areas, including: Cancer screening and immunisation, primary care supports, maternity services and postnatal hubs, gynaecology, mental health and supports for marginalised groups.

- **Period Poverty:** Removal of VAT from period products and HRT in Budget 2023. Funding of €0.71m was allocated for period poverty initiatives in Budget 2022, increased to €0.81m in 2023.

In 2023, the Women's Health Taskforce will continue to drive progress in areas of Research, Experiences including experiences of marginalised women and Gender- Proofing policy.

Access to essential health-care services – (SDG target 3.8)

In respect of the provision of essential health services, the number of medical cards – which allows holders of the cards to access free medical services - issued in Ireland rose from 1,478,560 in 2009 to 1,574,507 in 2018, an increase of 6.5%. In 2018, nearly one third (32.4%) of the population had a medical card.

The number of GP visit cards, which allow holders to access visits to GPs without needing to pay, stood at over 553,500 at end 2022. All children over the age of 6 and all persons over the age of 70 are automatically entitled to GP visit cards, while others may qualify on the basis of income.

There was an increase of 20% in the number of people on the long-term illness scheme between 2009 and 2018, with the numbers rising from 127,636 to 281,075.

The proportion of Ireland's population with Large Household Expenditures on Health was last surveyed in 2015, with COVID-19 delaying the publication of a more recent survey. Medical expenses represented 2.2% of average weekly household expenditure at that time.

Alcohol consumption – (SDG target 3.5)

From 2014 to 2019 alcohol consumption in Ireland remained steady at approximately 11 litres. The objective of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 is to reduce consumption levels to the OECD average of 9.1 litres per capita per annum. In Ireland, where alcohol consumption levels are high and binge drinking is commonplace, alcohol is a factor in more than half of all completed suicides and over one third of cases of deliberate self-harm. Alcohol consumption is a significant road safety issue in Ireland and is a factor in 38% of all deaths on Irish roads – with this figure rising to 75% at the off-peak hours of 10pm to 6am.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018 was developed to address the harms caused by alcohol consumption. To date 26 of the 31 provisions have been commenced which include provisions regulating alcohol advertising and alcohol sponsorship, the separation of alcohol products from grocery products in retail outlets, the introduction of financial mechanisms to address the affordability and accessibility of alcohol products including restrictions relating to alcohol promotions. The provisions aim to reduce alcohol consumption generally and the harms caused by alcohol consumption and also to reduce the exposure to alcohol products by children and young people.

Tobacco Control – (SDG target 3.a)

According to the 2022 Healthy Ireland Survey, 18% of the population smoke, 14% are daily smokers and 4% are occasional smokers. The Office of the Attorney General is currently drafting the Public Health (Tobacco Products and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill with the expectation that it will be enacted in 2023. The Bill will:

- introduce a licensing system for the retail sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products

- prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products from self-service vending machines and temporary/mobile units

- prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine inhaling products at locations and events intended for children

- prohibit the sale of nicotine inhaling products by and to persons under 18 years

- prohibit the sale of tobacco products by persons under 18 years (the sale of tobacco products to persons under 18 is already prohibited)

From 1 January 2023 the VAT rate for non-oral forms of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) was reduced to zero resulting in a reduction in the cost of NRT for people who wish to quit smoking.

7.3.3 Leaving No One Behind

Achieving universal health coverage

Sláintecare is a reform programme seeking to transform how we deliver healthcare in Ireland, building towards equal access to services for every citizen based on patient need and not their ability to pay. The aim is to deliver the Sláintecare vision of one universal health service for all, providing the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

The Sláintecare Implementation Plan and Strategy 2021-23 sets out the priorities and policies to take forward this reform, factoring in learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic, the new context within which the health system operates, Ireland's Programme for Government and the outcomes of engagement with key stakeholders and partners.

The Sláintecare Progress Report 2021 details the progress made against the 2021-23 Strategy and focuses on Programme 1 – the provision of safe timely access to care and promoting health and well-being, and Programme 2 – addressing health inequalities: towards universal healthcare.

The Department is committed to improving equity in access to quality care and has committed to the publication of an Inclusion Health Framework in 2023. This framework will address the social determinants of health and provide integrated and comprehensive healthcare services that aim to drive improvements that meet the health needs of the most excluded.

- **Supporting Traveller Health**

The National Traveller Health Action Plan published in 2022 is a comprehensive public health response to the health needs of Travellers. It provides tailored and affirmative measures to prevent disease, promote health and prolong life for this population group. It is guided by the principle of health equity, so that the underlying causes of Traveller ill-health are addressed in a strategic and multi-dimensional way.

- **Women's Health**

The Women's Health Action Plan 2022 - 23 (see 7.3.2) is committed to supporting the needs of Marginalised Women in society and to date funding has been provided to:

- Support research to understanding the mental health challenges, service needs and potential interventions for women from the Traveller and Roma community presenting to ED with suicidal ideation, Total €15,808.25 in 2022 and €9,880.75 in 2023.

- Research the key barriers and enablers that migrant women and ethnic minorities experience when accessing and using maternity services, Total €51,062.05 in 2022 and €193,573.90 in 2023.

- Improve healthcare services and address the social determinants of health for Traveller women who experience homelessness and who are transitioning into independent living, Total €500,000.00 in 2022.

- Bowel Screen - addressing low uptake by marginalised women, Total €50,000.00 in 2022.

In line with the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023; The Women's Health Taskforce is currently scoping four key areas of the Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023;

- Research: What further research interventions are necessary to grow the evidence base for women's health in Ireland?

- Experiences - Communications: Signposting of referral pathways and development of trusted web portal.

- Experiences - Marginalised Groups: Service developments/interventions necessary to support marginalised groups in accessing care in comfortable and convenient ways.

- Embedding a Gender lens: How can we most effectively embed a gender lens throughout the health and social care system.

The aim of this scoping exercise is to deliver tangible options to remaining Actions of the current Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023.

Health and well-being in Ireland

Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025, aims to increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life, to reduce health inequalities, to protect the public from threats to health and well-being; and to create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a healthy Ireland. The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan was published in May 2021.

7.3.4 Case studies

Case study : Homeless Supports during the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 brought into focus the significant health inequalities faced by socially excluded groups such as people who are homeless. From the outset of the pandemic Ireland's national health service worked closely with the community and voluntary sector to provide measures to reduce the density of individuals in congregated settings and to transfer individuals with underlying health conditions into separate accommodation.

In 2021, the Dept of Health provided additional funding of €11 million to enhance the health services for people who are homeless, and to continue the new protective public health measures for the medically vulnerable and COVID-19 positive homeless population, and continuity of care for people who are homeless.

During the pandemic, a strong collaborative response between the Health Service Executive and the Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive was witnessed and has demonstrably been successful in reducing COVID-19 transmission, and improving living conditions, access to addiction treatment and the health of homeless people.

Because of the success of this collaborative working across the homeless sector, a further €10 million was secured in Budget 2022, to maintain the public health measures and to consolidate improvements in health services for people who are homeless, that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The then Minister Frank Feighan TD and Donal Cassidy (HSE) during a visit to a HSE Vaccination Centre for Medically Vulnerable people in Homeless Services in May 2021. This initiative, part of the COVID-19 measures for the homeless population, provided transport for this cohort from their accommodation to the vaccination clinic.

SDG Assessment 7: Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025
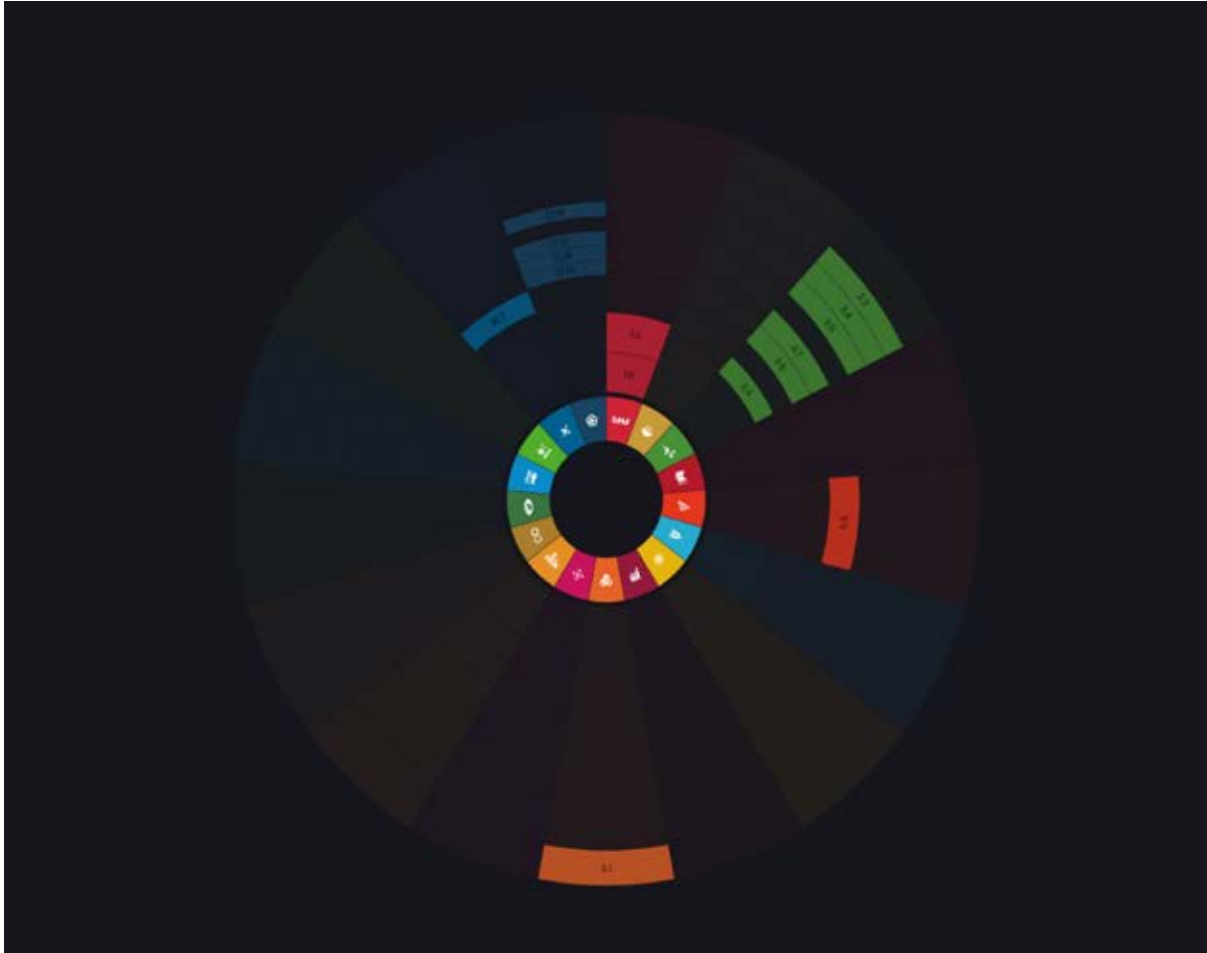
[Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Well-being 2013-2025](#) contributes to the progression of 15 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty; SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being; SDG 5 Gender Equality; SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

Civil Society Assessment – Health

Ireland has done well by:

- Creating space for mental health and well-being within the national health agenda.

- Enabling continuity of the health system through the Covid 19 pandemic and rolling out an effective vaccination programme.

- Improving access to sexual and reproductive health programmes.

- Having the highest average life expectancy in Europe

Ireland could do better by:

- Allocating more resources to sickness prevention and long-term public health planning.

- Enabling universal and single-tier access to health services and information, with a particular focus on the needs of at-risk groups and those living in more remote areas.

- Better supporting healthcare workers, enabling them to remain within the public health system for the long term.

Messages for the International Community:

- The effective targeting of resources requires high-quality and disaggregated health data and indicators that reflect the reality of people's lives – particularly those within at-risk groups.

- Long-term public health planning must prioritise prevention that is adaptive to the context of a changing climate and future demographic shifts.

7.4 Community engagement and inclusion

7.4.1 Introduction

While governments hold primary responsibility for achieving the SDGs, responsibility does not lie with governments alone. The SDGs belong to everyone, in every community, in every country across the world. The Government strongly believes that partnerships between governments, civil society organisations, businesses and communities will be essential to achieving the SDGs.

Community organisations will be vital players in achieving the SDGs. The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), in partnership with other Government departments, promotes community engagement and aims to work across Government to strengthen and build understanding and capacity in local government and the community and voluntary sector to support the delivery of current and future SDG National Implementation Plans.

A key commitment under the SDG National Implementation Plan involves mainstreaming the SDGs across national policies, so that when relevant sectoral policies are developed or reviewed, Ireland's commitments under the SDGs will be taken into account.

The following national community-focused policies are underpinned by and strongly align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

- **Our Rural Future, Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025**

Our Rural Future, published in March 2021, is the Irish Government's blueprint for the development of rural Ireland over the period 2021 - 2025. It provides the framework to achieve the vision of transforming the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas.

The policy commitments in Our Rural Future are linked directly to the SDGs. Each of the over 150 policy measures in Our Rural Future are aligned with one or more of the SDGs.

- **Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024**

The Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector 2019-2024 was co-produced by Government and the community development, local development, community and voluntary and local government sectors. The Strategy recognises the importance of the community and voluntary sector to a healthy, just and prosperous society, and sets out how Government will support the sector over the coming years and beyond. It also seeks to create a vibrant and active civil society, developing opportunities for all communities to contribute, engage and participate in decision-making and policy implementation.

The Strategy highlights that the "SDGs provide a critical framework for community development as they reflect the social justice, economic justice and environmental justice concerns of community work and community workers and designate the processes of participation, empowerment and collective action required to achieve change."

- **National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022**

The SDGs are mainstreamed into the National Social Enterprise Policy and implementation of the Policy is opening new opportunities for social enterprises to address social and environmental challenges, and thereby progress towards the SDGs. The policy reflects the Irish Government's commitment to facilitating the success of social enterprise in Ireland, as well as underpinning the Government's commitments to equality, human rights and social cohesion. The policy is aligned to the SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth in particular and the targets therein.

- **National Volunteering Strategy**

The purpose of the National Volunteering Strategy (2021 - 2025) is to recognise, support, and promote the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish society. The objective of the Strategy is to expand and reinforce the role of volunteers, and at the same time, assist Ireland's wider commitments to Sustainable Development. The Call for Input for the Strategy highlighted the need for additional investigation and research regarding the role of volunteering and the achievement of the SDGs.

The National Volunteering Strategy and the SDGs share common themes of sustainability, co-operation and inclusivity. These themes provide the critical framework for the Strategy and the SDGs are integrated into its five Strategic Objectives. Action 55 of the Strategy, set out under Strategic Objective 5[41], aims to provide supports for all Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to implement and raise awareness of the SDGs over the next 5 years. This will be achieved through the development of toolkits to develop and proof plans against SDGs and by supporting capacity in VIOs in relation to the delivery of the SDGs.

- **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027**

The SDGs provide an important frame of reference for the development and implementation of Embracing Ireland's Outdoors. The spectrum of SDGs is well represented in the actions of the strategy with 14 of the 17 SDGs included. There are particularly strong links with SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 15 Life on Land. Each action is directly linked to one or more SDGs and will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the targets associated.

- **Town Centre First Policy**

The Town Centre First Policy, launched in February 2022, provides a co-ordinated, whole-of-government policy framework to proactively address the decline in the health of towns across Ireland and support measures to regenerate and revitalise them.

Key elements of the Town Centre First Policy include the development of Town Centre First Plans, the appointment of Town Regeneration Officers. The Policy has a focus on ensuring

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41   Strategic Objective 5: "This Strategy affirms the contribution of volunteering at local and national level and commits to developing a cooperative approach between public bodies and volunteering representatives in the advancement of coherent policy. This Strategy also acknowledges the importance of ongoing research into the volunteering community in developing informed, evidence-based policy beyond the lifetime of this document."

we plan for sustainable cities and communities, in line with Goal 11 of the SDGs. The policy encourages renewed focus on the sustainable and adaptive reuse of existing assets and increasing the energy efficiency of individual buildings, including the thermal upgrading of the historic building stock.

Towns offer the opportunity for people to live closer to local services and amenities and to get around more safely by a sustainable mode of transport. Town Centre First provides a vehicle for local communities to become involved at the planning level with a view to making towns more sustainable and inclusive places to live, work and visit.

7.4.2 Building Back Better

The societal impact of COVID-19, with social distancing and reduced personal interaction left many people feeling isolated and uncertain. The crisis demonstrated the value of having robust community structures in place, the community and voluntary sector played a key role in the work of identifying and supporting the vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Community Call was an important part of that work and it enabled a coherent and agile response to the needs of people right across the country as this crisis emerged. It was an unprecedented mobilisation of both state and voluntary resources, with organisations working together to identify vulnerable people and their needs and deliver a range of services to them. The immediate focus was on the elderly and the most vulnerable, and mobilising rapid response in every county to make sure everyone was looked after and no one was left behind.

Relationships between the volunteering infrastructure and the local authority sector have been strengthened as a result of the crisis. The response to COVID-19 demonstrated how resilient our communities are and how our businesses can adapt to deliver services in innovative ways, to meet arising needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of digital infrastructure to ensure that people right across Ireland can avail of remote working, education and other essential online facilities and services to connect them with others.

Local Structures

A key avenue to building social cohesion and community empowerment is through encouraging participation, involving people affected in the process, and enabling them to have a sense of ownership over outcomes affecting their lives. Local structures play an important role in developing understanding and positive relationships between different cohorts in local communities.

There are now well-established structures for community engagement and consultation in place through the Local Community Development Committees and Public Participation Networks established in each Local Authority area. This Department encourages regular and meaningful engagement with communities on issues that affect their everyday lives, such as the implementation of SDGs through Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), which are currently under development.

The Guidelines for the development of LECPs were published by the Department in 2021 and highlight that "SDGs provide a critical framework for community development as they reflect the social justice, economic justice and environmental justice concerns of community work and community workers and designate the processes of participation, empowerment and collective action required to achieve change".

Public Participation Networks

A Public Participation Network (PPN) is a structure that brings together volunteer-led groups to provide representation for the community sector in Local Authority policymaking structures, giving local volunteers a greater say in local government decisions which affect their own communities. Where community representation is required on local authority committees, such as Strategic Policy Committees or Local Community Development Committees etc., it must be sourced through the PPN.

A PPN has been established in each of the 31 local authority areas. Membership of a PPN is open to all volunteer-led/not-for-profit groups in a local authority area, and over 18,000 groups nationwide are currently members of a PPN.

While DRCD funds and supports PPNs, they are independent organisations that develop their own initiatives. Many PPNs have embedded the SDGs in their initiatives, and each PPN Annual Report now includes a section on how PPN activities have made a local impact related to the UN SDGs.

7.4.3 Leaving No One Behind

The population of rural Ireland is increasingly diverse. It is important to recognise this diversity and to enable our society to be cohesive, inclusive, and ensure that the wellbeing of everyone is catered for and vulnerable members of society are not left behind.

Challenges continue to exist in supporting marginalised members of society and enabling access to employment for persons from minority and or disadvantaged communities.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is Ireland's primary social inclusion funding intervention, it aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality by supporting disadvantaged communities and individuals. Under SICAP, funding is provided to Local Development Companies to allow them to carry out work locally to help disadvantaged individuals and the groups that represent those individuals. The programme is managed by the Local Community Development Committee (LCDCs) in each Local Authority area.

SICAP has two programme goals. Goal one is supporting communities, which involves supporting local community groups representing disadvantaged communities and target groups so that they can work towards solving social exclusion issues that affect them. Goal two involves supporting individuals who have been identified as being in need to improve their life chances. This can be through lifelong learning and training, getting labour market supports to improve work readiness, or working with people in broader and more holistic ways so that they can improve their quality of life and general well-being.

SICAP continues to prioritise supports to those who are most marginalised and disproportionately affected by poverty. The following 13 target groups are engaged with under the Programme: Disadvantaged Children and Families; Disadvantaged Young People (aged 15 – 24); Disadvantaged Women; Lone Parents; Low Income Workers/Households; New Communities; People living in Disadvantaged Communities; People with Disabilities; Travellers; Roma; The Unemployed; The Disengaged from the Labour Market (Economically Inactive); Emerging needs category as selected by the LCDC.

Community Development Pilot Programme (CDP)

A new CDP Pilot Programme was developed to advance a Programme for Government commitment to "Introduce, on a phased basis, a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects". The aim of the pilot Programme is to use community development as an approach to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promote human rights with marginalised communities. Funding was allocated to seven successful projects in 2021 and the pilot will continue for three years. The funding will help provide the resources and supports needed to build on the community development projects with marginalised communities. For example, two of the projects focus on the Traveller community, with a concern to address equality and human rights issues including traveller culture, another project is focused on the Roma community, supporting the autonomous voice for intercultural integration, and addressing racism and exclusion. Other projects focus on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, marginalised women and people with disabilities.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

With support from the Dormant Accounts Fund and assistance from Pobal, DRCD are currently undertaking a project which seeks to build capacity, as well as providing resources and toolkits to support the engagement of marginalised communities in consultation and decision-making processes.

There are a number of elements to this project:

- Two national events targeted at LCDCs, Local Authority staff and LECP advisory committees, aiming to build capacity and share information on principles of good consultation and meaningful engagement;

- Four pilot projects selected to develop and test engagement strategies as part of the LECP process, to inform the development of adaptable toolkits that can be scaled up and used in a variety of consultation and engagement processes undertaken by local and central government;

- The creation of toolkits and a resource pack to support engagement;

- Potential for follow on actions informed by the findings and emerging issues (training is being provided to Local Authorities in intercultural awareness, Public Sector Duty and best practices in consultation and engagement strategies for example).

The resource guide, entitled 'A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making' was launched on 02 February 2023 in the IHREC Centre, Dublin. The guide will be reviewed and revised later this year, building on lessons learned through the pilots and any feedback forthcoming.

7.4.4 Case studies

Case study: Sustainable Development Goals In the TidyTowns World

The SuperValu TidyTowns competition is Ireland's best known sustainable and environmental initiative. Now in its seventh decade the competition has a reach onto over 1,000 towns and villages across the country.

The competition is adjudicated across eight categories by an independent panel appointed by the Department and in 2021 the UN Sustainable Development Goals were incorporated into the competition entry process. To assist the groups in making the linkages, the eight competition categories have the various goals that are aligned to that category listed, see example below.

The TidyTowns unit prepare a monthly newsletter which is shared with over 1,000 active TidyTowns groups, competition sponsors, Local Authorities, PPNs and widely shared on Social media and on the TidyTowns website. The newsletter has covered many features on the SDGs, all issues to date can be found by visiting; https://www.tidytowns.ie/about-us/newsletters/

In collaboration with the Department of Environment Climate and Communications, a special award entitled "Sustainable Development Goals Award" was introduced to the competition in 2021, This award featured in the 2022 competition and is being included for 2023 also.

These awards will further raise awareness of how towns and villages can "Act Local while Thinking Globally" and in association with the designated competition category "Sustainability – Doing more with less" will hopefully encourage us all to think a little more on how we can be more responsible from an environmental and sustainable perspective.

Case study: Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future is a whole-of-Government policy for the sustainable development of rural Ireland for the period 2021-2025. It was published in March 2021 and is the most ambitious rural development policy for Ireland in decades. It contains more than 150 measures for delivery, for both short-term recovery and longer-term sustainable economic and social development, and environmental and cultural wellbeing.

Ireland's SDG National Implementation Plan includes an ambitious vision for Ireland to fully achieve the SDGs at home and to support their implementation around the world. A key commitment under the SDG National Implementation Plan involves mainstreaming the SDGs across national policies, so that when relevant sectoral policies are developed or reviewed, Ireland's commitments under the SDGs will be taken into account.

DRCD's Statement of Strategy commits the department to align our policies with the specific goals and the targets in the Implementation Plan by placing the SDGs at the heart of our policies, and sustainability is at the heart of Our Rural Future. The policy was designed to align with SDGs and to illustrate how important sustainability is in the delivery of rural development measures across all sectors, each of the now more than 160 Policy Measures is directly mapped to one or more of the UNSDGs, to align with Ireland's SDG commitments and to facilitate complementarity in reporting (see example below: Measures 81 and 82).

81.	Provide investment for multi-purpose spaces in the community (e.g. community centres, libraries, schools, and sports clubs) for a variety of activities, including leisure, community, cultural and services provision.	D/Rural and Community Development	Local Authorities, Community Groups	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
82.	Further enhance the Public Participation Network and Local Community Development Committee structures to ensure that local communities are fully involved in, and contribute to, decisions affecting their local areas.	D/Rural & Community Development	Local Authorities, Local Community Development Committees, Public Participation Networks	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Our Rural Future is a living document, with Progress Reports published every six months. The annual Work Programmes allow for new actions to be added over the lifetime of the policy. These additional commitments continue to be aligned with the UN SDGs.

Case study: Wicklow PPN: Mapping Sustainable Development Goals among local community groups

In 2021, Wicklow County Council and Wicklow PPN came together to create an online mapping tool that allows local community groups to highlight how their actions and activities relate to one or more of the SDGs. Collaboration on raising awareness of this tool is ongoing and a significant number of groups continue to upload their projects, stories and images. Link to Map.

SDG Assessment 8: Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025
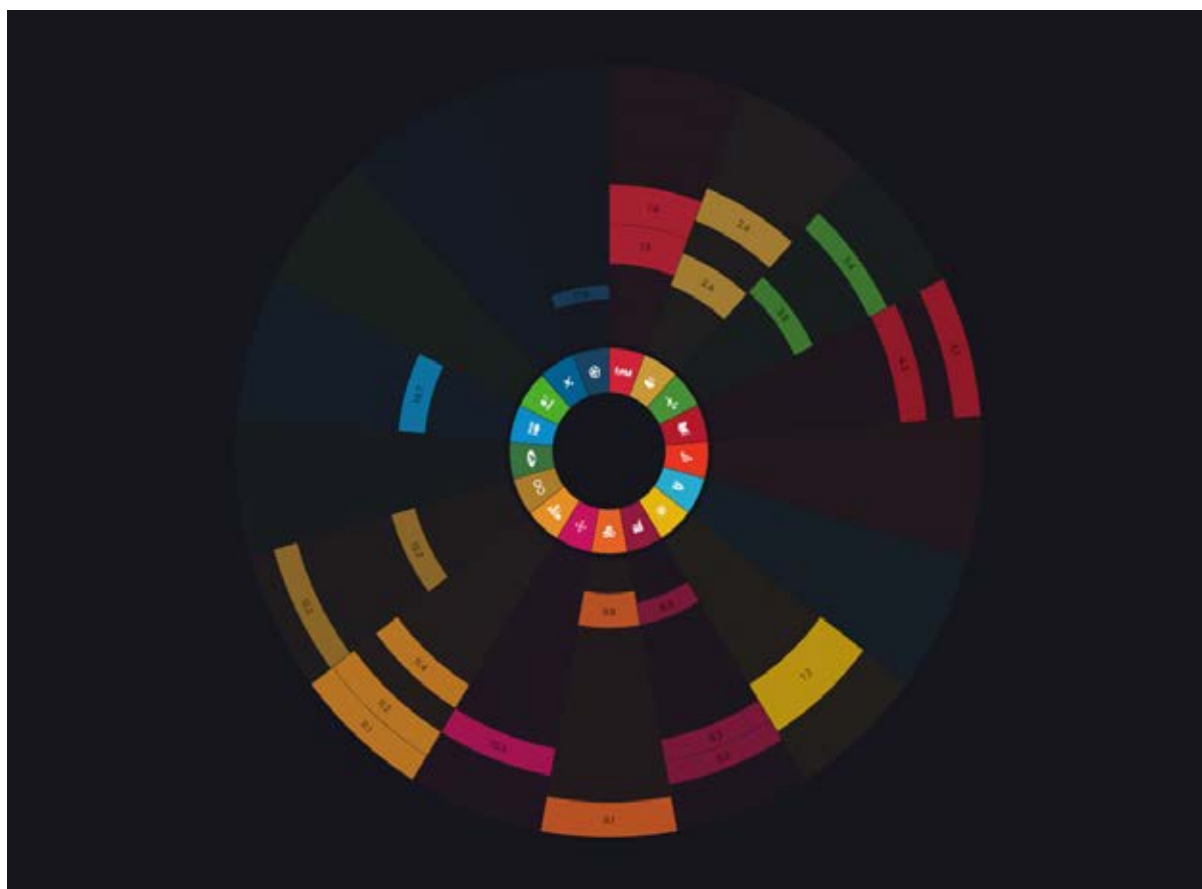
[Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025](#) contributes to the progression of 22 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty, SDG 2 Zero Hunger, SDG 3 Good Health and Well-Being, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 14 Life Below Water and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

SDG Assessment 9: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024
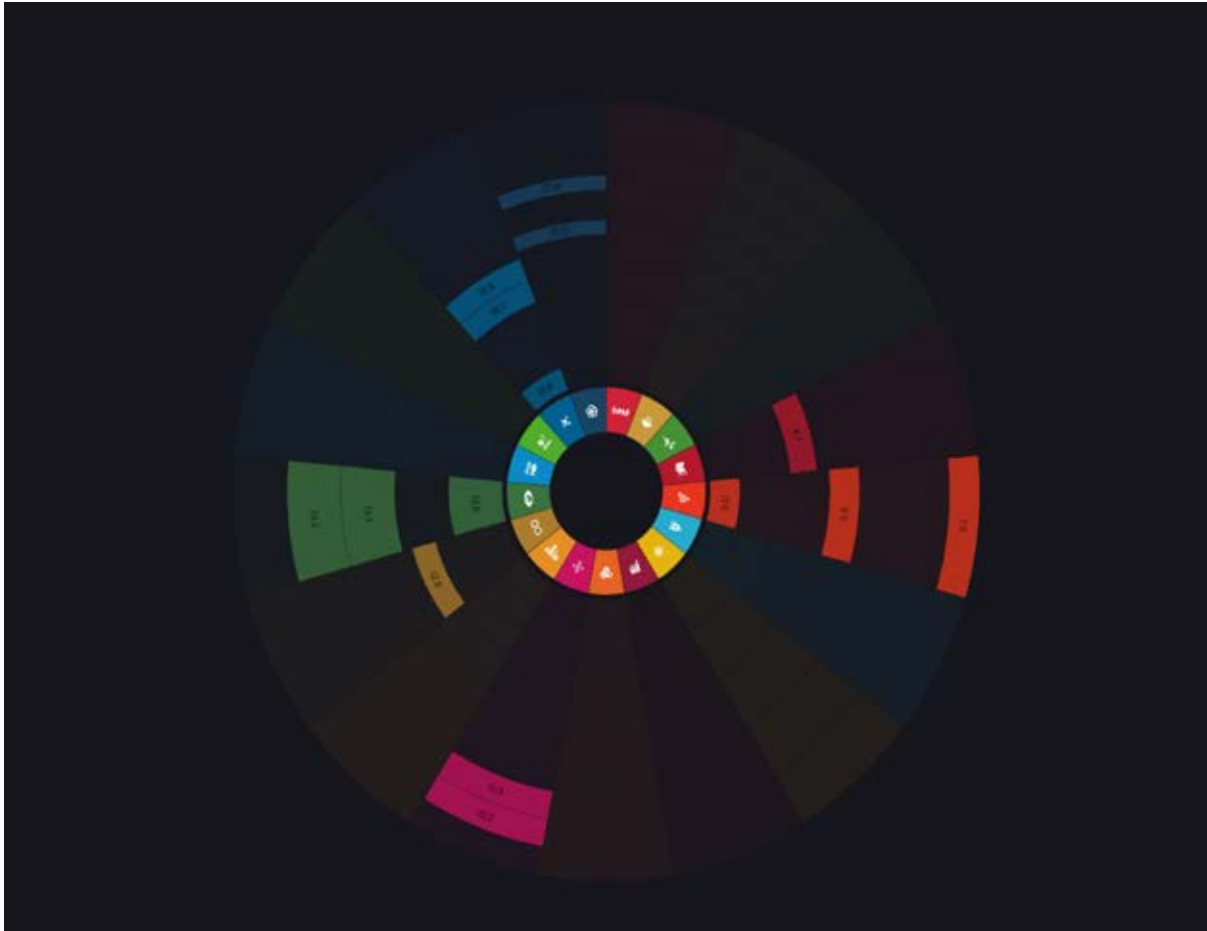
[Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024](#) contributes to the progression of 15 SDG targets under SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals.

Civil Society Assessment – Community Engagement and Inclusion

Ireland has done well by:

- Supporting social sector initiatives that have been highly effective in mobilising communities, such as the Gaelic Athletic Association, Local Development Companies and the Tidy Towns Awards.

- Facilitating an evolution in democracy through citizen's assemblies, public consultations on policy development and Public Participation Networks.

- Investing in a public library network that enables public access to information for sustainable development through a nationally distributed physical infrastructure.

- Reporting transparently on SDG implementation progress through data collected and analysed by the Central Statistics Office.

Ireland could do better by:

- Accelerating awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals across society through more cohesive whole-of-government messaging.

- Further investing in, promoting and learning from "SDG Champion Projects" - not as the exception to business-as-usual - but as the norm and a fundamental requirement for a licence to operate.

Messages for the international community:

- The SDGs are essential and their implementation must be ensured, but a fundamental shift in our traditional approach to governance is needed. Currently, individual departments compete for resources instead of taking a more collaborative approach. We must shift to a more integrated form of government that operates from a unified perspective to make resource-allocation decisions based on the principle of Leave No One Behind.

- The SDGs and Leave No One Behind must become the unifying framework and common language for developing, implementing and evaluating local, regional and international policies. Leave no one behind must become the common enterprise of humanity!

- The decision-making process must be transparent and inclusive. This is key to winning broad-based community support for a sustainable transition.

7.5 Housing

7.5.1 Introduction

Ireland currently faces significant challenges in the area of housing due to unprecedented challenges in the external environment, including cost of living increases, and interest rate rises. The ongoing war in Ukraine has contributed to the rise in construction costs and overall inflation. In the year to March 2023, wholesale prices for construction materials rose by almost 14%. These cost pressures make homes costlier and more difficult to build. The Rental sector in Ireland has continued to grow in importance with a demand for rental accommodation outstripping a restricted supply. The unmet demand and restricted supply places upward pressure on rents. Rents and lack of availability of rental properties are causing affordability issues, particularly for those with low incomes and the more vulnerable citizens. The increase we have seen in homelessness is a serious concern.

The Government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life. The Government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system.

The focus throughout 2023 will be on meeting the challenges of viability, affordability & sustainability; reforming the planning system; delivering social & affordable homes; boosting productivity; increasing construction sector capacity; revitalising our towns & villages; improving the rental market; and planning for the future.

- Housing for All

Housing for All is the Government's housing plan to 2030.It is a multi-annual, multi-billion euro plan which aims to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The policy has four pathways to achieving housing for all:

- supporting home ownership and increasing affordability;

- eradicating homelessness, increasing social housing delivery and supporting social inclusion;

- increasing new housing supply; and

- addressing vacancy and efficient use of existing stock.

At the heart of Housing for All is a massive expansion in the role of the State in providing affordable homes for purchase and rent, while building higher levels of new social housing. It involves the public and private sector working in tandem to meet our housing needs.

At its simplest, the Plan will increase the amount of affordable and social homes, remove barriers to further progress and give support to allow the private sector to grow, intervening where necessary. Over 300,000 new homes will be built to 2030, including a projected 54,000

affordable homes for purchase or rent and over 90,000 social homes. It is the largest State led building programme in our history and is financed by the biggest State funding commitment ever.

The Plan will increase new housing supply to an average of at least 33,000 new units per year to 2030. This includes a plan for 10,000 social homes each year between 2023 and 2027, with 9,500 of these being new-builds, and an average of 6,000 affordable homes for purchase or rent.

This Plan focuses on achieving a more sustainable housing system with a planning system that is fit for purpose and that will create long-term vibrant communities with the necessary supporting infrastructure. Some of the upcoming priority actions include:

- Progressing the Planning and Development Bill (published on 26 January 2023). The review and ensuing legislation will deliver a simpler, more streamlined planning process with continued public participation which will ensure decisions, appeals and appeals decisions happen more quickly.

- Completing Implementing the actions of a study on the cost of residential construction which will identify identifies opportunities for cost reduction and increased standardisation.

- Taking action on the recommendations from a report on the cost and availability of finance for residential development.

- Ensuring there are no impediments to delivery of social and affordable homes on State Lands identified for transfer to the Land Development Agency.

- Developing proposals to enable a significant increase in public housing delivery using Modern Methods of Construction.

- Developing a new whole-of-Government approach to enhance the adoption of Modern Methods of Construction, to improve construction sector productivity, innovation, speed of delivery, sustainability and ultimately, costs.

- Working to attract and retain those with the necessary pre-existing skills, providing new training opportunities for those interested in a career in the construction sector, and proactively engaging in international labour markets where supply is unavailable locally.

- Undertaking a comprehensive review of the private rental sector which will take into account the significant regulatory changes over the past several years. The review will ensure that our housing system provides an efficient, affordable, safe and secure framework for both landlords and tenants.

- Ensuring we produce a sufficient number of homes into the future, through undertaking a review of current targets and projections in light of Census 2022.

7.5.2 Building Back Better

Progress to date

While COVID-19 hindered progress by hampering the building of new houses and causing major disruption to the construction sector, the response in the sector has been strong and recent home delivery indicators show that Housing for All is working. In 2022, 29,851 homes were completed. This is an increase of 45.2% from 2021 final figures (20,560) and a 41.3% increase on the pre-pandemic 2019 (21,134) final delivery figures. The 2022 total exceeds the Housing for All target of 24,600 by 5,251, an additional 21.3%.

Along with increasing the supply of homes, the Government has introduced a range of affordable purchase and rental measures and legislated for long-term reforms of the housing and planning systems.

Affordability

Affordable purchase initiatives, such as the First Home Scheme, Local Authority Home Loan and the extension of the Help to Buy Scheme have been implemented.

The First Home Scheme, which was introduced in July 2022, supports first-time buyers to buy a new home. The support takes the form of an equity stake in the home equivalent to the level of funding provided. The purchaser is able to redeem or 'buy out' this equity stake at a time of their choosing, with no compulsion to do so.

- The Local Authority Home Loan is a Government-backed mortgage for first-time buyers and certain other applicants. Loans are offered at reduced interest rates and can be used to buy new and second-hand properties, or to build a home. The interest rates are fixed for the full term of the mortgage, so the repayments remain the same for the lifetime of the loan.

- The Help to Buy (HTB) Scheme helps first-time buyers purchase a newly-built house or apartment. It also applies to once-off self-build homes. The Help to Buy Scheme gives a refund of the income tax and Deposit Interest Retention Tax (DIRT) the purchaser has paid in Ireland over the previous 4 tax years.

Rental Market

The private rental sector in Ireland delivers housing services across Irish society, including many of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged households. It continues to face challenges due to a demand for rental accommodation outstripping a restricted supply, which can place upward pressure on rents. Over recent years, there has been considerable change in the demographic profile of households renting in the private market, which is increasingly similar to those in homeownership. Balancing policy in the interests of landlords and tenants in a measured way continues to be challenging.

The rollout of Cost Rental housing is a new form of State-backed secure, long-term rental tenure through which rents are aimed at a minimum of 25% below open market rates. This is a key initiative to provide affordable and secure rented accommodation to those tenants on incomes above the threshold for social housing but are still having difficulty affording private

rental accommodation. Housing for All commits to delivering 18,000 cost rental homes to the end of 2030, with 1,850 of those cost rental homes to be delivered in 2023.

A number of new and enhanced protections have also been legislated for including a cap on allowable rent increases at the Harmonised Consumer Index of Prices or 2% (whichever is the lower) a restriction on deposit amounts;; the extension of notice periods; and the introduction of tenancies of unlimited duration. There are also further proposals for enhanced local government support for tenant purchase.

Vacancy and using our Existing Housing Stock Effectively

Housing for All dedicates a pathway to ensuring that Ireland's existing housing stock is being fully utilised. The Plan introduces a number of incentives and measures to bring vacant and derelict properties back into residential use, including, an updated Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant; a Town Centre First policy that includes initiatives to revitalise towns, and changes to the Fair Deal Scheme, which remove disincentives to rent or sell vacant property.

A new Vacant Homes Action Plan was launched on 30 January 2023. The Action Plan provides greater detail on the key measures set out in Housing for All that will be progressed over the coming years to bring more vacant and derelict residential and commercial properties back into use as homes. This includes the rollout of a data collection project across all local authorities (where each authority has a dedicated vacant homes officer) to capture accurate data to inform the future programme of work.

Other measures introduced under Housing for All include the Vacant Properties Refurbishment Grant which provides funding for the renovation of vacant and derelict homes for people to live in or rent out. Funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage through the Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund, grants are provided up to €50,000 to renovate a vacant property and up to €70,000, if the property is derelict.

One of four funds set up under Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework and National Development Plan, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fun (URDF) provides grant funding for public infrastructure and public realm projects across the country. A significant allocation of over €1.5 billion in funding has been allocated under Calls 1 and 2 of the URDF, to support 132 proposals comprising over 400 sub projects across the country that will drive the regeneration of Ireland's five cities and other large towns.

In 2023, a €150 million Urban Regeneration and Development Fund was also announced which will see a call for proposals from local authorities for funding to acquire vacant or derelict properties or sites in their area. Crucially, the fund is self-sustaining, as it will be replenished from any proceeds received from sale or use of a site and reinvested in further tackling vacancy and dereliction across the country.

7.5.3 Leaving No One Behind

Social Inclusion

Looking after the most vulnerable in our society is at the heart of Housing for All. Preventing homelessness, protecting tenants and supporting social inclusion are all areas which are prominent in the Plan. Social housing performs a key function in society, ensuring that households, who do not have sufficient resources to meet their housing needs, are provided with social housing supports.

Government policy on housing for disabled people and older people is set out in Housing for All. The Plan commits to ensuring that affordable, quality housing with an appropriate mix of housing design types (including universally designed units) is provided in social housing and is available to those who need it, including those with disabilities and older people.

The Government recognises the need for greater co-ordination among State service providers for those with a disability. The co-ordination of housing provision with the delivery of key health and social care supports is paramount. A new National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027 was published in January 2022. This Strategy places a greater emphasis on independent living and community inclusion. The development and implementation of the Strategy is underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Under Housing for All, there is a policy objective to increase and improve housing options for older people to facilitate ageing in place with dignity and independence. The Plan builds on and takes forward the ongoing actions in "Housing Options for Our Ageing Population" policy statement from 2019, published jointly by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Health, which provided policy options in support of a range of housing and accommodation alternatives for older people.

The provision of good Traveller-specific accommodation is a key action within Housing for All and is aimed at ensuring that delivery is on a sustainable path for the provision of timely accommodation to meet the needs of Traveller families. Significant progress is being made on Traveller Specific Accommodation providing culturally appropriate accommodation for members of the Traveller community. There was an 11% increase in the capital budget providing €20 million in funding for Traveller specific accommodation in 2023 from the previous year.

Homelessness

The increase in homelessness seen in recent months is a serious concern for Government. While emergency measures can help in the short-term, the long-term response remains an increased and sustainable supply of new homes alongside additional tenant supports. Increasing overall housing supply across tenures (social, affordable, private rental and private ownership) is critical. More social housing and an expanded rental market will mean less people presenting as homeless. The Government is focused on accelerating social housing supply and has a target to deliver over 9,000 new build social homes in 2023.

The viability challenge in the development of apartments is having a detrimental impact on the supply of affordable rental accommodation. This has been coupled with a decline in the number of small-scale landlords in the rental market. In spring 2023, the Government introduced a set of measures to enhance support for private rental tenants.

On 21 June 2021, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with the support of the Government, signed the 'Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness'. The Declaration commits all signatories to working towards the ending of homelessness by 2030. In signing the Declaration, Ireland has agreed to promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to those who are homeless. All relevant stakeholders will be involved in the design and implementation of policy measures. Ireland is committed to supporting our policy measures with adequate funding and to sharing our good practices in combatting homelessness.

To ensure a better coherence and coordination of homeless related services in delivering policy measures and actions, the Government has established a National Homeless Action Committee. This is a cross-governmental and inter-agency oversight group whose role has been informed by Housing for All and oversees the implementation of the interagency elements. Housing for All recognises that many households experiencing homelessness have additional support needs and includes specific measures to address these needs. These include measures to engage with and support rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation, the continued expansion of the Housing First model, a focus on the construction and acquisition of one-bed homes, and, importantly, ensuring provision of the necessary health and mental health supports required to assist homeless people with complex needs.

Furthermore, Minister O'Brien launched a [Youth Homelessness Strategy](#) in November 2022. The three-year Strategy aims to help young people aged 18–24 who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The first Youth Homelessness Strategy in two decades, it sets out 27 distinct actions to prevent young people entering homelessness, to improve the experiences of young people in emergency accommodation and to assist young people to exit homelessness. A Steering Group has been established to drive the delivery of the actions set out in the Strategy.

Accommodation of Ukrainian refugees

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has tragically resulted in millions of Ukrainians being displaced. Ireland is rightly fulfilling its duty to provide accommodation for these victims of war. On 4 March 2022 the Temporary Protection Directive was activated to provide immediate protection within EU countries for persons displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A dedicated Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach, has been established to oversee and coordinate the Ukraine humanitarian response in Ireland. Refurbishment projects are currently progressing through the Emergency Refurbishment Ukraine project to provide approximately 2,800 bed spaces on completion.

The launch of "Offer a Home" took place on 24 November, 2022 and as of 6 March, 2023, a total of 1,640 properties have been recorded through the Offer a Home scheme. The DHLGH is also assisting the Office of Public Works (OPW) with identifying sites that might be suitable to assist them to develop a programme of rapid build homes needed to accommodate Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTPs), on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). The Department has notified the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) of a number of such sites that may be suitable for rapid build houses intended to cater for 2,800 individuals.

SDG Assessment 10: Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland
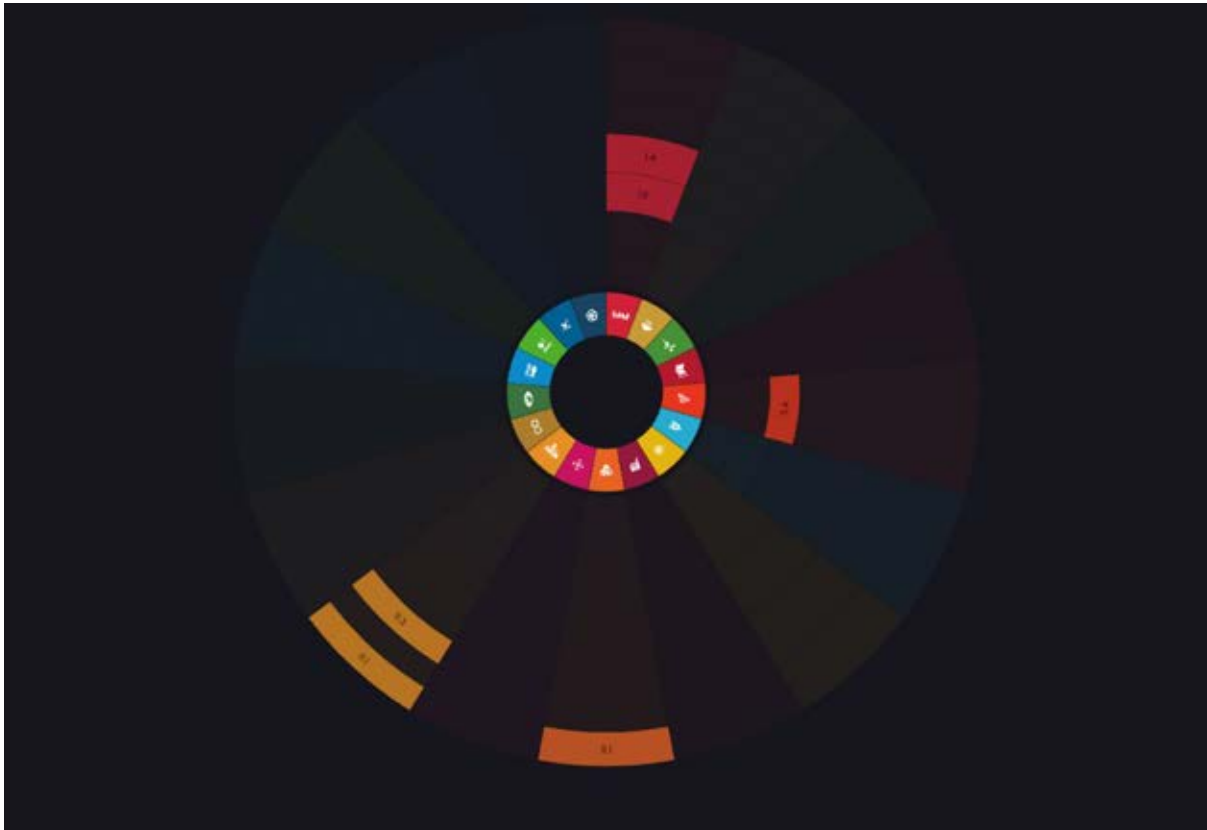
Housing for All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland contributes to the progression of 6 SDG targets under SDG 1 No Poverty; SDG 5 Gender Equality; SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; and SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Civil Society Assessment – Housing

Ireland has done well by:

- Committing to a Housing for All Policy: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ef5ec-housing-for-all-a-new-housing-plan-for-ireland/.

- Having a high level of engagement with the housing issue across all stakeholder groups.

- Incorporating sustainability criteria with housing regulations, particularly regarding energy efficiency.

Ireland could do better by:

- Recognising housing as a universal right.

- Engaging with housing as a whole-of-society challenge that incorporates socio-economic and cultural factors. It is not just a question of supply versus demand.

- Demonstrating urgency appropriate to the challenge by removing unnecessary impediments to housing developments.

Messages for the International Community:

- Housing policy must adapt to the long-term impacts of climate change on built infrastructure and future demographic shifts.

- Housing strategies and plans must not be beholden to any ideology, and the measure of the effectiveness of any strategy must be its impact on people's lives, particularly those at risk of being left behind.

7.6 Climate Action and Circular Economy

7.6.1 Introduction

Our climate is changing rapidly and is transforming our world. Today, atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2) concentrations are higher than at any time in at least 2 million years, and concentrations of methane (CH_4) and nitrous oxide (N_2O) are higher than at any time in at least 800,000 years. Human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land, leading to widespread and rapid change, including changes to our weather system.

Ireland has experienced first-hand the consequences of climate change as set out in the Climate Status Report for Ireland 2020, including:

- All seasons have seen a rise in temperature and the annual average surface air temperature has increased by over 0.9°C in the last 120 years;

- There has been a reduction in the number of frost days and shortening length of the frost season;

- Sea levels around Ireland have risen by approximately 2 to 3mm per year since the early 1990s;

- Projections predict a significant reduction in average annual levels of spring and summer rainfall with a substantial increase in the frequency of heavy precipitation events in winter and autumn.

In line with EU ambition, Ireland is committed to achieving a 51% reduction in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from 2021 to 2030, and to achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050; with legally binding requirements to achieve these objectives set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.

The circular economy offers an alternative to today's linear ('take-make-waste') model of production and consumption. The circular economy and climate action are inherently interlinked. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development study of four countries' GHG found emissions arising from material management accounted for between 55% and 65% of national emissions. Ireland's material consumption is well above the EU average, indicating that there is scope for savings in GHG emissions through maximising the efficiency of our material use.

Government is adopting a suite of measures to support reduced resource consumption, waste prevention, and increased levels of re-use and recycling.

The following national policies drives the achievement of climate mitigation and adaptation and the advancement of a circular economy in Ireland:

- **Climate Action Plan 2023 SDG 13**

Climate Action Plan 2023 (CAP 23), which was published in December 2022, provides the framework through which Ireland intends to meet legally-binding, economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and the emissions reductions targets set out in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Acts. It details how Ireland can accelerate the actions that are required to respond to the climate crisis, putting climate solutions at the centre of Ireland's social and economic development.

Targets under all 17 SDGs are being progressed by CAP23, as detailed in Chapter 21 in the published Plan. This demonstrates the comprehensive and cross-cutting work required to progress climate action and the importance and value of the Plan in terms of promoting and progressing sustainable development in Ireland.

- **Ireland's Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020-2025 SDG 12**

Ireland's Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020-2025 was published in September 2020 in line with the evolution of EU and UN environmental policy. This far-reaching plan re-confirms the link between the circular economy and climate action and mandates a whole-of-government approach to ensure Ireland's successful transition to a circular economy (SDG target 12.1). The Plan commits to a range of actions to support the transition to a circular economy through a mix of legislative, regulatory and financial measures, and reconfirms the link between the circular economy and climate action, mandating a whole-of-government approach to ensure Ireland's successful transition to a circular economy. It sets a robust and clear policy framework for a transition away from a focus on managing waste with much greater focus on patterns of production and consumption and an emphasis on circularity and preventing wasteful use of resources in the first instance – (SDG target 12).

- **Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023 SDG 12**

Ireland's first Whole-of-Government Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2023 was launched in December 2021 and is being implemented over the course of 2022 and 2023. In line with the approach set out in the Waste Action Plan, the Strategy's primary aim has been to set out an overall approach to circular economy policy, identify key objectives and indicate the direction of future policy development (SDG target 12.1). An additional aim has been to provide explanatory information which can demystify the circular economy for and raise awareness amongst non-specialist audiences (SDG targets 12.8 and 12.6).

The Strategy commits Ireland to achieving a material circularity rate above the EU average by 2030, this is an extremely challenging target as currently Ireland's rate is significantly below the EU average (SDG targets 12.2, SDG 12.5).

- **National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025** SDG 12

Ireland recognises food waste as a global problem that has environmental, social and economic consequences. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that Ireland generated approximately 770,316 tonnes of food waste in 2020. Ireland is fully committed to reducing food waste by 50% by 2030 and Ireland's National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025, published in November 2022, sets out a number of priority actions to bring the focus on food waste prevention, across key sectors in the food supply chain, together in a coherent manner (SDG target 12.3).

- **National Adaptation Framework and Sectoral Adaptation Plans** SDG 13

Ireland's first statutory National Adaptation Framework (NAF) was published in 2018. The NAF sets out the national strategy to develop a 'climate resilient Ireland' by reducing the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and by availing of positive impacts. Twelve Sectoral Adaptation Plans were also published, identifying the key climate risks faced by individual sectors and the approach being taken to address these risks and build climate resilience. Legally the NAF must be reviewed no less than every 5 years and in 2022 a comprehensive review was undertaken including stakeholder and public consultations. A new NAF is due to be developed over the course of 2023. This will in turn, underpin the development of a new cycle of updated Sectoral Adaptation Plans.

- **River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 SDG 6**

Ireland's forthcoming Third River Basin Management Plan will set out how we will protect, improve and sustainably manage our water environment up to 2027, in implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation. Climate change is exacerbating both water scarcity and water-related hazards (such as floods and droughts), as rising temperatures disrupt precipitation patterns and the entire water cycle. Sustainable water management is central to building the resilience of societies and ecosystems and to reducing carbon emissions.

This plan contains a programme of measures that will address all of the pressures impacting our waters. Protecting and restoring water quality in Ireland will need measures to address the loss of agricultural nutrients to water, continue to improve wastewater treatment and to re-establish natural free-flowing conditions in more rivers.

- **Investment in Water and Wastewater Infrastrucure** SDG 6

The Programme for Government commits to funding the national water utility, Uisce Éireann's, capital investment plan for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure on a multi-annual basis and delivery of the funding package committed to in Project Ireland 2040 (SDG 6). The National Development Plan commits to almost €6bn capital investment to be undertaken by Uisce Éireann in the period from 2021-2025 of which over €4.5bn will be Voted Exchequer funded in respect of domestic water services. This overall investment will deliver significant improvements in our public water and wastewater services, continuing our excellent track record in providing universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation services (SDG 6).

7.6.2 Building Back Better

Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 significantly strengthens the statutory framework for climate governance in Ireland. The 2021 Act binds Ireland to reducing by 51% its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, relative to 2018 levels, and achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

This legislation provides a legal basis for the delivery of successive Climate Action Plans and long-term Climate Strategies, supported by a system of carbon budgeting and sectoral emission ceilings to meet our 2030 and 2050 targets. This new framework is supported by appropriate oversight by Government, the Oireachtas and the Climate Change Advisory Council.

Sectoral emissions ceilings

Following the process set out in the 2021 Act, a programme of three successive five-year carbon budgets was adopted. These economy-wide carbon budgets informed the subsequent development of sectoral emissions ceilings, which set a limit on the emissions permitted in a given sector of the economy.

Our transition to a sustainable, healthy and more prosperous economy and society will be supported and guided by the sectoral emissions ceilings. They also assign responsibility to specific Government ministers to take actions to ensure that the sector(s) they are responsible for meet their emission reduction targets.

The multi-stakeholder engagement process to develop and introduce Ireland's carbon budgets and sectoral emission ceilings, as well as the annual update to the Climate Action Plan, illustrates how Ireland's climate action will require collaboration and engagement to support and facilitate changes across all sectors of our society and economy, particularly between Government, business, academia, communities, and individuals to implement new and ambitious policies, technological innovations, systems and infrastructures.

Decarbonising the electricity sector

Considerable progress has been made in decarbonising the electricity sector over the last decade, resulting in electricity emissions falling by 45% between 2005 and 2020. In 2020 42% of all electricity generated in Ireland came from renewable sources, while in 2021 electricity accounted for just 14.4% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland is in the top five globally for installed wind power capacity per capita and it is clear that onshore wind will continue to play a vital role in increasing the decarbonisation of the electricity sector particularly over the next five years, along with solar energy.

The electricity sector faces an immense challenge to meet its requirements under the sectoral emissions ceilings. Electricity will play an important role in the decarbonisation of other sectors through electrification, including transport, heating, and industry. Transformational policies, measures and actions, and societal change are required to increase the deployment of renewable energy generation, strengthen the grid, and meet the demand and flexibility requirements required to meet the challenge. Among the most important measures in CAP23 is to increase the proportion of renewable electricity to up to 80% by 2030 and a target of 9 GW from onshore wind, 8 GW from solar, and at least 5 GW of offshore wind energy by 2030.

Transport emissions abatement

The constraints on travel in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 resulted in transport sector emissions levels falling to 10.3 Mt CO2eq., relative to its 12.2 Mt CO2eq. emissions baseline. 2021 saw a 6.1% increase in emissions over 2020 levels, largely driven by the cessation of public health restrictions that had artificially reduced transport demand.

Meeting our 2030 transport emissions abatement will require transformational

change and accelerated action across all key decarbonisation channels. Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out revised approaches and targets to meet the higher level of ambition required, including a 20% reduction in total vehicle kilometres, a reduction in fuel usage, and significant increases to sustainable transport trips and modal share.

Fleet electrification and use of biofuels will continue to provide the greatest share of emissions abatement in the medium term, and vehicle targets, while unchanged, have been reframed as a percentage share of total fleet and new registrations, to better embed our vehicle strategy within our wider Sustainable Mobility Policy.

Climate Action Plan - Built Environment

All new dwellings will be designed and constructed to Nearly Zero Energy Building standard by 2025, and Zero Emission Building standard by 2030. Government has committed to retrofit 500,000 homes by 2030 (including increased funding through the National Development Plan particularly for free upgrades for low-income households) and will install 680,000 renewable energy heat sources in both new and existing residential buildings. We recognise that we will need work out ways to assist broader society with the costs of retrofitting.

The ambitious National Retrofit Plan will drive demand, make retrofitting more affordable, and expand the capacity of the industry including training of workers.

Other measures to decarbonise our buildings set out in the CAP include increased targets for district heating, renewable gas, and the public sector, as well as strengthening building standards for all buildings.

Decoupling the links between fossil fuel use and economic progress

This sector accounted for 10.2% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions in 2021. Compliance with the sectoral emissions ceiling requires changes in the way we produce, consume, and design our goods and services. Decarbonising our manufacturing industry is vital for Ireland's economy and future competitiveness. A number of important achievements were reached under CAP21 in this area, including:

- Launch of a €55 million Green Transition Fund;

- Delivery of training supports to 140 companies through the Climate Planning Fund for Business

- Launch of the Climate Toolkit 4 Business;

- Electrification of new and current manufacturing processes displacing using fossil fuel where possible and as soon as possible

- Low and zero carbon product substitution for construction materials and a reduction in the clinker content for cement where practical

- Utilisation of biomass, and low and zero emission gas as key fuels for the decarbonisation

- Expand and enhance supports from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland with a focus on achieving energy demand reduction, electrification, and biomass adoption in industry;

- Develop policies for hydrogen, and carbon capture and storage for the third carbon budget period Industry.

Transformation of the agriculture sector

Agriculture accounted for 33.33% of Ireland's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2021, down from 34% in 2020. Overall emissions in the sector have grown 19% over the last decade, however, the agriculture sector is currently undergoing a significant transformation to deliver the reduction in GHG emissions required. Guided by the Food Vision 2030 Strategy, Irish farmers and food producers will further prioritise delivery of environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Farm practices that enable farmers to produce world-class food with a lower carbon footprint are key. The use of less chemical nitrogen and more targeted use of fertiliser has been committed to, while maintaining the same level of grass growth through multi-species swards. Other measures include improving the genetics of our herds to reduce emissions and improve productivity. Increased organic farming and diversification into forestry, biomethane, tillage and renewable energy production will also be incentivised to provide alternative incomes and opportunities for livestock farmers in particular.

Land Use

Ireland's land use, land use change and forestry sector is currently a carbon source rather than a carbon sink. To reduce emissions and move to being an overall store of carbon, will involve further bog rehabilitation, increased afforestation, improved management of grasslands on organic and mineral soils, increasing the use of cover crops in tillage, and the rewetting of organic soils. The ongoing Land Use Review will inform the sector's sectoral emission ceiling. Some key actions set out in CAP23 include:

- Increase our annual afforestation rates from approximately 2,000 hectares (ha) per annum in 2021 and 2022 to 8,000 ha per annum from 2023 onwards, to deliver an additional 28,000 ha of afforestation across the first carbon budget period;

- Improve our management for carbon sequestration of 200,000 ha of grasslands on mineral soils;

- Reduce the management intensity of grasslands on 25,000 ha of drained organic soils

- Rehabilitate 33,000 ha of peatlands as part of the Bord na Móna Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme and LIFE People and Peatlands programmes.

Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022

Ireland has underpinned its Circular Economy national policies with legislative measures. The Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 was signed in July 2022 and defines the circular economy in Irish law and places a legal requirement on national government to have in place, and regularly update, a national circular economy policy.

The Act builds on Ireland's successful experience of using economic levies to promote sustainable behaviours and gives the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications the power to introduce new environmental levies on a wide range of single-use items, and in due course to prohibit the placing on the market of these environmentally harmful products. All revenue associated with these levies is ring-fenced in Ireland's Environment Fund (to be re-designated as the Circular Economy Fund during the course of 2023) which supports environmental projects across Ireland.

Further provisions in the Act will help drive better segregation of waste in the commercial sector by introducing incentivised pricing in the same way that currently applies to households. The Act will end the issuing of new licences for the exploration and mining of coal, lignite, and oil shale, consolidating our policy of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels (SDG targets 12.2 and 12.5).

Recycling targets

The latest available national waste statistics from Ireland's EPA relate to the year 2020 and indicate that Ireland met all current EU targets in relation to recycling and recovery of packaging waste and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), as well as re-use and recycling targets for end-of-life vehicles, and the 2020 EU target for recovery of Construction & Demolition (C&D) waste (SDG target 12.5). However, challenges remain in relation to achieving the separate EU target for WEEE collection and meeting the planned increased EU targets in relation to plastic recycling will the introduction of further policy measures. The implementation of the Waste Action Plan in the period 2020-2025 is making a significant contribution to the achievement of Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 12.

Tackling single-use disposable items

In line with EU policy and legislation, Ireland has already banned a number of single-use disposable items from being placed on the Irish market and continues to make extensive use of national Extended Producer Responsibility Schemes (EPRs) to ensure that producers contribute toward the recovery and recycling costs of specified materials.

During the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic Ireland, in common with many other jurisdictions, saw a drop in pre-existing levels of reusable packaging in favour of single-use disposable items, due to hygiene concerns on the part of consumers and businesses. In response, Ireland's Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Communications engaged with the Food Safety Authority of Ireland on this issue and the Authority was subsequently able to

issue national guidance on this issue, confirming that reusable containers could continue to be during the pandemic subject to adequate hygiene measures being in place. By acknowledging consumer and business concerns, assessing them and providing clear national guidance in response, Ireland was able to maintain its national policy ambition of phasing out single-use disposal items from the Irish market over time as suitable reusable alternatives become available.

Establishment of Climate Action Regional Offices

One of the most significant actions to assist the local authority sector to respond to climate change was the establishment of four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) in 2018. These offices are a shared service for the sector, operated by a lead local authority in each of the regions, and grouped according to shared climate change risks. They are crucial to driving and coordinating climate action at regional and local level, and enabling co-ordinated engagement across local and central government, building on the experience and expertise that exists across the sector, and driving practical policy and behavioural change.

Local authority reporting, Climate Action Plans and training

Local authorities report annually on progress under the Local Authority Climate Change Adaptation Strategy/Climate Change Action Plans which covers actions taken in mitigation, adaptation, community engagement, biodiversity, mainstreaming and awareness building. In 2021, 2,462 actions were reported and this increased slightly to 2,478 actions in 2022. These actions will be captured in the future Local Authority Climate Action Plans which each local authority is currently developing.

Local Authorities are begining to develop Local Authority Climate Action Plans (LACAP) to translate national climate policy to local circumstances to assist in the delivery of the climate neutrality objective at local and community levels. The individual local authority will be responsible for establishing decarbonisation zones, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from, and adapting its, own assets and infrastructure, whilst also taking on a broader role of influencing and facilitating others to meet their own targets. While each local authority may deploy their own approach to the style and structure of their climate action plans, all of them must demonstrate alignment with the key principles of the national Climate Action Plan to ensure that the local authority climate action plan is ambitious, action-focused, evidence-based, participative, and transparent. A set of guidelines has been developed to assist the local government sector in developing their local climate plans.

The Local Authority Climate Action Training Programme delivers training to local government staff and elected representatives. It comprises a suite of six training pillars, each tailored and designed to specific groupings within Local Authorities. The training is designed to develop climate action capacity in the local government sector across all functions and activities so they can better deliver the adaptation strategies/action plans and local climate plans. Over 13,500 staff, from across all 31 Local Authorities, completed training under the training programme during 2021.In 2022, over 4,000 staff received training. Further training will be delivered during 2023, with a particular focus on Community Climate and developing local climate action plans.

7.6.3 Leaving No One Behind

Just Transition Framework and Commission

Ireland has committed to a just transition to ensure that nobody is left behind as we strive to transition to a low-carbon economy. To reduce emissions, significant structural change will be required across large parts of the economy. These changes will affect different groups of society disproportionately, and therefore tailored and targeted responses are required by Government to ensure that this transition is fair and equitable for all and that existing inequalities are not exacerbated.

A Just Transition Framework has been incorporated into the annual Climate Action Plan cycle and sectoral policy making based on four principles:

1. An integrated, structured, and evidence-based approach to identify and plan our response to just transition requirements.

2. Ensure people are equipped with the right skills to be able to participate in and benefit from the future net zero economy.

3. The costs are shared so that the impact is equitable and existing inequalities are not exacerbated.

4. Social dialogue to ensure impacted citizens and communities are empowered and are core to the transition process.

The Government has committed through the Climate Action Plan 2023 to establish a statutory Just Transition Commission in 2023. This Commission will provide strategic advice to Government, build on existing research, and engage with the National Dialogue on Climate Action and the Climate Change Advisory Council on how Government policy can further a just transition.

Just Transition Implementation Plan for the Midlands Region

A core principle of a just transition is the erosion of inequalities which may arise in the process of a transition away from peat production.

Both the National and EU Just Transition Fund aid are progressing Ireland towards SDG 8 & 10, by creating decent work, economic growth and reduction of inequality, through creating high quality and sustainable employment and generating economic growth in the Midlands region. Both Funds are actively contributing to SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities and SDG 13, through peatland rehabilitation, the bioeconomy and innovative approaches to economic diversification into more sustainable jobs and net zero carbon opportunities.

The Government's Just Transition Implementation Plan for the Midlands Region continues to support the transition to a decarbonised economy and significant support and exchequer investment has been mobilised to date, including through:

- **National Just Transition Fund** - 56 Projects will continue delivery until 2024. The total value of projects in delivery mode is approximately €30 million, with €22 million

in grant funding. To the end of 2022, €4.3 million has been granted to projects with funding of a further €9.6 million currently scheduled in 2023. Projects are scheduled to conclude by the end of this year, with all remaining payments to be made in early 2024.

- **EU Just Transition Fund** – This Programme was approved on 13 December 2022 and will deliver an additional €169 million in investment to the economic transition of the Midlands region to 2027. The Fund seeks to address the adverse effects of the climate transition by supporting the designated territory in the Midlands and workers impacted by the cessation of commercial peat extraction for power generation to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. The priorities for the fund include:

  - generating employment by investing in the diversification of the local economy

  - supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and the regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets

  - providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition.

In addition a number of other measures have been undertaken to support the Just Transition Implementation Plan including, Peatlands restoration measures; Agricultural and Geological Research and Development projects; Training, Education and Enterprise Supports; Tourism and Recreation initiatives; Renewable Energy Infrastructure; and Community Participation.

While significant progress has been made in the process of achieving a just transition, it is evident that additional measures will be required to ensure that Ireland meets its carbon reduction targets in 2030 and beyond. The availability of funding from the EU Just Transition Fund will draw on the groundwork done in the midlands and ensure support is in place to continue the work started by the National Just Transition Fund.

Social Inclusion in Circular Economy policies

The transition to a circular economy represents a fundamental overhaul of the current global 'take-make-waste' economic model. Change of this magnitude, if not centred around the Leave No One Behind principle, has the potential to be highly disruptive for disadvantaged and/or marginalised people and communities in particular. Ireland has acknowledged this reality in its circular economy policies and taken steps to ensure social inclusion:

- The Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 places a statutory obligation on the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications to take Ireland's National Disability Inclusion Strategy and Ireland's Road Map for Social Inclusion into account when drafting both the Circular Economy Strategy and the National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap.

- As of 2022 there is a legal requirement on the Minister when drafting the Circular Economy Strategy to ensure that a poverty impact assessment has been carried out and that there is consultation with bodies who represent economically or socially disadvantaged persons, or persons who have a disability.

- Section 4 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 provides that the Government must have regard to the requirement for a just transition to a climate neutral economy which endeavours, in so far as is practicable, to maximise employment opportunities, and support persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition.

The Circular Economy Strategy also explicitly acknowledges social inclusion as a key factor for the circular transition, which must be fair and based on widespread consultation and engagement across society.

The National Dialogue on Climate Action

For Ireland to reduce carbon emissions by 51% by 2030 and become a net zero and climate neutral economy by no later than 2050, requires that we make changes to every aspect of our society and economy. The National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) guides delivery across four areas:

- Awareness: increasing awareness of climate change based on evidence

- Engagement: delivering an inclusive programme of engagement to inform climate policy

- Climate Literacy: promoting climate literacy and improving people's capacity to act

- Behavioural Change: empower people to make positive behavioural changes that improve their quality of life.

The 2022 programme included:

- **Climate Conversations 2022**, which serves as the annual public consultation on the Climate Action Plan, captured the views of over 4,300 members of the public through an online consultation; and engaged in a two-way dialogue with focus groups of populations who may be vulnerable to the transition to carbon neutrality; supported Public Participation Networks; and held expert interviews. The Climate Conversations 2022 Summary Report was published in December 2022.

- Two **National Climate Stakeholder Forum** events, which took the form of deliberative workshops and reached over 300 stakeholders from a wide range of organisations to discuss climate action challenges and solutions

- The first **National Youth Assembly on Climate** engaged over 40 young people, between the ages of 12 and 24, to capture their suggestions on how young people in Ireland can deliver climate action. The first NYAC Report was launched by Ministers Ryan and O'Gorman in November 2022.

- The EPA Climate Change in the **Irish Mind[42] study** provided nationally representative data on the attitudes and behaviours of 4,000 members of the Irish public in response to climate change.

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42   https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/climate-change/what-is-epa-doing/ndcayale-work/climate-change-in-the-irish-mind/

7.6.4 Case studies

Case Study: Deposit Return Scheme

Deposit Return Schemes (DRS) are used in several countries as a way of encouraging more people to recycle drinks containers. They work by charging anyone who buys a drink a small deposit for the plastic bottle or can that it comes in. The customer gets this money back when they return the drinks container to a retailer or other collection point to be recycled.

The Separate Collection (Deposit Return Scheme) Regulations 2021, published in November 2021, introduce a requirement on producers of in-scope products to establish a Deposit Return Scheme and appoint a body to operate it on their behalf. The DRS will apply to beverage bottles manufactured from Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) with a capacity of up to 3 litres and beverage containers manufactured from aluminium or steel with a capacity of up to 3 litres. The deposit will be 15c for bottles/cans ≤ 500mls and 25c for those > 500mls.

A national DRS will help Ireland reach the EU 90% separate collection/recycling target under the Single-Use Plastics Directive and the proposed new packaging obligations published by the EU Commission in November 2022.

DRS will increase the quantity of bottles and cans collected for recycling and will result in less going to landfill, incineration or becoming litter and, by ensuring a separate collection stream, will also improve the quality of recycled material being collected and generated.

Deposit Return Scheme Ireland CLG (DRSI) trading as Re-turn have been approved as the DRS operator under the DRS Regulations. Re-turn is a new, not-for-profit company set up by beverage producers and retailers. Re-turn is responsible for all operational matters relating to the DRS.

SDG Assessment 11: Climate Action Plan 2023

Climate Action Plan 2023 contributes to the progression of 85 out of 169 SDG targets which are progressed by actions set out under CAP23 as illustrated in the infographic. As well as contributing in particular to SDG 13 - Climate Action, the result of the assessment demonstrates that the CAP23's impact extends well beyond climate action to span all three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

SDG Assessment 12: Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020-2025
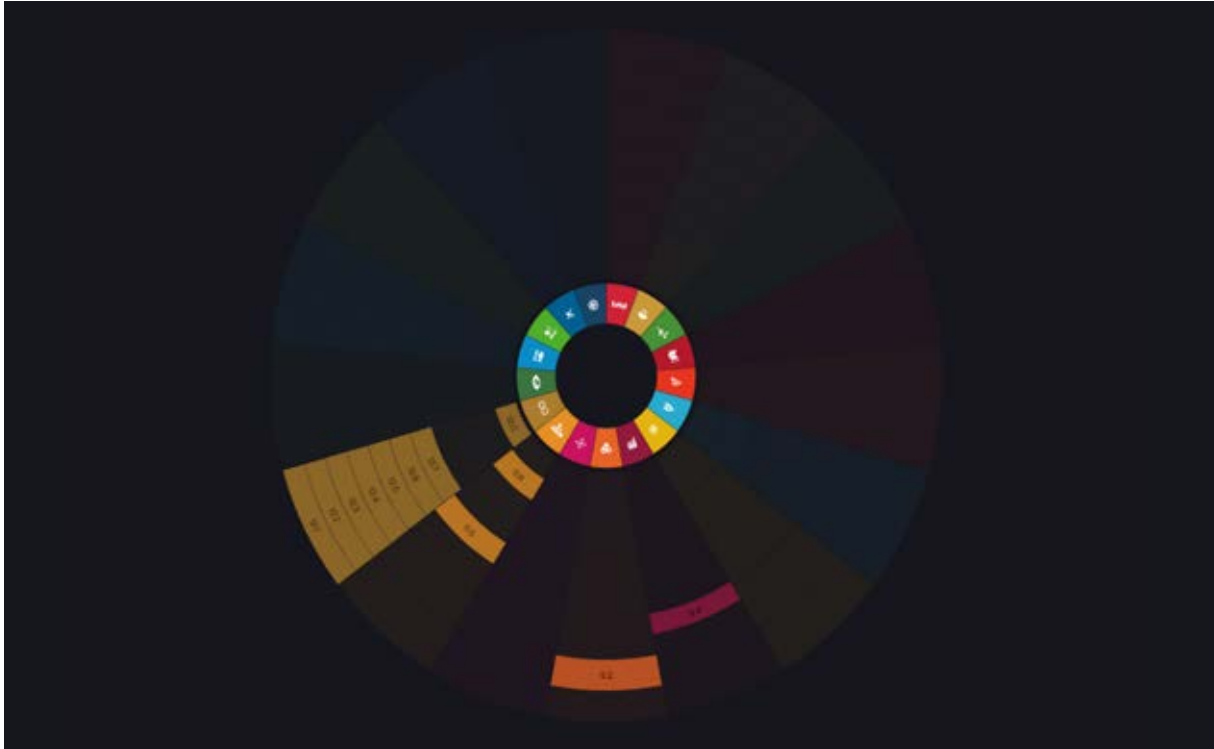
[Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020-2025](#) contributes to the progression of 12 SDG targets under SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 9 Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production.

Civil Society Assessment – Climate Action and Circular Economy

Ireland has done well by:

- Promoting greater awareness and public engagement with the climate emergency, resulting in broad acceptance of the imperative for action

- Developing comprehensive policies and plans as part of a legally-binding climate governance framework.

- Establishing a wide array of enterprise supports and grants for businesses and other organisations in support of sustainable transition.

Ireland could do better by:

- Translating targets, plans and actions into an outcome of reduced national greenhouse gas emissions. (Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise!)

- Engaging more meaningfully with LNOB at-risk groups, especially by using climate action as a lever for social justice.

- Cultivating a national culture of reduction and reuse, with recycling as a last resort.

Messages for the International Community:

- We need to move from a commitment to action to a commitment to results! Unfortunately, there is a disproportionate emphasis on measuring ESG and insufficient focus on results.

- The conventional wisdom that society has to pay a big price for a sustainable transition is a misconception. On the contrary, most people will be far better off in a world where Agenda 2030 is the reality.

- Where is the sense of emergency response that we saw during the pandemic? We need to bring that level of urgency and sense of possibility to the climate crisis.

8 Ireland's support of the international implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Chapter 8: Ireland's support of the international implementation of the 2030 Agenda

8.1 Introduction

At the midway point of the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals are significantly off-track worldwide. This is in part due to the combined impacts of COVID-19, global instability and conflict, including the war in Ukraine, all in the context of climate change, however progress was already lagging behind before recent crises. Every SDG has been affected: the eradication of poverty has slowed significantly; food security is under immense pressure; the pandemic has set back health and education; and we are seeing a pushback against gender equality. Ireland has worked to counter these negative trends, protect hard-won gains, and advance progress where possible.

The primary way in which Ireland contributes to the achievement of the SDGs internationally is through our international development programme. We provide official development assistance (ODA) to support the most vulnerable people in more than 130 countries. To this end, we form partnerships with governments, international and multilateral organisations, local civil society groups and international non-governmental organisations. We remain convinced that global problems can only be tackled through collective action.

Ireland takes a whole-of-government approach to international development. Successful implementation relies on effective cooperation across the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Health Service Executive, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Finance, among others.

Embedding the SDGs in policy

Since Ireland's last Voluntary National Review in 2018, a new policy for international development has been launched. A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development (2019) fully integrates the SDGs and sets out our contribution to realising them. Its headline priorities are to reduce humanitarian need, support climate action, promote gender equality and strengthen governance, with the overarching ambition to reach the furthest behind first. These priorities closely align with the SDGs, individually and collectively, and the overall approach and spirit of the 2030 Agenda.

Our regional strategies also reflect Ireland's commitment to the SDGs. Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025, Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean to 2025 and Strategy for Partnership with Small Island Developing States commit us to deepening engagement with countries in these regions in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and have a particular focus on reaching the furthest behind first. These commitments are translated into specific actions within the strategies and in country-level strategic planning.

Ireland's engagement with specific partners and sectors is also guided by the SDGs. Our [Multilateral Operational Framework for Ireland's Engagement on Development (2022)](#) requires our multilateral partners to be contributing effectively to the global achievement of the SDGs. Similarly, our [International Climate Finance Roadmap (2022)](#) sets out the strategy for achieving our climate finance commitments, a central target under SDG 13. Ireland's agri-food strategy, [Food Vision 2030](#), aligns its goals with targets across all 17 SDGs, and specifically aims to achieve policy coherence between Ireland's domestic food systems policy and its development cooperation and foreign policy.

8.2 Building Back Better

Funding to Ireland's international development programme has increased significantly in the period since Ireland's last Voluntary National Review. In 2022, Ireland's total official development assistance (ODA) increased to €2.33 billion, representing 0.64% of GNP. The figures include eligible first-year costs associated with the provision of services for Ukrainian refugees in Ireland. Ireland did not source any of these costs from the Government's allocation for ODA in 2022. Excluding the costs relating to Ukrainian refugees, the figure for Ireland's 2022 ODA is €1.446 billion, representing 0.4% of GNP. This is an increase on the 0.3% of GNP achieved in 2021, as a result of an increase in the allocation for ODA, costs for the increased number of people seeking international protection in Ireland, not from Ukraine, and an increase in Ireland's share of the EU development cooperation budget.

Contributing to global sustainable development is clearly not just about the quantity of development assistance, but also its quality. The OECD Development Assistance Committee's peer review of Ireland's development programme in 2020 concluded that "Ireland is a strong voice for sustainable development, leading and supporting policy dialogue at both international and local levels… Walking the talk, Ireland allocates its ODA to least developed countries and fragile states, priority partners and sectors… This clear focus enables Ireland, as a relatively small donor, to exercise leadership and make a visible difference."[43]

Ireland also supports the achievement of the SDGs through our diplomatic and normative work. We are a leading advocate for human rights, civic space and multilateralism; values which underpin and cut across all the SDGs. In 2021-22, Ireland used our term as an elected member of the UN Security Council to advance these values. This is a consistent aspect of our work across multilateral fora, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties; the governing bodies of UN funds and programmes; international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF; and the European Union. It is also mirrored in our work to influence national governments through our bilateral relationships.

Our Successes

Since Ireland's last Voluntary National Review in 2018, Ireland has deepened its support of the SDGs in the priority areas of A Better World – reducing humanitarian need, climate action, gender equality and strengthening governance – while continuing our work in traditional areas of strength such as food security, education and health.

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43   OECD (2020) Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: IRELAND 2020https://www.dfa.ie/media/missions/preppa-ris/OECD-DAC-Peer-Review-Ireland-2020.pdf

In the face of escalating needs, Ireland's **humanitarian** support has increased steadily. This includes both immediate humanitarian response to urgent needs, and efforts to reduce humanitarian need over the longer term. This means addressing underlying drivers and providing assistance in a way that builds resilience to shocks and stresses. Ireland is recognised as a principled humanitarian donor whose funding decisions are informed by need and need alone. We provide flexible funding to our partners, allocated according to rigorous needs assessments. Food and nutrition, water and sanitation services, health, education and protection (SDGs 2, 3, 4, 6 and 16) are consistently identified as top priorities.

Quality humanitarian funding is essential to making progress towards the SDGs, enabling longer-term planning, flexible programming and a more joined-up way of working with development and peace actors. The result is that humanitarian assistance is provided in a way that offers a pathway to sustainable development.

Some key achievements include:

- Allocation of over 90% of our country-specific expenditure to the most severe crises[44];

- Ranking fourth in the world for flexible funding and ninth for multi-year funding in 2021[45].

A significant element of our humanitarian work focuses on support for **refugees**. For example, in addition to our core funding, Ireland supports the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' response to crises such as in Jordan (for Syrian refugees), Venezuela, Bangladesh (for Rohingya), Afghanistan and Ukraine (including Moldova and Poland). Funding is also provided directly through our embassies in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda.

Linked to this is our work to facilitate the orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, through the International Organization for Migration and diaspora engagement.

Ireland is an active supporter of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and regularly contributes to its deployment of technical expertise, civil protection and related assets and humanitarian assistance.

In response to the triple planetary crisis of **climate** change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, (SDGs 11-15), Ireland takes a holistic all-of-government approach, prioritising adaptation and resilience to climate change, addressing loss and damage where adaptation is not possible, oceans and the blue economy, and climate and security.

Our work includes significant multilateral engagement – as a committed Party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement – and extensive cross-departmental work, including through the National Climate Delegation. On the UN Security Council, Ireland pushed for better appreciation of the impact of the climate crisis on international security.

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44   According to the INFORM Severity index, which measures the severity of humanitarian crises globally. Data available: https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Severity

45   HPG (2021) The Grand Bargain at five years: An independent review https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-06/Grand%20Bargain%20Annual%20Independent%20Report%202021.pdf

It also includes financial support: for example, we support the World Bank's PROBLUE trust fund for ocean projects and work on climate issues with indigenous communities in the Brazilian Amazon, and we support the Global Environment Monitoring System for freshwater, which provides sound data on freshwater quality to support scientific assessments and decision-making.

Key achievements include:

- Scaling up our international climate finance by almost 40% since 2016; pledging to provide at least €225 million per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2025;

- Playing a key role in achieving international agreement on addressing loss and damage at the UNFCCC 27th Conference of Parties (COP27) in Sharm El Sheikh;

- Co-founding and launching the Champions Group on Adaptation Finance, which built momentum on adaptation finance, including through the COP26 Decision calling for a doubling of international climate finance for adaptation;

- Co-chairing the UN Security Council's informal expert group on climate and security and leading negotiations, with Niger, on what would have been the Council's first ever Resolution on climate and security[46].

Advancing **gender equality** and tackling discrimination against women (SDG 5) are central to Ireland's development work. For example, Ireland's Embassy in Ethiopia is supporting the hardest to reach women and girls to participate in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconciliation. Our Embassy in Mexico supports projects promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and rural women's entrepreneurship.

We ensure that gender equality is prioritised and mainstreamed across all our work, including by holding our multilateral partners to account for the implementation of their gender commitments and by focusing on women and girls' needs in the delivery of basic services such as health and education.

Ireland played a key role in the 2021 Generation Equality Forum, pledging to tackle gender-based violence, support girls' education and support feminist and women's rights organisations. We also demonstrated political leadership on the UN Security Council, championing the Women, Peace and Security agenda and increasing women civil society voices at the Council table.

Key achievements include:

- Consistently ranking among the highest OECD countries in terms of the proportion of ODA expenditure targeting gender equality, ranking third in 2021[47];

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46   This was ultimately vetoed by Russia, but attracted a historic level of support
47   OECD (2021) Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment: Official Development Assistance
https://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/development-finance-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment.htm

- Becoming a Board member of the Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action, an inter-generational, inclusive movement for action on women, peace and security and gender equality in humanitarian action;

- Charing the UN Security Council's informal expert group on Women, Peace and Security and leading the first WPS field visit, to Lebanon.

Ireland promotes democratic principles and good **governance** (SDG 16) across our development programme. Through our embassies, Ireland supports civic education, youth and women's political engagement and election management, for example for presidential elections in Zambia and Uganda in 2021. We support transparency and anti-corruption work, notably through Transparency International. Recognising the fundamental roles that civil society plays in inclusive and sustainable development, Ireland works to stop the erosion of civic space and supports local civil society.

Ireland also supports governments in developing countries to mobilise domestic resources for sustainable development, including through taxation and trade. Ireland has revised its tax treaty policy to safeguard least developed countries' rights by committing not to seek tax treaties with least developed countries, and where Ireland is approached, to ensure that any treaty will be economically beneficial for both partners. Ireland also supports least developed countries to increase their global exports through multilateral "aid for trade" programmes at the UN and World Trade Organisation, bilateral support for organisations like TradeMarkAfrica, and by hosting a triennial Africa-Ireland Economic Forum exploring opportunities for increasing trade and investment.

Key achievements include:

- Establishment of the Global Team Europe Democracy Initiative to respond to threats to democracy, together with the European Commission and fellow EU member states;

- Support for the OECD Development Assistance Committee's Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development and Humanitarian Assistance, a legal instrument that sets out how we will promote civic space and support civil society;

- Launch of an all-of-government initiative to strengthen tax administrations in developing countries, bringing together the Department of Finance, the Revenue Commissioners, and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Ireland has a strong record of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We support partnerships with civil society, research and multilateral organisations on disarmament, mediation, peacebuilding and the inclusion of women, youth and other marginalised groups in peace processes. At the country level, we draw on our own experience of peacebuilding to share lessons and support work in this area. For example, we have provided sustained support for the peace process in Colombia, where Ireland is seen as a credible and trusted voice. We also contribute our human resources and expertise: members of the Irish Defence Forces serve in UN peacekeeping operations, and Irish experts are seconded to EU civilian common security and defence policy missions. Finally, we used our term on the UN Security Council to advance global peace and security (see box below).

Key achievements include:

- Increasing support for the UN Peacebuilding Fund, making multi-annual pledge of €10 million for 2020-24;

- Maintaining an unbroken record of service with UN peacekeeping missions since 1958.

Ireland's achievements on SDG 16 at the UN Security Council

The UN Security Council is a key platform for driving international progress toward SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. During our two-year term on the Council, Ireland promoted sustainable solutions to conflicts. We led negotiations on Resolution 2594 on peacekeeping transitions, which seeks to ensure that as UN peace operations draw down, they do so in a way that supports peacebuilding, putting in place the right resources and planning to preserve peace and protect civilians. The resolution was unanimously adopted and will have a lasting impact on the UN's peacekeeping architecture. Working with partners, we secured agreement on resolutions introducing a humanitarian carve-out to every UN sanctions regime and on continuing the vital cross-border humanitarian operation into North-West Syria. This means that humanitarian organisations can work without fear of inadvertently breaching UN sanctions and that millions continue to receive lifesaving aid. Ireland played a leading role on the Council's work on the conflict in Ethiopia, with a strong focus on humanitarian access and human rights. We delivered consistent, principled criticism of Russia's war in Ukraine. Ireland's commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda was clearly demonstrated across all issues addressed by the Council. Among other actions, we pioneered monthly commitments by the Council member holding the presidency to include women civil society voices at the Council table, since adopted by 14 out of 15 members.

Ireland is a leader on **food and nutrition security** (SDGs 2 and 3). We champion global efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition through sustainable food systems' transformation. Ireland actively participated in the UN Food Systems and the Nutrition for Growth Summits in 2021, aimed at mobilising resources and supporting coordinated, effective responses. Through the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Ireland provides un-earmarked, flexible funding to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and also supports projects via the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Ireland also manages an Africa Agri-food Development Programme, which leverages Irish private sector agricultural expertise to help develop nascent African companies through joint ventures. Our Embassy in Vietnam supports a regional programme addressing malnutrition among the furthest behind in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. On the UN Security Council, Ireland was a vocal and consistent advocate for action on global food insecurity.

Key achievements include:

- Pledging an additional €850 million for nutrition by 2026, with an emphasis on addressing wasting (acute malnutrition) among children under five;

- Increasing funding to the International Fund for Agricultural Development by 67% in 2022;

- Acting as UN Security Council informal co-focal point for conflict and hunger, alongside Niger;

- Co-chairing the Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger with Ecuador.

Access to **education** (SDG 4) is a longstanding area of focus for Ireland's international development work, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that girls access high-quality learning in safe environments. We champion education at both global and country level. For example our Embassy in Kenya supported Young Scientists Kenya to pivot online to ensure students could participate during the pandemic. Our Embassy in Vietnam builds capacity in the education sector, and in the occupied Palestinian territory, we support the implementation of the national Education Development Strategic Plan.

Key achievements include:

- The Ireland Fellows Programme, which brings promising individuals from Africa, Vietnam, the occupied Palestinian Territories and Small Island Developing States to Ireland to undertake a Master's programme. A new strand for Latin America was recently launched;

- Pledging €60 million to the Global Partnership for Education for 2021-25, with €10 million earmarked to the Girls' Accelerator Mechanism;

- Pledging €18 million over the 2023-26 period to support Education Cannot Wait in providing education to children in emergencies and protracted crises.

Ireland's traditional emphasis on **health** and health systems (SDG 3) was brought into renewed focus as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (as detailed below). More broadly, we continue to work to strengthen health systems, with a focus on reaching those furthest behind, particularly women and girls. The Health Service Executive facilitates links between Irish hospitals and training institutions and their counterparts in Mozambique, Sudan and Zambia. Ireland also works with global health partners such as the World Health Organisation, UNAIDS, the Global Fund to Fight HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria and Gavi, the vaccine alliance. The Global Fund and Gavi alone are estimated to have averted more than 66 million deaths since 2000.[48] We focus closely on supporting health and education in emergencies.

Key achievements include:

- Increasing our global health spend by over 15% since 2020, reinforcing investments in health system strengthening and the promotion of rights of women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;

- Increasing support for the Global Fund by 50% in the 2020-22 replenishment period, and pledging a further 30% increase in the 2023-25 period, for a total of €115 million in 2020-25.

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48   Gavi (2021) Annual Progress Report: https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/apr-2021-12-million-future-deaths-prevented-65-million-children-newly-protected; and Global Fund Results Report 2022 https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/results/

Beyond our work in specific thematic areas, and in line with SDG 17 on "partnerships for the Goals", we work in **partnership** with many organisations to contribute broadly to the SDGs across the world – including with governments, civil society organisations and multilateral institutions.

Multilateral organisations are critical international change agents, given their scale, influence, innovation capacity and convening power, as well as their ability to access and leverage finance. In recognition of this, Ireland is a strong supporter of multilateral action and cooperation. We provide flexible core funding to UN agencies and international financial institutions.[49] This allows them to focus on their areas of comparative advantage and respond quickly to crises, for example, in Afghanistan, Türkiye/Syria and Ukraine. Ireland also supports reforms of the UN development system which are improving its ability to provide coordinated, efficient and better-quality support. Our work with the World Bank Group supports its efforts to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity, as well as providing client countries with finance, data, and implementation support to attain the SDGs. Ireland also promotes the alignment of the work of multilateral organisations with the SDGs, and tracking and reporting against the Goals is now standard across these institutions.

Case Study: EU-AU Partnership for Sustainable Development

An example of SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals in action was the sixth European Union (EU)-African Union (AU) Summit in 2022 in Brussels, which aimed to revitalise the commitment to sustainable development between the two unions. Heads of State and Government from 27 EU and 40 African states took part. The then Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, T.D., co-chaired a Roundtable on Agriculture and Sustainable Development, along with the Prime Minister of Greece and the Presidents of Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire.

The Roundtable was an opportunity to highlight Ireland's strategic leadership on food systems and nutrition, and demonstrated the centrality of the SDGs to our foreign policy engagement. The Taoiseach noted the importance of placing agriculture at the centre of the broader framework of sustainable, resilient and nutritious food systems, helping address the "triple challenge" of food insecurity (SDG 2) and undernutrition (SDG 3) and ensuring economic opportunity for all (SDG 8). The Taoiseach reminded partners not to lose focus on the deeply gendered impact of poverty on women and girls (SDG 5).

Taoiseach Micheál Martin and the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, at the EU-AU Summit, Brussels, February 2022.

A notable outcome of the Summit was an Africa-Europe Investment Package of at least €150 billion to 2030, as well as an enhanced and reciprocal partnership on migration and mobility, renewed EU-Africa peace and security architecture, and strengthened EU-AU multilateral cooperation.

49   Including the World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Council of Europe Development Bank

A significant component of Ireland's contribution to the SDGs is through our membership of the European Union. The share of Ireland's ODA contributed through the EU budget is increasing; in 2021 it was approximately 27%. Most importantly, Ireland contributes to the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). This instrument, whose objectives include the achievement of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, has a budget of approximately €79.5 billion over seven years split across geographic, thematic and rapid response pillars. Ireland has actively engaged in shaping the direction of the NDICI's programming and action in line with our priorities and the SDGs. Ireland also forms part of Team Europe, which brings together the international action of the EU, its Member States and its development finance institutions.[50]

Key achievements include:

- Increasing our support for the UN Special Purpose Trust Fund for the Resident Coordinator system, which coordinates all UN development system activities at the country level;

- Establishment of the Ireland Trust Fund at the Asian Development Bank which helps to build climate change and disaster resilience in Small Island Developing States;

- Joining the African Development Bank in 2020; contributing to its support for climate resilience in Africa, as well as global work on food systems, education and gender equality;

- Contributing to the EU ODA budget which, combined with that of its Member States, made Team Europe the world's leading donor, providing 43% of global ODA in 2021[51];

- Contributing to the Team Europe response to COVID-19 which supported over 140 partner countries with a package of €53.7 billion.

Partnership with civil society forms another crucial element of Ireland's international support for the SDGs. We support local, Irish and international civil society partners who demonstrate a commitment to contributing towards the SDGs in their programmes of activities. This work supports funded NGOs' contributions across all 17 Goals, with results tracked against each Goal.

Key achievements include:

- Our flagship NGO international development programme, Ireland's Civil Society Partnership for A Better World, is providing €100 million in 2023 (up from €72 million for a preceding scheme in 2022) for programmes bringing together long-term development, climate action, chronic and acute crises, and global citizenship initiatives in partnership with 10 Irish NGOs across 42 of the world's poorest countries;

- Ireland's Civil Society Fund and Strategic Partnership Fund provide support to 35 other NGOs.

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50   Including the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
51   https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4532

Finally, Ireland also supports **Global Citizenship Education** which funds work in formal and non-formal education to increase the Irish public's awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live, empowering people to build a better world. Further details are contained in section 7.1 on Education.

COVID-19 Response and Lessons

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges and precipitated a reversal of progress in key areas, notably leading to the first global increases in extreme poverty for 30 years. Although the health impact of the pandemic varied from country to country, the impacts on socio-economic and human development caused by public health restrictions and economic disruption were significant. These impacts have made an already challenging situation worse in least developed countries, however they also affected countries not traditionally considered the most vulnerable – e.g., middle-income countries that are particularly dependent on tourism, such as small island developing states.

The pandemic and its wider consequences reaffirmed that Ireland's development programme is, in the main, focused on the right areas. Lessons learned from the pandemic include the need to build flexibility into our response and to focus on reducing vulnerabilities.

Unsurprisingly, COVID-19 had a profound effect on Ireland's work in global health. Ireland increased support to the World Health Organisation for their leadership and normative role and their programming work, focusing on health crisis prevention and response. We have also actively engaged in efforts to strengthen the global health architecture, including a proposal to develop a pandemics treaty to support pandemic preparedness and response.

Another key element of our pandemic response was our work to address vaccine inequity. Ireland is dedicated to the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and has donated more than 4.1 million COVID-19 vaccine doses to other countries and €13.5 million in financing to the COVAX facility, a collaborative initiative to accelerate worldwide, equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. To date, COVAX has shipped 1.89 billion vaccines to 146 participating countries.

Our COVID-19 response has drawn from lessons learned from earlier health crises such as HIV and Ebola. Key among these is the importance of health system strengthening to ensure equitable and inclusive responses, and to minimise the risk that new challenges pose for fragile systems.

Another key lesson from the pandemic was the importance of a coordinated international response to a global crisis. Ireland supported the leading roles taken by the UN and international financial institutions. For example, the UN Development Programme supported the development of 121 coordinated UN socio-economic response plans, across 139 countries. In the first year of the pandemic, the World Bank Group committed over US$200 billion to fight its impacts, including for vaccine support, social protection and sustaining livelihoods.

Finally, COVID-19 reinforced the importance of community participation and locally led action, as local actors are often best-placed to reach the most vulnerable. Ireland advocated for a strong focus on working with communities and building the capacity of local actors.

8.3 Leaving No One Behind

Leaving No One Behind is at the heart of A Better World. In fact, the policy goes beyond leaving no one behind to emphasise reaching those furthest behind first. In many ways, this is an evolution of Ireland's traditional focus on reaching the "poorest of the poor" to a more multidimensional and intersectional understanding of how different drivers of vulnerability interact. As a result, many of our longstanding priority areas, our ways of working and our partnership modalities are well-placed to reach those furthest behind; however they have been updated to maximise our impact.

Many of our funding streams have explicit criteria requiring partners to focus on leaving no one behind or reaching the furthest behind first. The Multilateral Operational Framework requires partners to "support the drive to reach the furthest behind first", and Ireland seeks to ensure that UN development partners realise this commitment on the ground, through an intersectional approach. Ireland's Civil Society Partnership for a Better World has a specific focus on reaching the furthest behind first, with all the funded programmes focused on addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. Most of our Embassy-managed bilateral development programmes are in least developed countries, and all focus on the most vulnerable groups.

We also push for the prioritisation of those left behind in our diplomatic work. Notably, as a member of the UN Security Council, Ireland sought to include strong human rights language into resolutions and statements. For example, Ireland consistently raised concerns about the safety and agency of human rights defenders, women's rights activists and indigenous and Afro-Colombian social leaders in Colombia, while strongly supporting the Colombian Peace Accord.

Ireland also supports people from least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS) and marginalised groups to participate fully, equally and meaningfully in political processes. Ireland's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security commits us to championing women's right to equal participation and their important role as leaders in all peacebuilding processes. Ireland provides financial support to attendees from the most vulnerable countries in international climate conferences through the UNFCCC Trust Fund for Participation and the Women's Delegates Fund. We also fund the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to support the participation of LDCs and SIDS in the work of the Human Rights Council. Finally, we consistently advocate for increased African and SIDS representation in the UN Security Council.

Challenges in Leaving No One Behind

A key challenge in Leaving No One Behind is the increasing concentration of poverty and vulnerability in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, which can make it more challenging to get assistance to those who need it. To combat this, we are building our capacity to work more effectively in fragile contexts, including across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. For example, we are working with partners with dedicated expertise in civil-military coordination, access negotiations and the protection of civilians.

A further challenge is the global pressure on civil society space, which impacts our civil society partners, who are responsible for much of our work with those furthest behind. In response

Ireland is supporting efforts to protect civil society space globally and in the countries where we work.

The lack of data identifying the most vulnerable groups and individuals is a further challenge. There has been considerable progress on data collection and analysis, however, and global efforts are ongoing to strengthen this aspect of leaving no one behind. Ireland asks all partners to provide data disaggregated by gender, age and other relevant drivers of vulnerability.

Progress in Leaving No One Behind

Ireland's international development work uses several levels of targeting to deliver on our commitment to Leave No One Behind. We prioritise the countries and contexts that are furthest behind, for example LDCs, SIDS and the most severe humanitarian crises. Within these contexts, there is a further level of targeting of the most vulnerable communities or areas. Finally, we focus on individuals most in need.

In terms of the country prioritisation, Ireland has a particular focus on LDCs. In 2020 LDCs received 48.6% of Ireland's bilateral official development assistance (€222.8m) – well above the OECD average of 24.4%.[52] Ireland has also increased our focus on SIDS: we launched Ireland's first Strategy for Partnership with SIDS in 2019 and are now drafting a follow-up strategy. Ireland also prioritises fragile and conflict-affected countries. Among OECD members, Ireland stands out for the highest share of bilateral ODA provided to fragile contexts (52.7% in 2020).[53]

The commitment to Reaching the Furthest Behind First is also at the heart of Ireland's climate engagement, as outlined in our Climate Finance Roadmap (2022). Ireland supports the Special Climate Change Fund and Least Developed Countries Fund, and actively pushes for improved access to funding for vulnerable communities. Further, our focus on addressing loss and damage caused by climate extremes – via advocacy at COP27 and funding for technical assistance and financial and social protection to support developing countries on loss and damage – also ensures our focus is squarely on supporting those most vulnerable to climate change.

Ireland's development programme has a longstanding focus on the most marginalised people. A sample of some important vulnerable groups is discussed below, however the definition of the most vulnerable is different in different contexts and may include women, children, older people, people living with disabilities, with HIV and AIDS, or with psychosocial needs, LGBTQ+ people, refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities or others.

A focus on people living in extreme **poverty** remains at the heart of Ireland's development work (SDG 1). It informs the sectors we work in and the ways we work. Some of our work supports direct poverty-focused interventions; for example our Embassy in Malawi works with the Ministry of Gender and UNICEF to support social protection for those living in extreme poverty, almost doubling our contribution in 2022. Other measures focus on wider social inclusion and ensuring the participation of and accountability to poor people in our work. Ireland also works with likeminded countries to ensure that poverty reduction remains the core objective of international development and to support efforts to measure poverty to ensure

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52   OECD (2023) Development Cooperation Profiles: Ireland https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/941ec6f0-en/index. html?itemId=/content/component/941ec6f0-en
53   Ibid.

quality programme design. To this end, Ireland is a founding and active member of the OECD DAC's Community of Practice on Poverty and Inequality.

Everywhere we work, we ensure a particular focus on **women and girls**. For example, our Embassy in Ethiopia has supported efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation and child marriage, and we fund efforts to support rural women's livelihoods in northern Vietnam and along the Mexico-Guatemala border. Ireland's work through civil society organisations supports survivors of gender-based violence and those working to empower women economically and in civic life. Our humanitarian work has a specific budget for gender and gender-based violence in emergencies. We also prioritise women and girls in our multilateral work: e.g. through UN Women, the International Finance Corporation's Gender Partnership and the World Bank's Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality. Ireland's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security recognises the particular impact of conflict on women and girls and commits us to prioritising gender equality in all aspects of our engagement in international peace and security and conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

Case Study: Promoting employment and climate innovation in Mozambique
Ireland provides financial support to the Yopipila Hub in Northern Mozambique, which was established by three local organisations (CEPCI, Azul and ISP) to promote entrepreneurship and green technologies among young people in Cabo Delgado province. The Hub trains young people, including internally displaced persons, in life and vocational skills and supports them to start income generating activities (SDG 8) based on technologies that improve environmental sustainability (SDG 13). The focus on young people and displaced persons supports the principle of leaving no one behind.

Saranque Lassine is a Yopipila Hub trainee. One of the many young people affected by the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique, the 23-year-old fled attacks on her home village. On arrival in her new home, she took part in renewable energy training provided by the Yopipila Hub. Saranque won €480 for a project she developed and with this she set up her own business called "Enjoy the Sun," supplying small-scale solar energy installations in the local area. Her business provides her with an income and helps to meet her family's basic needs.

Saranque says, "I feel happy and fulfilled. My future aim is to expand according to clients' needs. I hope to hire young people and provide them with an opportunity like the one provided to me."

Saranque Lassiane and fellow trainee Curanchia Abdala demontrate solar energy equipment at the entrepreneurship fair promoted by the Yopipila Hub. [Photo: Mamudo Bartolomeu]

Ireland's development programme also targets **children and young people**. For example, in the occupied Palestinian territory Ireland supports the UN Relief and Works Agency, which operates 702 schools, and UNICEF, which works to safeguard the rights of children in East Jerusalem. We work with civil society partners in Burkina Faso and Mali to enhance access to quality education, particularly by girls and children with disabilities. Ireland supports the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub to empower young people to co-develop innovative solutions as part of national food system transformation pathways.

Ireland recognises the important role of youth in peacebuilding and we have strengthened the focus on youth in our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Ireland supports the Glasgow Work Programme on Action for Climate Empowerment covering education, training, public awareness and participation for children and youth. Domestically, Ireland runs Climate Youth Delegate and UN Youth Delegate programmes for participation in Ireland's Climate Delegation at international meetings and in Ireland's delegation to the UN General Assembly, respectively.

Another important focus for Ireland's international development work is supporting **people living with HIV and AIDS**. For example, we support UNAIDS's work towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. This includes tailored responses to tackle the intersecting inequalities that drive the epidemic and addressing the needs and realities of those living with the disease. Our work with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria also supports progress in this area. Finally, our embassies support people living with HIV and AIDS, for example in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, including by strengthening local health systems for HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment and through HIV and AIDS education.

THINK
BEFORE YOU
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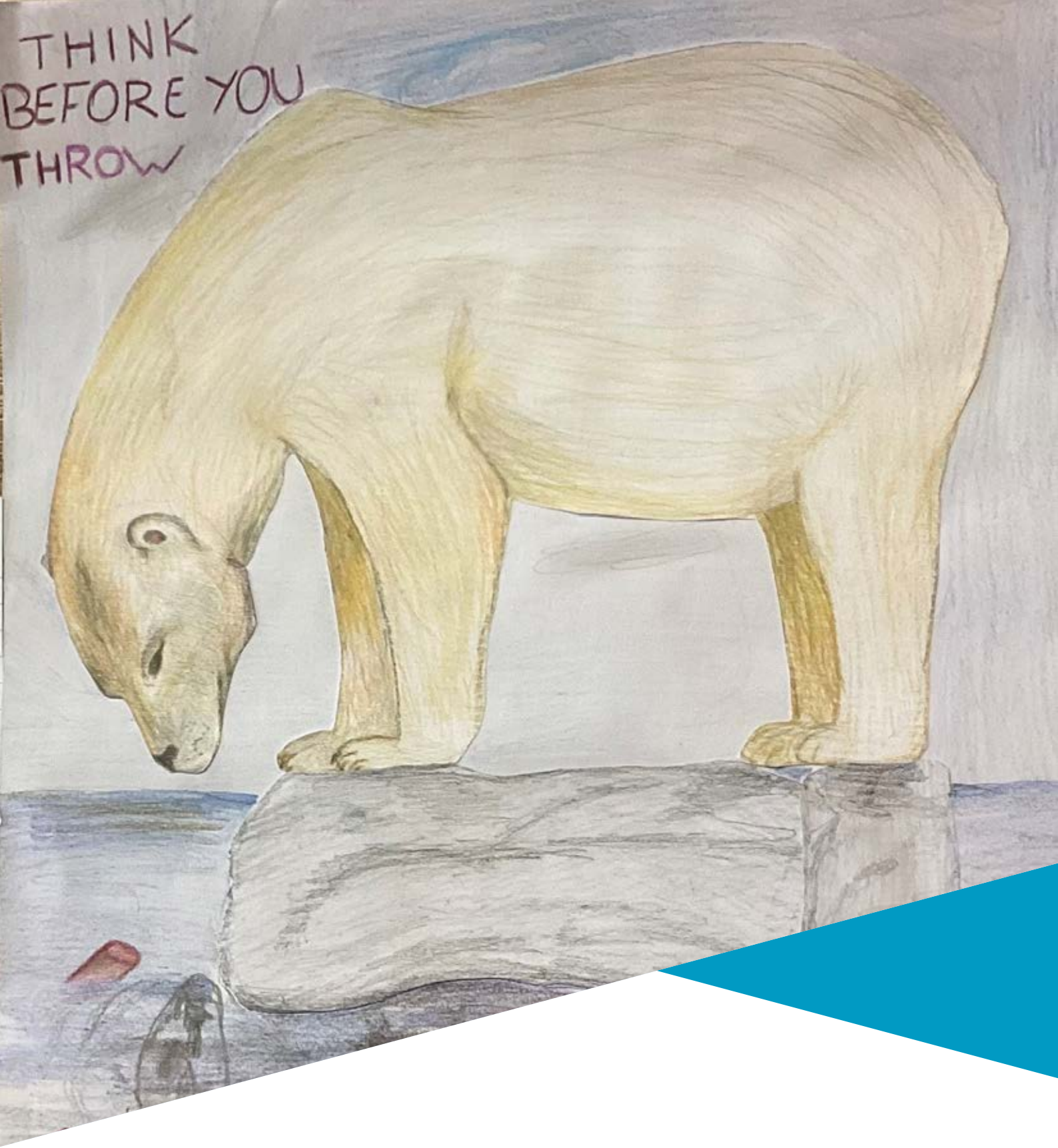
9 | Stakeholder
Assessments

Chapter 9: Stakeholder Assessments

Operating on the principle of 'open drafting[54]', key national stakeholder groups, representing a variety of sectors were invited to contribute a chapter for inclusion in the VNR report. These contributions are set out in this chapter of the report. Chapters have not been edited, and demonstrate inclusivity and transparency in reporting on Agenda 2030.

As parallel reports by National Human Rights Institutions ('NHRIs') cannot be independently submitted to the UN for formal consideration as part of the Voluntary National Review process, the independent observations of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission are included as a separate chapter in this report. The Commission is the A status NHRI for Ireland, and demonstrates the highest standards with regard to independence. The State welcomes its participation in this process and has put protections in place to ensure that the real and perceived independent status of the Commission has not been impacted, in line with SDG 16 and the UN Paris Principles.

Public submissions of up to 800 words were also invited from national stakeholders to form part of a compendium of stakeholder contributions, which are also included in this chapter.

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54 As per the 'Operational Common Approach Guidance Note', developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the UN Development Coordination Office in June 2022, Ireland has taken an 'open drafting' approach to the report. The 'open drafting' approach allows non-governmental participants to review and contribute to the VNR Report.

9.1 Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council

Chambers Ireland is the State's largest business representative network. We are an all-island organisation with a unique geographical reach; our members are the Chambers of commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member Chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities. We feel that we are well positioned to represent the views of business on engaging with the goals.

In consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from our Network and the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council, Chambers Ireland is pleased to contribute to Voluntary National Review on the SDGs, and we welcome the opportunity to represent the views of the business community. This is an important area for our Network of Chambers as our business members look to further their engagement with the SDGs, implementing them across their operations and supply chains.

Chambers Ireland acts as the Irish National Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC Ireland) which allows it to communicate its views on a range of policy issues on behalf of its members to intergovernmental organisations. The ICC has observer status at the United Nations[55] and played a central role in the delivery of both the Paris Agreement and in shaping the UN SDGs. As the institutional representative of 45 million companies worldwide, ICC recognises the urgent need to keep the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

The ICC is formally recognised as a custodian of the SDGs, founded the SDG Business forum, and has actively supported the UN's Global Compact since its inception. Chambers Ireland enjoys close engagement with its partners in the ICC and continuously collaborates with its international networks to drive the SDGs as a pivotal benchmark for sustainable development.

What has Ireland done well?

There is a great opportunity to build on the work that has been undertaken to date on the SDGs and to develop this to progress the targets.

Sustainability is now something that can be marketed and sold by businesses as consumers become more conscious of their environmental footprint. Businesses are also conscious of this and are continuously reviewing supply chains to secure more sustainable methods of doing business, something which is even more attractive if it can positively impact the organisation's bottom line. The combination of all these elements, and the risk of future EU and national directives and legislation on implementing sustainable business practices, means that there is large scale buy-in from Chamber members across the country. We are beginning to see more and more businesses take the lead on this which supports our overall work in this policy sphere.

Societal buy-in

Ireland benefits from an active civil society which, together with the private sector, has engaged with the SDGs since their adoption.[56] As such, civil society has a large part to play in the future implementation of the SDGs and must form a core component of the stakeholders in

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55   In 2016, the ICC was granted Observer Status at the UN in December 2016, providing business with direct access into the UN system for the very first time. International Chamber of Commerce (2016), Business and the United Nations

56   Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018

the next National SDG Implementation Plan. Civil society can take on a variety of functions in the implementation process through spurring government action through persistent advocacy and acting as a watchdog holding government to account to their commitments. They can also be useful tools in advising local and national government on concrete implementation measures to take, building on their experience on the ground.

To ensure effective society engagement in the implementation of the SDGs, it is important that involvement not be of a merely informative nature. Civil society should have formal roles, such as through formal follow up consultations on the government implementation plan, representation on mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts and formal channels for participation in accountability processes.[57] By doing so, this will enable the aims of SDG 16 to be met through "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making."[58]

What can Ireland improve on?

There is no shortage of reports on Ireland's progress in meeting the SDGs and the lists of policy actions in place, or needed, to support this. A 2020 Social Justice Report on Measuring Progress provides an overview of the pace of delivery of 15 comparable EU countries on delivering the Goals, with Ireland placed tenth overall behind the likes of Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and Germany.[59] The authors of this report conclude that Ireland faces challenges in 6 SDGs,[60] significant challenges in 7 SDGs[61] and major challenges in 4 SDGs.[62]

If we look at Eurostat's 2021 report on Sustainable Development in the European Union[63] Ireland is progressing well towards many of the SDGs and is performing better than the EU average, however there are some Goals that Ireland is progressing worse at than the EU, especially climate action (SDG 13), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9), and gender equality (SDG 5). Coalition 2030's report on Ireland's implementation of Agenda 2030 also outlines the country's slow progress in getting to grips with the implementation of the SDGs and the dramatic need to strengthen its commitment to the agenda.[64] Without referencing an exhaustive list of reports and findings, it is apparent that Ireland has made slow progress in achieving the SDGs over the past 3 years.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a mechanism for overcoming siloed thinking, and for gaining value for state investments. The lack of resourcing and co-ordination at the institutional and departmental level must be urgently addressed to overcome this and avoid any further hindering of the implementation of the SDGs.

57   The 2018 Voluntary National Review found that although it is growing, public awareness of the SDGs in Ireland was below the EU average at 36%.

58   United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Goal 16

59   Social Justice Ireland (2020), Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020

60   No poverty (SDG 1), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

61   Zero hunger (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitisation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and climate action (SDG 13).

62   Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), and partner-ships for the goals (SDG 17). Social Justice Ireland (2020), Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020

63   Eurostat (2021), Sustainable Development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context

64   Coalition 2030 (2018), Coalition 2030 Report

What SDGs has your sector been involved with?

Though most of the seventeen Goals are relevant to the work of business, there are five of the Goals which are of most strategic relevance, comprising in numerical order:

- Gender Equality (SDG 5)
- Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)
- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9)
- Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)
- Climate Action (SDG 13)

The targets of each of these often interlink. For example, sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) will be achieved through concrete measures to promote climate action (SDG 13) and balancing economic development (SDGs 8 & 9). Therefore, all five are equally as strategically relevant and important to our organisation and wider Network.

How has your sector contributed to achieving these goals?

We have learnt integrating the goals into business brings opportunities and structure to many of the activities they are already planning to introduce. Over the past number of years, businesses have significantly increased engagement and policy advocacy in sustainable development by leveraging the ideas and aims of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to transition to the SDGs, focusing all elements of the organisation and its outputs on the aims of the Goals.

In September 2019, on the fourth anniversary of the UN SDGs, all affiliated Chambers across Ireland pledged their commitment to the SDGs.[65] This involved all Chambers, committing to upholding, promoting, and implementing the SDGs into their daily operations, advocating for the Goals locally and creating or supporting policies that reflect the SDGs. Having engaged our network of chambers, we have delivered an awareness building, and action-orientated communication strategy with businesses throughout the island.

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65   Chambers Ireland (2019), Chambers to lead the way on SDGs

Each Chamber plays an integral part in creating a sustainable environment to work and live, and they collectively work together on achieving a prosperous future for Ireland.

In representing the needs of its business members, Chambers Ireland utilises the targets of the Goals as a lens to interrogate the causes of the policy priorities that our network raises and uses the SDGs to ensure cohesion in the policy recommendations and advocacy that we carry out nationally.

Since the commitment was made by the network, each of our policy outputs identify how the goals interact with our policy agenda and are used to identify parallel areas of interest and activity which can sometimes be missed in the consideration of a policy area. Examples include consideration of gender equality (SDG 5) in our submissions on the night-time economy, particularly it's interaction with safe late-night transportation for those that are enjoying the nightlife, and the workers who make it possible. Similarly, the Chambers Ireland submission on the National Development Plan 'Review to Renew' consultation[66] highlights how necessary that programme of activity is to deliver on climate action (SDG 13), and how, given the implementation of the Climate Action Plan, the National Development Plan will need to be realigned if we are to achieve the decarbonisation targets Ireland has committed to.

In addition, the Chambers Ireland submissions on the Government Budget annually and the Chambers Ireland General Election Manifesto 2020[67] have all be structured around the goals, a mechanism that was useful in prioritising and deprioritising various efforts which we have advocated for.

Achieving the SDG targets by 2030 is a collective task that cannot be accomplished without partnership and collaboration. Businesses are rooted in communities, which is why we use our platform to amplify the SDGs, the achievements of our stakeholders, and our network. By upholding and promoting the SDGs and Chambers Ireland's aim is to highlight the opportunities the Goals create and provide business with the confidence that meaningful results can be achieved.

Since pledging to advocate for and support the advancement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in November 2019, our Network has been closely engaged with the aims of the goals, taking a proactive approach on driving, and supporting, engagement throughout the business community has become central to our organisation's strategy.

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66   Chambers Ireland (2021), Chambers Ireland Submission on the National Development Plan Review to Renew Consultation
67   Chambers Ireland (2020), Chambers Ireland General Election Manifesto 2020

The Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business

Building on our extensive work to promote the SDGs, Chambers Ireland launched its SDG Toolkit for Business[68] in July 2021. Based on significant contributions from the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council, the Toolkit encourages employers of every size to advance their sustainability journey by integrating the Goals into their day-to-day activities.

The SDG Toolkit for Business equips business with the knowledge to take leading action across a range of issues and signal the direction to achieve a sustainable society in Ireland. Chambers Ireland encourages SMEs and larger companies to engage with the Toolkit and their local chamber in support of our collective work to secure a better, greener, and fairer planet in the years ahead.

Beyond raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, the principal aim of the Toolkit is to drive action on achieving the goals by bringing simplicity and practical guidance.

The Sustainable Business Impact Awards

Following its commitment to the SDGs in 2019, Chambers Ireland relaunched the Corporate Social Responsibility awards in 2020 as the Sustainable Business Impact Awards to continue the process of alignment with the Goals.

The Sustainable Business Impact Awards[69] celebrate best practice in sustainable development and social responsibility from companies of all sizes, nationwide. They recognise the meaningful and high quality-work from companies through different Awards categories, including excellence in Environment, Workplace, Communication, Social Enterprise, Community Partnership (divided into Charity, Volunteering and Community Programme), and Diversity & Inclusion.

What is the biggest challenge facing your sector and how does it relate to the SDGs?

The 17 SDGs address not only measurable changes of wellbeing, economic development, and better environments, but also how these changes will be induced by a means of clearly defining 169 targets to be achieved by 2030 and indicators to measure how it contributes with respect to the various SDG targets.

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68   Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business
69   The Sustainable Business Impact Awards

With the wealth of reports available on Ireland's progress on achieving the SDGs (which often utilise different reporting mechanisms) it is difficult to ascertain which is the most relevant and has the correct, up to date information. This makes it equally difficult to assess Ireland's overall progress. Developing structured indicators are a crucial next step for accurately identifying where we are as a country. These will help in understanding if the expected development changes are being realised. In terms of measuring the impact and quantifying the progress on SDG targets, developing effective indicators to gauge success is important.

Attracting and retaining skilled employees has been a challenge for businesses. We believe that aligning businesses with the SDGs will help attract and retain staff who have an increased interest in sustainability.

What would you like to see prioritized for your sector?

The great strength of the Sustainable Development Goals is their role in finding complementary processes within policy. Housing has long been a concern of Irish businesses because of the impact of the housing shortage on their operations. Often, members of staff spend months of each year attending viewings trying to find accommodation. These extra pressures have a deleterious effect on productivity. Once they find accommodation, they often seek increased pay to support the increased rent, in effect privatising a public policy failure. Those that are forced to commit to long commutes have lower productivity levels, experience a lower quality of life, and are often forced to seek new employment which is closer to where their home and family are. Recruitment from abroad is also an issue for many businesses as potential members of staff often pass through to the offer stage only to withdraw because of the difficulties and costs associated with housing. Other, particularly younger members of staff, frequently emigrate to other jurisdictions because of the inadequacy in the supply of housing, which creates problems for businesses as onboarding early career members of staff becomes a perpetual process and means that there is a hollowing out of skills within many cohorts.

Framing the housing issue within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals highlights the institutional need to focus attention and resources on the goal of achieving sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). It highlights that transport investment, activation of vacancies, and planning reform are all interlinking elements of solving the housing problem, but they will also help address our climate action (SDG 13) agenda, and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). Each of those elements are necessary conditions for addressing the housing problem, but without co-ordination at the highest level across all three elements, no housing policy agenda can succeed.

Standardised benchmarking system

As sustainability reporting has evolved over the last number of years, several key principles have emerged. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) has for example defined ten principles for sustainability reporting: stakeholder inclusiveness, sustainability context, materiality, completeness, balance, comparability, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, and reliability.[70] These are helping companies prepare high-quality information on the issues that matter and are useful for both sustainability reporting as well as communications overall. While the SDGs provide a framework for companies to understand their sustainability context, a sustainability report can home in on the effectiveness of the business to meet these aims.

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70   GRI, United Global Compact and wbcsd (n.d.), SDG Compass: The guide for business action on the SDGs

The European Commission's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive which while focused on publicly traded firms will also include non-traded firms which are part of their value and supply chains. There is a strong need to co-ordinate actions to ensure that it does not require businesses to engage in multifarious forms of reporting and engagement resulting in the duplication of efforts which results in smaller firms avoiding contracts and tenders which involve sustainability actions and declarations.

A failure to ensure that these (and similar) activities are co-ordinated will result in reputational damage to sustainable development because the associated administrative burden will come to be views as a burdensome hurdle which excludes ordinary businesses from participating rather than as a vehicle for creating further and deeper engagement with the goals.

Feedback from the business community tells us that there is a need for one standardised benchmarking system that all Irish businesses can adopt when analysing their sustainability progress. Currently, businesses are forced to employ their best judgement in choosing a system that might best reflect their progress in the Goals. However, many businesses, especially SMEs, do not have the means or expertise to devote sufficient time to evaluate which system is best to employ and often set out on a report that they cannot, and are not appropriately equipped, to answer. A single standardised methodology would greatly benefit those businesses and promote wider reporting on the Goals among the wider business community. It is imperative that businesses are not bureaucratically burdened with red tape and unnecessary reporting requirements when they embark on reviewing their progress.

How do you believe your sector is faring in building back better following COVID-19, while leaving no one behind?

One of the key drivers of the SDGs is their aptness for businesses to apply their creativity and innovation in solving the sustainability challenges. Through all the changes and challenges that the pandemic brought about in 2020, these did not deflect from Chambers Ireland's commitments to the SDGs, educating our Network on their importance, and introducing members to the various steps that they can take to incorporate the SDGs into their own businesses.

In adapting to the restrictions, businesses moved to online platforms and embraced the opportunity to reach a nationwide audience to continue the conversation and share information. In June and July 2020, Chambers ran a 5-week webinar series on the SDGs with the support of the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council. As a body that represents businesses across Ireland, we know first-hand how difficult the pandemic has been for local economies and SMEs. We have seen businesses prioritize staff and maintaining their business through the pandemic with less emphasis on sustainability. Nonetheless, Chambers Ireland believes that sustainability must not be allowed to slip from the agenda as the economy recovers.[71] Everything we do during and after this pandemic must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive, and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.

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71   Chambers Ireland (2021), Sustainability must not be allowed to slip from agenda during recovery, says Chambers Ireland at launch of the 2021 Sustainable Business Impact Awards

Have you any idea's on how Ireland can build back better while leaving no one behind?

Achieving the SDGs will require individual citizens, businesses, and wider communities to make meaningful, long-term changes to their behaviour. Civil society has a large part to play in the future implementation of the SDGs and must form a core component of the stakeholders through formal representation on mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts and formal channels for participation.

We cannot rely on technological innovation alone to achieve widespread reductions in carbon emissions or biodiversity depletion. No matter how many energy-efficient appliances, home insulation and water-saving devices we produce or install, technical efficiency won't be enough unless people change their ingrained habits.[72] A more sustainable future requires every facet of Irish society to rethink its core values and to adapt our behaviours. This must be led from a top-down approach, involving much more than an effective marketing campaign and encouragement for socially desirable pro-environmental action.

A growing willingness to get there

The IPCC have updated climate models that provide more detailed projections about possible future conditions which depend on the choices humans make about carbon emissions. We continue to see the need to quickly alter our behaviours and the growing willingness to get there and limit climate change. The increased coverage of climate change in the media is just one example of this growing willingness to achieve our collective climate action (SDG 13).[73]

Further, a recent national study that Chambers Ireland conducted on the shaping Ireland's electricity future demonstrated an overwhelming feedback for greater ambition and prioritisation of renewable energy in the design of Ireland's electricity network for the coming years.

Have you any suggestions for enhancing international efforts, national or local efforts for achieving agenda 2030?

There is always room to learn from international best practice and adopt the models used in other countries to replicate similar achievements. Some of the examples of international best practice include the following:

- In **Italy** the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) was established to raise awareness among the Italian society, economic stakeholders, and institutions about the importance of the 2030 Agenda and to spread a culture of sustainability. This initiative brings together over 230 members, including the most important institutions and networks of civil society

- A **ASviS report**: Starting in 2016, ASviS presents a report[74] each year that documents Italy's progress in achieving the SDGs..

- **Information and awareness-raising**: ASviS has conducted various awareness-raising activities on sustainability issues at large and on the 2030 Agenda among public sector, businesses, public opinion, and citizens

72   Steg and Velk (2009), Encouraging pro-environmental behaviour: An integrative review and research
73   RTÉ (2021), How RTÉ News is covering climate change
74   ASviS (n.d.) ASviS report

- **Education for Sustainable Development**: ASviS, together with the Ministry of Education, University and Research, has developed an e-learning course on the 2030 Agenda, available to all teachers and recently translated in English. It also launched the yearly contest "Let's score 17 Goals"[75] open to all schools in the country.

- **The Sustainable Development Festival**: ASviS organises the annual Sustainable Development Festival[76] which takes place throughout Italy for 17 days, corresponding to the 17 SDGs. In **Norway**, there is no national overarching strategy document or action plan for the SDGs. However, they are integrated into key policy processes. Each ministry is assigned with a responsibility for the SDGs matching with their competencies, while the Ministry of Finance is responsible for co-ordinating SDG reporting and to compile the yearly budget proposal presented to the parliament in accordance with the SDGs. To promote the localisation of the SDGs, the Ministry of Local Development and Modernisation has released an "expectation document", where it is stated that the government expects regional and local authorities to include the SDGs in their planning.[77]

- In **Argentina**, the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales, CNCPS), responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, is promoting co-operation agreements with the provinces to promote vertical co-ordination of the SDGs. the voluntary Provinces Report (Informe Provincias), highlights annual progress on the adaptation of the SDGs in each territory, in relation to the SDGs under review by the High-level Political Forum every year.

- In 2019, New Zealand introduced its very successful 'Wellbeing Budget' which, rather than using economic metrics such as GDP, used a much broader range of outcomes, including human health, safety, and flourishing, to assess the success of government policies.. What is unique about a 'Wellbeing Budget' is that it is focused on directly addressing problems, rather than on promoting economic growth in the hope that the wealth produced by growth (if achieved) will provide the necessary resources to address public priorities.[78] The aim is to measure progress;.[79] to check if policy initiatives are achieving the stated objectives. In effect, it is like a report card to evaluate the Government's performance.[80]

75   Italian Ministry of Education and Research (2018), Let's make 17 goals. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development
76   ASviS (n.d.), The Sustainable Development Festival
77   OECD (2020), A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report
78   Social Justice Ireland (2020), Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020
79   The OECD and NESC have advocated for this approach for many years, most notably in the NESC 2009 report on Well-Being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland
80   The OECD and NESC have advocated for this approach for many years, most notably in the NESC 2009 report on Well-Being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland

9.2 Coalition 2030

Ireland's progress on the SDGs – are we reaching the furthest behind first?

Introduction

Coalition 2030 is a civil society alliance of international development, domestic anti-poverty and equality, environment, and trade union organisations and networks working to ensure Ireland reaches the SDGs by 2030, and contributes to their achievement abroad.

This chapter outlines how Coalition 2030 and its allies perceive SDG progress from the perspective of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. It is a message to the Irish Government and all parties that with just 7 years to go, they must urgently unblock obstacles to the SDGs and create an enabling environment to reach them, in Ireland and abroad.

Context

While there has been some progress on the SDGs, global events have slowed and even eroded pre-pandemic gains.[81]

In the Global South, the ongoing effects of COVID-19-19, the invasion of Ukraine, a devastating cost of living and fuel crisis, and a severe food shortage in eastern and the Horn of Africa, have all stalled or undermined SDG progress.[82] Additionally, punitive debt repayments, IMF-imposed austerity, and tax avoidance by multinational companies, have reduced the fiscal space available to make progress.[83]

In Ireland, the continuing effects of COVID-19 and the cost of living and energy crisis have left people struggling to stand still, let alone progress towards the SDGs.

While the State's capacity to deliver on the Goals has certainly been challenged by COVID-19, other chronic factors such as the ongoing housing and accommodation crisis, meeting the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, and an overburdened health system, are demonstrative of the state's inadequate SDG progress. Moreover, the lack of State foresight and planning in responding to these issues, combined with the effects of cuts to services and the financialisation of housing, has enabled far right sentiment to take hold in some communities as certain actors exploit frustration and a sense of being left behind.

The State has and will always have obligations towards humanitarian aid. Delivering effectively on this is within the state's capacity. However, the state must also plan for and address domestic matters. Many countries face crises while simultaneously advancing SDGs. Progress on the SDGs simply cannot be at the mercy of current or future crises.

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81   https://sdg.iisd.org/news/sdgs-report-2022-delivers-reality-check-on-reversal-of-progress/
82   https://www.undp.org/africa/press-releases/new-africa-sdgs-report-shows-slow-progress-calls-greater-action-meet-targets
83

While we commend elements of Ireland's response to the invasion of Ukraine and COVID-19 (from which many lessons can be learned), advance preparedness, clear communication and a commitment to developing public understanding can mitigate the social unrest that can accompany reactionary planning. Using the SDGs and human rights in long-term planning would enable more effective policy design in response to emergencies, and continued progress in other domains.

Moreover, Ireland's ongoing inability to address structural impediments to achieving the SDGs - governance, data, accountability, policy coherence, political leadership, and crises preparedness - represents a significant obstacle, and risks contributing towards a political and societal environment whereby progress on the SDGs becomes increasingly challenging.

Housing and Homelessness

Ireland is experiencing a severe accommodation crisis with almost 12,000 people in emergency accommodation at the time of writing.[84] The failure to build enough social and affordable homes, a lack of a ban on 'no-fault evictions',[85] and policies that have encouraged the financialisation of housing have been significant factors in this.

A shortage of homes strikes at the fabric of communities, affecting people's health, damaging familial and societal cohesion, and undermining human rights.[86] The implications of this are felt not just in the lack of quality public housing and affordable homes, but also in mental health outcomes, levels of inequality, and uneven educational opportunity.[87]

Children are particularly vulnerable. Along with their families they constitute almost a third of all people homeless in Ireland.[88] Experiencing homelessness is traumatic, creating an adverse childhood experience with long term psychosocial and developmental impacts.[89]

Further, between a fifth and a third of people in the widely criticised direct provision[90] system are children,[91] the long-term effects of which are still unknown. Privatising direct provision without adequate oversight has resulted in poor accommodation and living conditions, and according to the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the system violates multiple human rights.[92] Increasingly, refugees and people seeking asylum are being left without any accommodation at all.[93]

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84   https://homelessnessinireland.ie/

85   https://www.thejournal.ie/how-irish-tenant-rights-compare-with-european-countries-6026428-Mar2023

86   Many commentators believe the official CSO figure of approximately 11,000 homeless to be significantly underestimated. Including those on housing waiting lists, in receipt of some form of housing or rental assistance and those living in housing insecurity, the figure is thought to be closer to 270,000 households - or half a million people- based on an interview with Rory Hearne, University of Maynooth.

87   https://www.into.ie/2022/11/22/housing-crisis-threatens-education-system-unions/

88   https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/80ea8-homelessness-data/?referrer=http://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/homelessness/other/homelessness-data

89   Supporting the mental health of children in families that are homeless: a trauma informed approach

90   Ireland's reception system for asylum seekers is known as Direct Provision. Under the Direct Provision system, people are accommodated across the country in communal institutional centres or former hotel style settings. The vast majority of the centres are managed on a for-profit basis by private contractors.
The system was designed as a short-term measure in the year 2000 https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/direct-provision-the-controversial-system-turns-20-1.4081833

91   https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2022/06/08/more-than-11600-people-in-direct-provision-as-numbers-rise-to-record-levels/

92   https://www.iccl.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/190531-ICCL-ORourke-Submission-On-Direct-Provision-System.pdf

93   https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/01/27/shocking-rise-in-homeless-asylum-seekers-as-55-

Travellers[94] are strikingly over-represented in the homeless population.[95] When overcrowding and unsuitable living conditions are taken into account,[96] over 1 in 10 (13.5%) of the homeless population are Travellers,[97] despite constituting only 1% of the general population. They suffer from discrimination in social housing and the private rental market, with 73% reporting discrimination when trying to rent or buy houses, evidenced by 82% of landlords saying they would not rent to Travellers.[98] Moreover, accessing the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) rental system presents problems for Travellers and migrants, leaving these groups particularly vulnerable to being left behind.

A National Housing Strategy for Disabled People has been released,[99] but people with disabilities remain more likely to be homeless than the general population.[100] The 2016 Census showed that 27% of the homeless population have a disability - double the rate of the general population. According to some advocates, this is partly because many Local Authorities (LAs) do not have adequately trained staff, and many have been refused funding for universally designed social housing.

Moreover, in a 2020 survey, 24% of LGBTQIA+ respondents experienced housing difficulty.[101] In a 2021 youth survey (14-24), 6% of respondents indicated that they had experienced homelessness in the 12 months prior.[102]

To address this, the State must build more quality social and affordable homes, and underpin housing policy with the recognition of housing as a human right. This would help rebalance a situation that has seen the increasing commodification of the housing market, and peoples' homes.

Refugees and Asylum-seekers

The multitude of global crises has tested the veracity of the State's ostensible commitment to leaving no one behind; nowhere more than in how it is responding to the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

While the initial response to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine was exemplary in many ways, it also exposed the two-tiered nature of Irish policy towards refugees. Under Ireland's implementation of the European Temporary Protection Directive, Ukrainian refugees were given an immediate assessment, PPS numbers, access to education and employment supports, and healthcare. By contrast, people seeking international protection from other situations continue to be processed under direct provision.

are-left-without-accommodation/

94   Mincéirs (Irish Travellers) are a traditionally nomadic ethnic minority indigenous to Ireland.

95   https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Harvey-B.-2021-The-Traveller-Community-and-Home-lessness.-Pavee-Point-Traveller-and-Roma-Centre.pdf

96   Official homelessness statistics do not include the "hidden homeless" in overcrowded and highly unsuitable conditions https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41068601.html

97   https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_key_issues_affecting_the_traveller_community/submissions/2021/2021-06-01_opening-statement-bridget-kelly-et-al-community-development-worker-national-traveller-women-s-forum_en.pdf

98   https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2017/11/Who-experiences-discrimination-in-Ireland-Report.pdf

99   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60d76-national-housing-strategy-for-disabled-people-2022-2027/

100   The Right Home: the Housing Needs of People with Disabilities

101   https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2020/lgbti-survey-data-explorer

102   LGBTI+ Life in Lockdown: One Year Later

This situation has been made worse as years of dysfunction in the Irish housing market, insufficient public services, an absence of government foresight, and policy incoherence have all exacerbated the inability of the State to respond to the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum.

According to the Far-Right Observatory,[103] far-right groups are exploiting this situation, testing the social cohesion of communities across Ireland and pushing a narrative that threatens marginalised groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants, and women. Indeed, there are increased reports of racism in Ireland.[104]

These are serious threats to societal and political cohesion - both prerequisites to SDG achievement. The recently published and long overdue National Action Plan against Racism (2023-2027) is a welcome development.[105] However, a fully funded implementation plan is required to ensure Ireland meaningfully tackles racism across all areas of Irish society.[106]

If the State is sincere in its commitment to Agenda 2030, then human rights commitments and obligations (including the Geneva Conventions) must be applied, implemented and protected - including for those seeking asylum. This requires robust government planning processes, resourcing of the Department of Justice to process applications, the delegation of sufficient budget and authority to local authorities, and meaningful engagement with the community and voluntary sector, trade unions, employers and relevant agencies. The State should also implement the recommendations of the Report of the Advisory Group on the Provision of Support, including Accommodation to Persons in the International Protection Process.[107]

Healthcare

While life expectancy in Ireland continues to grow, it is widely accepted that the healthcare system is underperforming. The pandemic exposed the inequity of a two-tier health system, but it also highlighted the benefits of an integrated public health system. In providing health care on a needs basis rather than on an ability to pay, an important precedent for how to achieve a quality public health system was established.

However, serious deficiencies remain. Ireland remains the only country in western Europe without universal primary healthcare.[108] Those on lower incomes present the worst health outcomes,[109] with a widening health and social gap evident by the time children are just five years old.[110] Ireland has the worst healthcare for transgender people among the 27 EU member-states,[111] and International Protection applicants experience a disproportionately high rate of mental health difficulties, being up to fifteen times more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder and five times more likely to be diagnosed with a psychiatric illness.[112]

103   https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2023/02/03/far-right-in-ireland-gaining-a-foothold-like-never-before/
104   https://inar.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Media-Release-2022-Racism-data-NAPAR.pdf
105   gov.ie - National Action Plan Against Racism (www.gov.ie)
106   https://www.youth.ie/documents/submission-on-the-national-action-plan-against-racism-2021/
107   https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/93440/05b40003-242c-4549-88a5-ba8fcdc20f60.pdf#page=null
108   Ireland
109   https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/health-and-disability-budget-2023
110   ibid
111   https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2022/10/31/ireland-ranked-worst-for-transgender-healthcare-in-eu/
112   Mental Health and Direct Provision: Recommendations for Addressing Urgent Concerns | Doras

As of the 2016 Census, 27% of the homeless population have a disability - double the rate of the general population - although the government has released a National Housing Strategy for Disabled People.[113] Those with disabilities report affordability as a challenge to meeting their health needs, and the incidence of mental health issues among this cohort is three times the state average, while a quarter report their health as bad or very bad compared with 3% average in the state.[114] How the state provides for and supports people with disabilities is a marker of its commitment to the SDGs.

Health inequality also exists in the Traveller and Roma communities. Infant mortality rate for Travellers is 3.5 times the rate of the general population,[115] and the Traveller suicide rate is 6 times higher than general population.[116] Over 1 in 3 (38.9%) of Roma do not have a family doctor/general practitioner.[117]

More encouragingly, the Programme For Government commits to introducing a publicly funded model of care for fertility treatment to bring Ireland in line with other European states, and the establishment of a new child poverty and well-being unit within the Department of An Taoiseach is another positive development.

Clearly, a quality public healthcare system is a key determinant of SDG success. Similar to Ireland's response to housing and refugees, progress in healthcare and specifically reducing health inequality will be a key metric by which to measure Ireland's overall progress towards the SDGs.

Trade Unions and Decent Work

Travellers, Roma, women, lone parents, people with disabilities, migrants, people seeking asylum, and refugees, are continuously overlooked and underserved in the Irish labour market. According to a recent IHREC report,[118] these groups are more likely to face restrictions in accessing the labour market; experience barriers in occupational attainment; have lower pay, reduced job security and poor working conditions; and are more exposed to work-related inequality and discrimination. Specifically, Travellers have the highest unemployment rate in the workforce at almost 80%.[119] Unaffordable childcare remains the single biggest barrier to women's equal participation in employment and public life,[120] while Ireland has the lowest rate of employment for people with disabilities in the EU.[121] When all other factors are equal, people with disabilities are twice as likely as other cohorts to experience discrimination.[122]

113   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/60d76-national-housing-strategy-for-disabled-people-2022-2027/
114   www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihsd/irishhealthsurvey2019-personswithdisabilities/healthsta
      tus/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676568544581806&usg=AOvVaw2D2kQLnM-KXfF3fgCBoTOE
115   www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Suicide-Facts-Figures-A0.pdf&sa=D&source=
      docs&ust=1676566268832937&usg=AOvVaw3c5hCFK3nfSuL-599bABWn
116   Kelleher et al., 2010
117   Curran et al., 2018
118   https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/monitoring-decent-work-in-ireland/
119   https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Factsheets-Pavee-Point-EMPLOYMENT-1.pdf, https://
      www.ssgt.ie/travellers-in-the-mainstream-labour-market-report/
120   https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/national_economic_dialogue_lack_of_affordable_childcare_remains_single_bigg
121   According to the most recent EU SILC data, Ireland has the highest percentage of people with disabilities at risk of
      poverty in Western Europe (37.8%). This is one of the highest percentages in the EU, almost 10% higher than the EU
      average. 31% of working age people with a disability were at work compared to 71% of those without a disability.
      Ireland's employment rate for people with disabilities is one of the lowest in the EU, 20% lower than the EU average.
122   https://www.esri.ie/news/new-esri-ihrec-research-shows-people-with-disabilities-much-more-likely-to-experience

During COVID-19-19, the inequalities of the digital divide became apparent,[123] particularly for people with disabilities. Investment in digital infrastructure and mobile technologies is vital to facilitate remote working. For people with disabilities, for example, this would include; funding assistive technologies; making it easier to work while also retaining a medical card; and rolling out a 'cost of disability' payment.

The lack of a legal framework for collective bargaining in Ireland has undermined efforts towards decent work. The manner in which recent sudden redundancies at certain Irish-based global tech firms were announced[124] was a stark illustration of how the absence of union representation can leave employees vulnerable in a globalised financial system. This may be addressed as part of the EU Minimum Wages Directive, due to be transposed into Irish legislation in 2023. This should ensure that collective bargaining is placed on a statutory footing.

Furthermore, to prevent people from being left behind, access to opportunities for education and training must be provided, including recognition of the prior learning of those seeking asylum. Additionally, socio-economic discrimination should be added to equality legislation.[125]

A Just Transition Mechanism as workers transition from carbon-heavy to green jobs must also be established. A lack of policy coherence across government has hampered efforts to ensure a just transition and has left employees in carbon-intensive industries vulnerable to unemployment and poverty. The establishment of a Just Transition Commission, as proposed in the current Programme for Government, and endorsed by the multi-stakeholder Just Transition Alliance,[126] will be crucial in ensuring that the move from polluting industries to greener alternatives does not result in any sector of the workforce being left behind. It is also crucial that we provide social and employment opportunities for those affected, and supports for future generations of young people, particularly in the midlands where the transition will be felt most.

Domestic Poverty and Inequality

Recent data shows that enforced deprivation increased from 13.8% in 2021 to 17.1% in 2022,[127] and there is an unacceptable dependence on foodbanks.[128] Poverty levels remain persistent for lone parents, people with disabilities, people seeking asylum, refugees, migrants, Travellers, and Roma people.

While targeted budgetary support between 2016-21 helped to reduce poverty levels to close to those before the financial crash, the absence of sustained and adequate support continues to leave people and communities vulnerable. The last 3 budgets have been described as regressive,[129] with the higher paid in Ireland benefiting more than those on social welfare. Recent research shows that for every $100 (€93) of wealth generated in Ireland, a third has

123 https://www.accenture.com/ie-en/about/irelands-digital-divide
124 https://www.independent.ie/business/technology/tech-companies-expanded-a-little-too-quickly-says-varadkar-as-twitter-to-lay-off-irish-staff-42118440.html
125 https://www.atdireland.ie/wp/socio-economic-discrimination-add-10th-ground
126 https://ictu.ie/publications/just-transition-alliance-joint-declaration
127 Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC): Enforced Deprivation 2022
128 Barnardos 2023 https://www.barnardos.ie/aldi ; EAPN Ireland 2022 https://www.eapn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Basic-Necessities-Final-Report-Double.pdf
129 https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/budget-2023-analysis

gone to the richest 1%, while less than 50c has gone to the poorest 50%.[130] This is consistent with an overall trend, where small increases in welfare contrast with more pronounced increases in earnings and reductions in income taxation for those on higher earnings. These trends are likely to widen income divides and increase poverty, increasing the 'rich-poor gap'.[131]

ESRI[132] research shows that the two groups at the highest risk of poverty are people with disabilities and lone parents.[133] Ireland has the highest rate of people with disabilities at risk of poverty in Western Europe.[134] Lone parents have the highest deprivation rate of any demographic at 45.4%.[135]

Child poverty remains high, with almost a third of those in poverty under the age of 18[136] - a number that excludes children in direct provision.[137] In addition, children and young people in direct provision were excluded from the double child benefit in Budget 2023, despite the cost of living crisis,[138] and despite child benefit being a 'universal' payment in Ireland, many Roma children are not entitled to it.[139] Many Roma households were also unsuccessful in their application for social protection payments, including child benefit.[140]

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have a right to education, but in Ireland, a person's socioeconomic background is a determinant of their educational attainment, as one is almost 3 times more likely to go on to higher education if their parents have a higher education than someone whose parents have not completed primary-level education.[141] Additionally, experiencing poverty significantly affects educational outcomes. A disproportionate number of young people who have experienced poverty become 'early school leavers'. They are 3 times more likely to be unemployed than others aged 18-24 who are not early school leavers.[142] To reach these young people, Ireland should expand funding for out-of-school child-centred education alternatives up to the completion of second-level education.

Income levels also affect children's health outcomes. For low-income families, the costs associated with returning to school increase financial pressures, restricting access to food, energy, and healthcare and acting as a barrier to children attending school at both primary and secondary levels.[143] Programme for Government commitments, as well as measures in Budget 2023, will help to address this burden, but the scope of the measures needs to be expanded and should include secondary-level students.

130   https://www.rte.ie/documents/news/2023/01/survival-of-the-richest-full-report.pdf
131   https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/budget-2023-analysis
132   Economic Social and Research Institute
133   https://www.esri.ie/news/decreasing-poverty-requires-a-mix-of-policy-measures-such-as-increasing-female-la-bour-force
134   https://www.disability-federation.ie/assets/files/pdf/dfi_prebudget_submission_to_dsp_for_budget_22_final.pdf
135   https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silced/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilcenforceddepri-vation2022/
136   2021 CSO SILC as mentioned in https://www.socialjustice.ie/system/files/file-uploads/2022-10/2022-10-05%20 SJI%20Poverty%20Focus%20October%202022%20PDF.pdf
137   Child Poverty Monitor 2022 A
138   https://www.childrensrights.ie/resources/press-release-budget-2023-goes-further
139   This is due to the implementation of the right to reside (European Directive 2004/38) and the associated policy, Habitual Residence Condition, by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.
140   UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - Ireland Joint Alternative Report by a Coalition of Traveller and Roma Organisations:
141   https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/submissions_reports/files/Chapter-1-Right-to-Education.pdf
142   https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Evaluation+of+the+National+Youthreach+Program-me%E2%80%9D+(2019)+Research+Series+Number+82.&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholart
143   https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/education/2022/07/26/it-has-gone-beyond-crazy-large-majority-of-parents-worry-about-back-to-school-costs-amid-cost-of-living-crisis/

Policy initiatives are often lacking in the necessary ambition, such as in the planned housing output, or are not being implemented effectively, as in healthcare reforms. If Ireland is going to reach those furthest behind, first, a more systematic and effective approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion is required. This should include ensuring adequate incomes for all; introducing a persistent poverty metric; ensuring access to quality public services, with a focus on public delivery and moving away from the current emphasis on a private, market model; ensuring decent jobs for those who can work; and tackling discrimination in all its forms.

Marginalised communities should have a meaningful collective voice in these developments, but the decimation of the local autonomous community development sector prior to 2010, and particularly the closure of the Community Development Programme, is hindering this.[144] The Pilot Community Development Programme introduced in 2021 is positive, but must be expanded.

Climate Change and Environment

Climate change disproportionately impacts certain communities within Ireland and globally[145] and so greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be reduced. Significant developments in this area have been the establishment of; two 5-year Carbon Budgets (2021-25, 2026-30); sectoral emission ceilings for each sector of the economy in 2022; and the necessary governance architecture to underpin the Climate Action Plan. However, while this Plan contains welcome commitments, several weaknesses remain. Energy efficiency measures and supports are not being delivered at the scale required, and they are not proactively targeting the increasing number of households at risk of energy poverty.

Energy poverty interlinks poverty, energy, housing and social inclusion and threatens over a third of Irish households.[146] However, despite attempts from the government to tackle this through an Energy Poverty Action Plan, systematic and holistic policy responses are lacking. Initiatives to retrofit homes risk leaving some people further behind, as the upfront costs make it inaccessible to many.[147] Moreover, the free energy upgrade scheme designed to target households in energy poverty is not accessible to tenants in the private rental sector.[148]

Travellers experience significant levels of energy poverty, and are largely still dependent on the burning of fossil fuels.[149] Traveller families in trailers are excluded from access to retrofitting grants,[150] and current policies and structures make it difficult for Travellers and Roma to switch to using low-emission mobility.[151]

Any emission reduction targets for the residential sector must prioritise policies that result in a radical reduction in energy deprivation. However, a key obstacle is that disaggregated data on energy deprivation is not adequately measured or reported by the government. Additionally,

144 https://ictu.ie/publications/downsizing-community-sector and https://comhlamh.org/wp-content/up-loads/2018/10/9-Paper-on-the-Destruction-of-Community-Development.pdf
145 https://communitylawandmediation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Environmental-Justice-in-Ireland-230322-1.pdf
146 https://www.esri.ie/news/energy-poverty-at-highest-recorded-rate
147 https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/news/friends-of-the-earth-report-reveals-significant-barriers-to/
148 ibid.
149 https://www.ntmabs.org/publications/development/2019/nt-mabs-energy-report-factsheet_.pdf
150 Blockages to Retrofitting and Heat-pump Installation in Ireland
151 Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 | Dublin City Council

alongside increases in social welfare payments and the fuel allowance, wider accessibility to government retrofitting schemes, grants, loan schemes and other models of financing are needed.

Furthermore, the government must turn the new sectoral pollution limits into policies and deliver on measures that hold emissions within limits set by the Carbon Budgets – especially as Ireland's emissions are still rising.[152] Public bodies should be mandated to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and fossil gas infrastructure and connections should no longer be promoted.[153] Agricultural policies should stop supporting intensification of livestock farming, which is increasing GHG emissions, damaging water and air quality,[154] and is the primary contributor to biodiversity loss in Ireland.[155] There must be greater focus on reducing the use of reactive nitrogen in fertilisers, and payments should be made for ecosystem services. While funding has been increased for peatland restoration, peat extraction from wetlands for horticultural use and export should end.

Many national climate actions will rely on the engagement of local groups and communities. However, funding levels for environmental organisations, traditionally in the vanguard of local activism, have failed to recover fully from the 2008 austerity cuts, creating an operational constraint.

International Development

This sector has witnessed stark reversals in SDG progress. Healthcare systems across the global south struggled to control the worst effects of the pandemic, their efforts hampered by pharmaceutical companies' refusal (supported by European countries including Ireland) to share vaccine-related IP and technology.[156]

The pandemic also saw women and girls fall further behind. The burden of unpaid care on them increased, restricting educational and employment opportunities, increasing gender-based violence and increasing hunger.[157] Women were disproportionately on the frontline of the pandemic, comprising 70% of the healthcare workers globally, and typically underpaid and under-resourced.[158]

In addition, a severe drought (exacerbated by climate change) combined with the global food insecurity crisis (compounded by the war in Ukraine) has worsened the situation in the Horn of Africa, pushing 22 million people into a hunger crisis not seen in the region for decades.[159]

Responding to these crises has been made more difficult in countries where IMF-imposed austerity demanded a slashing of public services to reduce wage bills. At the height of the pandemic, 15 low-income countries were forced to reduce their public wage budgets,[160] undermining progress on SDGs such as health and education.

152   https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/ghg/latest-emissions-data/
153   Network Development Plan 2021 | CRU Ireland
154   Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions Projections - 2020-2040 | EPA.ie
155   https://www.irishtimes.com/business/farming-food/2022/10/13/farming-having-disproportionate-impact-on-fall-ing-water-quality-says-epa/
156   https://peoplesvaccine.ie/#our_demands
157   https://www.concern.net/news/impact-of-COVID-19-19-on-women-and-girls
158   New ActionAid research shows stark reality of COVID-19-19's impact on young women's lives in the developing world
159   https://www.wfp.org/stories/horn-africa-extreme-drought-deepens-hunger-region-beset-conflict
160   The Public vs Austerity (Executive Summary)

Debt levels continue to cripple government efforts to deliver the SDGs with 23 out of 50 sub-Saharan African countries (including Irish Aid partner countries) considered to be in or at high risk of debt distress.[161] Unsustainable debt levels (compounded by rising interest rates and currency depreciations) cause countries to spend increasing proportions of their national budget servicing debt loans, reducing already insufficient resources for SDG investment even further.[162]

A lack of tax revenue also reduces fiscal space for SDG achievement, yet Ireland continues to play an oversized role in facilitating corporate tax avoidance. Last year, research from the Director of the EU Tax Observatory and others estimated that Ireland is the single largest destination of multinational 'profit-shifting' in the world, which sees badly-needed revenue flow out of countries of the global south.[163] In February the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed 'serious concern' over Ireland's tax policies, and called on the State to ensure that its tax policies did not enable tax abuse by companies operating in other countries, undermining the available resources for the realisation of children's rights.[164] Ireland must do more to end tax dodging globally, especially given serious concerns over the extent to which global south countries will benefit from the recent OECD-brokered global deal on corporation tax.[165]

More positively, Ireland has resisted the trend among other EU member states towards more tied aid, and its increasing privatisation. Its policies continue to promote development effectiveness, including Good Humanitarian Donorship principles, and engagement with OECD DAC[166] recommendations regarding locally-led development and civil society financing and policy engagement.

Ireland's 'A Better World' policy is an illustration of that commitment; however a helpful addition to the policy would be a clear, 'Framework of Action' and monitoring mechanism. This should demonstrate pathways for SDG implementation that reach the furthest behind first, plus a commitment to work with partner countries and safeguard civil society space both in Ireland and those countries.

It is positive that this policy commits that Ireland's ODA will be poverty-focused, and 100% untied.[167] What's more, Ireland's ODA[168] tends to have a strong climate, hunger, gender, human rights and humanitarian focus. Nevertheless, while there have been welcome increases in ODA recently, as a percentage of GNI it remains low and stagnant. A roadmap and timeline detailing how and by when Ireland will meet its commitment to 0.7% must be established. An increase in ODA should be accompanied by a move to reach the European benchmark of 3% of ODA on

161   https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-19/rich-nations-can-stave-off-african-debt-crisis-afdb-says
162   https://www.financialjustice.ie/what-is-financial-justice/debt-justice/
163   Tørsløv, Wier and Zucman, 'The Missing Profits of Nations' (Review of Economic Studies) July 2022: https://www.restud.com/the-missing-profits-of-nations/
164   'Ireland's role in enabling tax avoidance under spotlight at UN', Christian Aid Ireland 2023: https://www.christianaid.ie/news/news-and-blogs/irelands-role-enabling-tax-avoidance-under-spotlight-un https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FIRL%2F-CO%2F5-6&Lang=en: "Ensure that tax policies do not contribute to tax abuse by companies registered in the State party but operating in other countries, leading to a negative impact on the availability of resources for the realization of children's rights in those countries."
165   https://www.icrict.com/press-release/2022/12/14/eu-agreement-to-implement-the-global-minimum-tax-is-a-step-forward-but-not-enough
166   Development Assistance Committee
167   Least Developed Countries
168   Official Development Assistance

Global Citizenship Education.[169] This would act not just as an SDG target, but as an enabler of all SDGs.[170]

Similarly, Ireland is still falling short on pledged climate finance support to help poorer countries deal with the impacts of climate change. While the quality of Ireland's climate finance is recognised as being high, with grant-based flows focused on adaptation in countries most at risk, the quantity remains low, with roughly €90m provided per year, representing less than one-fifth of Ireland's fair share.[171] This is likely to increase further, given the historic agreement at COP 27 to provide additional funding to address unavoidable 'Loss & Damage'.[172] Climate finance should be new and additional to ODA.

SDG Governance in Ireland

Significant strides have been made in Ireland's SDG governance and implementation. A lead department has been named for each action in the national plan, the SDG Champions programme has been expanded, and stakeholder engagement has improved.

Additionally, acknowledgement in the [Programme for Government](#) of the need to supplement existing economic indicators with new ones, and initiatives such as the establishment of a Wellbeing Framework are welcome.

However, notwithstanding that global events have created a difficult environment in which to progress towards the SDGs, a large number of the actions in the 2022-2024 Plan are vague or focused on finding baselines. This is not demonstrative of the ambition required.

Additionally, the State's failure to date to establish the necessary governance architecture creates additional challenges.

Below we outline a suite of recommendations which, if implemented with urgency, would unblock obstacles and create an enabling environment for Ireland to reach the SDGs.

Coalition 2030's Toolkit for SDG Achievement in Ireland

1. **Lead from the top**

   Currently Ireland's SDG ministry is housed in the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. In order to demonstrate the political ambition required for SDG achievement, the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) should have overall responsibility for SDG oversight and implementation. Additionally, Government departments should be held accountable for the delivery of the SDGs with time-bound specific targets, and Government ministers should be mandated to report annually on their department's progress towards the Goals to both houses of the Oireachtas and their respective Committees.

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169   Global Citizenship Education
170   https://www.ideaonline.ie/press-release
171   See Christian Aid Ireland, Presentation to the Oireachtas Climate Committee, October 2022: https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_environment_and_climate_action/submissions/2022/2022-10-25_opening-statement-conor-o-neill-head-of-policy-and-advocacy-christian-aid-ireland_en.pdf
172   https://unfccc.int/news/cop27-reaches-breakthrough-agreement-on-new-loss-and-damage-fund-for-vulnerable-countries

2. Budget for the SDGs

The United Nations Development Programme advises that:

"When SDGs become part of the country's national policy framework, it is crucial that the process is then followed by SDG integration into the countries' budgetary frameworks. This is essential to ensure that the policy prioritizations are expressed in budgets as the latter is the strongest domestic legal basis that reflects countries' commitments to 2030 Agenda and its related SDGs. If not integrated into the budgets, then it is very likely to expect disconnects between the strategic planning frameworks that have made commitments to the 2030 Agenda on the one hand, and public budgets that remain driven by "business as usual" on the other".

The annual Budget process is arguably the most important policy event of the year – yet the SDGs have never meaningfully featured. 'SDG budgeting' in the context of Ireland would mean explicit and measurable presentation of SDG targets in budget allocations and reports and use of those in budget decision-making.

3. 'SDG-proof' policy

All proposed policies must undergo prospective SDG-proofing to ascertain their impact on each SDG; both positively and negatively. This would help mitigate trade-offs in policy making, increasing policy coherence.[173] In order to reduce unintended negative consequences of policies, the SDGs should be the fundamental framing tool for policy making in Ireland, at all levels of government. Furthermore, local authorities should be guided on how to embed the SDGs in city and county plans, and the PPNs,[174] LENs,[175] ETBs[176] and communities should be true partners in policy design and SDG implementation.

4. Measure what matters

Ireland should have a coherent set of indicators that covers all its contributions and obligations to the achievement of the SDGs, both nationally and internationally. At present, this does not exist. Amending this may involve adapting the Wellbeing Framework which does not account for transboundary effects of policies, and/or developing a set of nationally relevant indicators.[177] Furthermore, the Central Statistics Office requires additional resourcing to collect relevant data. Without disaggregated, relevant, timely data it is difficult to develop targeted policies to support those furthest behind. Finally, considering the extensive overlap between human rights obligations and the SDGs,[178] Ireland should integrate its measurement of and reporting on human rights obligations with its measurement of and reporting on the SDGs. Tied to this, IHREC should be resourced to engage with questions of SDG/human rights alignment.

173   Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development https://www.oecd.org/governance/pcsd/Note%20on%20Shaping%20Targets.pdf
174   Public Participation Networks
175   Local Environmental Networks
176   Education and Training Boards
177   https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6050a46343a94a74eb25ae61/t/63624c500ab-41b3ac12909d2/1667386456433/EN-Policy-Paper-Finland.pdf
178   https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en/sdg/report/country/886

5. **Establish a Commissioner for Future Generations**

In Wales, the role of the Future Generations Commissioner is to act as a guardian for the well-being and interests of future generations in Wales, and it is our strong view that this role be established in Ireland.

Conclusion

The government's response to COVID-19 and its initial response to accommodating Ukrainian refugees showed that the State can respond to crises quickly and effectively. The previously strongly held conviction that certain policies and actions were not possible was cast aside in a commendable effort to assist those who needed assistance most.

This creative and ambitious policy mind-set is what is needed for SDG success. That a lack of government planning and foresight has begun to derail support to those seeking protection, only serves to underline the need for the SDGs to be more centrally embedded in the policy-making process.

Further global crises that threaten SDG progress are inevitable. The State has demonstrated that it has the capacity to respond deftly.

However, to avoid a situation whereby every crisis sets the SDGs further back requires a State prioritisation of the SDGs hitherto unseen.

Coalition 2030 would like to thank its members and allies that contributed to this chapter.

9.3 Ireland's Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the Higher and Further Education Advisory Group

The contribution of Ireland's Further and Higher Education Sector to the SDGs.

Background:

The higher education sector in Ireland has been active in contributing to sustainable development objectives over a number of decades. In 2007, University College Cork established a pilot Green Campus initiative and in 2010 was the first university in the world to be awarded a Green Flag from the Foundation for Environmental Education. In 2011, GMIT Mayo campus were the first Institute of Technology in the world to achieve the Green Campus accreditation. At present fifty-two Campuses from across the further and higher education sector in Ireland are formally registered on the Programme and twenty of these have been awarded the Green Flag. The **Green-Campus Programme** encourages practical environmental education and the empowerment of campuses to become exemplars in environmental stewardship.

In 2014 the Government published Ireland's first National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development. The second National Strategy "ESD to 2030", launched in 2022 focuses on five priority action areas

1. Advancing Policy

2. Transforming Learning Environments

3. Building Capacity of Educators

4. Empowering and Mobilising Young People

5. Accelerating Local Level Actions

In addition, Ireland's National SDG Implementation Plan specifically highlights the "significant impact that further and higher education institutions can make to the progression of the SDGs both as individual organisations and as part of multi-stakeholder partnerships."

The sector has identified sustainability as an area of strategic importance with a number of higher education institutions placing the sustainability objectives at the heart of their institutional strategies with the appointment of Ireland's first Vice President for Sustainability in late 2021 at Technological University Dublin; subsequently several more senior Vice President appointments have been made across the sector. The higher education sector can be seen as a microcosm of broader society and contributes to sustainability through its activities in learning and teaching, research, operations and engagement. What follows is a selection of case studies highlighting the depth and breadth of these activities.

The contribution of HE and FET to achievement of SDG goals in Ireland:

1. Teaching and Learning

Focused on **SDG 4** and of particular relevance to the theme of Leaving no one behind, the Munster Technological University's **UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Physical Education** has been leading global efforts to advance the inclusive policy actions of UNESCO's Kazan Action Plan since 2017. This work aims to advance inclusive education through a system-based approach aligned with Agenda 2030 and varied human rights treaties. Capacity building programmes and initiatives have been developed and delivered globally to ensure both undergraduates and professionals understand and can address the barriers that limit the full and effective participation of those experiencing marginalisation.

In the adult and community education sector, **Saolta** is a Global Citizenship Education strategic partnership which consists of AONTAS, Concern Worldwide, Irish Rural Link , the Adult and Community Education Department in Maynooth University (ACED) and, the lead partner, Development Perspectives (DP). The partnership uses informed, participatory and experiential learning approaches to help tutors and education practitioners in Adult Continuing Education and Further Education and Training critically explore how global justice issues interlink with their everyday lives. They are guided towards how to understand and tackle the root causes of issues related to poverty, inequality, and climate change through accessible, critical, action and systems-based approaches to learning. The programme delivers the above outputs through a number of projects and resources, for example: Various workbooks, The SDG Advocate Training, The Training of Trainers and Local Authority Workshops which to date have engaged with over 2,000 participants.

In addressing the theme of "Building Back Better", numerous projects have focused on building the capacity of educators within the sector. A sectoral collaboration between Atlantic Technological University (ATU), Dublin City University (DCU), Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), and University College Cork (UCC) developed the **'Introduction to Education for Sustainability'** Digital Badge (25 hours), an introductory course exploring the basic concepts and practical steps on how to embed sustainability across the curriculum. It is funded by Ireland's National Forum for the Enhancement in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and encompasses the EU Green Competency Framework focusing on embodying sustainability values, embracing complexity, envisioning sustainable futures, and acting for sustainability. University College Cork's **SDG Toolkit** project is an open-source toolkit that supports teaching staff to self-assess their curricula against each of the 17 SDGs on a 5-point scale of increasing embeddedness and transdisciplinarity.   The toolkit includes a Resource Library to of off-the-shelf assets that can be integrated into teaching activities.

Both the Digital Badge course and SDG toolkit mentioned above received funding under the **Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education (SATLE),** which is a €7.7m million fund administered by the National Forum in partnership with the Higher Education Authority designed to drive teaching and learning innovation across the higher education sector, with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as one of its three areas of focus. This thematic focus is directly informed by the Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development to 2030. It provides opportunities for collaboration and peer learning on ESD, with a particular focus on transformative pedagogies, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches. Details on collaborative projects and events

are being updated on the National Forum's website, which includes a Resource Hub of Open Educational Resources for Teaching and Learning.

A significant change within the Further and Higher Education sector in Ireland has been the consolidation of 12 Institutes of Technology to 5 Technological Universities namely, Technological University Dublin, Munster Technological University, Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest, Atlantic Technological University, and Southeast Technological University. In support of this the **National Technological University Transformation for Recovery and Resilience (NTUTORR)** project aims to transform the student experience through the learner experience; transforming learning, teaching and assessment by developing staff capabilities; enabling digital ecosystems to transform learning, teaching and assessment. Sustainability and the SDGs are core themes running throughout the project to support the Technological University Sector in leading the implementation of Ireland's Climate Action Plan. A key output will be an Academy of Education for Sustainability, Leadership and Employability.

There are over 50 green skills programmes available in colleges, institutes and training centres across Ireland through further education and training (FET). Following progress in developing a national network of **centres of excellence in retrofit skills training,** the number of workers availing of these opportunities has increased steadily since the first centre was opened in 2020, with over 2,000 enrolments in 2022. The courses are free, fast and flexible with weekend and evening provision available. Alongside courses in NZEB and retrofit, a **national suite of green skills programmes** is currently being developed by SOLAS in collaboration with enterprise partners for blended delivery by the Education and Training Boards in areas such as sustainability awareness and resource efficiency to assist in delivering on these challenges.

   2.   Research

Ireland's FET and HE sectors are home to globally leading researchers in the field of sustainability.   Many institutions have undertaken significant mapping exercises to determine the impact of their research on the SDGs. At University College Cork, a 9-month project using qualitative and quantitative methods saw 497 researchers across all 4 schools map their research against the SDGs. The project uncovered over 5,000 publications from UCC researchers addressing SDG challenges over a three-year period. A similar exercise at Technological University Dublin on research and innovation to address the SDGs has focused on action and engaged research to influence national and European policy. A survey in 2023 within TU Dublin shows that at least 50 academics and career researchers are involved in over 100 activities that inform government policies, including: Government Departmental Committee membership, experts at Oireachtas Committees and Citizen Assemblies' Boards of State Agencies, performing research that directly contributed to the development of a policy, organising events that facilitated policy development', authoring or co-authoring White or Green Papers and EU Policy Committees and International Policy Committee membership.

COALESCE is a programme of the Irish Research Council which seeks to fund excellent research addressing national, European and global challenges linked to one or more of the SDGs; it is run in partnership with a number of government department and agencies. The Scheme is also designed to encourage interdisciplinary approaches for knowledge generation that will produce rigorous and influential evidence and learning, with a view to impacting at a societal level in partner countries, as part of the implementation of "A Better World: Ireland's

Policy for International Development". Examples of funded project include "APPLICABLE: Assistive Product List Implementation Creating Enablement of inclusive SDGs" whose deliverables will lead to the improvement of the disability policy in Malawi, and "B-CAUSE: Building Collaborative Approaches to University Strategies against Exclusion in Ireland and Africa: pedagogies for quality Higher Education and inclusive global citizenship" whose learnings will be used to inform work on policy development in the context of equality and diversity in higher education. Both projects have been funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

To genuinely Build back Better science must inform policy and decision making. **MaREI** is the SFI **Research Centre for Energy, Climate and Marine** research and innovation co-ordinated by the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) at University College Cork, with 12 other institutional partners. The Centre comprises over 220 researchers focusing on defined global challenges such as the Energy Transition, Climate Action and the Blue Economy. MaREI researchers aim to provide the necessary evidence base to inform the development of key national and EU policies, support Government in the negotiation of policy at an EU-level, and inform the implementation of EU Directives and regulations. MaREI research has helped to inform the All of Government Plan on Climate Action, the National Mitigation Plan, the National Adaptation Framework, and the Climate Dialogue, and the Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth strategy.

The environment doesn't recognise political borders, and it is imperative that Ireland's response to the SDGs recognises this. **The North-South Research Programme (NSRP)** is a collaborative scheme being delivered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and the Shared Island Unit at the Department of the Taoiseach. The total value of the programme is €50 million. To date, 62 projects to the value of €37.28M across three strands and all disciplines have been funded through the programme. The approaches underpinning the proposals are nuanced by the objectives of the Good Friday Agreement, the National Development Plan 2040, and Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Operational Excellence

In addition to HE and FET campuses teaching and research activities addressing SDGs, it's widely recognised that these institutions should "walk-the walk" in demonstrating best practice on their own campuses. The **EPA-IUA Campus Living Labs Sustainability Project (Campus Living Labs)** project is a two-year partnership project between the Environmental Protection Agency and the Irish Universities Association. Recognising that university campuses are exemplary ecosystems to test and trial effective interventions for waste management and recycling, the ambition of this project is to deliver evidence to inform campus sustainability programmes and advance activities that will introduce systemic change in preventing waste and increasing recycling on campus. Through Campus Living Labs, several pilot schemes have been implemented to date including an online interactive "Waste Game", an e-cups reusable coffee cup trial, a measurement tool for food waste and campus workshops on bulky waste, bike and textile repair.

The Capital Projects Unit within the HEA, in partnership with DFHERIS and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland fund a programme called the **Energy Efficiency Decarbonisation**

Pathfinder Programme which is aimed at decarbonising the sector to meet the targets within the Government's Climate Action Plan 2023. To date, 15 different projects have been funded with an estimate impact of 2000 tonnes of carbon per annum saved. Following initial successes, the programme is now trialling deeper retrofit and renewable heat solutions. The programme adopts a holistic approach to improving the energy performance of public bodies and sectors. As well as decreasing carbon emissions, completed projects have resulted in improved indoor air quality, enhanced understanding of retrofit and energy solutions, upskilling of professionals, peer-to-peer best practice exchange, and the testing of innovative procurement and finance.

Campuses should also demonstrate best practice in terms of Leaving no one Behind, and the **Athena SWAN charter** is a framework that is used across the globe to support and transform gender equality in higher education and research. The charter launched in Ireland in 2015 with a specific remit to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine employment. The charter has since been expanded to include arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law and staff working in professional, managerial and support roles. The framework also now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, including consideration of the experience of trans staff and students, as well as the underrepresentation of men in particular disciplines. There are currently 112 Athena Swan award holders in Ireland. Some programmes of particular note in relation to SDG5 include **UCC's Bystander Intervention Programme** and the related national **Unmute Consent** campaign**,** as well as the national animation campaign **'Moving Parts'** video series led by the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology.

The **Healthy Campus Charter and Framework** addresses SDG 3 and is based on the Okanagan International Charter for Health Promoting Universities. The Framework sets out the key steps for campuses to develop local implementation plans that reflect national and local priorities to improve health and wellbeing. A Healthy Campus adopts a holistic understanding of health, takes a whole campus approach and aspires to create a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health and wellbeing of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential. It operates on the principles of participation, partnership, being evidence-based and sustainability. A number of national policies and strategies have been developed to support the Healthy Ireland vision in the keys areas of physical activity, obesity, tobacco, sexual health, mental health and drugs and alcohol.

4. Engagement

In recognition of the "global" goals and Leaving no one Behind the **Universities of Sanctuary** Ireland is an initiative to encourage and celebrate the good practice of universities, colleges and other education institutes welcoming refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants into their university communities and fostering a culture of welcome and inclusion for all those seeking sanctuary. The **University of Sanctuary Scholarship** provides tuition fee waivers to first-time higher education applicants who identify as a refugee, asylum seeker or a person in a refugee-like situation as defined by the UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention. Currently Dublin City University, University of Limerick, University College Cork, University College Dublin, University of Galway, Maynooth University and Trinity College Dublin have received the University of Sanctuary Award. Universities of Sanctuary do everything possible to secure equal access to higher education for refugees, reach out to and support refugees in their local

communities who could benefit from University resources in a sustainable way and undertake activities to nurture a culture of welcome and an inclusive atmosphere within their institutions, such as among staff and students.

Launched in 2023, **SDSN Ireland** is an all-island chapter of the **international Sustainable Development Solutions Network** co-hosted by University College Cork and Queen's University Belfast. SDSN Ireland is a North-South cooperative network focused on developing context-specific solutions and mobilising local action for the SDGs. Engaging universities, research centres, local authorities, NGOs, civil society organisations and policymakers, the Network will bring the latest research to bear on producing solutions to the challenges within the SDGs and will seek to empower individuals and organisations to achieve impact through education and engagement.

Climate Ready was developed by **Skillnet Ireland** to support Government's Climate Action Plan and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill. Climate Ready offers several pathways for businesses to build sustainable operating models and develop green talent. This includes the **Climate Ready Academy** which offers a suite of practical and specialised learning supports for businesses in the areas of climate action and sustainability including leaders' programmes in energy, waste, transport, the circular economy and sustainability. Over 1,000 employees and 300 businesses have benefited from these programmes which have been designed in partnership with SEAI and other agencies. Climate Ready Academy recently launched the first enterprise-led micro-credential programmes dedicated to climate action in Ireland in partnership with the University of Limerick. The stackable micro-credentials will enable participants to develop tailored sustainability charters and action plans for their organisation across the areas of energy, sustainability, waste, and circularity

The **Creative Ireland Programme**, is a 5-year all-of-government initiative which places creativity at the centre of public policy. In March 2021, the **Creative Climate Action fund** was launched in collaboration with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. This will fund creative and cultural projects that aim to meaningfully connect people with the profound changes that are happening as a result of climate change, and transform that connection into climate action. Examples of funded projects in the sector include Línte na Farraige, a series of light installations across Irish coastal sites revealing the risks of rising seas and storm surges in collaboration with scientists from Trinity College Dublin and Maynooth University.

Challenges

The Further and Higher and education sector in Ireland is a complex landscape; its physical infrastructure spans the length and breadth of the country from rural to urban settings, though its reach extends much further.   The sector is tasked with both developing the skills and competences to deliver on the 2030 agenda, while also demonstrating best practice in its own operations. The challenge in terms of transforming these learning environments cannot be overstated and will require an enormous investment as well as an openness to more innovative approaches.

The primary challenges in the sector relate to the resources available to implement sustainability projects as well as the often-siloed nature of further and higher education, which can impact coordination, communication and the most efficient use of resources.   There is

also a skills gap in terms of the specialist knowledge and skills required to deliver sustainability programmes in this complex environment. The complex further and higher education system means that a one size fits all approach is not suitable and is a challenge in terms of benchmarking and measuring progress.

Suggestions for enhancing national and international efforts

An **Advisory Group for ESD** in Further and Higher Education has been established by DFHERIS to   support the coordination of new and existing institutional and sectoral initiatives in ESD and Sustainability, as well as providing a forum for collaboration, sharing good practice and for developing leadership capacity in ESD in further and higher education. This group reports into an over-arching Steering Committee, with representatives from key government departments and agencies, to support policy alignment on ESD and the SDGs across government.

SDSN Ireland proposes an All island Living Laboratory for Sustainability, where the knowledge generated by member institutions is used to implement projects delivery on the SDGs within their localities. Other proposed activities include a seed funding scheme to support SDG related development projects, a bursary scheme for students which would enable them to study both sides of the border (an opportunity that no longer exists as Northern Ireland can no longer avail of the future Erasmus programme) and the development of masters and diploma courses on SDGs between both universities.

Conclusion

Ireland is a uniquely scaled, developed, and highly networked country. As the English-speaking capital country of Europe it is well positioned to deliver on sustainability objectives and the UN global agenda through a combination of transformational systems changes to build capacity across society through meaningful education and relevant research and innovation. Ireland's nimbleness can respond to the urgency and pace for change required through just and inclusive approaches that speak to our histories, our knowledge, our local communities and our ambition to create a sustainable future for all areas of our society.

This chapter was prepared by Dr Maria Kirrane, University College Cork on behalf of SDSN Ireland and with input from the DFHERIS ESD Advisory Group.

9.4 Libraries

Introduction

The public librarian is the original circular economist. The very basis of public libraries is recycling, and the sustainable sharing of collections. In Ireland, this approach is practiced every day across 330 public libraries that are available to everyone, regardless of their background or status. Anyone can become a library member, free of charge, and there are currently nearly 800,000 registered members regularly using their library service to access more than 13 million books, CDs and DVDs, tens of thousands of eBooks and eAudiobooks, and thousands of digital magazines and newspapers. Both members and non-members alike can access a diverse offer of resources and services that include free internet access, reading and literacy supports, digital skills training, formal and informal learning courses, and the provision of reliable guidance on many topics including health and wellbeing, job seeking and personal development.

The library as location for information, knowledge, and facts is just one feature. The physical presence of the library building in the heart of the community ensures that everyone has a place to meet and come together. Every day, libraries across Ireland arrange events, preserve and provide access to cultural heritage collections, or bolster the democratic process by providing access to trusted information sources. Public Libraries are proactive partners collaborating and contributing to development actions and changes through initiatives, facilitation, and citizen involvement. We are uniquely positioned to implement many specific aspects of the vision of 2030 Agenda, including universal literacy, inclusivity and national ownership.

Irish Public Libraries and the SDGs

It is safe to say that as providers of information on every conceivable topic, public libraries in Ireland have been involved with all SDG goals at some point since 2016. We are making a cross-cutting contribution across the 2030 Agenda and there are some areas where the impact of public libraries' activities can be felt more strongly. In Ireland, we have been particularly active and effective around sustainable food (Goal 2), health and wellbeing (Goal 3), literacy and education (Goal 4), women and girls (Goal 5), climate change (Goal 13) and public access to information (Goal 16). In all these areas public libraries have undertaken programming and activities that support the achievement of the goals while also raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda itself. Awareness raising is a particularly valuable contribution as librarians know their local communities and are able to help people to understand a topic in a way that relates to their lives and how they can make a difference on a personal and local level to achieve the SDG goals. Libraries' efforts to achieve these goals can be illustrated by a number of specific examples:

Goal 2: In 2021, public libraries partnered with Healthy Ireland and a national healthy food initiative, Grow it Yourself (GIY) with an objective to engage 50,000 people directly in a food growing programme called **Grow it Forward**. This programme, which was part of the Government of Ireland's Keep Well initiative, directly contributed to achieving Goal 2 of the SDGs.

Grow it Forward encouraged participants to grow their own food from seeds and then share their growing with others to create a movement of food growers in communities all over

Ireland. 50,000 growing kits were made available through 330 library branches across the country, and 50 library ambassadors were appointed to create momentum for the campaign at a local level. Each kit contained seeds and related materials to engage up to 10 people. Libraries held events and activities to help participants learn more about growing and get the most out of their seeds.

Participants reported numerous benefits including new knowledge, improved mental health, social connection and pro-environmental behaviour. 100% of participants sowed seeds and 80% shared their growing with others, creating an estimated 217,500 people taking part in total. More than 50% of participants were first time growers, with 82% reporting increased growing knowledge. 94% will continue to grow after the campaign, with 87% more likely to adopt pro environmental behaviours. 59% reported improvement to mental well-being, 68% became more aware of physical benefits of growing their own food, and 42% felt growing increased social connection.

Goal 3: The '**Healthy Ireland at Your Library**' **(HIaYL) Programme** supports communities and individuals to improve their health and wellbeing through access to a national collection of health-related books and other reading materials, along with the provision of health information services and a range of programmes and events and staff training. Started in 2017, HIaYL is part of the National Healthy Ireland strategy whose aim is to improve health and wellbeing by placing a focus on prevention, individual awareness and keeping people healthy for longer.

The library programme centres on the three Healthy Ireland themes – Eat Well, Think Well, Be Well. The book collection has over 100 titles covering these areas, and each book was specially evaluated nationally to provide individuals and families with reliable, accessible information to manage their general health and wellbeing. The collection includes books for children and young adults as well. This collection is available to borrow in every local library free of charge. There are also a collection of eBooks and eAudiobooks under the 'Healthy Ireland at Your Library' Programme that can be accessed online through the library's national BorrowBox app.

Goal 4: Literacy and education are key to the role of libraries and we are uniquely positioned to support activities in support of literacy and education, with an ability to implement national programmes and campaigns that reach deep into the community. For example, **Ireland Reads** is an annual promotional campaign that focuses on literacy and wellbeing. People of all ages are invited to read to relax and look after their mental health, and to set aside time on February 25th each year just for this purpose. Media coverage across high-profile national TV, print, radio and digital media supports the campaign, which has resulted in tens of thousands of people all over the country joining library digital services for the first time, and pledging to spend thousands of hours reading on Ireland Reads day.

Libraries can also focus on specific user groups. **Little Library** is a programme under the cross government First 5 strategy[179] and the public libraries' Right to Read Programme supporting early language and literacy development among young children. **Little Library** encourages library usage and the provision of library services to Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings. The programme started in 2021 and more than 4,500 early learning and care providers were offered free book bags and story time events. In 2022, almost 23,000 4 and 5 year olds received their My Little Library Bag and library membership to help support their transition to primary

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179   First 5 | A Government Strategy For Babies & Young Children

school. As a result of the programme 63% of all 4 and 5 year olds in Ireland are now members of their library, giving them access to millions of books to aid their literacy development - all free of charge.

Goal 5: Where, in some cases, other public institutions are sometimes culturally inaccessible for women and girls, libraries are considered as **safe, trustworthy spaces.** For vulnerable migrant women in particular, having a safe space to engage in activities can be life changing. A collaborative approach between libraries and integration services is leading to tangible results in this area, not only in the form of sustainable skills and materials but also in confidence building and career focusing outcomes. For example, the Shakti programme in Waterford is a Social Enterprise programme (SEAM+) level three aimed at vulnerable migrant women. The name Shakti comes from a Hindu Goddess and means power, energy and force. The programme focuses on language learning, digital skills as well as social enterprise and has an emphasis on self-empowerment often through creativity and health and wellbeing. In 2022 a second Shakti programme was set up for Ukrainian women.

Goal 13: Libraries are sustainable institutions which play a big part in helping to provide knowledge, understanding, and resources to their communities. Books and reading materials are one way to do this, and collections and reading lists have been created around the SDGs, with individual goals showcased each month. Libraries' **programming activities** also have a major impact on raising awareness of sustainable development. In every local authority in the country, individual libraries have held hundreds of workshops on climate action, sustainability, and building a social economy ecosystem, inviting experts from across society to contribute as speakers or facilitators. Activities and events have taken place to highlight the goals to the public and schools, and these are often themed to complement high-visibility campaigns such as PRIDE month or biodiversity week. All libraries in Ireland took part in the first SDG week in September 2022, and will continue to expand their activities annually during this week and throughout the year as part of the national implementation plan, which includes the provision of home energy monitoring kits to the public through the library service.

Goal 16: Programmes and activities are key tools for public libraries to help achieve the SDGs, but the most fundamental area of impact is through the provision of public access to information on all subjects, for all library users, without barriers. 100% of our public libraries offer **free internet access to users.** This enables everyone, regardless of their ability to access the internet at home, or via their phone, to have a reliable place to go online and seek information. Access to information is a human right and enables the delivery of other human rights. It is vital to support effective decision-making in favour of sustainability at all levels, and it addresses other divides which otherwise jeopardise sustainability – education, employment, democracy, culture – now and in the future. Ireland's 330 public libraries are the point of access to information in the community, with trained library staff providing access to information on development related issues directly to users, and providing the technology that supports user-directed information seeking on the same topics. Library computers are accessed millions of times during the course of a year by our users, creating an incredible positive impact on public access to information.

A Note on Academic Libraries in Ireland

This chapter is concerned with the impact of public libraries, but it bears mentioning that Ireland's 31 academic and university libraries play an equally large role in supporting the SDGs. Academic libraries support the country's higher education and research sector, and by doing so contribute to progressing all SDGs. For example, with the support of research libraries and the Irish Research Electronic Library (IReL) Ireland is ensuring that the scientific input required to achieve the SDG's is openly available[180]. In 2021, IReL supported the publication of 2813 research articles in Open Access and a projected 3500 articles in 2022. Under the auspices of the National Open Research Framework (NORF) libraries in research institutions are working to put in place infrastructure that supports equitable and open access to quality Irish research and to build capacity in the area of Open Science to better enable global collaboration towards achieving the Goals[181]. Ireland's commitment to open access and open science is a cornerstone of the country's approach to achieving the SDGs.

Challenges to the Sector and How to Overcome Them to Deliver the SDGs

In an era where information is primarily consumed by users in a digital format, and disinformation is becoming more common, the biggest challenge facing the public library sector in Ireland is digital inclusion and information literacy. Increasingly, access to government (and non-government) services is mediated through online platforms, and to be able to properly participate in society requires an ability to go online and engage effectively. While the Irish population has a level of basic digital understanding that is above the European average – 70% of people have at least basic digital skills under DESI 2022[182] – there is a need to improve digital skills and information literacy across the country, so that people can access the information they need to improve their lives. There are additional factors too, such as basic literacy and numeracy, which complicate the situation. Ireland still has challenges regarding adult literacy in particular, and these must be overcome, something which libraries are supporting through the national Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy, Adult Literacy for Life[183].

Therefore, it is not enough just to provide internet access. Instead, we must meet the challenge of providing meaningful access. Meaningful access starts with connectivity, and we need to ensure that libraries continue to provide high-speed, high-quality internet access as technologies improve. This access needs to be equal and available to all, as economic, social and other divides can undermine people's ability to access and use information. We must support the development of people's skills to use digital resources online, as skills are essential to be able to use information effectively. This must be complemented by supporting people to navigate the online information environment – developing their media and information literacy. Finally, we must defend people's rights to access information – they must be free to access, apply, create and share information freely. By raising all literacy levels, people will be empowered to engage meaningfully online with access to information in all areas of the SDGs.

To overcome these challenges, we would like to see upgrades to the libraries' IT infrastructure prioritised in the coming years, with faster connection speeds, improved public access PCs and

180   https://irel.ie/open-access/
181   https://norf.ie/
182   Harnessing Digital: The Digital Ireland Framework 2022 Progress Report (www.gov.ie)
183   Home | Adult Literacy for Life Strategy

tablets, and increased availability of technologies in libraries, such as 3D printers, virtual reality or augmented reality. The role that the library plays in the community to help people of all ages become familiar with new technologies is crucial, and should be supported.

This should be implemented in parallel with a programme of training for library staff, to enable them to support users effectively as they engage online and access digital information and services, and also new learning opportunities for users, particularly in the areas of emerging technologies and artificial intelligence. The success that libraries have had in supporting coding development for children and younger people in the past decade must be built on to ensure we are offering skills training in the right areas for the remaining period of the 2030 Agenda.

There is also work that can be done at an inter-governmental level. There are now an increasing number of 'library leader' countries where governments have recognised the contribution that libraries are making to achieving the SDGs – e.g. Ireland, France, Latvia, Argentina, Botswana, Lesotho, the United States and Jamaica to name just a few. There would be value in convening library and government representatives from this group to create a network that could be used to share best practice, and encourage other countries around the world to leverage library resources in support of the SDGs. Globally there are 2.8 million libraries that reach over a billion registered users[184]. These are taxpayer-supported institutions that already exist in their communities. Taken together they can be an incredible resource to support development, and a coordinated effort to utilise their collective resources in support of the 2030 Agenda could have a powerful impact.

Recovery and Resilience – Libraries Leave No One Behind

Following COVID-19 the library sector is emerging from a period of uncertainty and restriction, but also a time of substantial innovation and activity that is continuing today. The impacts of the pandemic were far-reaching, and a full recovery has not been possible before additional complications from regional conflicts and a global energy crisis emerged. Yet the current moment offers a great moment of opportunity. Public libraries already play critical recovery roles by supporting digital inclusion, providing literacy and technology skills training for those looking for work, and helping people to access government services. Through the many partnerships with other agencies that libraries had developed pre-COVID-19, strengthened through COVID-19 and built on post-COVID-19, libraries have been working to target specific groups with services and programmes. This really enables libraries to have a positive impact on marginalised and disadvantaged groups in particular. For example: our sensory library programmes provide sensory play equipment, toys and assistive technologies to make libraries a welcoming place for those with special needs or learning disabilities. The Age Friendly Libraries programme supports older people to access digital library resources, and ensures our buildings and services are easy to physically access. The services we offer to refugees and displaced persons, such as through our Libraries of Sanctuary in Portlaoise and Louth, or more generally through the countrywide library supports for those fleeing the war in Ukraine, particularly children, enable people to engage with each other and new neighbours in a safe space.

These are just some of the services that libraries have been quick to offer again following the pandemic. The Irish public library proved itself to be a resilient institution of great relevance

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184   IFLA Library Map of the World

during a national crisis, and as society's re-opening progresses, libraries must be key partners in the recovery programmes that are underway around the world, including in Ireland. A fundamental challenge of the post-pandemic society will be encouraging people to engage once more with our institutions, our town centres, and our community facilities. Libraries, as freely available public institutions in the heart of our cities, towns, and villages, are uniquely placed to do this. The public library sector, aligned with key national recovery policies, gives a firm platform to work from and contribute to the rebuilding of society at a difficult time.

Conclusion

For the first years of the 2030 Agenda our activities have been delivered under a national public library strategy for the period 2018-2022. The new five year strategy for 2023-2027, The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration, seeks to maintain our general progress and is progressive and ambitious for the development of our core services including reading and literacy and access to information. Yet it also aims higher, with measures to help aid Ireland's recovery from the pandemic, combat the cost-of-living crisis, and support climate action. It proposes new actions on lifelong learning, cultural heritage and digital inclusion that will make Ireland's libraries a leader in global librarianship. Importantly, it is our first national library strategy to have a specific focus on sustainability and climate action, with actions designed to help Ireland achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This connection with the SDGs is reinforced by the inclusion of public libraries in the government's National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-202[185]. This makes Ireland one of a handful of leading countries globally that is utilising the benefits of public libraries to achieve the SDGs, and places our libraries at the forefront of trends in international librarianship. The plan recognises public libraries as sustainable institutions which play a big part in helping to provide knowledge, understanding, and resources in our communities. As key stakeholders in Ireland's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda the plan asks libraries to support many specific aspects, including universal literacy, inclusivity and national ownership. To do this, we have mapped our new strategy's targets to the SDGs, meaning our work in the coming five years will specifically address 31 SDG targets, and make contributions to 15/17 goals. We look forward to working with all partners to reach our objectives.

9.5 National Disability Authority

Introduction

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory body with a duty to provide information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities, and to promote Universal Design. The NDA welcomes the opportunity to contribute a stakeholder chapter for Ireland's Voluntary National Review on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2023.

Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2018. This means Ireland made a commitment to protect and promote the rights of disabled people. It is important that the SDGs are implemented in line with the UNCRPD in order to ensure that Ireland leaves no one behind and builds back better after COVID-19.

This stakeholder chapter asks the question, 'Are the SDGs being achieved for and with disabled people in Ireland?' While it cannot examine every SDG, the NDA has engaged directly with Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) in the preparation and review of the chapter to identify priority themes to highlight. The chapter will seek to also examine the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people where possible.

Main themes

UNCRPD and the SDGs

Ireland's National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS), a whole of government strategy to improve the lives of disabled people, came to an end in 2022 and consultation is underway on a successor strategy which will seek to address UNCRPD implementation. This presents a timely opportunity to consider both the UNCRPD and SDG agendas in tandem. The NDA welcomes the inclusion in Ireland's second National SDG Implementation Plan of a specific action to work with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to identify synergies between UNCRPD and the SDGs.

There are several cross-cutting issues which must be applied in the implementation of the SDGs and UNCRPD. For example, Universal Design, accessibility, participation of disabled people in decision making (discussed further under SDG 16), and the collection and analysis of disability disaggregated data (discussed further under SDG 17). SDG 5 'Gender Equality' and SDG 10 'Reducing Inequalities' are also relevant throughout in terms of promoting the rights of the most marginalised.

While all SDGs are relevant to disabled people given the universality of the Goals, eleven specific references are made to persons with disabilities throughout the 2030 Agenda.[186] Persons with disabilities are also included under the definition of 'vulnerable persons'. However, it is important to highlight that disabled people are not inherently vulnerable, but are made vulnerable by discriminatory social and environmental barriers. The NDA highlights the importance of adopting a social model definition of disability, in line with UNCRPD, in initiatives to advance the SDGs in which the focus is on removing barriers to inclusion. This approach also

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186   Global Disability Rights Now Link between the SDGs and UNCRPD

recognises the importance of a disabled person's gender, class, ethnic background and other intersectional lived experiences.

SDG1: No Poverty

Disabled people in Ireland are around three times more likely to experience consistent poverty than people without a disability. The consistent poverty rate for disabled people in 2019 was 13 per cent compared to 4 per cent for non-disabled people.[187]

A 2021 Cost of Disability report carried out by Indecon consultants on behalf of the Government,[188] researched the extra spending needs that disabled people face in their day-to-day lives that non-disabled people do not face. On average, households with a member with a disability have nearly €8,000 less annual equivalised income than a household without a member with a disability. Households with a member with a disability also display higher rates of arrears on mortgages, rent and utility bills and a higher rate of poverty.[189] There are also additional costs of disability, driven by healthcare, transport and domestic costs.[190]The Government introduced a range of income supports for individuals and businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) varied between €203 and €350 depending on previous earnings. [191] However, disaggregated data by disability status is not readily available for the recipients of PUP. In Budget 2023, additional supports were provided to combat the cost of living crisis, including supports for disabled people. A cost-of-living double payment for persons in receipt of disability allowances, in addition to a lump sum disability support grant were among the measures introduced.[192] However, we are aware from our engagement with DPOs that meeting the criteria to access these supports can be challenging. There are concerns that not being able to access the required financial supports can make some people financially reliant on others, contributing to a lack of independence and putting disabled people at greater risk of domestic abuse. We are also aware that the government intends to introduce a national living wage by 2026[193] and highlight that disabled people in receipt of disability allowances should not fall beneath this income floor. Engagement with disabled people in the design of such measures is important in this regard as we build back better from COVID-19.

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing of disabled people in Ireland

Disabled people report poorer general health than non-disabled people in Ireland. In Census 2016,[194] 92.7% of persons without a disability reported their health as being good or very good, compared to 51.2% of persons with a disability. More recent data from the Irish Health Survey (2019) found that 4% of people overall reported their health status as bad or very bad, while the corresponding figure for disabled people was 25%.[195] The results of a national survey

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187   ESRI (2021) Identification of skills gaps among persons with disabilities and their employment prospects
188   Indecon (2021) 'The Cost of Disability in Ireland – Research Report'.
189   Ibid.
190   Ibid.
191   Citizen's Information Pandemic Unemployment Payment.
192   Department of Social Protection (2023) Budget 2023.
193   Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Press Release, November 2022.
194   E9078 CSO. (2016). Table E9019 Census 2016 Statbank.
195   CSO (2020) 'Irish Health Survey Persons with Disabilities'

on Wellbeing and Social Inclusion[196] carried out in 2022 indicate a significant divergence in the mental wellbeing of disabled and non-disabled respondents. While the survey was not representative it found that more than 6% of non-disabled respondents had scores indicative of probable clinical depression, compared to 23% of those with a disability. A further 13% of non-disabled respondents had scores suggestive of possible mild depression, compared with 20% of those who reported a disability.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its concluding observations[197] on Ireland's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports in 2023 highlighted particular concerns about inadequate mental health services for children, long waiting lists and the placement of children in adult psychiatric wards. In particular, long waiting lists for children to obtain an 'Assessment of Need', if it is considered that they may have a disability, is a significant issue with regard to delivering the entitlements outlined under the Disability Act 2005. According to the most recent Health Service Executive (HSE) performance report of Quarter 3 2022 just under a quarter of children referred (23.6%) received their Assessment of Need in the statutory timeframe.[198] The NDA is also concerned that the focus on assessments is further exacerbating the challenges with regard to providing the necessary interventions to support children and their families.

COVID-19 impact on Health and Wellbeing

Health care is especially important for persons with a disability. Most people who have a disability acquire their disability as a result of an accident or illness during the course of their life and thus many are regular health service users. The COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on health and disability services in Ireland. For example, many outpatient and in-patient services were cancelled which caused a growth in the numbers of people on waiting lists[199] in a hospital system that was already overstretched prior to the pandemic.[200]

The majority of Disability Day Services closed during the first lockdown leaving disabled people with little supports, loss of routine and loss of social connections.[201] There was a disproportionate loss of lives among nursing home residents, the majority of whom had a disability. People with disability living in residential services experienced reduced community based activities. All older people and residents living in disability services were advised to 'cocoon'. This meant that visiting was suspended in nursing homes and residential services which had an impact on wellbeing.

An NDA report, 'Lockdowns Unlock Innovations,[202] highlighted some innovations which emerged as a result of restrictions imposed during the pandemic which may have ongoing benefits such as the use of accessible information and advances in telehealth.

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196   NDA (2023) 'How's It Going? Wellbeing and social inclusion survey report'.
197   UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2023) 'Concluding observations on Ireland's fifth and sixth periodic reports'.
198   Health Service Executive (2022) Performance Reports 2022.
199   If we use Census 2016 data to compare the population of persons with a disability to the non-disabled population we see that more than one in three persons with a disability are aged 65 or over but only one in ten of the non-disabled population are aged 65 or over.
200   OECD (2019) 'Ireland: Country Health Profile 2019'.
201   Inclusion Ireland (2020) 'COVID-19 and the impact of the Closure of day services on People with intellectual disabilities'.
202   NDA (2021) "Lockdowns Unlock Innovation: Review of innovations and adaptations affecting persons with disabilities arising from COVID-19 restrictions."

Accessible information

Information on COVID-19 and guidance on testing and treatment was made available in easy read, audio, braille and ISL formats. Government press conferences and announcements were made with simultaneous ISL interpretation. Specific information regarding the vaccine programme was also available in different formats.[203] Similar efforts should be applied to all public health campaigns or other situations of emergency, and the experience of the pandemic offers a model approach for this.

Telehealth and remote services

Prior to COVID-19, provision of telehealth in Ireland was novel rather than widespread. The pandemic has changed the attitudes and practices of patients and health professionals and fast-tracked investment in and adoption of digital technologies. Guidance on telehealth has been issued by professional bodies and by the Health Service Executive (HSE). The changes are predicted to mark a permanent shift in interactions with healthcare providers.[204] The NDA advises that telehealth and telecare should be part of wider approaches to assist people to live independently and inclusively and should be designed in accordance with Universal Design principles.[205] For example, telephone consultations are unsuitable for persons with hearing impairments and others with communication difficulties. In addition, digital accessibility is something that must be considered if implementing remote services post-pandemic. The NDA advises that clients may want to choose a blended approach to accessing services and that this should be supported.

Nursing home care

The disproportionate loss of lives among nursing home residents led to the establishment of a COVID-19 Nursing Home Expert Panel which reported to the Minister for Health in August 2020.[206] The recommendations of the Expert Panel have resulted in increased funding for the health and social care of older people and a shift in funding away from nursing home care to in-home and community based supports. COVID-19 may therefore be a catalyst for structural change in the model of care for older people. The NDA's Universal Design Guidelines for improving quality of life and enhancing COVID-19 infection control in residential care settings for older people is another initiative with the potential for transformative changes in the care of older people.[207]

SDG 4: Quality Education

Educational outcomes for disabled people

Disabled people in Ireland tend to have lower levels of educational attainment compared to non-disabled people. The 2016 census found that 20.8% of persons aged 15 and older with a disability had primary education as their highest level of education compared to 6.7% of those

203   HSE, 'COVID resources and translations'.
204   https://www.irishtimes.com/business/technology/coronavirus-driving-surge-in-use-of-telemedicine-1.4227870
205   National Disability Authority, 2018a.
206   COVID-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel, 2020.
207   NDA (2022) 'Universal Design for Improving Quality of Life and Enhancing COVID-19 Infection Control in existing Residential Care Settings for Older People'.

aged 15 and over without a disability. The corresponding figures were 29.9% vs 26.8% for secondary level, 13.6% vs 16.7% for further education and training (FET), and 13.1% vs 25.4% for tertiary education. In a 2021 survey conducted with parents of children who were Irish Sign Language (ISL) users, less than four in 10 (38%) reported that their child currently had full access to the school curriculum through ISL.[208] While the survey is not representative, it is indicative of access to education issues experienced by Deaf children.

Research on parental educational expectations of children with disabilities has found that, in some cases, parental expectations were lower than expected based on the actual academic achievement of the child. This is linked to lower secondary performance of young people with special educational needs.[209] Furthermore, career guidance, an essential mechanism to empower young people to make informed choices about their post-school pathways, is not provided in special schools in Ireland.[210]

Education system in Ireland

> The current education system in Ireland for students with disabilities ranges from additional support in mainstream schools or special class in a mainstream school to specialist support in special schools.[211] Recent years have seen a steep rise in the number of special classes. Ireland needs to develop a clear vision and a subsequent roadmap that will ensure an inclusive education system for Ireland. A number of parallel activities such as the review of legislation on special education needs provide an opportunity for this to be developed.[212] We highlight from engagement with DPOs that any such vision should have due regard for upholding the status of ISL and the culture and cohesion of the Deaf community.

There are some promising programmes underway which advance inclusive education in Ireland. In terms of Teacher Education, student teachers must demonstrate an understanding of inclusive education in their work. In Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) a model called Access and Inclusion (AIM) supports children with a disability to access the ECCE programme in pre-school settings nationwide without the need for diagnosis. A review of the programme is currently underway which will consider if and how the programme might be expanded beyond ECCE. In higher education, the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) has been operating since 2016 and provides funding to higher education institutions (HEIs) to support the participation of specific target groups in higher education. A new strand known as PATH 4 is now underway[213] to support inclusive universally designed higher education environments for all students with a focus on students with intellectual disabilities and autism. The NDA is supporting the Higher Education Authority and relevant departments in embedding the concept of Universal Design in Education.[214]

208   NDA (2021) 'Review of the implementation of the ISL Act 2017'. 60 parents completed this survey.
209   Parental Educational Expectations of Children with Disabilities
210   Indecon (2020) Review of career guidance.
211   Citizen's Information, Overview of the Irish Education system.
212   See for example the review of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act currently underway.
213   PATH 1 supported access to teacher training by target groups; PATH 2 Bursary Fund focused on the most socio-economically disadvantaged in the target groups; PATH 3 developed regional and community partnerships to help increase access to higher education. See https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/path/
214   NDA (2020) Universal Design in Education and Training Policy Landscape in Ireland.

Impact of COVID-19 on education

School closures as a result of COVID-19 had a significant impact on learning for students with disabilities. Available research suggests that school closures are linked to a decline in learning attainment and an increase in anxiety and mental health difficulties.[215] Those that are likely to find remote learning especially difficult include students that have special educational needs or whose parents have special educational needs, students whose parents can offer very limited support due to ill health or disability, and those that do not have access to digital technology. The differential impact of school closures is likely to increase inequalities in educational attainment.[216]

However, the closure of educational institutions has driven schools and colleges to embrace and embed technology at pace. Blended learning formats that combine in-person teaching with digital resources have the potential to result in a more inclusive model of education, particularly at third level. The increased integration of digital technologies in teaching and learning must be accompanied by concerted efforts to address digital poverty and skills to ensure differential digital access does not drive educational inequality.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Employment data

A 2022 report by the European Commission found that the disability employment gap in Ireland is the largest in the EU, at 38.6%.[217] The EU-Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) annual household survey found that while the disability employment gap has fallen from 34.9% in 2014 to 31.4% in 2021 for persons with 'some activity limitation', the gap has widened considerably for persons with a 'severe activity limitation', rising from 50% in 2014 to 66.6% in 2021. This demonstrates that the most marginalised are being left behind in terms of employment.

Data from the 2016 Census highlights inequalities regarding the rate of persons "Not in Education, Employment, or Training" (NEET). The NEET rate for disabled young people is 23%. This is over twice the rate of that for non-disabled young people, which stood at 10%.

For disabled people who are in employment, workplace discrimination is also a significant issue. The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) reported in 2022 that for complaints made under the Employment Equality Acts 1998 – 2015, the highest number of complaints received in 2021 were in relation to disability which was an increase of 11% on the previous year. The report highlighted that disability is consistently in the top three grounds cited since the establishment of the WRC.[218]

Ireland has a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 (CES) which seeks to increase the employment levels of persons with disabilities aged 20 to

215   NDA (2020) 'Lockdowns Unlock Innovations.'
216   Kuhfeld et al, (2020) 'Projecting the potential impact of COVID-19 school closures on academic achievement.'
217   European Commission (2022) https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/2022-european-semester-country-report-ireland_en.pdf

218   WRC (2022) Annual Report 2021

64 from the 2011 Census figure of 33% up to 38% by 2024.[219] Some positive employment measures were progressed under the CES and the NDIS such as allowing people on disability allowance (DA) to earn a certain amount of income before it affected their DA payment, removal of the requirement for work to be rehabilitative in nature if in receipt of a disability payment and permitting young people to defer the offer of a day service to try further education or employment.[220] However, DPOs have highlighted that this does not allow disabled people to retain their allowances when earning a liveable wage. For example, for earnings of more than €165 a week, 50% of earnings between €165 and €375 are not taken into account in the DA means test, while any earnings over €375 are assessed in full.[221] Additionally, there has been no agreement at time of writing (April 2023) on the final three year action plan for the CES due to run from 2022-2024 due to lack of agreement in relation to targets and ambition of the strategy. The gap in implementation planning is concerning given the extent of the disability employment gap in Ireland.

COVID-19 impact on employment

Evidence shows that by 2019, across all education levels, people without disabilities had recovered to pre-recession levels of employment while this was not the case for people with disabilities. [222] It is important that in the rebuilding of the economy post COVID-19, which had precipitated another recession, that disabled people are not left behind once again.

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, remote working has become more widespread. A change to a hybrid model of working, where there is a mix of physical attendance and remote working enabled by digital connectivity can remove some of the barriers to entry and retention in the workplace for persons with disabilities. Since the ending of lockdowns, there have been concerns that the opportunities for remote working are being removed by some employers. The opportunity provided by remote or hybrid working should be considered as a key element of supporting disability inclusion in the workplace in the recovery from COVID-19.

There are also some difficulties with remote working, which include isolation and the lack of high-speed broadband in some parts of the country.[223] The provision of local shared working hubs may be a way to overcome this challenge but will require both transport and accessibility of the hubs to be considered.

SDG 11: Sustainable and inclusive cities and communities

Social Inclusion of disabled people

The NDA's Wellbeing and Social Inclusion[224] survey data indicate that respondents with a disability enjoy lower levels of social inclusion than respondents that do not have a disability. When asked if they feel part of their community, one in six (16%) disabled respondents disagree strongly. This compares to one in twenty (5%) non-disabled respondents. We are aware from

219   Government of Ireland (2015) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024, Dublin: Stationery Office, p.24.
220   See NDA independent assessments of progress of CES and the NDIS 2017 - 2022
221   Citizen's Information, Disability Allowance.
222   Kelly E, Maitre B (2021) Identification of Skills Gaps among Persons with Disabilities and their Employment Prospects.
223   McCarthy et al, 2020
224   NDA (2023) 'How's It Going? National survey on wellbeing and social inclusion report'

our engagement with DPOs that many disabled people had to isolate for longer periods during the COVID-19 pandemic, and indeed some are still isolating due to health concerns, which has an impact of wellbeing and social inclusion. The Department of Health has recently launched a campaign called 'Hello Again World' to encourage older people to get back out and about after COVID-19 to combat social isolation.[225]

Deinstitutionalisation

A key pillar in order to build inclusive communities is to end the institutionalisation of disabled people. A commitment was made by government to transition all persons with disabilities living in congregated settings (settings with 10 or more people) to the community by 2021.[226][227] The rapid spread of COVID-19 in institutions further highlights the urgent need for deinstitutionalisation. The population within congregated settings has reduced from 2,514 people at the start of 2017[228], to approximately 1,650 by mid-2022[229], but this falls short of the targets set. Deinstitutionalisation must be accompanied by the provision of accessible public services, such as transport, accessible housing, and Personal Assistance (PA) services in order to fully support independent living and being included in the community.

The Housing Strategy for Disabled People and the Department of Transport's Accessibility Work Programme include commitments in relation to Universal Design which are welcome. However, we caution that these have not yet been fully realised and the outcome for disabled people is not yet clear. An ESRI review[230] of Personal Assistant (PA) services in Ireland highlighted issues relating to underfunding and variation in allocation and provision across the country. Disabled people reported dissatisfaction in the number of PA hours received, with some effectively confined to their homes due to lack of PA supports. The research also found that those who accessed supports prior to 2010 austerity funding cuts receive greater levels of support now compared to those who accessed supports after. It is important to consider how disabled people are often left behind as a result of economic shocks and to meaningfully engage with disabled people as we build back better from COVID-19 to ensure an inclusive recovery.

SDG 13: Climate action

Impact of climate change on disabled people

Measures to mitigate against climate change must not undermine disability rights and engagement with disabled people is critical in order to achieve this. Findings from a focus group with disabled people for the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA) highlight challenges that may disproportionately affect disabled people including inaccessible public transport, the shift towards walking and cycling over personal car use, disruption to routines when retrofitting homes, limited access to sustainable options in place of single-use plastics.[231]

225   Department of Health (2023) Press release.
226   HSE (2012) 'Time To Move On From Congregated Settings'
227   NDA (2022) Overview of UNCRPD Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community.
228   Health Service Executive. (2017). Time to Move on from Congregated Settings: A Strategy for Community Inclusion: Annual Report.
229   See estimate in the NDA's 2023 NDIS indicators report (forthcoming)
230   Carroll, E. and McCoy, S (2022) 'Personal Assistance Services in Ireland: A Capability Approach to Understanding the Lived Experience of Disabled People.'
231   Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (2023), Opening statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters.

According to national DPOs, a lack of engagement with DPOs means that some measures are having unintended negative consequences on the lives of disabled people, for example, banning plastic straws.[232]

Efforts made to engage with disabled people, through DPOs, within the National Dialogue on Climate Action (NDCA)[233] is welcomed although further structured engagement is needed across all climate policy. We welcome the inclusion of references to disabled people in the National Adaptation Framework [234] and the Climate Action Plan (2023)[235] but believe these can go further in terms of incorporating the views of disabled people. We welcome the requirement in the Circular Economy Act 2022[236] of consultation on a strategy with relevant bodies with persons who have a disability specifically mentioned. We highlight that such consultation should take place in line with UNCRPD requirements and highlight our 'Participation Matters' guidance in this regard.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Access to Justice

Evidence suggests that people with an intellectual disability are overrepresented in all parts of the criminal justice system, including in police custody.[237] While there is little data to accurately estimate the prevalence of people with intellectual disabilities in Irish prisons, the data that do exist suggests the prevalence is higher than international estimates.[238] Research by the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) identified concerns about the physical accessibility of Irish prisons for disabled people, limited access to education, employment and recreational activities, and difficulties in accessing healthcare services while in prison.[239]

We are also aware that Deaf people face particular barriers in the Courts. Section 4 of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 is explicit in stating that a person may use ISL in any court. An NDA report[240] on the operation of the ISL Act found that free ISL interpretation has been consistently provided in the criminal courts, however it has not been consistently provided in other courts. The Courts Service indicates that work is currently underway to publish relevant information regarding ISL interpretation procedures online.

Progress has been made recently in a number of areas related to access to justice for disabled people. Ireland will end its system of wardship, in which persons may be deemed to lack legal capacity, through the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Bill on April 26th 2023. Over 2000 persons who have been 'wards of court' will exit wardship on a phased basis over the next three years. While this new legislation does bring the State's practice more in alignment with the requirements of UNCRPD, we highlight that

232   Independent Living Movement Ireland (2023) Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters.
233   Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (2023), Opening statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters.
234   Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (2018) National Adaptation Framework
235   Government of Ireland (2023) Climate Action Plan
236   Circular Economy Act (2022) https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2022/act/26/enacted/en/print.html
237   Mental Health Commission 'Access to Mental Health Services for People in the Criminal Justice System'
238   Ibid.
239   Irish Penal Reform Trust (2020) 'Making Rights Real for People with Disabilities in Prison'.
240   NDA (2021) Report on the Operation of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017.

Ireland has submitted a declaration and reservation on article 12[241] and that the new legislation does still provides for a degree of substitute decision-making.

Work is underway by the Department of Justice and Department of Health to address issues relating to people with mental illness who come into contact with the criminal justice system. A report published in September 2022 includes recommendations which are considered to capture the entirety of an individual's interactions with the criminal justice. These recommendations will now be implemented by the relevant responsible bodies.

The Courts Service is currently implementing a modernisation strategy which includes actions in relation to improving the accessibility of Court buildings. However, because of the pandemic, some of the barriers relating to accessibility of buildings have been overcome with the move to on-line provision of services. For example, the Courts Service of Ireland believes that 'hybrid courts' a combination of digital and physical courts will remain in place into the future.[242] However, it is important that even if some services continue to be delivered online, attention returns to the issue of accessibility of the built environment and that public bodies continue to work to comply with Section 25 of the Disability Act.[243]

Responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making

A 2021 NDA consultation highlighted the barriers faced by disabled people to participate in decision making at all levels, including inaccessible environments and information, negative attitudes and low expectations of disabled people and a lack of funding for DPOs. However, it also highlighted that the move to remote meetings as a result of COVID-19 restrictions enhanced participation opportunities for many disabled people.[244] The continuation of hybrid consultation and engagement approaches offers an opportunity to support participation of disabled people going forward.

UNCRPD outlines an obligation on Government to engage with disabled people through their representative organisations, known as Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs). The NDA welcomes the inclusion of a DPO representative in the national SDG Stakeholder Forum Committee as well as targets within the second National SDG Implementation plan around engagement with DPOs.

Other structures of engagement with disabled people in Ireland include the Disability Stakeholder Group which is appointed to monitor the implementation of the NDIS 2017 – 2022 and carries out its work through Disability Consultative Committees in eleven government departments. The Disability Participation and Consultation Network (DPCN) was established in 2020 as a standing mechanism of engagement between government and the disability community. However, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters highlighted that it does not consider the DPCN in its current format to satisfy the requirements of UNCRPD with regard to consultation.[245] An independent evaluation of the DPCN is underway by the NDA on behalf of DCEDIY.

241   United Nations Treaty Collection, List of declarations and reservations.
242   The Courts Service (2021) Virtual Courts Update.
243   Section 25 of the Disability Act requires all departments and public bodies to ensure that the parts of their buildings which are accessed by the public, apart from heritage sites, are brought into compliance with Part M 2010 of the Building Regulations, which deals with accessibility, by 1 January 2022.
244   NDA (2022) Participation Matters Consultation Report.

Strengthening engagement with disabled people and DPOs in decision making should be a key area of focus in the implementation of both the UNCRPD and the SDGs. The NDA highlights its 'Participation Matters' guidelines in this regard.[246]

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Disaggregated Data

Both the SDGs and the UNCRPD require the collection and use of disability disaggregated data. It is important that data relating to the people with disabilities is also disaggregated by gender and other relevant categories in order to highlight intersectional inequalities and to robustly measure the impact on disabled people of current and future strategies, particularly on those most marginalised. An Equality Data Strategy is being developed that will identify current gaps in equality data and develop guidance on filling the gaps as well as a standard practice on classification.[247] This work is a crucial step towards enhancing evidence-informed policy for the effective implementation of UNCRPD and the SDGs.

International Cooperation

The European Disability Forum[248] has highlighted that Irish Aid's "strong policy focus on putting the 'furthest behind first' offers a natural opportunity for Ireland to become a leader in disability inclusion" but that its policies and processes rarely emphasise disability and that more could be done to engage with DPOs. The NDA advises that Ireland could strengthen its delivery of disability-inclusive international development and humanitarian aid. The development of the UNCRPD implementation strategy by DCEDIY in 2023 could present an opportunity to progress this.

Conclusion

While progress is being made in a number of areas, the SDGs are not currently being delivered for and with disabled people on an equal basis with others. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on disabled people is clear, but so are the opportunities afforded by the move to remote delivery of services, hybrid employment and education opportunities as vehicles to remove barrier to inclusion. It is crucial that these progressive initiatives are not lost now that social distancing constraints have been lifted. Embedding a Universal Design approach into the efforts to 'Build Back Better', drawing on the innovations driven by the response to COVID-19, could have a transformative impact on the rights of disabled people. However, this must take place in close consultation with disabled people and their organisations, in all their diversity, together with the robust collection and use of disaggregated data, to ensure that the most marginalised are not left behind.

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246   NDA (2022) Participation Matters: Guidelines on implementing the obligation to meaningfully engage with disabled people in public decision making.

247   NDA (2023) Final Review of Progress on Indicators of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (forthcoming).

248   European Disability Forum (2020) Fact sheet: Disability inclusiveness of development and humanitarian aid in Ireland.

9.6 UNESCO Chair Munster Technological University – Embedding Agenda 2030 in Higher Education

The MTU UNESCO Chair has worked to advance progress on sustainable development goals and human rights since 2016. Our Chair has worked globally on this Agenda with many stakeholders, from UN agencies to NGOs, and experienced the opportunities and challenges presented.

The Berlin Declaration of Education for Sustainable Development affirms that transformative learning is vital for the futures of people and planet [249] and ESD 2030 Framework[250] and Roadmap[251] provide the blueprint. The International Forum on Inclusion and Equity in Education, comprising multi-sectoral agents, also reaffirmed its commitment to human rights education and training to deliver the SDGs. Education is critical to galvanise all dimensions of sustainable development and to ensure balanced development across all three pillars by building human capital through research and implementing solutions through partnerships.[252]

Universities are essential enablers of this Agenda and must step up and disrupt. Through this chapter, MTU shares thought leadership on how to shape this disruption. We share our experiences and learning and make suggestions for progressing. The chapter finishes with examples from our work in and through sports, physical activity, physical education, and allied sectors.

Socialising Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Understanding Agenda 2030 and SDGs

The SDGs have become topical in higher education (HE), which is hugely positive given HEI's potential to equip current and future learners, leaders, and citizens with the capacity to address the challenges the SDGs present.

Agenda 2030 is a much-needed 'supremely ambitious and transformational vision'.[253] The declaration, vision, shared principles, and commitments are crucial to understanding why and how we should progress. While the goals and targets, implementation guidelines, and follow-up and review mechanisms provide an action focus.

Achieving these Goals involves very big, fundamental system changes. HE must urgently demonstrate the 'bold and transformative steps'[5] to address the three dimensions of sustainable development through a pervasive system-level focus on Agenda 2030.

249   UNESCO World Conference on ESD. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/esdfor2030-berlin-declaration-en.pdf
250   UNESCO Framework for ESD beyond 2019 https://www.oneplanetnetwork.org/sites/default/files/from-crm/40_c23_framework_for_the_implementation_of_esd_beyond_2019.pdf
251   UNESCO 2020 Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802
252   UN Universities Getting Ready for SDGs https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/universities-getting-ready-sdgs
253   UN 2015 Transforming our World the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development (p7, p5)

Towards full and effective understanding, implementation, and investment

Delivering significant changes in HE to address Agenda 2030 while balancing universities' autonomy could have been challenging. HEI leadership have embraced the Agenda and is acting. University's actions can impact locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Alignment of activity with the governance systems and procedures in HE is necessary for coherence. A system-based approach supported by workforce capacity building integrated with community and regional partnerships and participatory planning is essential at the university level. This can reflect the varied levels of readiness of units within the University.

Clarity of purpose and authenticity is key to delivering results and maximising human and resource investment. While interest, goodwill and intent are elevated, care is needed in planning a coherent approach to rolling out solutions.

Intentionality, Prioritisation, and Scale

Intentionality refers to deliberately embedding SDGs across the HE landscapes at all levels of function and operation in strategies, budgets and action plans. The UN Global Compact[254] outlines that this should be led from the top with a clear ambition for transformative change that is consistently communicated internally and externally. This ambition and action must deliver at scale through all stakeholders in the universities' sphere of influence who, in turn, aspire to provide within their scope of operations.

The University and its leadership are responsible for being a living embodiment of the changes it aspires to in society, the economy and the environment. While the SDGs are universal and integrated, prioritisation may be desirable within functions. However, focusing on the furthest behind first is essential.

Universities are critical partners in delivering on the SDG agenda and must be accountable to the highest national and international standards. The MTU UNESCO Chair advocates a modified quintuple helix approach where university-industry-government-public-multilateral partnerships and agendas converge.

The Human Rights Connection

Human Rights and Public Sector Duty

We all share the same human rights; like the SDGs, they are universal, interrelated and mutually reinforceable. While we know morally and ethically that enabling people to access their rights is a good thing, this has not had the necessary impact on reducing inequalities and discrimination experienced by many in society, in HE or in the workplace. Equality and non-discrimination are central to Agenda 2030 with a commitment to 'leave no one behind'.[5] Inclusive and participatory decision-making is essential so that 'all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality'.[5] The human rights dimension is the most legally binding dimension of Agenda 2030.

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254   UN Global Compact https://blueprint.unglobalcompact.org/sdgs/intro/

No country, Ireland included, has fully and effectively addressed the barriers facing marginalised populations, with COVID-19 implications hitting particularly hard. Unequal access to resources, unequal participation and denial of opportunities prevail. These human rights matters are imperative in activating a just transition. HE can be a significant player in perpetuating or eliminating discrimination faced. Staff, students, and graduates across all areas should know what human rights are at play in their work and how to eliminate the barriers people face in accessing their rights.

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (PSEHRD) is a legal obligation on public bodies, including universities, contained in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.[255] This Duty and its full and effective implementation by public bodies creates the foundation for public bodies to help accelerate SDG progress. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) assists public bodies in meeting their obligations under section 42 by providing guidance and support and encouraging public bodies to develop policies and good practices concerning human rights and equality. In implementing the PSEHRD, public bodies are required to follow three steps:

- Assess which equality and human rights issues are relevant to their purpose and function.

- Address the issues through actions outlined in policies, plans, programmes and procedures.

- Report annually on progress in addressing equality and human rights issues.

Given the 90% overlap in SDG and Human Rights indicators[2,256] the MTU UNESCO Chair strongly recommends further resourcing the IHREC to support and monitor HEIs aligning PSD and SDG activity.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) staff, committees and policies are operational across HE. EDI is about supporting human rights, reducing inequality, prejudice and discrimination, and respecting and valuing all people. It is about eliminating the barriers people experience in accessing their rights in and through HE. When aligned primarily with human resources and gender and/or race equality metrics, its impact in HE is minimised. EDI can maximise its impact through direct alignment with public sector duty, a clear national framework with mandatory reporting obligations.

Many universities have and continue to establish roles/units in sustainability which should be broadened to sustainable development aligned with the right to development[257]. In many instances, the direct connection between EDI, sustainable development goals, human rights and public sector duty is poorly understood. Convergence across these agendas can add value, be mutually reinforcing, and could support transformative system change HEI-wide. HE can deliver results across these allied areas by embracing its duty and contribution to knowledge and society.

255   https://www.ihrec.ie/elearning/
256   https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/
257   https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-right-development

Taking meaningful action

Meaningful actions mean significant actions designed and reasonably expected to achieve a material positive change.[258] HEIs need to examine how they can make a real tangible difference to the communities they serve through their internal and external work.[259] A proliferation of activity is ongoing on SDGs in HE among varied stakeholders. Maximising the impact of this human and financial investment on SDG outputs is critical. Clear, accurate, coordinated leadership and action are central to effective results.[260] As a matter of urgency, HE leadership and staff at all functional levels need to be socialised on SDGs, ESD, and Human Rights Education. This should be followed by programme and curricular content while embracing the broad principles and purpose of the SDGs.

Embracing SDGs in HE effectively will impact organisational culture. It should be transformative for all aspects of the University and the community and region its serves. Socialising the concept well will motivate staff and students to embrace this new Agenda personally and professionally. It will empower staff to explore the interconnectedness of their subject area to other discipline areas. It will open up new dialogues, cross-curricular collaborations, and new ways of thinking and planning.

Furthest Behind First is a key priority of Ireland VNR 2023. In Irish HEIs, MTU Kerry Campus has the joint highest proportion of students attending from lower socio-economic groups. However, access to HEIs for people with disabilities and across other underserved populations remains problematic in Ireland.[261] Reasonable accommodations and flexibility in academic programmes, assessment, timelines, funding/grants and transition to work supports must be accelerated and embedded in the HEI system.

Within their local areas and regions, Universities under this Agenda have increased responsibility and opportunity to collaborate with local stakeholders to advance the Agenda. Working collaboratively through research, education, procurement and partnerships to meet real needs in the regions they serve will also contribute to regional development. Universities and their assets should be central to developing the communities they serve.

HEIs have a duty to support excellence in research, education, and training on an international level.[5] This should support SDG 17 on partnership and ideally align with international priority areas such as those furthest behind first, including small island developing states and least developed countries. MTU demonstrated its commitment to this Agenda beyond campus through its investment in the activities of its UNESCO Chair, who works globally to support the rights of those with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

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258   Definition extracted from Cornell Law School glossary
259   TU Act https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/section/9/enacted/en/html#sec9 (b,c,e,f)
260   https://unglobalcompact.org/
261   https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2018/09/Disability-and-Discrimination.pdf

Pedagogy, Teaching and Learning

Education for sustainable development & human rights approaches

HE has adopted various approaches to address SDGs in academic programmes. Most involve mapping programmes, modules, and research alignment with SDGs by default or design. This may only have the desired impact with a complementary pedagogical approach. Target 4.7 presents approaches to building capacity among learners to support the delivery of the SDGs. Education for sustainable development [ESD] is the foremost of these. UNESCO described it as a transformational education that addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It can transform society in line with SDG and human rights objectives, contributing to more equitable, greener, safer, and more peaceful societies.[6] ESD recognises the need to disrupt education.[3]

MTU sees 'education for sustainable development as an integral element of the SDG on quality education as a key enabler of all the other SDGs'.[262] This approach will empower graduates to tackle complex sustainable development challenges with the competencies, knowledge, and values to contribute to the SDGs and positive societal change in line with the TU Act.[263] ESD is based on human rights principles, and UNESCO affirms that a new social contract in education must be grounded in human rights.[264] Thus, participatory approaches that address the needs of all learners systemically are needed to eliminate barriers that prevent participation and achievement. [265, 266]

Embedding ESD & Building Capacity

ESD embeds a human rights approach. 'Higher education institutions not only have the social responsibility to educate ethical citizens committed to... human rights ... but also to generate global knowledge to meet current human rights challenges'.[267] ESD is not new, UNESCO and the International Association of Universities[268] have advocated this approach since the 1980s. Progress requires HEIs to take urgent transformative action in programme and module design and retrofitting existing content. Clear guidance exists within the frameworks of ESD[14] and human rights education.[269,270] Many professional sectors have or are in the process of SDG-aligned standards development of relevance to pre-vocational and lifelong learning programmes in their field, e.g. engineering, accountancy, cities, energy and climate, and maritime.

System-based alignment of programme and modules with these frameworks will increase staff familiarity with the requirements of these approaches. UNESCO promote using the CoDesignS

262   https://www.mtu.ie/media/mtu-website/courses/documents/MTU-Strategic-Plan.pdf (p8)
263   https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/act/3/section/9/enacted/en/html#sec9 (9c)
264   UNESCO 2021 Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707.locale=en
265   UNESCO 2017 A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf
266   UNESCO 2019 Cali commitment to equity and inclusion in education https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370910
267   https://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/human_rights_education_in_ireland_an_overview.pdf
268   International Association of Universities https://www.iau-aiu.net/HESD?lang=en
269   Tibbitts, Felisa. "Evolution of human rights education models." Human rights education: Theory, research, praxis (2017): 69-95. https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812293890-005
270   Bajaj, M. (2011). Human rights education: Ideology, location, and approaches. Human Rights Quarterly, 481-508. https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0019

ESD Toolkit Planner to support embedding ESD into curricula and pedagogies.[271] The mapping of modules and programmes could follow this process to identify gaps and make changes as necessary to address same.

Mapping modules against sectoral indicator frameworks provide a benchmark for progress and aligning with global sectoral efforts can open access to resources for implementing actions. The quality assurance lens used to review academic programmes needs to be consistent with this new approach.

The embedding of the ESD approach across curricular areas needs to be consistent with the activity of EDI, PSEHRD and Sustainable Development functions of the HEI. PSEHRD sets the statutory obligation of HEIs and serves as an ideal mechanism to unify monitoring and reporting as part of the annual report. Within this report, universities can elaborate on how curricular content helps to align the human rights obligations underpinning SDGs.

Capacity building requires coherence with the whole institution, whole of government, and whole of society approach. It should add value and impact to university operations, education, outreach and community engagement.

Conducive Culture

Strategic coherence

Embedding SDGs in HEI strategy is pivotal to the cascading system changes needed to drive impact. This Agenda needs to be shared, pervasive, enduring and implicit at all levels of the organisation.[272] Culture brings strategy to life, blending intention with attitudes, norms, knowledge, experience, behaviours, and values through the work of all organisational staff. With such a critical transformative change agenda at stake, leaders must ensure governance and culture align with sustainable development principles in a spirit of solidarity and enabling environment.[273],[14]

An organisation and its culture are inherently connected, so bespoke solutions are needed. Culture can be a liability or an asset within a university, especially a newly multi-campus merged one like MTU. Establishing a new culture takes a dedicated effort. A positive culture can be accelerated if aligned with strategy, future-focused and underpinned by valuing results.[25] Universities that aspire to advance the SDGs need to articulate this clearly and authentically by those who believe in it and create the changes necessary for the organisation to deliver on it. Given coherence with many areas of university operation and values, a culture based on SDG principles makes sense.

Funded/ funding initiatives

Many funding schemes support the rollout of SDGs at an international, regional, national, sectoral or institutional level. UNESCO has called on states to mobilise funding in education towards ESD activity.[2] Prioritising human and financial resources on this Agenda is essential.

271   https://codesignsesd.org/codesigns-esd-toolkit-planner/
272   https://hbr.org/2018/01/the-leaders-guide-to-corporate-culture
273   Baena et al. (2022). The Influence of the Organizational Culture of Andalusian Local Governments on the Localization of Sustainable Development Goals. Land. https://doi.org/10.3390/land11020214

Sectoral agencies and universities should invest in socialising the SDGs and mobilising strategy and culture around sustainable development, ESD and PSEHRD. This must permeate all levels of the sector and HEI, beginning at the top. HE needs to be prudent in how and whom they invest for maximum gain.

Investment in coherence across sectoral stakeholders and HEI functional units is imperative as we progress. This will enhance the sustainability of the effort and multiply the potential impact. Operating these areas discretely distils their individual efforts, disconnecting them from the desired pervasive culture. Aligning sectoral and institutional funding with SDGs indicates the cultural priority attached to this area.

Personal and professional multiplier effect

Where personal and professional interests align, it can be a tremendous force for progress.[24] It connects institutional culture with personal values. The universality of the SDGs can connect our personal and professional roles. The appeal of the SDGs and the Agenda they underpin are matters of public interest and affect people in their lives. Staff and students are making choices and changes in their lives to respond to the challenges addressed by the SDGs.

Within the University, the SDGs and ESD present the opportunity to examine the framework behind the challenges and the mechanisms needed to deliver solutions. Combining personal interests and professional competencies empowers staff and graduates to synergise values to drive progress. A university culture that embeds and embraces this transformative Agenda appeals to staff and students alike and may determine educational and professional choices.[274]

MTU UNESCO Chair SDG Action

Since 2013, the UNESCO Chair has been recognised as a global leader and respected for its contribution to advancing practice, especially for those Furthest Behind. The Chair has worked at the coalface of the sports sector response to SDGs since 2016, holding a three-day event for Global Goals week at the Irish Pavilion at the World Expo Dubai in 2022. This demonstrates MTU's active contribution to advancing its strategic objectives,[15] the TU Act [16] and the 2030 Agenda through its local and global outreach activities.[275,276,277,278]

The Chair's work supported the development and prioritisation of inclusive policy actions of the Kazan Action Plan[279] that emerged from the World Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials in Sport in 2017.[280,281] Working through the quintuple partnerships approach consistent with SDG 17, the Chair contributed to designing, piloting, and monitoring a mechanism for global sports stakeholders to embrace the SDGs. MTU UNESCO Chair research helped shape the work of the Coalition for Sustainable Development Through Sport.[282]

274   https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/be6d1d56/files/uploaded/accelerating-education-for-the-sdgs-in-unis-web_zZuYLaoZRHK1L77zAd4n.pdf
275   https://trustsport.net/information-and-resources
276   https://ipepas.com/
277   https://justdoufit.com/
278   https://aclu.ie
279   UNESCO 2017 Kazan Action Plan https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252725
280   UNESCO CIGEPS Report 2019 MTU/ITT Page 7 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000369479
281   UNESCO CIGEPS Report 2020 MTU/ ITT Page 2 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374351
282   https://coalition-sport.org/

The MTU Chair led a global consortium on the convergence of well-being and human rights with the SDGs and researched the sectoral response to shape future directions and accelerate action. This demonstrated the critical global priority placed on SDGs and how collaboration is key to delivering solutions. It also presented the problems in addressing this vast global challenge and helped refine solutions for future actions.

The MTU UNESCO Chair is intrinsically involved in shaping global progress in our field on the SDGs.[283]This informed our contribution on the role HE can play. We held events and delivered programmes and presentations at UN Offices in New York, Paris, and Geneva and UN events with the African Union in Small Island Developing States and least-developed countries. We actively contribute to Irish State and International Consultations in this field.[284] We are the academic lead in Coalition 2030 and support multiple national initiatives connected with this agenda with the public sector, private and civil society partners.

Conclusion

The opportunity to dive deep into the SDG arena affirmed the urgency and importance of unifying action within and across organisations and sectors to address the most pressing problems challenging us currently and into the future.

The critical importance of the Agenda goes far beyond rankings, awards, and recognition. Success puts an onus on all staff who must be enabled, resourced, empowered, and led from the top sectorally and institutionally. It is well within the purview of HEIs to embrace this cultural shift and deliver on the transformative vision set out in Agenda 2030. Ireland, of all countries in the world, as co-chair of Agenda 2030, should show leadership and commitment urgently.

283   http://www.sportandhumanrights.unescoittralee.com/index.php/homepage
284   http://www.sportandhumanrights.unescoittralee.com/index.php/submissions

9.7 Oireachtas All-Party SDG Group

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a landmark agreement that was the culmination of an unprecedented process of public consultation and intergovernmental negotiations, the final stage of which Ireland had the honour to co-facilitate, together with Kenya in 2015. The seventeen goals are a transformative vision for action by all countries in a global partnership. They are a step-change from the Millennium Development Goals, in that they have a strong focus on equality. This was something rightly demanded by the global south during the negotiations. The SDGs are universal in their application, every country needs to find a way to express the SDGs for themself and every country needs to support other countries in achieving them. They are a powerful and practical blueprint for better policies on equality, environment, society and economy.

Given the central role Ireland played in the intergovernmental negotiations for the SDGs, and Ireland's current role as co-facilitator of the political declaration that will be issued at the 2023 SDG Summit at the United Nations this September, Ireland must step up its ambition and demonstrate leadership at home and internationally on delivering the 17 SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the eight years remaining to 2030.

The Oireachtas (Irish parliamentary) All-Party Group on the Sustainable Development Goals was formed in 2020. The Group, which is open to parliamentarians from all Irish political parties in both houses of the Irish parliament, the Dáil and the Seanad, works to promote awareness and action on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development here in Ireland and internationally. The Group is chaired by an independent Senator and co-chaired by a Government Deputy from the Green Party. Since its formation the Oireachtas SDG Group has:

- met and exchanged ideas and best practice with a range of stakeholders from civil society

- conducted mapping exercises to identify SDGs and targets that fall under the remit of various Oireachtas (parliamentary) committees

- created a new parliamentary Standing Order 100 (4) which stipulates:

  Oireachtas Committees of the 33rd Dáil are requested to consider and include in their workplans 'progress on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as set out in the United Nations Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. This standing order has been instrumental in having the Houses of the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament) mandate oversight of the progress on the implementation SDG goals into the work programmes of Committees which shadow Government Departments

- Engaged with Government Departments to promote the inclusion of SDG targets and indicators in Departments' Statements of Strategy

- Analysed if and how SDG commitments and targets are reflected in Departmental Statements of Strategy

- Sought the inclusion of SDG commitments in relevant Irish legislation such as legislation on climate change

A number of Oireachtas SDG Group members are also members of the international network, Parliamentarians for the Global Goals (PfGG), which exchanges ideas and best practice and contributes to collective momentum on delivery of the SDGs. This group of parliamentarians from around the world are connected by their commitment to the vision offered by the SDGs and recognise that, with the world facing serious challenges from conflict, hunger, natural disasters, covid and climate change, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are needed now more than ever. Such challenges cannot be allowed derail or undermine the commitments made by world leaders to deliver on the SDGs. On the contrary they underscore the importance of moving away from business as usual and delivering a more creative, ambitious, sustainable use of policies. This is exactly the kind of joined-up approach offered by the SDG framework. The SDGs must not be viewed as an aspirational add-on but rather as a viable solution to the challenges we face and the foundation for a better future. It is important that as countries develop responses and allocate resources to deal with these diverse challenges, those responses and resources are designed in a way that bring us forward rather than backwards in relation to SDG targets. Developing countries who have suffered the worst impact of recent crises must be offered additional support, including financial support to assist their achievement of the SDGs. One important commitment under SDG 13 is the collective commitment to deliver €100 billion per annum in climate financing to developing countries. Ireland is not yet contributing its fair share in respect of this target.

In Ireland, there have been some areas of progress on the SDGs, however many gaps in SDG delivery remain. In 2022 the Oireachtas SDG Group made a detailed submission to the public consultation on Ireland's second National Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024 on the Sustainable Development Goals. In it, we highlighted actions which must be implemented this year at national and local level to significantly accelerate delivery of the SDGs in Ireland and internationally.

Commitment to the SDGs and Agenda 2030 varies across Government Departments. Whilst many Government Departments reference the SDGs and Agenda 2030 in their Statements of Strategy, they do not report on how they are performing with respect to specific SDG targets, nor do indicate whether they are complementing global SDG targets with concrete national targets and indicators applicable for Ireland, as has been done in other countries. Included in that should be information on how Government will gather the data for measuring these national indicators. Disaggregated data collection to measure outcomes for those furthest left behind in Ireland must be prioritised. Ownership of the SDGs across Government and monitoring of SDG progress has been insufficient to date and must be progressed without delay.

There is a clear need for greater policy coherence for sustainable development across Government. The Oireachtas SDG Group would like to see a 'SDG Red Flag' system introduced which would allow Oireachtas committees, Government Departments, public bodies, state agencies and local authorities to flag proposals and policies which could undermine SDG delivery. This SDG Red Flag system would greatly enhance policy coherence for sustainable development, a central tenet to SDG progress.

The actions outlined in Ireland's second SDG National Implementation Plan (NIP) to embed the SDG framework into Government Departments must be underpinned by financial and human resources. Ireland's second SDG NIP does not detail the resources which will be allocated to

the various actions and initiatives listed. There is a lack of information on the levels of financing that will be required and provided to effectively deliver on the SDG actions contained in the plan up to 2024 and beyond.

As advised by the United Nations Development Programme, it crucial that the SDGs are integrated into countries' budgetary frameworks. If not integrated into the budgets, then it is very likely there will be damaging disconnects between the strategic planning frameworks that have made commitments to the 2030 Agenda on the one hand, and public budgets that remain driven by "business as usual" on the other.

The Oireachtas SDG Group recommends the SDG framework and Agenda 2030 framework are integrated into Ireland's budgetary process and an SDG expenditure tagging system is rolled out across all Departmental budgets as soon as possible. Given there are only eight years remaining to deliver on the SDGs, it is critical we see the integration of Agenda 2030 and the SDG framework into Ireland's budgetary process for budget 2024. As suggested in the National Implementation Plan, this could compliment and contribute to the development and delivery of the Wellbeing Framework which should be strongly evident in the discussion, decisions and framing around budget 2024.

SDG awareness levels across Government Departments, state agencies, local authorities and Oireachtas members in Ireland are still very low. The actions outlined in the National Implementation Plan to address this must be prioritised and delivered this year.

Making the SDGs relevant to people in their everyday lives and in their local areas is vital. A 'place-based approach' to the SDGs can create a greater understanding and appreciation amongst people of the SDGs and the difference the SDG targets can make to our shared communities and our shared planet. Local authorities in Ireland should play a central role in adopting and implementing this 'place-based approach' to the SDGs, including but not limited to SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities. Delays in capacity building and awareness raising on the SDGs at local authority level across Ireland have already contributed to missed opportunities. It is regrettable earlier action was not taken by the Government to allocate resources to promote the SDGs at local level and to incorporate Agenda 2030 and the SDGs into all new City and County Development Plans (CCDP) and Local Enterprise and Community Plans (LCEP). There was a timebound window to scale up understanding of the SDGs within local authorities so that they could properly reflect the SDGs in their new six-year CCDP and LECP. Many of these plans are already finalised and have not systematically incorporated Agenda 2030 and the SDGs into them. It is critical that remedial action be taken now to ameliorate the impacts of this missed opportunity and additional resources, including financial or staffing resources if required, are made available to local authorities to support integration and implementation of the SDGs within the new CCDP and LECP.

Additional funding should be provided for local authorities to support partnerships within and between local authorities in Ireland and internationally in order to exchange best practice and develop new collaborations and initiatives around SDG delivery.

Ireland has plans for significant capital expenditure under its National Development Plan (NDP). It is important the NDP reflects and progresses the SDGs and doesn't become another missed opportunity. Major national strategies and investments must progress the SDGs and not move us backwards on SDG delivery. The proposals around policy coherence for development highlighted earlier in this chapter are critical in this regard.

The SDG Oireachtas Group notes the Department of Environment and Climate Change has lead responsibility for implementing many of the actions proposed in the plan and for the overall leadership, coordination and monitoring of the delivery of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. Given the all-encompassing nature of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, and the need for political leadership and inter-Departmental coordination to deliver on them, SDG leadership and coordination would be better placed in the Department of An Taoiseach.

A formal SDG reporting mechanism from Government to Oireachtas members has yet to be established in Ireland. In addition to the ongoing incorporation of the SDGs into each Oireachtas Committee's policy examination and legislative scrutiny, a formal annual consideration of the relevant SDGs by each committee should be established. This should involve each Minister reporting on an annual basis at a public session of the relevant Oireachtas committee on the progress the Minister's Department is making on Agenda 2030 and the delivery of the SDG targets relevant to that Department. Government Ministers should also be obliged to report annually to both Houses of the Oireachtas on their Departmental progress towards the SDGs.

In September this year, world leaders will gather at the United Nations SDG Summit in New York to assess progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the implementation of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to signal how they will put the world back on track to achieve the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. The 2030 Agenda remains the single most powerful framework to break through to a better future. Honouring the extraordinary trust and cooperation invested in the SDGs, and the vision for the better world they represent, the global community must regain the ground we have lost, scale up our ambition and match that renewed ambition with concrete actions, resources and solidarity to deliver equality, end poverty and the scourge of hunger, and protect the planet for future generations. Ireland should show leadership on an international level and on a national level by accelerating our own actions and commitments on delivery of all 17 SDGs and their targets.

9.8 Compendium of Stakeholder Contributions

Foreword

Ireland strongly supports stakeholder participation in the 2030 Agenda process at both national and global level, to ensure that voices from civil society and the private sector continue to be heard as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are implemented.

Therefore, the Government of Ireland has facilitated the production of this compendium of stakeholders' inputs to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The intention is to provide national stakeholders with an equal opportunity to present their individual observations regarding the SDGs, and Ireland's implementation, directly to the 2023 session of the HLPF.

Stakeholder contributions were collected by means of an on-line process.

Stakeholders were encouraged, when providing contributions to the compendium, to consider and respond to the following questions:

- What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

- What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

- What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

- What is Ireland doing well?

- What could Ireland improve on?

- Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

All contributions received have been included in the compendium and the content of those contributions has not been edited in any way by the Government of Ireland.

Stakeholder Contributions

Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network Ireland

The **Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN)** is a faith-based international network committed to economic justice between the European Union and sub-Saharan Africa. AEFJN Ireland is the Irish National Branch (Antenna) and comprises of ten religious congregations.[285] AEFJN-Ireland is a member of the **Irish Coalition for Business and Human Rights (ICBHR)** who are advocating for a UN binding Treaty and EU regulation of multi-national value chains.[286]

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285   For more information visit our website: https://www.amri.ie/justice/aefjn-ireland/
286   For more information visit the ICBHR website: https://www.icbhr.org/

The effective achievement of the SDGs creates the conditions for the full realization of human rights. By building capacity and marshalling resources in line with Agenda 2030, national governments make the exercise of human rights possible. The integrated nature of the SDGs and human rights means working towards the comprehensive achievement of the SDGs must first and foremost include a response to the violation of human rights. Indeed, those whose human rights are being violated represent those left furthest behind. As such, the principle of "Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind," ought to see efforts to enhance legislation and regulation to that protect human rights and our environment be incorporated into any SDG National Plan.

Of particular concern to the AEFJN are the reported human rights abuses committed with impunity by transnational corporations. Companies have an enormous impact on people's lives and the communities in which they operate. We believe that transnational corporations have a role to play in the achievement of the SDGs, contributing positively to SDGs 1, 2, 8 and 10. However, we also know that their impact can be negative – when corporations exploit weak and poorly enforced domestic regulation. The complexity of globalized business relationships allow some corporations to turn a blind eye to human rights abuses in their value chains. The activities of corporations, both directly and indirectly, have contributed to the erosion of workers' rights, environmental destruction, and forced and child labour. All of which undermine human rights and the achievement of the SDGs.

The universal nature of human rights and Agenda 2030 mean that their full achievement rests on the principle that they be achieved everywhere. This is especially pertinent in relation to an increasingly globalized market, where we really are connected to people in far-flung parts of the world by a common participation in globalized corporate value chains. In such a market, no state can hope to regulate corporate activity alone, when so much of that corporate activity take place beyond its borders. Robust international regulation guided by human rights, rather than economic self-interest, is essential if the SDGs and human rights are to be realized in the context of a global market. Indeed, Agenda 2030 recognises the importance of adherence to "relevant international standards and agreements,"[287] specifically referencing the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Ireland's record in supporting human rights is significant and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Irish Aid are to be commended for their consistent ongoing efforts. Notwithstanding such generosity, we suggest that the creation of a global regulatory environment, that is mandatory rather than optional, is not only in line with Ireland's commitment to achieve the SDGs and human rights, but a logical outcome of that commitment. Therefore we recommend that, as part of the support of the SDGs in our foreign policy, Ireland should include the agreement of mandatory global regulation as a diplomatic goals for the DFA and our ambassador to the UN.

While the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights have been an important first step, ultimately they are only guiding principles and fall short of the mandatory due diligence necessary to root out human rights abuses in corporate value chains. In the short to medium term, we urge Ireland to take a lead role in the negotiating a strong Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence Directive at the EU, and the effective transposition of that directive into Irish Law with an equally robust national law on corporate accountability. In the longer term, we ask that Ireland take up a leading role in progressing the negotiations on the proposed

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287   OECD Guidelines NCP - DETE (enterprise.gov.ie) Ireland Second National Implementation Plan Page 100

Binding Treaty on Business at the UN.[288] We believe that these diplomatic objectives should be part of any national plan for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

All Together in Dignity Ireland

ATD Ireland (All Together in Dignity) is part of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, ATD Fourth World – All Together in Dignity to overcome poverty (https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/ It is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most disadvantaged and excluded families around the world, with more than sixty years' experience of tackling inequality and promoting social justice. ATD International is present in 32 countries worldwide, working to give voice to those living in deprived areas through action research and projects designed to empower and encourage active participation. ATD Ireland has been present in Ireland since 2000, mostly working in Dublin's North Inner City, while also running a number of nationwide projects.

We are responsible for the Human Rights and Poverty Stone on Dublin's Customs House Quay and annual events marking the UN Eradication of Poverty Day on the 17th of October. We hold a vision of a world without poverty, a society where each person is respected. Poverty is an affront to human dignity, and people in poverty have unique knowledge and experience that can lower the barriers separating people and communities.

Since 2015, ATD Ireland has been at the forefront of raising public awareness and communicating the important message of the SDGs at home and abroad.

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288   For more information see: https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/wg-trans-corp/igwg-on-tnc
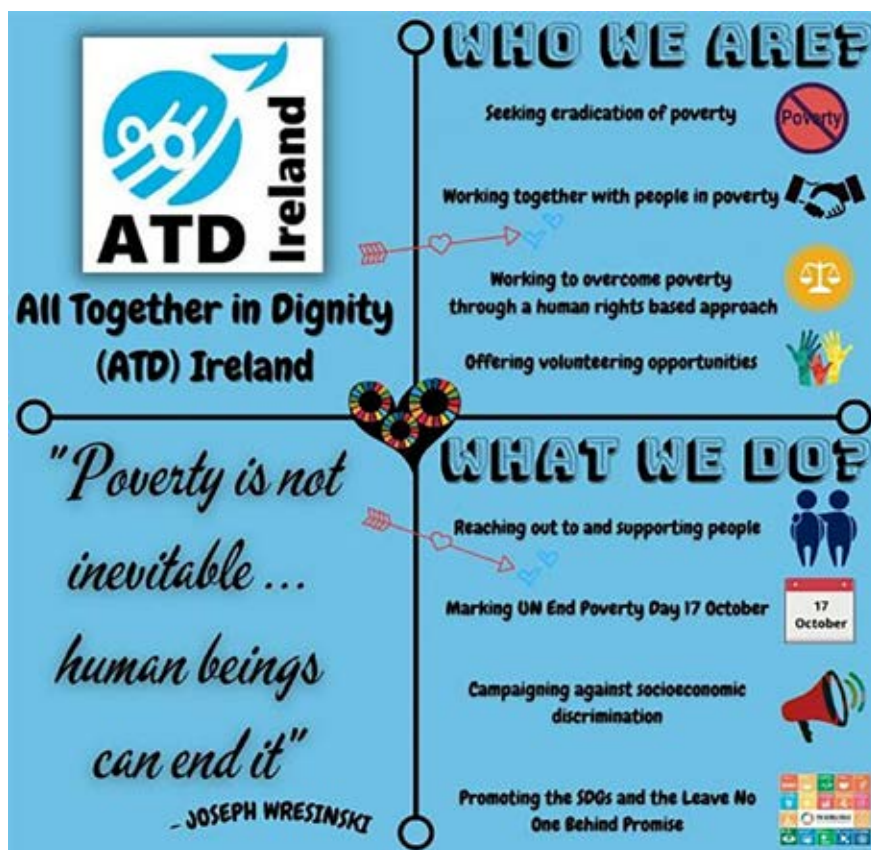
Inspired by the Agenda 2030 Promise for Sustainable Development to Leave No One Behind, All Together in Dignity Ireland first began to spread awareness of the Promise through our Leave No One Behind Conversations Series 1 campaign which consisted of thought-provoking community workshops. This was followed by the 'Leave No One Behind Conversations' Series 2, an ATD Ireland project supported by Concern Worldwide, which ran a workshop series designed to continue an inclusive conversation about the Leave No One Behind Promise, and which built on the Leave No One Behind Conversations First Series.

http://17october.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/LNOB-Working-Paper-Oct-2018s.pdf
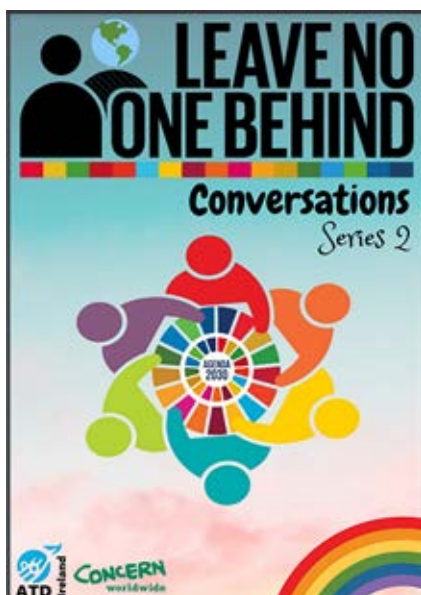
This project aims to raise awareness of the Leave No One Behind Promise of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to involve citizens from all walks of life (children, youths, adults- including people with experience of poverty and marginalisation). We want to empower marginalised groups to actively contribute to dialogue in Ireland around the Sustainable Development Goals by valuing their knowledge of social exclusion issues based on lived experience

https://www.atdireland.ie/wp/plan2030/

Progress to date on the Implementation Plan in Ireland and the Agenda 2030 worldwide has in general been quite slow and disappointing. We hope that by further promoting the importance of the SDGs and the 2022 ATD published report of the Leave No One Behind Promise Series 2 of community workshops, and by bringing forward the voices of those who have continued to be left most behind within Irish communities, we can shine a light on the importance and relevance of the Agenda 2030 Goals and Promise to those struggling the most. We also hope that the suggestions by the participants of our workshops on who participants felt was most left behind and what we can do to ensure people are not left behind will be reviewed and acted on by Government, policy makers and other actors of influence, and also reflected in the upcoming second Voluntary National Review.

Currently we are undertaking "Our Leave No One Behind Series 3" workshops, funded by Concern. SDG 3 – Health and Wellbeing is at the core of this series, as SDG 3 and SDG 1 No Poverty emerged as two of the goals most significant to the participants of Leave No One Behind Series 2 as expressed in the ATD 2022 report. Workshops continue in Donegal and in Dublin, with several more LNOB sessions planned around Ireland in 2023. We hope to bring the groups we work with together for a 'Festival of Change' in September this year, where we will showcase the positive actions taking place in these communities to the wider public/government officials in the hopes of influencing positive policy change as well as public opinion on various SDG related matters.

At the most recent National Stakeholder Forum, we learned with disappointment that only 1 in 4 people in Ireland have heard of the SDGs. At this time of the preparation of Ireland's second Voluntary Review, the mid-way point with only 7 years remaining to achieve these goals, we consider this a poor reflection on Ireland's commitment and progress to date.

475km from Dublin to Paris over 6 days as part of the international week of action and awareness for the Sustainable Development Goals (#Act4SDGs). A team of eight Irish cyclists took the boat from Dublin Port to Cherbourg and were joined by a number of French cyclists, including some local authorities, along the way. The purpose of the trip was to raise awareness for SDGs Week, to highlight the strong alliance between Ireland and France in SDG implementation, and to promote France's recent adoption of a new Roadmap for the **2030 Agenda.** https://www.atdireland.ie/wp/cycle-for-sdgs/

Clearly there is much more to be done to raise the awareness of the SDGs and we are pleased with the SDGs Champions programme that will go some way to raising the profile of the SDGs. In ATD Ireland, we continue to work tirelessly (see examples) to advance the SDGs message and promise, and where we can we engage with partners (Coalition 2030, Global Citizenship School, Concern, and the Members of the October 17th Committee) to amplify our message.

The #Act4SDGs March - Dublin, 25th September 2017

To mark the 2nd Anniversary of the adoption of the Agenda 2030 and the 17 Global Goals members of the Irish Coalition came together and march from the Rosie Hackett Bridge to the Human Rights and Poverty Stone with stops at the James Connolly Statue and the Famine Memorial. The march was prepared by World Vision Ireland, the Irish Environment Network and ATD Ireland with support of the EU DEAR funding "Make Europe Sustainable for All". Pictures by (Pierre Klein https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1437712476335574.1073741841.499324343507730&type=3)

With only 7 years remaining to achieve the SDGs, we feel that Ireland's ambition as outlined in our second National Implementation Plan (NIP2), although comprehensive, needs to be backed up with commensurate action to ensure success. Central to such achievement is the commitment to public communication on the SDGs, informed by timely and comprehensive data collection as outlined by Coalition 2030 in their 7 tests for the NIP2[289].

We would hope that when, published, the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to raise awareness of the SDGs. In addition, we believe that the SDG Unit is a hardworking unit that might be better suited to the Department of An Taoiseach, thereby offering a greater prominence to the SDG agenda, given that any efforts to achieve full SDG implementation will necessitate a much greater government engagement that will be matched with the necessary commensurate financing.

At the most recent National Stakeholder Forum, we heard the voices of those who might be considered furthest behind and this should be reflected in the VNR in both the written report and at the UN when it is presented at the forthcoming HLPF 23. ATD Ireland is happy to facilitate the Irish government in identifying those individuals and groups who consider themselves among those furthest behind so as to facilitate a more inclusive VNR.[290]

We would hope that Ireland can lead the call for more robust, honest and transparent reporting in the VNR process by leading by example.

At the 77th UNGA in next September, Ireland and Qatar will co-facilitate and lead the consultations on the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit. This is a real opportunity for

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289   https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a9536538f5130e91324a697/t/628759e9d-3c8d6075680c078/1653037546183/For+website+20+May_+7+Tests+for+the+second+National+Implementa-tion+Plan+on+the+SDGs.pdf Page 3
290   A published example of facilitating the emergence of a strong voice for those who feel marginalised in communities that have been left behind. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ht0IYQ6dQiU

Ireland to drive home the SDGs as the only fully agreed agenda for the whole world. It should also be noted that Barry Andrews MEP has responsibility for delivering the EU VR[291] at the forthcoming HLPF, and along with other respected SDG advocates such as Ambassador David Donohoe, and Presidents Mary Robinson, Mary McAleese and Michael D Higgins, Ireland should and must make this VNR count as an example of sincere government commitment to do more, faster to implement the SDGs both at home and abroad.

Amanda Anastasiu

Introduction

The need for the introduction of mandated disability reporting in Ireland for organisations, would increase the representation of people with disabilities in the workforce while highlighting that women with disabilities are experiencing greater barriers compared to men. Women are underrepresented in the industry but with disabilities are extremely underrepresented in the Financial Services and Fintech Industry and there is no visibility of women with disabilities in leadership roles in the industry.

By 2026, the National Disability Authority expects that the number of people in Ireland with a disability will have increased by 20%. One-third of this increase will be because of the increased size of the population and the other two-thirds of the increase is due to the ageing of the population. As women get older, the likelihood of developing a physical disability increases more than men, women with disabilities need more assistance, and the chance to live independently decreases.

This can only be achieved by amending the current Employment Equality Act 1998 to require employers to publish information relating to their employees for the purpose of showing the percentage of employees with disabilities employed within the company, the gender of the employee with disabilities and the disability pay gap. This would require employers to publish statements setting out reasons why there are no or low representation of people with disabilities employed within the organisation, a difference in pay for people with disabilities or/and there is a difference in gender equality for people with disabilities. This amendment would require organisations to set out measures taken to address these issues or propose measures to be taken to eliminate or reduce disability exclusion in their organisations.

There are many barriers faced by women with disabilities within in Fintech and Financial Services Industry in Ireland. The introduction of a yearly report would be, progressive to disability inclusion, increase the integrity of data through standardised reporting and facilitate disability inclusion in becoming a consequential priority for organisations and their stakeholders by generating increased visibility and representation. This will be achieved in an organisation by disability representation becoming visible in standardised key performance indicators, recruitment and HRM practices, metrics and targets through which organisations measure their performance and the value they contribute to society.

The constantly low volume of employment of people with disabilities should be viewed with worry. Company/Employer attitudes researchers have outlined as a challenge to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Some employers may have concerns related to legal risks and responsibilities. Other researchers stated the recruitment of people with disability,

that disability inclusion has been hindered the by barriers such as cost associated with increased training and supervision and a lack of understanding about compliance requirements associated with anti-discrimination legislation.

Why is the introduction of disability reporting required in Ireland?

Self -Identification

Workforce representation, also known as self-identification (self-ID), describes when an employee or employee candidate voluntarily discloses information about their identity to their employer, which includes their disability status. Many women find the measure of self-identifying or taking part in an organisational-led self-ID process offers support, resources, and access to communities of co-workers living with disabilities. For the organisation, self-ID measures can be utilised as important tool within employee input and culture framework, to assist organisations in understanding the needs of their workforce and measure the organisations progress towards equality, diversity, and inclusion goals for women with disabilities.

Organisation Performance and Visibility

Disability inclusion is alarmedly absent from standardised key performance indicators, metrics or targets through which companies measure their impact, performance, and the value of contribution to society. Introducing reporting creates invisibility for women with disabilities within the Financial Services and Fintech Industry. Many organisations have diversity and inclusion, but it covers a vast amount of people such as LGBTQIA+, gender (including non-binary), disability and/or neurodiversity, veteran status, ethnicity, parenting, etc. It is crucial for employees to connect with others who share their lived experience and help employees gain access to needed advocacy, resources and support, this can only be achieved by separate and specific reporting, such as disability reporting, gender gap reporting, LGBTQIA+ reporting.

Detailing with transparency and setting goals is an effective strategy to increase an organisations inclusion of female employees with disabilities. Creating objectives that are specific to women with disabilities must be outlined plainly and agreed upon within an organisation allowing senior management to be accountable for their delivery on the goals, through detailed planning and the correct tracking mechanisms. Goals must be supported by accurate data and measured by regular progress reports on women with disabilities exclusively.

Innovation

Reporting facilitates organisations to create new innovative ways of thinking around incorporating disability inclusion into materiality assessment and risk mitigation processes. Reporting assists organisations in reducing inequalities for women with disabilities, by identifying who experiences inaccessibility of a retail locations and a lack of digital accessibility. Organisation through reporting can visualise the lack of representation for people with disabilities and create representations of women with disabilities in leadership positions.

Law

What is required is the amending the current Employment Equality Act 1998.The Bill entitled to an Act to amend the Employment Equality Act 1998 to require regulations to be made that will require employers to publish information regarding representation of their employees by reference to the purpose of showing disability percentage of employees within an organisation. Employers will be required to publish statements setting out reasons for no or low disability representation, disability pay gap and proportions of females and males with disabilities within an organisation and the measures taken or proposed to be taken, by these employers to eliminate or reduce disability and disability gender exclusion.

Legislation such as the European Accessibility Act has increased the need for organisations to design more advanced digital accessibility for people with disabilities. Research at present details that over of 90% of the world's websites are not fully accessible to the disability community. Research outlines that digitally accessible offerings also benefit people without disabilities. When it comes to business and inclusion, in a post covid ,remote working employment landscape access to virtual meeting platforms, apps, the organisations online systems and digital solutions used in corporate settings, where there is an unawareness of the need for digital accessibility the consequences for women with disabilities are exclusion from of an organisation if unable to attend the office and the exclusion from varying working arrangements such as hybrid or remote working options. This can also affect women with disabilities financially and mentally.

In 2018, the UN set issued a report that set out to identify the needs and views of women and girls with disabilities in national strategies on disability and on gender. Developing policies and programmes focussing on women and girls with disabilities to facilitate equal participation in society was the reports aim. The report acknowledged the need to support the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities through education and supporting the journey from school to employment. (Realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities, UN,2018)

Organisational Working Options

Working at home aids women with disabilities be healthier and more productive, as it is more manageable to deal with mobility issues, chronic pain, and mental health conditions when they experience the control over their work environment. Women with disabilities reported they felt more respected and supported by management when they received the option to work remotely.

CSR

The decision to recruit a person with disability may involve the rationalisation of the potential costs of lower job performance but organisations have a social responsibly. The importance of reporting the data in relation to employees with a disability in annual reports is beneficial from a CSR perspective.

Representation and Leadership

The lack of women with disabilities in leadership positions in the industry, affects the volume of role models that most women with disabilities experience in their career.

<u>**Conclusion**</u>

Ireland does not perform well when it comes to the working status of people with disabilities compared to other EU countries. Ireland has the fourth lowest employment rate for people with disabilities and the employment gap in Ireland between people without and with disabilities is one of the largest rates compared to EU countries. In Ireland there is also very little difference in the employment rate by severity of disability. This outlines that in Ireland the barriers to work are linked to factors other than the severity of disability.

Employees with disabilities are proven to be more punctual, reliable, and loyal in their workplace which resulted in increased productivity and improved organisational profitability. By amending the current law and introducing yearly reporting it would be progressive to disability inclusion, increase the integrity of data through standardised reporting and facilitate disability inclusion in becoming a consequential priority for organisations and their stakeholders by generating increased visibility and representation .Women with disabilities have a right to apply for any role within the Financial Services and Fintech Industry and employers have an obligation to be a "Equal opportunity employer" but until the Law is changed and mandated Disability Reporting is introduced Disability inclusion is not a strategic property for these organisations and not properly regulated or monitored by the Central bank of Ireland.

Amdocs Ireland

This is a submission by the Dublin office of **Amdocs** towards Ireland's second <u>Voluntary National Review (VNR)</u> of the Sustainable Development Goals to the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023.

A paper in 2019 '<u>How is Ireland Performing on the Sustainable Development Goals?</u>', commissioned by Social Justice Ireland, examines Ireland's performance toward implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and ranks Ireland 11th out of 15 countries in overall implementation.

For the purposes of this submission, a key finding is that Ireland also ranks 11th out of 15 for SDG 13, Climate Action

Amdocs Green Teams

This submission will focus on the growth of employee-driven **Green Teams** within Amdocs. This is an initiative that started in Openet in Ireland in February 2020, and has continued and spread through Amdocs, following its acquisition of Openet in the summer of 2020.

This initiative is one that can be replicated in other workplaces in Ireland and help to empower individuals and organisations to meet Ireland's target under SDG 8 Climate Action

Amdocs and Sustainable Development Goals:

Amdocs is a global technology organization which plays a major role in serving the communications and media industry, empowering our increasingly connected world. This industry is the backbone of society, ensuring seamless communication for the benefit of all: individuals, families and businesses across the globe.

Amdocs aligns its CSR strategy with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and uses its knowledge, creativity, and technology to maximize impact to promote them. Seven SDGs are strategic priorities for Amdocs, including Climate Action

Amdocs has joined the Science Based Targets Initiative setting GHG emissions targets in line with the Paris Climate Agreement and the level of de-carbonization required to limit global warming to 1.5°C for our scope 1 and 2 emissions.

As well as the corporate level CSR initiatives towards SDG 8 and other SDGs, the Amdocs Green Team is an example of an employee-driven activity which drives the targets of the global organization.

Amdocs Ireland Green Team Impact

The **Openet Ireland** Green Team was formed and had its first meeting in February 2020. It grew out of a staff survey on the 20th birthday of Openet to find out what issues were of most concern to staff.

Our Goals include ensuring transparency and honesty about the environmental impact of Amdocs, improved sustainability in Amdocs' products, reduced emissions, and education of colleagues on how they can work and live in a way sustainable way.

Covid-19 happened almost immediately after the formation of the team and made it challenging for the Openet Green Team to gain momentum. However, they contributed towards the overall care of staff during 2020 and 2021 with monthly newsletters and an information site including tips on Reducing our Carbon Footprint and Sustainable Eating.

Openet was acquired by Amdocs in August 2020. In December 2021 the Openet Green Team in Dublin rebranded as the **Amdocs Ireland Green Team**, incorporating the Amdocs sites in Ireland.

Environmental improvements in Dublin Park West office that have been championed by the Green Team include:

- Green Start program, partly funded by the IDA, which measured the scope 1,2 and 3 emissions of the Park West office, and gives a benchmark for future improvements;

- New Air Conditioning and LED lighting installed throughout the building saving on electricity consumption by almost 2/3 as well as reducing maintenance costs;

- Office Plants, bird feeder, insect house - increasing our biodiversity impact at Park West;

- Volunteer Clean-ups every two months along the canals and beaches and in the parks of Dublin;

- Monthly newsletters highlighting environmental events, concerns and ideas;

- Website including sections on carbon footprint reduction, sustainable eating, and "Freecycle @ work" where colleagues can offer 2nd hand items which might be of use to others;

- Linking with the local community in Cherry Orchard to help with the Community Garden initiative;

- Met with pension suppliers for Amdocs, regarding ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) options, which are a measure of how sustainable and climate friendly pension options are.

In March 2022 Amdocs Global EHS launched **Amdocs Go Green**. The idea was to have many teams like Amdocs Ireland Green Team around the world. This was directly a result of the Amdocs Ireland Green Team initiative. This has resulted in Amdocs Green Teams forming in the UK, Israel, USA, India, Brazil and Malaysia.

The first **Amdocs Environmental Week** took place in June 2022, including "Let's Talk Climate Action Workshops" with Amdocs employees throughout Europe invited to join.

Major initiatives for 2023 include driving the installation of solar panels in Park West office and working with other businesses in Park West to drive plans for a pocket forest and increased biodiversity.

An Post

At An Post our purpose is to act for the common good and to improve the quality of life in Ireland, now and for generations to come. Sustainability informs every aspect of our business, enabling us to deliver benefits to our employees, our customers and the communities we serve. As one of Ireland's first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Champions our ambition is to be the leading corporate in Ireland for sustainability and to share our experiences.

While we focus on five sector-relevant SDGs, we take a holistic view of sustainability and are mindful of the inter-connected nature of all UN SDGs and understand that making progress on climate action (SDG 13) is not possible without taking care of our employees (SDG 8); investing in sustainable infrastructure (SDG9); supporting and being part of sustainable communities (SDG 11); and adopting a circular economy business model (SDG 12).

As one of Ireland's largest employers, we want to be a leader in turning 'decent work' into a reality. Part of our commitment to this is to leave no one behind especially in the road to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to enable everyone to have the opportunity to realise their full potential so we provide Education Support Schemes to our employees as well as improving literacy and education for all generations within our communities, e.g. through our ongoing work with initiatives such as Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the National Adult Literacy Agency.

We are committed to protecting the planet's natural resources and making a positive impact on the communities we serve through our actions such as; zero emission vehicles and zones in our cities, engaging in water saving initiatives and have installed a biodigester on one of our sites providing us with compost to be used for our planting initiatives.

We are acutely aware of the impacts of climate change and the urgency for climate action. We are the first postal company in the world to achieve zero emission deliveries in all our major cities. We were also the first company in Ireland to trial the use of HVO fuel, which has up to 90% lower carbon emissions, in our HGV fleet. An Post is ready to work with Government to develop a strategy on HGVs and to be a first adopter of zero emission hydrogen technologies. To achieve this, essential funding support is required to make this ambition a reality.

We purchase 100% renewable electricity and have recently begun projects in generating our own solar electricity to power our DSUs. We also supply our customers with green fast charging points in two locations so far. With Government support we can expand our national EV charging network and help to enable conditions for faster EV uptake. We have identified a need to introduce AC charging into smaller towns and villages, which could be supported by our network of offices, as an intermediary option between fast charging (DC) points.

Through our Green Hub Financial services, we are helping Irish citizens access advice, affordable finance, and trustworthy suppliers, thus supporting Government's objective to bring 500,000 houses up to a B2 energy rating by 2030. In a similar vein we can further increase our ambitions with Government collaboration and support by retrofitting in the commercial sector. An Post plans to retrofit its 180+ properties, many of which are older buildings that require extensive work to address the 3,800 tonnes of CO_2 associated with the heating of same.

Ireland has demonstrated its ability to prioritise people throughout the past few tumultuous years, through its quick reaction to the pandemic and currently through the ongoing support to the Ukraine. An Post's response complimented this by using our wide network to connect and support our communities in the ways we know best such as; COVID-19 check-ins, distribution of antigen kits, support of SMEs through discounted trading. This year we have extended our community to welcome and support refugees through actions such as removing fees on moneys sent to/from the Ukraine as well as providing free calls and texts to/from the Ukraine.

Working together to utilise diverse perspectives and skills, with clear strategies that are tailored to specific needs of communities, will help to achieve nationwide SDG Implementation. Our position is unique as cornerstones within the community. Through our ability to connect and cooperate with a wide variety of other organisations, we are able to help Government to increase the implementation of SDGs.

An Taisce

The Environmental Education Unit of An Taisce operates a wide number of national and international sustainability programmes.

The key links to the SDGs on each are outlined below:

- The Green-Schools programme promotes learning, action and behaviour changes via a student-led approach in a variety of thematic areas including Biodiversity, Water, Marine Environment, Food, Travel, Energy, Waste and Global Citizenship

    Green-Schools contributes to all 17 of the SDGs

- The Safe Routes to School Programme is designed to encourage as many pupils and students as possible in primary and post-primary schools to walk and cycle. It has three aims: o To accelerate the delivery of walking/scooting and cycling infrastructure on key access routes to schools.

- To provide "front of school" treatments which will enhance access to school grounds.

- To expand the amount of bike parking available at schools.

    Safe Routes to School contributes to Goals 3, 9, 11, 13 and 17

- The Green-Campus Programme encourages a partnership approach to environmental education, management and action in third level institutions. The Programme primarily aims to ensure that members of a campus community can engage in a meaningful way to enhance sustainability on campus.

    Green-Campus contributes to all 17 of the SDGs

- The Clean Coasts programme works with communities to help protect and care for Ireland's waterways, coastline, seas, ocean and marine life by:

- Organising 100s of beach clean-ups each year

- Mobilising thousands of volunteers, removing large quantities of marine litter from our coastline.

- Promoting and facilitating coastal clean-ups and marine litter surveys.

    Clean-Coasts contributes to Goals 3,4,6,12,13,14,17.

- The Climate Ambassador programme trains and supports individuals taking action on Climate Change and has a wide network of committed participants across Ireland.

- The Climate Ambassador programme contributes to all 17 SDGs.

- National Spring Clean is Ireland's most popular, well recognized and successful anti-litter initiative. Taking place during the whole month of April and now in its 21st year, the campaign encourages every sector of society to actively participate and take responsibility for litter, by actually conducting clean ups in their own local environment.

  National Spring Clean contributes to Goals 3, 6, 12,13 and 17.

- Neat Streets is an anti-litter education and awareness raising programme for second-level schools in Ireland. Participating students are empowered to create campaigns and work together.

  Neat-Streets contributes to Goals 3, 4, 6, 12, 13 and 17.

- The GLOBE (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment) Programme provides students and the public worldwide with the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to our understanding of the Earth system and global environment. Through interdisciplinary activities and inquiries into the various Earth spheres, GLOBE gives students a hands-on approach to the scientific method.

  GLOBE contributes to Goals 4,6,11,12,13,14,15,16 and 17.

- Blue Flag is one of the world's most recognized awards for beaches, marinas and boats. The mission of the programme is to promote environmental education, sustainable development of tourism, environmental management systems and ensure safety and access for beach users.

  Blue Flag contributes to Goals 3,4,6,12,13,14 and 17.

- The LEAF (Learning About Forests) programme uses interactive learning and field trips to reconnect the next generation with their environment, educating them to be more conscious of protecting it and instilling in students a sense of ownership of the natural world that surrounds them.

  LEAF contributes to Goals 3, 4, 9, 12, 13, 15 and 17.

- The YRE (Young Reporters for the Environment) programme and competition encourages students to investigate a local or national environmental issue and report their findings through a written article, video clip or captioned photo.

  YRE contributes to all 17 of the SDGs

- An Choill Bheag is a long-term educational programme, an initiative of LEAF Ireland. Choill Bheag is a small, dense, biodiverse native woodland habita. Choill Bheags are outdoor living classrooms, with space created for seating to spend time learning outsideIt is based around practical sustainable tree planting and long-term woodland and eco-system education, management and practical skills.

  An Choill Beag contributes to Goals 3, 4, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17

- The Green Flag for Parks Award scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces. The aim of the award is to ensure that everybody has access to quality green and other open spaces, irrespective of where they live.

  Green Flag for Parks contributes to Goals 9,11,12,13,15 and 17

Comhlámh

About our work on the SDGs: Comhlámh is the Irish Association of Development Workers and Volunteers. Part of our work includes creating the conditions for values-led international volunteering: with support from Irish Aid, we coordinate a good practice network of more than 30 Irish-based volunteer sending agencies that are active in the areas of international development and global citizenship. Our network operates in a wide range of countries across the Global South, as well as in Ireland, and we have recently begun to collaborate closely with the Irish domestic volunteering sector, through connections with the national network of Volunteer Centres and Volunteer Ireland. Much of our global citizenship work is informed by, and contributes to, SDG 4.7, with its emphasis on developing knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development.

Key observations on SDG implementation and international volunteering: Since the last VNR, the Irish National Volunteering Strategy has been developed and launched. This includes a dedicated section on the SDGs, as well as efforts to mainstream them throughout the Strategy's five objectives. For example, Objective 4 aims to "promote ethical and skills-based international volunteering to deliver results for beneficiaries and to enhance Global Citizenship in Ireland." A global citizen is defined as someone who works with others to "make the world more equal, fair and sustainable in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals." We very much welcome the launch of the Strategy, its emphasis on the links between national and international volunteering, and the ways in which it mainstreams the SDGs and recognises important role of volunteers in their achievement, in line with the UN General Assembly's resolution on Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

What is Ireland doing well? National and international volunteer-involving organisations have used the NVS as an opportunity to deepen engagement and critical reflection on issues of global inequality and injustice, working to raise awareness of our interdependent planet and the potential of volunteers to imagine other ways of doing and being in the world. A specific example is the recent launch of the "End Orphanage Care Campaign", which brings together groups and individuals from Ireland and the Global South to advocate for child-centred care reform. This work is engaging with a range of government departments and marks the first occasion when national and international civil society organisations have collectively collaborated to address this issue.

What could Ireland improve on? The End Orphanage Care Campaign outlines four recommendations which we believe Ireland should work to implement. These are within the targets outlined by the NVS and would contribute to strengthening the international child-centred care reform movement, as well as responding to the call to "leave no child behind".

- Recommendation 1: Irish Aid should introduce a dedicated funding stream for care reform strategies, including family and community-based support programmes.

- Recommendation 2: The Department of Foreign Affairs should introduce foreign travel advice warning of the harm caused by orphanage volunteering (including the risk of incentivising trafficking) and encouraging people not to visit or volunteer in orphanages.

- Irish Aid should recognise the harm of orphanage volunteering and introduce funding criteria that no programmes or activities that involve the sending of volunteers to orphanages will be supported.

- The Departments of Education, and Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, should develop child-safe guidelines for trips overseas, including guidance not to visit or volunteer in orphanages.

Comhlámh - in conjunction with our network of volunteer sending agencies, Volunteer Ireland, and the national network of Volunteer Centres - urges the adoption of these recommendations, in line with Targets 42 and 46 of the National Volunteering Strategy ("Support ethical and responsible international volunteering, including through the promotion of the Comhlámh Code of Good of Practice for international volunteer-sending agencies" and "Revise travel advice to highlight issues and provide information for citizens to consider before engaging in international volunteering").

Concern Worldwide

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Project Us is Concern Worldwide's movement for change in Ireland. It is an all-island, Irish Aid funded initiative to engage the public with the UN SDGs. Since 2018, Project Us has co-hosted hundreds of World Cafés and SDG Design Thinking Workshops across many sectors of society. We explore how issues at local level connect to the SDGs to create a more equal world. It is a unique forum for the people of Ireland, to share ideas, connect and explore tangible solutions to achieving the Goals.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Like the rest of the world, Ireland is off track.

Ireland is not acting as a global leader in our efforts to address the SDGs. Average scores of Project Us event attendees' surveys highlight that the Irish public are aware of the SDGs but are not familiar with their targets and purpose. Therefore, they do not know how to take tangible action.

This extends to the Irish political sphere. There is still a lack of SDG understanding at a political level. Understanding the SDG genesis, being aware of SDG commitments and adjusting and developing policy to make the changes and deliver on the goals, are not the same thing. Leadership on delivering the Goals on a domestic and international level has not translated into policy and practical change at the level needed.

To ensure no one is left behind, each Oireachtas Committee should have a reporting system to keep track of progress to strengthen accountability.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

Project Us recommendations are:

Ensure all government departments include a specific SDG section when renewing their three-year strategy statements and report directly on SDG outcomes and actions each year in their annual reports.

The Irish government should ensure that targeted interventions to reduce inequality, in all its forms, here at home and through aid programmes overseas, are reaching those left furthest behind.

Participants in our world cafés came up with concrete suggestions for change in Ireland under the SDGs that Concern Worldwide programmes touch on and their related indicators and targets:

SDG 1 – No Poverty

- Providing permanent shelter for all;

- Basic income scheme;

- Community development – building on the theme of empowering health, growth and community resilience;

- Adjusting attitudes and choices through education and campaigns.

SDG 2 – Zero Hunger

- Change public policy on food and the ability to access it;

- Greater knowledge and action about how we waste food;

- Chefs identified as champions.

SDG 4 – Quality Education

- Creation of a more 'education friendly environment';

- Renewed approach to teaching and teaching quality;

- Mandatory environment and nature classes from kindergarten.

SDG 13 – Climate Action

- Community led action strategies;

- Collective consumer pressure;

- National policy to make climate action education compulsory.

At Project Us SDG Design Thinking Sprints, participants are given a global theme, they respond to it and create a tangible solution that could indeed be replicated in the Global South.

SDG 4 – Quality Education

- Appoint a youth committee to work with the Department of Education on SDG 4;

- Incentives for forest schools/clubs - children will have a better connection with and care for the environment after spending time learning in nature;

- Trauma-informed education spaces for refugees and asylum seekers.

SDG 5 – Gender Equality

- Free-expression walls on every campus;

- Free theatre programmes on GBV;

- Engage male allies to be agents of change in pursuit of gender equality in the workplace through mentoring programme. Women can play an important role in helping men address their own biases and fears. Additionally, as mentor to younger men, women can help prepare the pipeline of the next generation of male allies.

SDG 10 – Reduce Inequality

- Convert decommissioned vehicles, buildings into homes;

- Offering mobile showers and sanitation to people experiencing homelessness;

- Destigmatise homelessness - produce and release videos to inform the public of the homeless situation, and that homeless people are just like us.

SDG 13 – Climate Action

- A community-based initiative – 'Cycling Bus' promoting active travel by bike for school children;

- Public private partnerships and creative funding models can help universities green their own operations;

- Convert the kinetic energy from footsteps into electricity to power lights and other devices in the workplace.

What is Ireland doing well? / What could Ireland improve on?

Using the design thinking tool Rose, Thorn, Bud, Project Us captured the publics opinion on SDG progress.

The general consensus from Project Us participants is that Ireland is doing well on SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 14 and SDG 16.

Ireland has potential in areas such as SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 6 and SDG 17.

From the opinions harvested participants suggested Ireland could improve on SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 11, SDG 12 and SDG 13.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Reaching the furthest behind does not mean having the 'exception' from that harder to reach group speaking on behalf of their community but engaging and working directly with communities and individuals over time to report on their experiences, messages, and solutions.

Find and share tangible stories of where SDGs have had positive impact to inspire and encourage individuals and collectives to take action in their communities.

Ensure the easy availability of quality data and reports. The overuse of jargon in public policy can mean people disconnect from the message, feel isolated and ultimately leads to miscommunication.

Cork Migrant Centre

The Cork Migrant Centre (CMC) at Nano Nagle Place is a Psychosocial Well-being & Integration Hub focused on strengths-based capacity-building activities for people seeking international protection, refugees and migrants in general, including the newly arrived Ukrainian children and families, addressing the 2030 Agenda principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

CMC Programme Activities supporting the achievement of the SDGs

The Mother & Baby group project is premised on creating a 'safe space' for psychosocial support (emotional, social, physical, knowledge and skills) for families living in Direct Provision Centres, addressing SDGs 3, 5 and 10.

Saoirse EHD is an enterprise run by women living in Direct Provision centres which creates an opportunity for those living in the centres to bring their creativity, passion and skills to market, and developing an economically viable enterprise. Saoirse EHD is framed in the context of SDGs 3, 5, 8 and 10.

The International Garden allows families living in Direct Provision centres in Cork to grow food in solidarity with local communities and connect through the universal language of gardening. Importantly, the garden provides a respite from crowded Direct Provision centres, and additionally promotes urban gardening and growing food locally. In this respect, the project addresses SDGs 3 and 13.

Education Support

Cork Migrant Centre provides weekly online homework sessions that connects young people from Direct Provision Centres with tutors. Students in exam classes are provided with: Studyclix codes to access supporting/complementary study resources; access to placement/internship opportunities; and supports from mentors who themselves have been in Direct Provision or have accessed education through alternate pathways. The mentorships program is very important as students seeking international protection who have been in Ireland for less than 3 years do not have access to third-level education through the conventional route and have to apply for a Sanctuary Scholarship or pay international fees. Through these activities, CMC support SDGs 4 and 10.

Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program.

This programme supports migrant girls, mostly living in Direct Provision, to engage with STEM subjects, thus bridging the gap for girls who are underrepresented in STEM around the world. Thus, supporting progress on SDGs 4 and 5.

Dance, Music, Art Workshops

Young people seeking international protection are among those furthest behind in Ireland, residing in accommodation centres that are isolated from the community and other services, and have many challenges including those related to mental health. These capacity-building workshops These workshops are premised on creating safe spaces and aim to build confidence and self-esteem. These activities work towards SDGs 3, 4 and 10.

Key observations in relation to the achievement of the SDGs

Cork Migrant Centre recently collaborated with other faith-based partners to make a joint-submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in advance of its Review of Ireland[292] We identified the detrimental impact of racism and discrimination on the mental health of children of ethnic minorities in second level schools. This is compounded by the lack of diversity in second level school staff, which poses a barrier to integration and equality for children from an ethnic minority background. CMC staff report that students regularly reported racist incidents at school that remain unacknowledged and unaddressed.[293] This is contrary to the attainment of the SDGs as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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292   Joint Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: 93rd Pre-Sessional Working Group, August 2022: https://www.olaireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Input-to-the-State-Report-of-Ireland-Joint-Submission-OLA-PBVM-SMA-CFC-FPM-CMC-IPA-15-August-2022.pdf

293   Joint Submission, paragraphs 35-50.

Suggestions to strengthen implementation of the SDGs

1. Racism is systemic in society, including second level schools. This presence of racism in schools undermines Ireland's progress in achieving SDG 16 and represents a breach of articles 2, 29 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. The lack of ethnic diversity in school staff must be addressed in schools. The failure to promote and realise ethnic and other diversity in school staff contributes to an environment in which school staff are not representatives of the student body, children of diverse ethnic backgrounds do not feel supported in their identities, and in fact feel conflicted about the richness of their identities. Such failure hampers progress in realising progress on SDG 4.7 and undermines articles 2 and 29 of the UNCRC.

3. The UN CRC recently criticised Ireland's general lack of quality disaggregated data which hinders the identification of those children furthest behind and is detrimental to the effective realisation of SDG 4.7 and represents a failure to implement articles 2 and 29(c) of the UNCRC. The State must ensure relevant disaggregated data is being collected in order to develop effective policy and target racism in schools.

Galway City Community Network

Established in 2014, Galway City Community Network (GCCN) is the network of community, voluntary and environmental organisations, and groups active in Galway City. As the Public Participation Network for Galway City, GCCN is the main link through which the local authority, agencies and the state connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City. GCCN is committed to contributing to the development and achievement of a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.

GCCN convenes the Sustainable Development Goals Working Group which coordinates 'Seed Nine: Advance capacity and commitment to drive implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals' (hereafter the SDGs). This is a cross-sectoral Working Group which sets out to promote the SDGs, make them relevant for Galway, and establish the means for advancing their implementation through mainstream policies, plans and programmes as a means to ensuring civic, social and economic rights for all.

Ireland is a laggard when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs and there is outstanding work to be done in a number of key areas if the urgent aims of the SDGs are to be achieved within a reasonable timeframe[294]. The SDG Working group recognises that the task is complex and notes that significant resources, planning and implementation systems, and partnerships must be implemented if Agenda 2030 is to be achieved.

Given the intersectional nature of the SDGs, policy coherence across the whole of government departments, between national departments and local authorities, and within local authorities themselves is key. For example, there is currently tension between national planning objectives, and local zoning practices when it comes to the provision of amenities, green spaces, and climate action in local are development plans that threaten the attainment of SDG 11, 13, and 15[295].

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294   Clark et al. 'Measuring Progress: Economy, Society and Environment in Ireland' 2022.
295   Housing_Minister_eLetterhead new details (galwaycity.ie)

Our experience at a local level amplifies the learning at the last National Stakeholder consultation regarding the implementation plan. There is a lack of understanding of the interrelatedness of the SDGs amongst local authority decision-makers, and this interacts with national decision-making processes highlighting a need for policy coherence again. For example a focus on industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) at a local level cannot ignore the concept of decent work for all (SDG 8) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10) which are influenced by decisions made at higher levels of governance. Capacity building and knowledge exchange will be key considerations for future implementation if key decision-makers are to ensure the meaningful implementation of the SDGs.

In addition to this action there is a need for clearly specified indicators that can be used to monitor the progress of achieving the SDGs at a local and national level to be integrated into plans. Indicators serve the important double function of being a report card, measuring progress and performance, and a management tool that aims to 'help countries develop implementation strategies and allocate resources'[296]. However, for indicators to be feasible, they need to be integrated into existing local planning practices, with an appropriate method of assessment[297].

Collaboration with civil society is also key to the delivery of this complex goal. Establishing appropriate mechanisms for knowledge sharing will ensure buy-in, innovation, and co-operation across civic society, enterprise and trade, and different social and public agencies. These collaborative fora should also be implemented within local authority structures, between local authorities and National Departments and Policy Units in government so that the Implementation of the SDGs can be delivered in a way that respects their intrinsic interrelation. This means that those goals which secure our environment, prompt our innovative development, and drive progress towards key public infrastructure achieve the goal of leaving no-one behind.

In particular, the SDG Working Group would like to advocate for enhanced participation at a local level as the role of sub-national policy in the realisation of the SDGs is crucial. In particular GCCN notes that the participation of civil society is key to the principle of leave no-one behind. The SDG Working Group in Galway provides an example of a networked collaborative mechanism to support participation and work towards SDG fulfilment at this level of decision-making through collaborative reflection. The PPN framework supports effective, and sustainable decision-making as underpinned by both legislation and policy so there is a well-defined mandate for their functioning in this regard (Local Government Reform Act 2014, s46; Putting People First, 2012; Agenda 2030; ICCPR, Art. 25; UNCRC, Art. 12).

Gas Networks Ireland

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Currently Gas Networks Ireland report on our sustainability performance via our annual sustainability report "Sustainability in Action". The report is aligned to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standard for Sustainability reporting. Gas Networks Ireland have been championing the UNSDGS since 2018 as part of our sustainability strategy. We have chosen six

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296   Stina et al. 'Governance for sustainable urban development: the double function of SDG indicators' 2019.
297   ibid

of the UNSDGs to champion and as part of our Sustainability Strategy are continuing to drive and embed them across the organisation. In 2022, we carried out a UNSDG review to ensure we were championing the correct SDGs that were relevant to our revised business strategy. As part of the review, we reviewed the 17 UNSDGs and the 232 indicators and 169 targets behind each of the SDGs to affirm we were championing the UNSDGs that we as a business could influence or have the biggest impact on. In 2022, we developed school programmes to support the awareness of the UNSDGs amongst primary and secondary school via our Junior Achievement Energize Programme and World of Work programme. Sustainability can be a difficult topic to explain and the 17 UNSDGs are an excellent communication tool to use in the promotion and communication of sustainability.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Sustainability is complex. The 17 UNSDGs are a great communication tool but it can be hard to align or relate to all the indicators and targets behind the goals. With regards to Ireland's performance on achieving the UNSDGs – we would like to understand better how we as an organisation are performing with regards to other organisations implementation of the UNSDGs. Also, how does our performance contribute to Ireland's performance, to understand better how Ireland's performance is measured. In Gas Networks Ireland as well as using the UNSDG framework, we also use other sustainability frameworks to help communicate and report on our sustainability performance, such as GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) and CDP (Central Delivery Point). The CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) will also help standardise sustainability reporting and support the implementation of the UNSDGs.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

The awareness of the UNSDGs is probably poor among the general public, but awareness of sustainability in general and its importance has increased in recent years. The 2022 "reduce your use" campaign was particularly successful and maybe a similar campaign with regards to the UNSDGs would be beneficial. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland PSMR (Public Sector Energy Monitoring and Reporting System) initiative has also been hugely successful, driving change across the public sector with regards to energy management. We suggest similar monitoring and reporting initiative with regards to the UNSDGs across the public sector.

What is Ireland doing well?

Implementation of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, SEAI Reduce your use campaign, PSMR initiative, School and University educational programmes, integrating climate change and sustainability into educational courses are areas where Ireland is doing well.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Ensuring we have a skilled workforce to enable Ireland deliver on the UNSDGs and ensuring sustainability is embedded right across our educational programmes, could contribute to the drive to Build Back Better.

Gas Networks Ireland (biomethane)

What can we do to Building Back Better?

Ireland can make a significant contribution to improving its sustainability footprint by developing biomethane production. Currently we are lagging behind our EU counterparts as we are 20th out of the 27 member states in terms of biomethane production volumes. Irelands largest indigenous industry is food and agriculture. In terms of Building Back Better, we have to reimagine the food and agriculture sector operating on a more sustainable basis. Biomethane production can help both the agriculture sector and food production sector as waste can be reused in the production of sustainable biomethane which in turn can displace fossil fuels. We are ideally placed, as the best EU member state per capita in terms of biomethane production potential. Despite coming late to this source of energy we can learn from other and adopt a fast follower approach to help industries decarbonise.

What can we do to contribute to the challenge of "Leaving No One Behind"?

Many initiatives required to address climate change require investment. This can be a challenge for businesses that have low margins or individuals who do not have the wherewithal to invest in such measures and can be locked out of the journey to sustainability. Biomethane, if supported in a similar manner as renewable electricity, can assist these people and businesses to participate and contribute to a more sustainable future. Biomethane once it is verified as meeting sustainable criteria can be used as a direct replacement for natural gas. In this way customers to not have to invest in new equipment. They can use existing equipment with no added expenditure while increasing the use of sustainable energy. As such we see biomethane as a component of the Just Transition.

What is Biomethane?

Biomethane is produced by cleaning and upgrading biogas produced by the AD process. Biogas is typically made up of approximately 60% methane (CH_4), 40% carbon dioxide (CO_2) and a small number of contaminants. The methane can be separated, captured and injected into the gas grid as a renewable and sustainable alternative fuel substitute to natural gas. The remaining carbon dioxide can either be captured for utilisation in applications such as greenhouse crop production, or food and beverage manufacturing, or it can be released to the atmosphere. Where it is released to the atmosphere, it is accounted for in the overall life cycle sustainability assessment for biomethane. Biomethane is of a similar quality to natural gas and can be used as a direct substitute for natural gas without requiring infrastructure changes.

- Biomethane is a sustainable renewable gas, which is produced from farm and food waste through anaerobic digestion. Renewable Gas is a term used to describe gases that can be used as a clean energy source; emissions created as the fuel is burned are offset by emissions avoided through the production of the gas.

- Biomethane has enormous potential in helping decarbonise our gas supply and it is largely, as yet, untapped here in Ireland.

- It will be a significant help in displacing emissions in agriculture and food production and can displace some chemical fertilisers with highly effective bio-fertilizer.

Benefits of Biomethane Development

There are many benefits emanating from the development of a biomethane market:

1. **Renewable and Sustainable Fuel** – Biomethane satisfies the Renewable Energy Directive II's (RED II) life cycle analysis (emissions created and avoided are accounted for and sustainability criteria met) and can be classified as "renewable gas". Biomethane can, therefore, assist in meeting Ireland's decarbonisation targets.

2. **Support the circular economy** - the process of extracting biogas through anaerobic digestion also produces a bio-fertiliser, rich in organic matter and nutrients, which can be returned back to the soil. This bio-fertiliser offers many environmental and productivity benefits over chemical fertilisers and raw slurry.

3. **Aligns with a range of EU and national policy requirements** - Help in meeting Ireland's climate action targets on reducing emissions and increasing renewable energy, and its commitments under EU climate strategies including the EU Methane Strategy, EU Farm to Fork Strategy, EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.

4. **Support security of energy supply** – Via indigenous or locally produced biomethane, the security of Ireland's energy supply can be strengthened, thereby, protect against price volatility in international markets.

5. **Availability of Natural Resources** – Ireland is estimated by the European Commission to have one of the highest indigenous biogas production potential per capita in Europe[298].

6. **Safe and Well-established Technology** – Anaerobic digestion and biomethane production are well established worldwide, as evidenced by the continued steady growth in renewable gas injection facilities across Europe (in Europe alone, there are over 17,500 anaerobic digesters and 729 biomethane plants[299]).

7. **Efficient Use of Wastes and Residues** – Anaerobic digestion is a key technology in the reduction of methane emissions arising from the natural decomposition of wastes and residues, as noted in the EU Methane Strategy[300].

8. **Versatility of End Use** – As a direct substitute for natural gas, biomethane can be used to decarbonise some of the harder to decarbonise sectors such as process heating, dispatchable power generation and heavy-duty freight transport.

9. **Delivers a Pathway to Decarbonisation of Gas** – Currently, there are over 700,000 customers connected to the gas network in Ireland, one of the most modern gas networks in Europe. Biomethane offers an opportunity for these customers to decarbonise without the need for infrastructure changes.

10. **Supports Job Creation within the Rural Economy** – Anaerobic Digestion can create significant employment opportunities within rural communities – circa. 3,000 jobs can be created and sustained across rural Ireland[301] according to a 2021 KPMG report.

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298   https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/ce_delft_3g84_biogas_beyond_2020_final_report.pdf

299   https://www.europeanbiogas.eu/the-european-biomethane-map-2020-shows-a-51-increase-of-biomethane-plants-in-europe-in-two-years/

300   https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/eu_methane_strategy.pdf

301   https://www.renewablegasforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Project-Clover-KPMG-Feasibility-Summary-Nov-2021.pdf

11. **Compatible with Biodiversity Goals** – Biomethane offers many opportunities to enhance biodiversity through the inclusion of rotation cropping, catch cropping, multi-species sward grass production and use of digestate derived bio-fertiliser displacing chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

12. **Supporting Sector Coupling, Enabling Deep Decarbonisation and the Production of Hydrogen** – The gas network can act as an enabler for variable renewable electricity production. Biomethane can also be blended with hydrogen in the gas network, or, alternatively, biomethane can be converted to carbon negative hydrogen (when combined with carbon capture)[302]. The certification to Gas Network Ireland's Green Gas Certification Scheme (GGCS) for gas to be traded on the market as renewable gas provides assurances to gas consumers, in validating and verifying, in a transparent manner, that biomethane is sustainably produced.

13. **Pathway to More Sustainable Systems** – Biomethane offers pathways to reduce emissions across the agri-food and beverage sectors' processing and logistics supply chain. Biomethane production provides opportunities for the agriculture industry to become more sustainable by avoiding methane emissions which occur naturally from the degradation of wastes and residues (such as manures) and through the replacement of chemical fertilisers with digestate. The use of digestate results in lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and/or lower pathogen spread associated with slurry-spreading and, over time, enhanced carbon sequestration and soil fertility, leading to a more resilient and efficient growing process.

14. **Climate Change Resilience** – AD facilities can act as a storage reserve for animal fodder in the event of future climate emergency events (subject to certain requirements). Using ensiled material for agri-biomethane feedstock provides a significant boost to ensuring fodder supplies are available and maintained above and beyond fodder demand, providing a local supply for relevant farmers in the event of future climate impact events. AD facilities outside of Ireland have provided a significant source of supply during fodder crises.

Biomethane Contribution to UN Sustainable Development Goals

In terms of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), biomethane has the potential to make substantial contributions to nine of the 17 UN SDG:

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 2:** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;

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302   Pyrolysis Methane to Hydrogen processes: https://pubs.acs.org/doi/pdf/10.1021/acs.iecr.1c01679 - SoCalGas release: https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/socalgas-works-to-develop-new-technology-that-makes-carbon-fiber-during-hydrogen-production-300577866.html - PNL release: https://www.pnnl.gov/news-media/new-clean-energy-process-converts-methane-hydrogen-zero-carbon-dioxide-emissions - Hazer links: ● https://hazergroup.com.au/about/#hazerprocess , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZA9OWT2Y_o

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 6:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 9:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reserve land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Global Citizenship School

The Global Citizenship School aims to promote the mainstreaming of Global Citizenship Education in the Primary School Curriculum and supports teachers and schools in taking human rights based primary school appropriate action on local, national and global justice, equality and sustainability issues. Global Citizenship School supports teachers and schools in helping pupils become Active Global Citizens.

We are members of Coalition 2030s, (Domestic and Anti-Poverty Pillar) and we support and endorse their work in the preparation of Ireland's official Voluntary Review. We have collaborated with others (All Together in Dignity Ireland - ATD) to raise awareness of the SDGs at home in Ireland by cycling around Ireland to different schools bringing the good news of the SDGs to as many as possible. In another venture we were the inspiration behind a similar venture from Dublin to Paris with a group from ATD Ireland (and friends) where along the entire route we raised awareness of the SDGs to coincide with SDG Sept 25th 2019.

Our Steering Committee consists of teachers, former teachers, INTO Head Office officials and elected INTO representatives who subscribe to our vision and mission. We work through the INTO Trade Union which has about 43,000 primary school teacher members in the Rep. of Ireland and approximately 7,000 members in Northern Ireland.

We have developed a set of simple SDGs lessons for all age groups in the Primary School that not only raise awareness of the SDGs but also try to awaken the social justice spark in pupils that will help young learners to become active global citizens.

While we welcome the new specification for a Climate Action and Sustainable Development subject which will be introduced in network secondary schools from September 2024 we feel the National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA) together with the Department of Education and Science should do much more to raise awareness of the SDGs at a much earlier stage of a pupils schooling recognising that being an active citizen is now one of the key learning competencies[303] as outlined by the NCCA.

At the most recent National Stakeholder Forum we disappointingly learned that only 1 in 4 has heard of the SDGs. And now, at the time of the preparation of Ireland's second Voluntary Review, the mid-way point with only 7 years remaining to achieve these goals we consider this a poor reflection on Ireland's commitment.

Clearly there is much to be done to raise the awareness of the SDGs and we are pleased with the SDGs Champions programme that will go some way to raising the profile of the SDGs. We do however feel pupils must be familiar with Agenda 2030 at the earliest possible opportunity. The Department of Education should develop a toolkit, a set of lessons or a module of learning for all students in school that teach the principles of the SDGs, raising awareness of the SDGs and helping students to find their place in the goals.

With only 7 years remaining to achieve the SDGs we feel that Ireland's ambition as outlined in our second National Implementation Plan (NIP2) although comprehensive needs to be backed up with commensurate action to ensure success. Central to such achievement is the

303   https://ncca.ie/media/4870/en-primary-curriculum-framework-dec-2020.pdf Page 7

commitment to public communication on the SDGs, informed by timely and comprehensive data collection as outlined by Coalition 2030 in their 7 tests for the NIP2[304].

We would hope that when published the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to further raise awareness of the SDGs. We also feel that the SDG Unit is a hardworking unit that might be better suited to the Department of An Taoiseach offering a greater prominence to the SDG agenda given that any efforts to achieve full SDG implementation will necessitate a much greater government engagement that will be matched with the necessary commensurate financing.

At the most recent National Stakeholder forum we heard the voices of those who might be considered furthest behind and this should be reflected in the VNR in both the written report and at the UN when it is presented at the forthcoming HLPF 23.

We would hope that Ireland can lead the call for more robust, honest and transparent reporting in the VNR process by leading by example.

At the 77th UNGA is next September, Ireland and Qatar will co-facilitate and lead the consultations on the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, this is a real opportunity for Ireland to drive home the SDGs as the only fully agreed agenda for the whole world. It should be also noted that Barry Andrews MEP has responsibility for delivering the EU VR[305] at the forthcoming HLPF and with other respected SDG advocates such as Ambassador David Donohoe, Presidents Mary Robinson, Mary McAleese and Michael D Higgins Ireland must make this VNR count as an example of sincere government commitment to do more, faster to implement the SDGs both at home and abroad.

GOAL Global

GOAL welcomes the opportunity to consult on Ireland's Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly under the theme 'Building Back Better while Leaving No One Behind', as well as Ireland's commitment to co-facilitating the SDG political declaration for the SDG Summit 2023.

GOAL is a humanitarian agency supporting highly vulnerable communities to respond to and recover from humanitarian crises, strengthening local systems and building solutions to alleviate poverty and vulnerability. In 2021, GOAL reached 18 million underserved and excluded individuals with lifesaving supports across 14 countries in Africa, Middle East, Latin America and Ukraine. GOAL makes specific contributions to progress on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 13 through our strategic objectives; people survive crisis, have resilient health, and food and nutrition security. GOAL also supports the local systems approach. Even in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, there are local systems that can be supported to be more functional and inclusive, ensuring the most vulnerable have access to opportunities and services.

304   https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a9536538f5130e91324a697/t/628759e9d-3c8d6075680c078/1653037546183/For+website+20+May_+7+Tests+for+the+second+National+Implementa-tion+Plan+on+the+SDGs.pdf Page 3
305   EU Voluntary Review

What Ireland does well:

- Ireland's official development assistance (ODA) focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and fragile and conflict-affected states, where some of the starkest reversals in progress towards the SDGs have been witnessed, is significant in terms of contributing towards the achievement of Agenda 2030.

- Ireland's multiple ODA modalities enables progress towards the SDGs at all levels by multiple actors including Irish INGOs operating in the most fragile contexts across the world.

- Ireland's multi-annual development funding allows for SDG contribution, while humanitarian and emergency funding streams allow for agile response in sudden-onset and protracted crises – for example, the Ukraine crisis in 2022 and the recent Türkiye / Syria earthquake. In the current global context of polycrisis, this focus on ensuring those furthest behind benefit from both development interventions and humanitarian assistance is crucial to the achievement of SDG 1.

- Ireland promotes food and nutrition security, recognising that there are multiple causes of malnutrition and access to food alone is insufficient in achieving SDG 2.

- Ireland prioritises genuinely gender transformative programming that tackles social norms that are barriers to women's leadership and decision-making in issues that affect their lives, critical to SDG 5.

- Ireland also encourages civil society partners to consider the intersection of women and security – a message reinforced during its time on the UN Security Council – often overlooked by development organisations.

- Ireland has made significant progress towards SDG 13 with increased investment in climate financing and domestically with the introduction of legally binding carbon budgets in 2022 following the passing of the 2021 Climate Action and Development Bill.

To Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind and further Ireland's progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030, GOAL makes the following recommendations:

Goal 1 No Poverty

- **Increased ODA Investment**: GOAL welcomes Ireland's recent increase to the ODA budget and encourages this continued commitment to reaching 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) spending on ODA by 2030.

- **Furthest Behind First:** GOAL echoes the recommendation of the OECD DAC peer review (2020) for Ireland to develop operational guidance on reaching both the furthest behind first and its policy priorities and welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership to provide input to this guidance.

Goal 5 Gender Equality

- As part of its localisation approach, GOAL recommends Ireland launch a specific fund dedicated to strengthening initiatives focused on tackling gender-based violence, investing in women's rights organisations and women-led organisations all of which remain severely under-funded despite global commitments to gender equality.

Goal 13 Climate Action

- **Climate Commitments:** GOAL recommends that Ireland closes the implementation gap between ambition and action. Despite having committed to a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) data shows that Ireland's emissions increased by 4.7% in 2021. GOAL urges Ireland to reduce polluting emissions across all sectors and a phasing out of all fossil fuels in accordance with Paris Agreement commitments and national climate action legislation. Government agencies e.g. EPA and systems must adapt and respond much more quickly to private sector and partners who are aligned to the Government's Climate Change agenda.

- **Climate Financing:** GOAL encourages Ireland to continue to increase its climate finance contributions beyond 2025, including financing the Loss and Damage Fund.

- **Private Sector Engagement:** Ireland's ODA could better leverage the skills and capacity of Irish businesses (particularly small and medium enterprises) to contribute to the SDGs, through partnership with INGOs). GOAL encourages Ireland to incentivise private sector partners to collaborate with INGOs and national partners through a special innovation fund to find new solutions to food and nutrition insecurity, water and health. Acknowledging the growing threat of new and extreme global pandemics, Ireland should prioritise investment and incentivise partnerships for emergency preparedness & response planning and Early Warning and Response Systems (EWRS) for improved preparedness for health shocks/disease outbreak.

Greystones Library

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

- My organisation has a Green Team and I am the UN SDG officer for our section. To this end, I run a children's book club where we read books connected to the Goals and discuss them. Each event is connected to the Goals in some way and a goal is usually displayed on each poster. For example, free ladies' sanitary products has Goal number 5 displayed.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

- We should see the Goals everywhere, in every walk of life, from schools to hospitals, libraries to bus shelters.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

- We should see the goals everywhere, on every form, sign and poster or ad campaign that the Government use. This will spread the message and increase their relevance and importance.

What is Ireland doing well?

- Making people aware of how our choices impact on other people's lives worldwide.

What could Ireland improve on?

- In my opinion, we need to focus on self firstly. What can a person themselves do to contribute to the Goals. Then move on to community, then our country, then others in the world.

Inishowen Development Partnership (IDP)

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Through our ChangeMakers (CM) programme, funded by Irish Aid, we engage with and support adults in Donegal on a range of development education and social justice topics linked to the SDGs. We work to increase understanding and awareness and encourage and enable action to be taken on SDGs in various ways including the provision of our 'Seeds of Change' Grants and Mentoring Programme to community and voluntary groups and the delivery of a range of public workshops, talks and debates in the community. We deliver accredited training courses (Intercultural Studies/Global Development) through our partnership with the Donegal ETB and provide structural support and promotion of Fairtrade across the county.

In addition, we are currently launching a newly developed and innovative 'Sustainability Passport' resource targeting adults, communities, and businesses countywide to take actions in support of Sustainability. As part of this process, we are engaging in national and cross-border collaborations with other organisations in the development education sector to widen our impact.

Additionally, the IDP supports the SDGs through various other programmes including Inishowen SEC, ECO Carn, Decarbonization Zone, Slainte Care (food poverty and mapping), disadvantaged youth work - CHANCE, support for women's programmes, etc.

Our Inishowen SEC has ambitious targets – including development of the region as a renewable energy centre of excellence. Currently we are carrying out an in-depth consultation with all stakeholders to develop a roadmap/business plan to deliver these objectives, and raise awareness of the SDGs through his process.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Although progress is being made, the SDGs are still not widely promoted at a public level and the message is not translating well. Further understanding is required around the links, impacts and actions to be taken, with more accessibility and examples of SDG work on the ground and how this connects and fits to everyday life in Ireland. There is an urgent need for better practise around applying and delivering on the SDGs, with more models that work well, such as the Green Schools programme.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

Increase social media campaigns for best practise and make the implementation of the SDGs more relatable by offering accessible guides to people/communities/SME's, such as Changemakers' Sustainability Passport, to encourage small steps and actions that everyone can achieve.

Introduce a recognition/award system for implementation of SDGs to drive motivation and showcase best practice to the wider community.

What is Ireland doing well?

The SEAI is a good initiative however the gap in linking the advice provided to the general public needs addressing and improvement of grant systems are critical for a just transition i.e., more support for lower income households.

Access to Education is good, however more tailored apprenticeship models for young people and an increased value and emphasis on non-academic routes is required.

Performance levels are reasonably good for healthcare and wellbeing, however the capacity of hospitals, acute services and pressures on A+E are at a critical level and need urgent addressing.

Progress in the area of Gender Equality is improving, with a lot of good work around LGBTI/Pride, with increased awareness at community level.

What could Ireland improve on?

Environmental issues (incl. Water/Biodiversity/Energy) still require urgent attention. More community led project funding and support of community led initiatives around responsible consumption is needed to drive Sustainable Energy Communities.

Better circular economy promotion, public campaigns and development of accessible reuse and repair initiatives is essential, with more policy change, harder measures and implementation/deterrents around plastic packaging/waste and SUP's, with a drive to promote effective alternatives.

Much of the packaging on the market currently labelled as compostable/biodegradable only works in largescale commercial composting units and not regular home composting systems – resulting in a lot of this packaging waste still ending up in landfill. More work is needed to create awareness and understanding around this and stricter laws around labelling/disposal information to enable action and responsible consumption decisions to be taken.

Ireland could improve on the following points:

- Further progress is also required around the 9 grounds that relate to Discrimination.

- Housing Issues – concerns and hijacking by far-right disruption.

- Concern in Donegal (and other counties) re the rights of families/households affected by Defective Concrete Blocks/MICA and the application and approval processes.

- SDG 7 (Energy) Key Concern on the costs and lack of opportunity for community led energy projects. To connect to a node/station in rural communities often requires additional or new transformer, these costs should not be incurred by the local providers. These costs should be carried or funded by the state and its agencies.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Increase the support for community led initiatives – SEC, targeting lower income/ rural communities, with a focus on providing accessible and affordable alternative energy solutions to traditional fossil fuels such as turf.

Actively and comparatively address urgent housing issues countrywide to tackle disparity.

Ensure Black & Ethnic Minority strategies at county level are implemented and supported.

Connectivity/Broadband still needs to reach certain remote areas.

Major barriers to inclusion need to be tackled around rural transport/ childcare/ hospital waiting lists and the current two-tiered private/public health system.

International Presentation Association

The International Presentation Association (IPA) is an association of religious sisters and Presentation People, founded in 1988 as a global advocacy association with a presence in 22 countries. We are one of the only faith-based members of Coalition 2030s, (International Development Pillar). We have been members of Coalition 2030 since its inception and we support and endorse their work on the preparation of Ireland's official Voluntary Review.

As a faith based NGO we have ECOSOC status at the United Nations and we use this consultative status to influence policies at the United Nations, reflecting our specific IPA commitment to: 'Respond to the cry of Earth and to people made poor by embracing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a human rights framework, addressing the issues of women and children, care of Earth and indigenous peoples, as is relevant to our local regions.'

Most recently we have collaborated with other religious congregations to advocate for those in Ireland who are furthest behind using the UN Human Rights Mechanisms of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In our submission to the UPR of Ireland we outlined specific concerns and recommendations with respect to victims of domestic violence, primarily women and children. In this submission we outlined those SDG targets and indicators that are not being addressed and we would urge that the conclusions and recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Ireland[306] 2021 would be referenced in the upcoming official VNR of Ireland given that the conclusions primarily concern many of those who are furthest behind in Ireland and understanding that the VNR will be prepared and written with those furthest behind to the fore.

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306   Published on December 14th

In a similar manner we collaborated with other religious congregations making an input to the State Report of Ireland in advance of the Review of Ireland by the Committee for the Rights of the Child with respect to Ireland's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) where we specifically referenced children as victims of domestic and gender based violence as being among those furthest behind in Ireland. In a separate input we referenced children of people in prison as being a cohort of children that remain largely unseen and unsupported. We attended this UNCRC review in the Palais Wilson, Geneva[307], where we met Minister Roderic O'Gorman and we asked that he would forward the concluding outcomes of this important review for consideration by those charged with preparing the Irish State VNR.

In our public commitment to the implementation of the SDGs within a human rights based framework it is imperative that the conclusions of Ireland's review/involvement in recent UN Human Rights Mechanisms[308] must be taken into account by the authors of our upcoming 2nd VNR, and this is in line with our IPA commitments.

A criticism levelled at the Minister (many times) at the recent UNCRC was that the lack of quality disaggregated data mitigates against the identification of those children furthest behind and therefore means that we are only therefore paying lip service to commitment to reach the furthest behind first. There is very little data on the numbers of children who are victims of human trafficking, domestic violence or indeed those with family members in prison and then there is the added issue of the well-publicised inability of the regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to fully cater to the mental health needs of those furthest behind. We would hope that the State VNR would ask for a greater degree of usable, disaggregated that would support the targets and indicators of all SDGs.

We would hope that when published the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to raise awareness of the SDGs. We also feel that the SDG Unit is a hardworking unit that might be better suited to the Department of An Taoiseach offering a greater prominence to the SDG agenda given that any efforts to achieve full SDG implementation will necessitate a much greater government engagement that will be matched with the necessary commensurate financing. Given our International Development interest, we commend the Irish Government on their ongoing commitment to peacebuilding with the longest unbroken peacekeeping record in the world as well as their commitment to refugees fleeing conflict we would however ask that Ireland reach our agreed Overseas Development Aid target of 0.7% of GNI well before 2030. At the most recent National Stakeholder forum we heard the voices of those who might be considered furthest behind and this should be reflected in the VNR in both the written report and at the UN when it is presented at the forthcoming HLPF 23. ATD Ireland have alerted the SDG Unit to their willingness to help in preparing a delegate to attend the UN which a lived experience of being left behind. We would support their work.

We would hope that Ireland can lead the call for more robust, honest and transparent reporting in the VNR process by leading by example. In the same manner we hope that the Irish Government would champion Civil Society Organisations and campaign for a greater degree of safe civil society space at home and abroad.

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307   January 24th & 25th 2023
308   Both the UNCRC and the UPR outcome statements.

In our commitment to our mother earth we would also ask that perhaps 2023 is a good time to review the SDGs, (the half way point), with some focus on decoupling 'SDG #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth' understanding that consistent economic growth is often at the expense of our environment.

At the 77th UNGA in next September, Ireland and Qatar will co-facilitate and lead the consultations on the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, this is a real opportunity for Ireland to drive home the SDGs as the only fully agreed agenda for the whole world. It should be also noted that Barry Andrews MEP has responsibility for delivering the EU VR[309] at the forthcoming HLPF and with other respected SDG advocates such as Ambassador David Donohoe, Presidents Mary Robinson, Mary McAleese and Michael D Higgins Ireland must make this VNR count as an example of sincere government commitment to do more, faster to implement the SDGs both at home and abroad.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Ireland's performance on the SDGs with a particular focus on Goal 8

Collective Bargaining

The lack of a legal framework for collective bargaining in Ireland has undermined efforts towards the SDGs and in particular, Decent Work. Research from the World Bank has shown that wage inequality falls during periods when union density is increasing, and rises when union membership is in decline[310].

These issues may be improved as part of the EU Minimum Wages Directive, due to be transposed into Irish legislation in 2023 and the report of the High-Level Group on Collective Bargaining[311] and Industrial Relations, whose recommendations will form the basis for the transposition of the directive, including placing collective bargaining on a statutory footing thereby creating more favourable conditions for progress towards Decent Work.

Decent Work Deficits

One in 5 workers in Ireland are low paid[312], 5.8% of people in employment are living below the poverty line - over 133,500 people. 1 out of every 5 people in poverty has a job.

Worryingly also is the continued marginalisation of Travellers, Roma, women, lone parents, people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, who continue to be overlooked and underserved in the Irish labour market. According to a recent IHREC report[313], these marginalised groups are more likely to face restrictions in accessing the labour market; experience barriers in occupational attainment; have lower pay, reduced job security and poor working conditions; and are more exposed to work-related inequality and discrimination. Travellers have the highest unemployment rate in the workforce at almost 80%[314]. A lack of affordable childcare remains the single biggest barrier to women's equal participation in

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309   EU Voluntary Review
310   https://ictu.ie/sites/default/files/publications/2021/156283954032063131.pdf
311   https://ictu.ie/news/publication-collective-bargaining-coverage-recommendations
312   Eurostat - Data Explorer (europa.eu)
313   https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/monitoring-decent-work-in-ireland/
314   https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Factsheets-Pavee-Point-EMPLOYMENT-1.pdf

employment and public life[315], and Ireland has the lowest rate of employment for people with disabilities in the EU[316].

Ireland continues to have a stubborn gender pay gap of 11.3% and the impact on that of the recent introduction of gender pay gap reporting for large companies is yet to be determined.

While recent ratification of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work[317] is welcome, women continue to experience sexual harassment at work[318] and implementation of the Convention will be key to stamping it out.

Exclusion from a living wage and poor-quality work have knock-on effects on other human rights, such as access to education and training, health and welfare, child supports, public transport and quality housing.

Just Transition

Crucial to leaving no one behind in the labour context is the establishment of a Just Transition Mechanism as employees transition from carbon-heavy to green jobs. A lack of policy coherence across government has hampered efforts to ensure a just transition (including pathways for upskilling and reskilling for the green circular economy) and has left employees in carbon-intensive industries vulnerable to unemployment and poverty.

The establishment of a Just Transition Commission, as proposed in the current Programme for Government, and endorsed by the multi-stakeholder Just Transition Alliance[319], will be crucial in ensuring that moves away from carbon-heavy and polluting or extractive industries to greener alternatives do not result in any sector of the workforce being left behind.

International

The 2022 report of the ILO Director General[320] states that as the final decade for the implementation of the UN's Agenda 2030 advances and the prospects for achieving many of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals become increasingly daunting, the international community is challenged over its real determination "to leave no one behind". The labour market conditions set out in this report, constitute a particular test.

Trade unions are calling for a New Social Contract with SDG 8 at its centre, rooted in a gender-transformative agenda based on jobs – the creation of decent, climate-friendly jobs with just transition; rights for all; minimum living wages and equal pay; universal social protection for all; equality, and freedom from discrimination; and inclusion, ensuring development systems that empower developing countries.

315   https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/national_economic_dialogue_lack_of_affordable_childcare_remains_single_bigg
316   According to the most recent EU SILC data, Ireland has the highest percentage of people with disabilities at risk of poverty in Western Europe (37.8%). This is one of the highest percentages in the EU, almost 10% higher than the EU average. 31% of working age people with a disability were at work compared to 71% of those without a disability. Ireland's employment rate for people with disabilities is one of the lowest in the EU, 20% lower than the EU average
317   https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/news-and-events/department-news/2022/december/20221212.html
318   https://ictu.ie/news/ictu-survey-reveals-shockingly-high-levels-under-reporting-sexual-harassment-work
319   https://ictu.ie/publications/just-transition-alliance-joint-declaration
320   https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/110/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_844922/lang--en/index.htm

It is clear that corporate greed is a serious obstacle to achieving the SDGs by 2030. It feeds global inequality, concentrating wealth in the pockets of a few at the expense of the environmental, social and labour rights of the many. And it imprisons workers and their communities in poverty and illness, and deprives their country of important tax revenues that could be invested in sustainable recovery and resilience. In contrast, a world that leaves no one behind holds corporations to account by mandatory due diligence, including grievance procedures to effect remedy for violations.

Ireland needs to play a constructive supportive role on these issues in international decision making fora.

Irish Development Education Association

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The Irish Development Education Association, IDEA, is the national network for Development Education, also known as Global Citizenship Education (GCE), in Ireland representing over 100 member organisations and individuals involved in the practice, promotion and advancement of GCE in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Our members are drawn from across civil society including the development, human rights, environment and education sectors.

We work with our members to strengthen GCE in Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role it plays in both fostering global citizenship and as a key enabler of all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Much of our work focuses on SDG 4.7

"By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through Education for Sustainable Development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development"

We are a member of both Coalition 2030 and Dóchas. Much of our policy and advocacy work focuses on lobbying for the prioritisation and implementation of the SDGs at local, national and EU level. We also work to build the capacity of our members to engage on these issues.

We share the concern of many of our members that nationally and globally, we are failing to achieve the targets of the SDGs and there is a need for renewed focus on implementation.

2. Key challenges facing Ireland in its achievement of the SDGs?

In our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, Ireland is significantly impacted by the global challenges of conflict, inequality, human rights violations, and poverty.

- The climate emergency is intensifying and requires a climate justice focussed response.

- Racist and anti-migrant narratives, the rise of far-right politics and the spread of conspiracy theories and false information threaten democracy and our values of human rights, equality, and sustainability.

- Economic inequality is at a record high and intensifying. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new sites of inequality.

- Civil society space is under threat and shrinking.

- War and conflict remain prevalent across the world in the 21st century.

Mid-way through the SDG process, we are concerned that Ireland has not made the progress anticipated and it now seems unlikely that the primary targets of the SDGs will be achieved by 2030. Indeed, many of the recommendations from the 2018 Voluntary National Review are still relevant for the 2023 Voluntary National Review. We understand that the challenges and constraints caused by Covid-19 over the past three years contributed to the lack of progress. Nevertheless, Ireland remains significantly behind where it needs to be.

If the term "Leave no-one behind" is not to become just a meaningless platitude, we need a renewed effort with a new focus on creating a 'Just Recovery' from the effects of Covid-19 and ensuring those hit hardest and those with marginalised voices are recognised and supported. We fully support the call from Coalition 2030 that putting "the furthest behind first" must be a priority for Ireland's SDG Implementation.

3. What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Ireland led the UN in establishing the Goals. As a state, we must lead, and be seen to be leading, in implementing ambitious actions to achieve the Goals.

We welcome the "whole-of-society" approach to the SDGs and also the commitment to a "whole of government approach" outlined in the National Implementation Plan. However, this will involve a proactive, "action-led" approach by each Government Department, which has been sorely lacking to date.

We acknowledge that there have been some good policies developed, particularly in the education area, but action on implementation falls far short of what is needed. This is in part due to a lack of leadership at official and political level on the SDGs. Civil Society is leading in the areas of education for the SDGs. However, civil society is often under-resourced and lacks the policy and curricular infrastructure needed. Supporting civil society through policy infrastructure, curriculum development (at all levels) and investment is essential to achieve the potential of education in the SDGs.

The findings reported in the National Implementation Strategy[321] at the lack of awareness/ knowledge of the SDGs in Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities and that high-ranking officials seem oblivious to their responsibility in the delivery/implementation of the SDGs were most alarming. Indeed, with such levels of ignorance, it is difficult to see

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321   SDG Second National Implementation Plan, Chapter 2 pps. 35 & 36

how implementation could be a priority. The lack of awareness of the SDGs among the general public also reported in the Strategy[322] is hardly surprising when there is such a gaping hole at official state level.

This needs to be addressed first before the policy challenges can be effectively addressed. Individual action will follow if the leadership and policies create the conditions for this to happen.

One example is the failure of many local authorities to use the SDGs as a framework to base the future development of their Counties/Cities in the new round of Development Plans that were adopted over 2021 and 2022. Cork City Council was one of the few Councils to reference each chapter within the framework of the SDGs in their Development Plan[323].

We are concerned that the SDG unit within DECC is completely under-resourced which seems to be reflective of the overall approach to SDG implementation.

4. What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

We would repeat some of the calls we made in our submission to the SDG National Implementation Plan.

- Prioritisation of the role of education, and in particular Global Citizenship Education, for a deeper public engagement and participation with the SDGs. This would require a comprehensive public education strategy to develop awareness and understanding of the SDGs to be delivered through formal, non-formal and informal education. We would particularly like to see a stronger focus on non-formal education. We reiterate our call in previous submissions on the need for a strong public education programme.

- There is a need for a clear plan on resourcing the implementation and co-ordination of the National Implementation. Hence, we believe that there should be a specific commitment to providing additional budget for SDG implementation. We note that the SDG unit within DECC is under-resourced and commend the work done by the staff in difficult circumstances. We support the call by Coalition 2030 and other Civil Society Organisations for the SDG Implementation Unit to be housed within the Department of the Taoiseach with sufficient resources to carry out its task effectively.

- There should be an enhanced role for the Oireachtas in terms of SDG implementation such as a specific Oireachtas Oversight Committee. Furthermore, we believe all policy/legislative proposals to be SDG-proofed before being advanced/enacted. We would support the call from C2030 for a Minister for Policy Coherence in Ireland.

- IDEA believes that Local Authorities play a pivotal role in the implementation of the Goals and the creation of communities of learning for sustainable development. Local government is the way forward for up to 60% of the implementation of the SDGs[324], but local government is not being driven to do the necessary work to progress the

322 Ibid, pps 33,34
323 https://www.corkcity.ie/en/cork-city-development-plan/volume-1-written-statement/
324 Coalition 2030 Submission to Second SDG National Implementation Plan

SDGs. In particular, resources should be made available to local authorities to carry out Local Voluntary Reviews. We point to the example of Bristol[325] as an example of good practice of Local Voluntary Reviews and note that this review was done in partnership with Bristol University.

5. What is Ireland doing well?

We welcome the "whole-of-society" approach to the SDGs and also the commitment to a "whole of government approach" outlined in the National Implementation Plan. However, this will involve a proactive, "action-led" approach by each Government Department, which has been lacking to date.

In terms of GCE, there has been a number of important policy developments in recent years to support

SDG implementation, including:

- The Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy (2021-25)[326];

- The second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development[327];

- The Dublin Declaration[328] on Global Education to 2050 which was ratified in Dublin Castle in November;

- The proposal for a new Leaving Certificate subject on Climate Action and Sustainable Development is being progressed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

There have also been positive policy developments at EU and international level which are worth noting:

- EU Council Recommendation on Learning for the Green Deal and Sustainable Development[329] (2022);

- EU Council Conclusions on transformative role of education for sustainable development and global citizenship as an instrumental tool for the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)[330];

- The UN Transforming Education Summit (TES)[331] represented a significant development in the prioritisation of education and the recognition of education as an enabler of all of the SDGs;

325   https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/cabot-institute2018/documents/BRISTOL%20AND%20THE%20SDGS.pdf

326   https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/publications/Global-Citizenship-Education-Strategy.pdf

327   https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/02952d-national-strategy-on-education-for-sustainable-development-in-irelan/

328   https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f6decace4ff425352eddb4a/t/636d0eb7a86f6419e3421770/1668091577585/GE2050- declaration.pdf

329   https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9242-2022-INIT/en/pdf

330   https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10345-2022-INIT/en/pdf

331   https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit

- The current revision of the UNESCO 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace[332].

In tandem with these policy developments, IDEA members and civil society organisations are continuing to build on their excellent work, reaching all parts of Irish society. This work has been strengthened with Irish Aid's introduction of strategic partnerships for Youth, Adult and Community, Primary Education organisations. There is a greater recognition of the importance of GCE/ESD among the wider public.

However, there is a need for much greater investment and scaling-up of activity within the sector if the ambition of SDG Target 4.7, that all learners would have the "knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development".

6. What could Ireland improve on?

While acknowledging that there is a policy infrastructure in place for SDG implementation, the impediments often lie in the middle – between policy and grass roots – in the execution of these polices within institutions / state bodies. Implementation is side-lined or becomes a mere box ticking exercise.

Hence, the need to ensure that those in leadership and management positions within Government Departments and state bodies are prioritising the SDGs and taking them seriously. Problems emerge when there is a lack of institutional follow up to ensure implementation of policies that have already been put in place.

As the business sector is becoming increasingly aware of the SDGs and their responsibility to deliver on key targets, the State needs to protect against "cherry-picking" and ensure that the whole indivisible SDG agenda is being acted on by business.

There is a strong impetus for the SDGs coming from learners, teachers, civil society and local communities that demonstrates the importance of a multi-governance approach and strong stakeholder collaboration. There is a risk that the good will of these groups will be lost if this is not acted on and progress on achieving SDG targets continues to lag behind.

In relation to the Second National Implementation Plan, there is an overly strong focus on the formal education sector within the education chapter. Disappointingly, sufficient attention has not been given to the Adult and Community Education Sector. If we are to ensure that "No one is left behind", then the inclusion of non-formal and informal education provision should be a priority.

Key challenges specifically for the implementation of SDG 4.7 in Ireland include both insufficient strategic prioritisation of GCE / ESD within overall departmental strategies and insufficient funding to scale up and activate the potential of GCE/ ESD in Ireland.

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332   https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383055

7. Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

There is now a need for a renewed focus on creating a 'Just Recovery' from the effects of Covid-19 and ensuring those hit hardest and those with marginalised voices are recognised and in line with the key message of "Leave no-one behind".

In terms of Ireland's international approach to the SDGs (section 1.6) we would have liked to see the reaching of 0.7% of GDP in Overseas Development Aid specifically referenced in the Plan. Given the role of the DFA in the co-ordination and implementation of the plan we believe such a commitment to be a sine qua non of Ireland's implementation plan.

As outlined above there is a need for a strong public global citizenship education programme to develop awareness and understanding of the SDGs. Awareness alone will not ensure public participation in the SDGs. It requires public education and a comprehensive public education strategy with a focus on SDG action. We believe that Ireland needs to move towards the European benchmark of 3% of ODA for GCE. The priorities for the GCE sector are clearly outlined in our Strategy statement Vision 2025.

Localisation of the SDGs is pivotal to their implementation. However, the NIP came too late for many County and City Development Plans which had already been adopted. The new cycle of Development Plans run from 2022 to 2028 (with just two years to 2030). Disappointingly, few of the Development Plans adopted in 2022 make commitments to work towards the implementation of the SDGs or contain more than a passing reference to the SDGs. There is a need for a mechanism to hold Local Authorities accountable for incorporating the SDGs in terms of using the SDGs as a tool for policy-making in Corporate and County Development Plans.

In summary, the following issues should be prioritised at national level:

1. Policy coherence: A whole of Government Approach with cross-government and institutional strategic prioritisation for the SDGs;

2. A commitment to reaching 0.7% of GDP in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and corresponding annual budgetary increases;

3. Multi-stakeholder collaboration - facilitating alliances between a wide range of actors (such as businesses, civil society, scientific committees, communities and informal groups;

4. Localisation of the SDGs should be seen as critical to their delivery and will help ensure that those who are at risk of being left behind are reached. Financial assistance and support should be provided to local authorities for the production of Voluntary Local Reviews (similar to one carried out in Bristol);

5. Investment in Global Citizenship Education -GCE/SDG 4.7 should be viewed not just as SDG target but as enabler of all SDGs. Education and communication programmes to better communicate the SDGs to the public which will involve increased investment for GCE. This would involve the following:

    a. Investment and Funding: Moving to the European benchmark of 3% of ODA for GCE;

    b. Scaling-up Global Citizenship Education across the formal, non-formal and informal education sectors;

    c. Commissioning longitudinal research on the impact of GCE programmes.

6. Specific SDG Training for Government officials, local authorities, public representatives;

7. Ensure a focus is kept on those most at risk and actions to support "furthest behind first" in all aspects of SDG implementation.

Irish Museums Association

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Museums are strongly connected to the fundamental rights to participate in cultural life, enjoy the arts, and share benefits from scientific advancement; the right to education; right to development; and the right to information and freedom of expression. Museums are safe, shared spaces within which difficult questions can be asked and explored. They can open up conversations around our sense of place, our sense of identity, and how this is evolving.

As such, they relate strongly to the all-of-society and Leave No-one Behind aspects of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. They protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage (SDG 11.4), support education for sustainable development (SDGs 4.7, 12.8, 13.3), help empower everyone to take part in cultural life and sustainable development (5.1, 10.2, 11.7), support sustainable tourism (8.9), support research (9.1, 9.5), adopt sustainable working practices (12.6), including providing decent work (8.8), and develop and broker partnerships, locally, nationally and internationally (SDGs 17.16, 17.17). In order to do so, they must be connected to other sectors and to broader society (SDGs 16.6, 16.7, 16.10, 16.B)

The Irish Museums Association (IMA) has been working to empower its members to understand the aims of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs to promote uptake and participation, through workshops, training events and publications.

Museums have contributed to a wide range of sustainable development topics, promoting peace and reconciliation across the island, and environmental protection and awareness, through public events and community dialogue. Many museums are working to reduce their negative environmental impacts and to build awareness around climate action.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs aim to Leave No-One Behind, meaning that the voices and views of the most marginalised must be included in decision making. Stronger connection could be made with the work of sectors, to facilitate the top-down and bottom-up flow of information, as well as cross-community and all-of-society dialogue, to accelerate the transition to a sustainable future.

The educational and participation aspects of a range of international agreements are still only being addressed in a small way. The new framework for the Paris Agreement, adopted at COP26, specifically mentions museums and cultural institutions in having a key role to play in empowering people to know, care and act on climate change. The new programme for the Convention on Biological Diversity also emphasises the importance of an 'all of society' approach. Museums are ideally placed to support these programmes in communities across Ireland.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

Embed sustainable development into sector policies, funding and reporting.

Empower sectors such as museums to bring the voices of people and communities into sustainable development by:

- Recognising and strengthening the key role of national, regional, and local cultural institutions in community-led, rights-based sustainable development activity.

- Support creative experiences relating to sustainable development topics for everyone, through strong support for museums and other creative and cultural activities.

- Provide museums and other sectors with public-friendly information on the SDGs and Ireland's work towards them, to share with communities.

- Work in closer partnership with the museum and other sectors, to actively seek the views of people and communities everywhere, to identify local, regional and national sustainable development goals in relation to topics of public concern and interest (e.g. environment, climate action, human rights, peace, sustainable communities). These could be in the form of community consultations, dialogues, Youth Summits, and similar events.

- Provide opportunities for museums to collate information from public events to share with decision-makers and in reporting, and support sharing of good practices and lessons learnt.

What is Ireland doing well?

Public-facing consultations and dialogues, such as on climate action, are very positive. They could be strengthened through greater partnership and involvement with museums and other capacity builders.

What could Ireland improve on?

See above under enhancing SDG implementation.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Enhance the involvement of communities and their voices in shaping their priorities, through museums and similar institutions.

Further information:

IMA (2019). Bridges Over Brexit. IMA, https://irishmuseums.org/news/bridges-over-brexit

McGhie, H. A. (2020). Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals: leave no sector behind. Museums Ireland (27), https://issuu.com/irishmuseums/docs/museum_ireland_2020/s/13438668

Just Forests

Just Forests believe the SDGs in their current order have failed not just here in Ireland but globally.

We believe it is way past time that the Global Goals were re-imagined and prioritised if there is to be some possibility of impact.

Until we urgently tackle climate related issues all goals will be beyond reach.

Just Forests could never understand (from the very start of the SDGs) why climate action was not set out by the United Nations as the most important of all the 17 Global Goals. Climate change is the defining issue of our time. It must be urgently prioritised as GOAL 1. We have all become increasingly aware of the urgent and potentially devastating impact of climate change on air quality, food production, fresh water supplies, biodiversity, livelihoods and ongoing environmental destruction. Much of the debate and actions on what needs to be done without delay must focus on fossil fuels, the damage they do and, on the power and impact of fossil fuel companies.

Natural resources and ecosystem services are the foundation of our livelihoods and economic development. Yet, since the start of the industrial revolution we have wrongly treated natural resources as income instead of natural capital. Ecosystem restoration supported by a reduction in the consumption of red meat and reduced reliance on fossil fuels are essential to the just, fair and moral realisation of all THE GLOBAL goals. To this end, Just Forests believes that a peaceful, hospitable and habitable planet is essential or none of the other goals can be fully realised.

By wrongly accounting for our natural resources and ecosystem services as 'income' instead of 'capital' we end up bankrupt - as Fritz Schumacher outlines in his bestselling book of 1973, Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered. The goods and services provided by the natural world make human development and economic trade possible and as such should be regarded as capital. We continue to deplete our soils, poison our water, pollute our air, destroy our forests and over-fish and pollute our oceans with oil and plastic. The resulting economic activity is treated as income, not as a decline in the endowment of natural capital.

Just Forests strongly believes that the UN Global Goals urgently need to be re-prioritised to reflect that urgency starting with Climate Action as GOAL 1. Shrinking natural resources resulting from climate in-action and the threat of losing a million species of life in the form of animals, birds, insects, pollinators, trees and other plants as referenced in The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report of April 2019, (REF) tell us that it can never revert to 'business as usual' after the coronavirus.

To this end we have re-ordered the SDGs and added one more.

This is the link to **Just Forests on-line Submission on the Consultation for Ireland's Voluntary National Review 2023** http://rememberrio.com/?page_id=553

Justice Desk of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles

As a religious congregations, concern for justice, peace and care for our environment are central to the mission of the Irish Province of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles. We support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the realization of human rights and care for our environment, especially in relation to the most marginalized in our society.

The OLA Justice Desk collaborated with other faith-based groups in 2022 to make a joint submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.[333] This follows an earlier submission to the Human Rights Council, as part of the Universal Periodic Review of Ireland, in 2021.[334] In both submissions, we drew attention to the problem of human trafficking. We identified multiple concerns regarding human trafficking which are contrary to the attainment of **SDGs 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2**.

Between 2018 and 2021, 169 trafficking investigations were reported by Government. Despite the identification of more than 500 victims of trafficking since 2013, only two human traffickers have been convicted under the amended anti-trafficking law. A failure to identify trafficking victims is of particular concern; no children were identified as victims of trafficking in 2021 or 2020, compared with 9 in 2019 and 5 in 2018. Furthermore, The Second National Action Plan outlined an intention to establish a specific identification mechanism which takes into account the special circumstances and needs of child victims of trafficking. However, such a mechanism has not been delivered. Finally, Ireland has failed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Given that it has been 22 years since it was signed, it is concerning that the State is still ill-equipped to ratify the protocol.[335]

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333   Read our joint-submission to the UNCRC: https://www.olaireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Input-to-the-State-Report-of-Ireland-Joint-Submission-OLA-PBVM-SMA-CFC-FPM-CMC-IPA-15-August-2022.pdf

334   Read our joint-submission to the UPR: https://www.olaireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UPR-Submission-on-Human-Trafficking-Domestic-Gender-Based-Violence-and-Rights-of-Refugees-Asylum-Seekers-ERI-IPA-OLA-18-03-2021.pdf

335   Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, Trafficking in Persons Report, (2022), p. 298-299, (2021), p. 303, (2020), p. 270, and (2019), pp. 251-252

Recognizing that victims of trafficking are among the most marginalised in society, we invite the SDG Unit to incorporate a commitment to address these concerns in the VNR for 2023 in order to "Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind." We make the following recommendations:

1. The State should update and adopt a Third National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Ireland, with a clear timeline for implementation, responsible ministries, and a budget and resources for implementation.

2. The State should promptly improve the identification of, and assistance to, child victims of human trafficking by ensuring all social workers within Tusla receive adequate training and support in this area.

3. Ireland should establish a specific child-centred referral mechanism which takes into account the special circumstances and needs of child victims of trafficking.

4. Clear criteria, and associated training, should be provided to all groups engaged in victim identification. Training should be appropriately resourced and mandated for those frontline personnel in positions likely to encounter trafficking.

5. Ireland should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography without delay.

Given the integrated nature of the SDGs and human rights, we regard the vindication of human rights essential to the comprehensive achievement of the SDGs. As such, in line with the principle of "Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind," we believe it is important that recommendations arising from UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies inform the implementation of the SDGs in Ireland. We recommend that the 2023 concluding observations of the review of Ireland by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the recommendations arising from the 2022 Universal Periodic Review of Ireland be incorporated into the Voluntary National Review.

We note that during the UNCRC dialogue in Geneva in January of this year, criticism was levelled against the Government's lack of disaggregated data about human rights issues affecting children. Indeed, this is especially the case when responding the needs of hidden populations such as victims of trafficking. This gap in data needs to be rectified so that steps can be taken to allow the proper attainment of the SDGs.

We hope that, when published, the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to raise awareness of the SDGs and to encourage a greater cross-party commitment and political-will to full SDG implementation. Additionally, as an administrative measure to integrate the SDG framework into policy-making across all government departments, we recommend that departmental objectives and actions be individually linked to the relevant SDGs in all policy and planning documents, especially budgetary documents.

LendRB

We are a sustainability first startup that is looking to bring the circular economy to all households in Ireland. We have completed New Frontiers phase 1 and 2 and have received support from our LEO and Enterprise Ireland (EI). We are based in statistically one of the most disadvantaged areas in Ireland - Longford. Based on our experience so far over almost 2 years, I think it's important we highlight our views on progress being made in the areas concerning us, and the findings we have made.

We have found that over the years 2018 to 2022, Enterprise Ireland startup funding (The Competitive Start Scheme) has:

1. 80% of funding went to companies not in the sustainability space.

2. No funding has been given to Longford or Cavan companies in the last 5 years.

3. The Combined population of Longford, Cavan, Roscommon, Westmeath and Leitrim (the midlands) is 6.4% of Ireland's population, however we have just received 2.1% of awards.

4. The population of Dublin is 28.3% yet has received 44% of funding.

As you can clearly see Enterprise Ireland are not doing their part when it comes to sustainability or ensuring balanced regional development. Indeed what is happening is just perpetuating sdg no. 8 Decent work and Economic Growth, no. 10 reduced inequalities and a number of other goals, and perpetuating inequalities within Ireland. We have brought this up with EI who say that this is not an issue. We feel that it is a very serious issue.

EI needs to start implementing sustainability checks immediately on all companies that seek funding, and must make urgent and concrete moves to ensure that there is more funding for Startups in the sustainability space. This should be checked on all future PSSF applications, as EI does when it comes to their Women in Leadership strategy.

EI must ensure they are investing equitably across all of Ireland, and there must be immediate safeguards put in place to ensure this happens. The fact that the midlands receives c. 3 times less funding than our population suggests, and Dublin receives c. 2 times more funding than their population is disgraceful, and does nothing but maintains ingrained, entrenched and historical discrimination in certain areas in Ireland. This is just ensuring more and more stress on Dublins already depleted resources as EI are ensuring that jobs will be created in Dublin and not in regional, rural areas. That EI does not think there is an issue is also incredibly concerning as its just destined to keep repeating itself.

Please let us know if you would like any further information. I have copied members who can advise on their strategy if they wish. We think it's important that nobody is left behind, and all government agencies work together to help combat the climate emergency - we noticed the government has failed to produce its long term strategy on sustainability so this is something that needs to be addressed across government and there is no time for inaction.

Midlands Science

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

All of the work of Midlands Science is focussed on bringing STEM into everyday life and situations and its commitment to sharing how SDGs are linked to its work shares the same focus. Midlands Science is keen to demonstrate that everyone in society, individuals and groups, large and small can make a contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to showcase how STEM skills and education can make a strong contribution the SDGs. The work of the organisation is linked SDG 4 ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning and opportunities. Specially within this SDG 4.4, 4.5 and 4.7. This means focusing on increasing the number of people with relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. This is particularly important in the midlands region as the region is currently undergoing huge socio-economic changes driven by necessary decarbonisation measures. This work also means eliminating discrimination in education by ensuring equal access to the opportunities we provide and this includes people with disabilities, people of different ethnic backgrounds and those in vulnerable situations. This is undertaken through co-created programming and targeting of particular communities of interest. It also means linking the outreach work undertaken with engaged citizenship as STEM outreach isn't just about education and skills but about building the capacity of all people to engage with the decisions we take throughout life, which demand a certain level of scientific literacy and ability to discern evidence. This is necessary as we all now make decisions as citizens, consumers etc which are vital in our world – climate change, vaccines and biodiversity for example.

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

Ireland has adopted a whole-of-government approach to SDG implementation, with overall political oversight provided through the Cabinet and this is working well, as awareness of the SDGs has increased outside of the community/voluntary sector to business, arts and others.. The Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications has responsibility for promoting the SDGs, and for overseeing their coherent implementation across Government and would suggest his profile for this isn't as strong as it could be and perhaps responsibility could like with Taoiseach's Department.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

More awareness raising in communities of the importance of the SDGs to everyone's quality of life and equality of opportunity.

What is Ireland doing well?

Creating awareness among different sectors and general awareness of SDGs in a variety of groups that may not have engaged previously.

What could Ireland improve on?

Wider engagement of more disadvantaged groups and communities who may see SDGs as not relevant to their lives and experiences – co-create content and awareness raising activities with them, as opposed to for them. Involve more disadvantaged communities in designing SDG awareness raising and project activities.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Citizen Assemblies have provided valuable models of participative democracy and could such an approach, more voices being heard in a real way, using a co-creation approach be used to address how communities can take part in projects relating to SDGs. It feels like a very pivotal time in Ireland and social solidarity is being tested by the housing crisis and the rise of far right protests – the only way through these challenges is through open honest dialogue and communication to develop real community solutions. Building back better would mean listening to communities and addressing issues of concern that undermine social solidarity and therefore leave no one behind.

National Adult Literary Agency

Ireland's progress towards SDG goal 4 on education

NALA welcomes the publication in 2021 of the <u>10-year Adult Literacy for Life Strategy</u> that proposes a "cross-government, cross society and cross-economy approach" to achieve its aim to "ensure that everyone has the necessary literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to fully participate in society and realise their potential". We also welcome the beginning of implementation of the strategy with the setting up of a programme office in late 2021 and the appointment of 16 regional coordinators.

We would like to see quicker progress now on setting real and ambitious goals and agreeing plans to provide greater opportunities for adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to access quality and flexible literacy learning options.

Ideas on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

In line with the <u>Adult Literacy for Life strategy</u>, we must target identified groups who are the furthest behind (page 59 lists 12 groups of people). To support these and leave no one behind, the state needs to:

1	Have involvement from all relevant government departments to addressing adult literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs. These government departments must agree inter-related policies and action plans to work collaboratively towards the same goals. For example, there needs to be an inter-departmental discussion and agreement between Department of Social Protection and other relevant Departments on supporting the literacy needs of adults experiencing long-term unemployment.
2	Offer tailored and holistic supports for adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs and or less than a QQI Level 4 qualification (Leaving certificate or equivalent). This should include: • career guidance, counselling and mentoring where needed; • intensive and flexible options (face-to-face, blended, distance and online); • peer-to-peer learning programmes and support; • appropriate supports as required (a basic income, paid learning leave from work, transport, child and elder care); • work placement where appropriate; and • progression opportunities.
3	Provide financial support to ensure a basic income for any adult experiencing unemployment or on a social protection payment to return to education for QQI levels 1, 2 or 3. Other supports such as full-time childcare or elder care and transport costs should also be available.
4	Ensure government departments deliver a literacy friendly service that takes account of and supports adults with unmet literacy, numeracy and digital literacy needs to access public services. Building on good practice to date, there is a need for a centrally-led programme of education and training on literacy awareness and plain language in government departments dealing with the public and the wider public sector. Government Departments should: • Have designated staff attend literacy awareness and plain language training. • Ensure "All public service communication should be in plain language" in line with current Programme for Government Commitment, June 2020 and the 10-year Adult Literacy for Life Strategy, which states: "The Cross-Government Implementation Group should ensure that each of its constituent members has a clear plan in place to ensure communication in plain language, with a nominated person responsible for coordinating action to deliver on this."

National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) welcomes the opportunity to submit a stakeholder input to the Department of the Environment, Climate, and Communications (DECC) for consideration in Ireland's 2023 VNR on the SDGs.

NYCI has been actively promoting and applying the SDGs since before their 2015 agreement. Our policy and practice have enabled the publication of educational resources, an online SDG Map, and the delivery of SDG trainings, consultations, and events. We continue to influence policymaking at Irish, European, and Global levels through our programmatic work, with our aim being to raise awareness and inspire action on the SDGs among our more than 50 member organisations and the almost 400,000 young people that they work with. Ahead of the September 2023 SDG Summit, NYCI is actively engaging in international stakeholder forums on goals which specifically impact young people, although not exclusively, with our position being that all 17 goals, their targets, and indicators, are relevant to young people.

NYCI supports Ireland's implementation of the SDGs by collaborating with various government departments. We welcome Ireland's global standing in relation to the SDGs since and in their creation, and we remain willing and available to engage further in any capacity required. As highlighted in the recent Sustainable Progress Index, we note that Ireland faces only minor challenges to achievement of nine SDGs. We hope that these challenges can be overcome in the short-term to record an achievement of ten SDGs, in order to put greater emphasis on addressing the three SDGs with major challenges (SDG 6 – Clean Water & Sanitation, SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, and SDG14 – Life Below Water), and the four SDGs with significant challenges (SDG2 – Zero Hunger, SDG12 – Responsible Consumption & Production, SDG13 Climate Action, and SDG17 Partnerships).

NYCI calls for the following improvements to be made regarding Ireland's SDG implementation: increased communication, transparency on reporting and target achievements, and greater meaningful engagement with young people. Communication strategies must adopt a whole of society approach, ensuring that all members of the public are made aware of the SDGs and the impact that they have on lives locally, nationally, and globally. Capacity building should follow this information dissemination, to empower action and commitment to achievement through personal values, professional work, and formal and non-formal education. In implementing this approach, the public will be able to better engage with government consultations on solutions. Transparency on reporting and target achievement is essential for public understanding and maintaining the social contract. It is appreciated in this regard that Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan on the SDGs honestly addressed where we stand on their achievement. More inclusive material, in terms of language and access, should be made available. Lastly, in order to advance SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), engagement with young people needs to become more meaningful. This was a key theme that emerged from the recent youth consultation held by Ireland's UN Youth Delegates for preparation in writing their youth chapter for the VNR. Young people are a key demographic of global society, equipped with the lived experience and knowledge required to innovate on the issues the SDGs seek to address. Political will to engage with and listen to young people needs to change, to fuel global citizenship, increase trust in the government, and ensure that they don't feel left behind by leaders which many of them are unable to elect.

Drawing again from the recent youth consultation and national stakeholder forum, we suggest that Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind by focusing on SDG3 (Good Health & Wellbeing) and SDG1 (No poverty) specifically. The pandemic highlighted the power of community and the possibilities that we could achieve together. However, as we continue to emerge from this crisis, young people are faced with great difficulty in accessing essential mental health and other healthcare services. Barriers include the affordability, availability, and location of services provided. Young people living rurally, and those living in socio-economically disadvantaged areas are especially vulnerable and would benefit most from improved service provision. Secondly, the rising cost of living is persistently impacting the youth work sector. Prior to the 2022 Budget, NYCI presented a petition to the government signed by over 3,000 people calling for increased investment. Youth work changes lives, but with 73% of our member organisations reporting increased deprivation in their communities as a direct result of the living costs, fundamental challenges remain in terms of electricity, housing, and food. Increasing governmental financial support for youth work organisations would enable underserved communities to benefit from their life-changing and life-saving services. To ensure achievement of the SDGs, NYCI re-issues its call for increased investment in global youth work and global citizenship education, particularly supporting the youth sector nationally and globally.

Natural Capital Ireland

NCI is a not-for-profit organisation leading the national conversation on natural capital (view our website here). We are a group of organisations and individuals from academia and the public, private and NGO sectors. We are committed to the development and application of the natural capital approach to policy and decision making. This approach reveals the full range of values the natural environment provides for our society.

Natural capital is an economic metaphor for nature; a concept that frames the world's resources like plants, animals, water, and minerals as assets or stocks that yield a flow of benefits to people. Natural capital encompasses our biodiversity, the habitats and ecosystems it inhabits and creates, and the wider landscapes and seascapes which it influences and regulates. As such, the natural capital approach is deeply concerned with the conservation and sustainable use of our biodiversity and natural resources. The Natural Capital Approach involves measuring and valuing natural capital assets and requires consideration of evidence across a very broad range of scientific disciplines. This approach helps to reveal the often hidden social and economic costs of environmental damage and the benefits related to the conservation and wise use of natural assets, and thereby provides critical information for a wide spectrum of national and local policies across all sectors in Ireland (See Appendix 1 for definitions relating to natural capital).

NCI believes that it is important for national policy to explicitly recognise that all SDGs are interlinked. Successes in one area of sustainability provide supports for others, with substantial economic, cultural, social and environmental benefits obtainable through careful and co-ordinated actions across the SDGs. Conversely, failure to ensure coordination - and effective cross-sector, whole-of-government partnerships – for the SDGs will result in missed opportunities, wasted resources and limited success. We are not saying that a natural capital approach inevitably reveals win-win solutions across the goals. But we do argue that this approach reveals precisely where trade-offs may be necessary, and better informs these tough decisions.

Whilst two of the SDGs deal explicitly with biodiversity (SDG 14, Life Below Water, and SDG 15, Life On Land), research has shown that biodiversity underpins several other of the global goals and contributes substantially to all 17 SDGs (see Image 1 below). A large and growing body of research shows that biodiversity-focused SDGs can act as multipliers for co-benefits across all goals. Similarly, incorporating natural capital approaches into the other SDGs is essential to ensuring that the biodiversity-focused SDGs – and all related biodiversity policy and action plans – are achieved. Whilst trade-offs often come into play and must be examined in an open and participatory fashion, grounding such considerations in a natural capital approach, where the essential role of natural capital (biodiversity, ecosystems, and the benefits they provide) in supporting human well-being is placed at the fore, can minimise conflicts and maximise success. NCI again strongly advocates that this relationship between nature and all four pillars of sustainability (economic, cultural, social and environmental) be explicitly recognised and incorporated within Irish SDG policy.
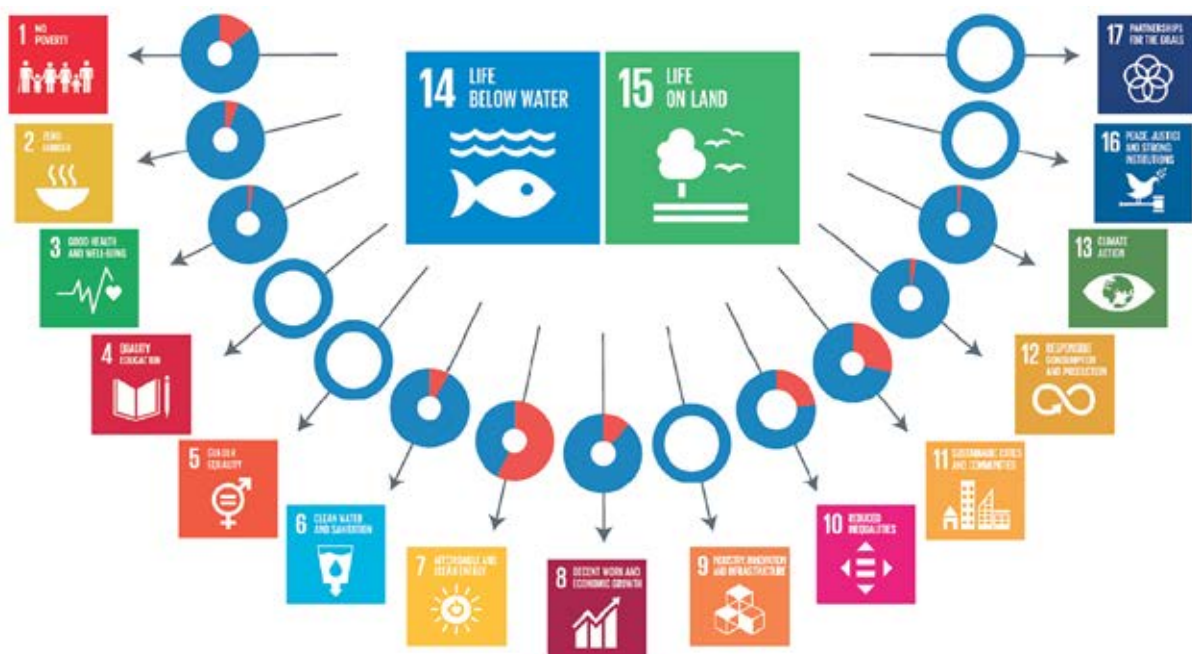
Image 1: The contribution of biodiversity-focused SDGs to other SDGs. From Obrecht et al., 2021.

(Obrecht A, Pham-Truffert M, Spehn E et al (2021) Achieving the SDGs with Biodiversity. Swiss Academies Factsheet 16 (1))

Ireland will be one of 41 countries presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the high-level political forum (HLPF) in 2023. We set out our response below and hope that our input will highlight the importance of the natural capital approach in delivering on Ireland's SDG commitments:

What is your organisation doing to support achievement of the SDGs?

NCI's mission is to help build an Ireland in which natural capital and ecosystem services are valued, protected and restored. We do this by supporting the adoption of natural capital concepts in public policy and corporate strategy, promoting informed public and private sector

decision-making and assisting in the establishment of a national natural capital accounting standard as required by the EU.

Our natural capital (= our biodiversity and ecosystem services) provides a wide range of resource values essential to the realisation of all 17 SDGs, however, this relationship is frequently unrecognised. We are ultimately entirely dependent on healthy biodiverse ecosystems (our natural capital) for functional societies and economies, and for our very survival (see Image 2 below).

Image 2. Image from video on Natural Capital on Farmland (produced by Natural Capital Ireland)

Natural capital approaches, and natural capital accounting specifically, present a means to support policy and decision-making with a much wider range of analysis/data than that offered by conventional approaches, because it builds in the fullest possible range of environmental – and cultural – costs, benefits and risks in the assessment of any policy. It is also valuable because it can be used continuously to monitor the full cost-benefit performance of any policy into the future.

NCI contributes to achieving the SDGs in particular relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services (SDG 14 Life Below Water and SDG 15 Life on Land), but as mentioned already, biodiversity-focused SDGs can act as multipliers for co-benefits across all 17 goals. We outline below some of the work NCI is currently involved in that supports the achievement of the SDGs using natural capital concepts:

- NCI produces accessible resources, seminars, webinars, lectures and meetings to raise awareness about natural capital approaches and natural capital accounting. NCI also participates in original research and contributes to draft policy.

- In order to protect, restore and enhance our natural capital, we must first understand the extent and condition of existing natural assets. In other words, we must establish a baseline upon which targets for improvement can be set. NCI is a partner on the pioneering EPA-funded INCASE project, which is the first project to apply Natural Capital Accounting principles to river catchments in Ireland using the UN SEEA-EA. This is an integrated and comprehensive statistical framework for organising data about habitats and landscapes, measuring ecosystem services, tracking change in ecosystem assets and linking this information to economic and other human activity. The UN Statistical Commission adopted the SEEA-EA in March 2021 and today Ecosystem Accounts have already been used to inform policy development in more than 34 countries.

- Natural capital accounting reports across four main sets of ecosystem accounts – extent, condition, services and benefits - and presents a standardised platform to collate information and regularly report on progress in relation to climate actions, biodiversity conservation and restoration, protection of waterbodies, and general good environmental practices (as identified in cross-sectoral areas such as agriculture, energy, environment, forestry, nature, marine, planning and water supply/use policies). The INCASE report, due to be published in 2023, will recommend support for better understanding of biodiversity to inform creation of accounts, and focused research on ecosystem service assessment. Overall, there is a need to develop an aligned approach to data generation and management to fill the gaps and discrepancies that currently hamper integrated decision-making. There is a range of articles, blogs and supporting videos available from the INCASE website.

- The INCASE project pilot can be built upon to develop a national strategy for the management and enhancement of Ireland's natural capital. This would closely align with current government initiatives such as the National Land Use Review, the development of a National Soil Strategy, revision of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, and expansion of Ireland's Marine Protected Areas network; and Department priorities such as sustainable, balanced development and sustainable management of water resources from source to sea under the EU Water Framework Directive.

- NCI was involved in drafting Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2027 (NBAP) which is due to be finalised in 2023 and NCI advocates that the natural capital approach and natural capital accounting should inform the Plan, in line with EU-wide adoption of the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), and the EU Regulation on Environmental Economic Accounts. As part of natural capital accounting, Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EA), adopted by the EU Statistical Commission in March 2021, aims to reorient policies to deliver sustainable development and improved human well-being by measuring and valuing the extent, condition and services of Irish ecosystems as part of the System of National Accounts under the Central Statistics Office's Irish ecosystem accounting. The draft NBAP also includes an action that by 2023, relevant departments (DOE, DHERIS and DHLGH) will work together to align the aims of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to 2030 and the 4th NBAP and to develop and progress mutual actions (Action 3A11).

- NCI is currently involved in a project (ForES) that will use natural capital accounting approaches to co-develop tools for sustainable forestry management decision-making. This project will build on the learnings of the INCASE project outlined above.

- NCI is also working with the Business for Biodiversity Platform Ireland (BFBI) which is driving the transition of a nature positive Irish economy, where activities enhance natural systems in addition to minimising impact, by harnessing the energy and innovation capacity of Irish businesses.

What are your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

- The importance of the conservation and wise use of biodiversity and the benefits provided by healthy ecosystems to sustainability has long been understood and recognised by the scientific community and in the context of international sustainable development policy. However, to date this reality has not been sufficiently reflected in national policy. NCI responded to the public consultation on the Draft Second National Implementation Plan for SDGs 2022-2024 in June 2022 and was disappointed that the relationship between nature and all four pillars of sustainability (economic, cultural, social and environmental) was not explicitly recognised in the recently published final document Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024.

- NCI does not believe that Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the SDGs 2022-2024 reflects the seriousness of the biodiversity crisis, nor does it explicitly recognise the necessity of healthy biodiversity ecosystems, and the services they provide, for mitigation against the negative impacts of climate change. The recent World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report (WEF, 2023) considers biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as one of the fastest accelerating global risks over the next decade and is ranked in the top 4 risks over the next 10 years.

- All six environmental risks are ranked in the top 10 risks over the next 10 years (Failure to mitigate climate change; Failure of climate change adaptation; Natural disasters and extreme weather events, Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse; Natural resource crises; Large-scale environmental damage incidents). Each of these risks are inter-related risks that compound each other. These risks are a direct threat to our natural capital, and also stem largely from our failure to conserve and restore it.

- Ireland's VNR (2018) was based on data provided to the National Sustainable Development Unit by the CSO using the EU SDG indicator set. Performance for numerous SDGs was mixed with specific challenges relating to areas such as housing, sustainable consumption and production, biodiversity and habitat destruction, mitigating and adapting to climate change, being highlighted. Ireland's Total Official Assistance for Biodiversity in 2020 (relating to SDG 15a.1) was $47.4m (Source: UN Statistics Division). Ireland is still lagging in many of its conservation commitments under directives such as the EU Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive, and Birds Directive. NCI believes that there continues to be insufficient funding from the Irish Government to address the biodiversity crisis, which is a key tool in delivering Ireland's SDG commitments. This failure to fund biodiversity is rooted in a deeper failure, to recognise the need for a whole-of-government integrated approach to this

crisis. Natural capital accounting is, we believe, the ideal tool to achieve this integrated approach.

- With regard to SDG 14 (Life Under Water), the creation – and effective management – of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is vital for the protection, restoration and augmentation of marine and aquatic natural capital. One of the pioneers of the natural capital approach, Herman Daly, pointed out a paradox: that by over-subsidising built capital in this area – onshore processing facilities, bigger fishing vessels – we are depleting the natural capital – fish stocks – that we depend on for much of our food. The solution is to create zones where this natural capital can flourish, and soon spread into areas where fishing is permitted. This management of natural capital creates a truly sustainable solution to the problem of overfishing. NCI welcomes the publication of the General Scheme of Ireland's new Marine Protected Area (MPA) legislation in December 2022 and the recent Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage scrutinising this MPA legislation - this being the first step in bringing this legislation into law. This legislation will enable the Government to fulfil its commitments of achieving the designation of 30% of Ireland's seas as MPAs by 2030.

What is Ireland doing well and how could it improve?

- The recently published Second SDG implementation Plan 2022-2024 provides a good framework and the cross-departmental and cross-functional emphasis is welcomed.

- In relation to the SDG Implementation Plan, in terms of Local Authorities, a key action is auditing and mapping of plans and policies against the 17 SDGs, as undertaken by Dublin City Council. This would help identify not just 'how the SDGs have been incorporated and highlight examples of best practice' (Measure 29a), but also the gaps that need to be addressed in the short-to-longer term.

- The commitment to 'leaving no one behind' is also very good to see. Many of the SDGs will be impacted by climate change over coming decades as this will be a key driver of change. There are many analysis reports available from the World Health Organisation and the United Nations. Looking to the future, SDGs will be even more interrelated with knock-on impacts, e.g. climate change will change the availability and cost of food, amount and distribution of water; rising temperatures will mean the transmission of new diseases, etc. Protecting and enhancing natural capital is a key priority with multiple social and environmental benefits in strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts.

- The SDG National Stakeholder Forum: 'Leaving No One Behind' held in January 2023 provided an opportunity to meet in person to discuss and develop a shared understanding of what Leaving No One Behind means in an Irish context. Outputs from this forum will inform the preparation of Ireland's second VNR which will be presented to the UN in July 2023.

- While stakeholder engagement is seen as essential and there are plans for better representation of stakeholders in the national SDG Stakeholder Forum, there is inadequate detail on how this is to be achieved. Furthermore, there is little detail on

how to improve awareness and engagement with practices that promote sustainability among civil society and communities.

- The SDG Geohive (Ireland's hub for SDGs) is a highly valuable resource. However, it must be kept up-to-date if it is to be a valuable resource for policy and practice. For example, the map of the status of Ireland's rivers is based on 2015 data, rather than updated with the more recent EPA data. This was highlighted in NCI's response to the draft SDG Implementation Plan public consultation in June 2022.

- On page 38 it states that 'While Ireland remains above the EU average for SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 15 Life on Land, it is currently moving away from progressing those SDGs'. Although we may be above the European average, we still have significant biodiversity issues relating to water and land. SDG implementation must aim to progress all SDGs cognisant of their interconnections and the prime importance of the biodiversity and climate crises, as these affect most, if not all of the SDGs.

- Integration within all Programme for Government functional areas is the priority with clear sustainability outcomes. It does need to be resourced but following the SDGs can also save money and it is important to acknowledge that behavioural change is the key to the success of delivering on the objectives of the SDGS. This behavioural change must cross all sectors of society and Government.

Ideas on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind

Natural Capital Accounting can and should be used to inform social justice policy including leaving no one behind. NCA in cities and towns can help us to understand and mitigate against issues such as gentrification and homelessness. Trends that we identify in ecosystem accounts can help us to understand and plan for the educational demands that we can expect as our communities transition from current environmentally destructive and extractive industries to future industries that will support adaptation and mitigation measures as well as an improved bioeconomy that favours sustainable practices.

The past number of years have been challenging in terms of the global pandemic, political unrest, and humanitarian crises. Climate change and biodiversity loss, which are expressions of the critical erosion of our natural capital, pose further challenges to our societies and exacerbate the political and economic challenges we are also facing. Protecting, restoring and ultimately augmenting our natural capital is key to achieving these objectives.

We hope you find that the points above offer opportunities to expand, deepen and co-ordinate policies across the whole range of economic, environmental, social and cultural values, and we would welcome the opportunity to work closely with the Department to deliver on Ireland's Voluntary National Review and future SDG Implementation Plans over the coming years. Please contact us for clarifications, and further information at researchteam@naturalcapitalireland.com.

APPENDIX 1 – Natural capital concepts and definitions

We outline below what the natural capital concept is about and why we consider that viewing our biodiversity and ecosystem services through the lens of natural capital enables

us to understand much better its importance to our lives, health and economies. We include a definition of biodiversity, ecosystem and ecosystem services, as these are central to understanding our natural capital.

What is natural capital and the natural capital approach? What is natural capital?	What is the natural capital approach?	What is natural capital accounting?
It is an economic metaphor for nature. A way of framing the world's ecosystems including biodiversity, water and minerals as stocks of assets that yield flows of benefits to biodiversity and people. Biodiversity is one element of our natural capital, the other being ecosystem services.	This approach involves measuring our natural capital to reveal how it is delivering important benefits to society and the economy. The concept of natural capital provides a way to understand the value nature provides and our dependence on it, and enables the public and policy makers to avoid unintended losses.	This is a system for organising information about natural capital stocks and ecosystem service flows. Natural Capital Accounts (NCA) detail the extent and condition of natural capital stocks (including biodiversity) and the flow of services and benefits, and enable tracking of each over time. NCAs can be linked to national accounts, making visible the previously hidden value of nature and its impact on the costs and benefits of policies in every area.
Biodiversity	**Ecosystem**	**Ecosystem services**
Biodiversity refers to the variety of all life forms on earth, including humans. In most cases, the more biodiverse ecosystems have higher rates of ecological functioning, and more resilience to environmental change.	An ecosystem is a biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment, e.g. woodlands, peatlands, dune systems, oceans, rivers, hedgerows, soils, etc. Healthy ecosystems are vital to our survival, well-being and prosperity.	Ecosystem services are the result of processes that ecosystems perform, resulting in benefits such as air purification, which make human life both possible and more enjoyable.

New Directions

New Directions is a new initiative which aims to offer a free, confidential information and support service for families affected by imprisonment. It offers a listening ear and emotional support to help families with the challenges they face.

New Directions was set up in 2018 by Sr Imelda Wickham PBVM, a former Prison Chaplain. During her time as Chaplain Imelda witnessed first-hand the challenges and distress faced by families affected by imprisonment. It is an issue Prison Chaplains have raised continually in their annual reports:

"For every individual incarcerated, there is a circle of people directly affected by their imprisonment. Children grow up with one person absent from their lives. Mothers are often left to rear these children with constant financial struggles."

We collaborated with other religious congregations making an input to the State Report of Ireland in advance of the Review of Ireland by the Committee for the Rights of the Child with respect to Ireland's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) where we specifically referenced children of people in prison as being among those furthest behind in Ireland. We attended this UNCRC review in the Palais Wilson, Geneva[336], where we met Minister Roderic O' Gorman and we asked that he would forward the concluding outcomes of this important review for consideration by those charged with preparing the Irish State VNR.

In our public commitment to the implementation of the SDGs within a human rights based framework it is imperative that the conclusions of Ireland's review / involvement in recent UN Human Rights Mechanisms[337] must be taken into account by the authors of our upcoming 2nd VNR, and this is in line with our IPA commitments.

A criticism levelled at the Minister (many times) at the recent UNCRC was that the lack of quality disaggregated data mitigates against the identification of those children furthest behind and therefore means that we are only therefore paying lip service to commitment to reach the furthest behind first. There is very little data on the numbers of children with family members in prison and then there is the added issue of the well-publicised inability of the regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to fully cater to the mental health needs of those furthest behind relevant as an important service to children of people in prison. We would hope that the State VNR would ask for a greater degree of usable, disaggregated that would support the targets and indicators of all SDGs.

We would hope that when published the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to raise awareness of the SDGs. We also feel that the SDG Unit is a hardworking unit that might be better suited to the Department of An Taoiseach offering a greater prominence to the SDG agenda given that any efforts to achieve full SDG implementation will necessitate a much greater government engagement that will be matched with the necessary commensurate financing. Given our International Development interest, we commend the Irish Government on their ongoing commitment to peacebuilding with the longest unbroken peacekeeping record in the world as well as their commitment to refugees fleeing conflict we would however ask that Ireland reach our agreed Overseas Development Aid target of 0.7% of GNI well before 2030. At the most recent National Stakeholder forum we heard the voices of those who might be considered furthest behind and this should be reflected in the VNR in both the written report and at the UN when it is presented at the forthcoming HLPF 23. ATD Ireland have alerted the SDG Unit to their willingness to help in preparing a delegate to attend the UN which a lived experience of being left behind. We would support their work.

We would hope that Ireland can lead the call for more robust, honest and transparent reporting in the VNR process by leading by example. In the same manner we hope that the Irish Government would champion Civil Society Organisations and campaign for a greater degree of safe civil society space at home and abroad.

In our commitment to our mother earth we would also ask that perhaps 2023 is a good time to review the SDGs, (the half way point), with some focus on decoupling 'SDG #8 Decent Work and Economic Growth' understanding that consistent economic growth is often at the expense of our environment.

336   January 24th & 25th 2023
337   Both the UNCRC and the UPR outcome statements.

At the 77th UNGA in next September, Ireland and Qatar will co-facilitate and lead the consultations on the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit, this is a real opportunity for Ireland to drive home the SDGs as the only fully agreed agenda for the whole world. It should be also noted that Barry Andrews MEP has responsibility for delivering the EU VR[338] at the forthcoming HLPF and with other respected SDG advocates such as Ambassador David Donohoe, Presidents Mary Robinson, Mary McAleece and Michael D Higgins Ireland must make this VNR count as an example of sincere government commitment to do more, faster to implement the SDGs both at home and abroad.

Northern & Western Regional Assembly

Introduction to the NWRA

The Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) was established in 2015 and is one of three Regional Assemblies in the Republic of Ireland. As part of the regional tier of governance, the NWRA works with key stakeholders at EU, national, regional and local level to accelerate and optimise **effective regional development**.

The NWRA is primarily focused on promoting regional policy through the formulation, adoption, implementation and review of the **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES).** Additionally, the NWRA has a statutory role in the oversight and coordination of Local Authority Development Plans, Local Economic and Community Plans, management of EU Operational Programs, and engages in EU project participation and the implementation of national economic policy.[339]

Application of the sdgs to the work of the NWRA

The primary operational document underpinning the work of the three Regional Assemblies is the RSES which is drawn up for each region.[340] The current RSES adopted for the Northern and Western Region provides a high-level development framework for the period 2020-2032 which complements the implementation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government.[341] Fundamentally, the RSES, is a 12-year Vision document with which to align each strategy, plan and programme of all public bodies in the region to ensure the coordination and delivery of effective regional development.

The 2030 Agenda encourages countries to develop national responses to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and incorporate them into planning and policy. There is inherent synergy and policy alignment between the SDGs and the NPF. As an integral

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338   EU Voluntary Review

339   The NWRA is comprised of representatives from 9 County (and City) Councils: Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Galway (City and County), Mayo, Monaghan, Roscommon and Sligo.

340   The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 (the government's long-term overarching strategy for development which is comprised of the National Development Plan and the National Planning Framework) and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Region. The RSES is required under the Planning and Development Act 2000 to address employment, retail, housing, transport, water services, energy and communications, waste management, education, health, sports and community facilities, environment and heritage, landscape, sustainable development and climate change.

341   The NPF sets the context for the RSES through 10 National Strategic Outcomes (NSO's): 1) Compact Growth, 2) Enhance Regional Accessibility, 3) Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities, 4) High-quality International Connectivity, 5) Sustainable Mobility, 6) A Strong Economy, Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, 7) Enhanced Amenities and Heritage, 8) Transition to Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society, 9) Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and Other Environmental Resources, 10) Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services.

instrument of the NPF and due to its broad, overarching role the **RSES is to be regarded as the touch stone through which to deliver coordinated, transformational change and, therefore, has a role to play in promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at regional level.** The importance of the SDGs in providing a policy context and setting the scene for policy development, underpinning the RSES is evident in the document.[342]

In fact, as a core planning document, each of the three RSES makes reference to the SDGs as there is significant overlap between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their aim of integrating the three indivisible dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental, and the ten National Strategic Outcomes set out in the NPF, which provides the blueprint for each RSES of the three regions.

Consultation questions set by DECC

3.1.   What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

The NWRA, as mandated through the NPF, developed and published the RSES of the Northern and Western Region; with this statutory framework embracing the overarching principles of the SGDs as a means of delivering sustainable development in the region.

A non-exhaustive list of examples provided below show a snapshot of the parallels that can be drawn between the SDGs and the 5 Growth Ambitions, underpinned by the Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) laid out in the RSES:

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342   Northern & Western Regional Assembly, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2020-2032, (2020) p.4.

Five Growth Ambitions in RSES	UN Sustainable Development Goals
Principles- People and Places: Compact Growth will be pursued to ensure sustainable growth of more compact urban and rural settlements, supported by jobs, houses and services and amenities, rather than continued sprawl and unplanned economic growth.	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING / 16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
1. **Vibrant Ambition:** The NWRA believes that strong economic growth, which creates permanent, sustainable jobs, is best achieved by building a competitive and productive economy. Focusing policies on scale, investing in connectivity and our people whilst aggressively pursuing a low carbon approach to enhance our differentiation.	1 NO POVERTY / 2 ZERO HUNGER / 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING / 4 QUALITY EDUCATION / 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH / 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES / 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
2. **Natural Ambition:** It has been identified that more strategic actions are required to prepare the region for what is to come and highlights the need to create a combined long-term vision for the future of both energy supply and our ability to use renewable energy. To address our energy requirements our RSES emphasises the need for coordination, new thinking, investment and skills to implement change. All considerations need to be cognisant of our natural resources, landscape and heritage (natural, social and cultural).	7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY / 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES / 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION / 13 CLIMATE ACTION / 14 LIFE BELOW WATER / 15 LIFE ON LAND
3. **Connected Ambition:** Accessibility and mobility within the region have a direct effect on the region's economic competitiveness. It also has an effect on the attractiveness of the region as a favourable living and visiting environment. The RSES will support further investment in sustainable transport measures. In addition, to achieve our Vision for the region we need to strengthen our digital network and enable new technologies to work by ensuring that policies and systems are in place that can help people transition to a world much more digitally connected.	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING / 4 QUALITY EDUCATION / 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH / 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES / 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES / 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION / 13 CLIMATE ACTION / 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

4. Inclusive Ambition: One of the strongest foundations and emerging propositions this region has to build on is its 'liveability'. The region aspires to be one of the most liveable places in Europe with a commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth	**1** NO POVERTY **2** ZERO HUNGER **3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING **4** QUALITY EDUCATION **5** GENDER EQUALITY **8** DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH **10** REDUCED INEQUALITIES **16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
5. Infrastructure Ambition: Provision and maintenance of economic infrastructure, such as energy, water, and wastewater, are key to delivering compact growth and a connected, vibrant, inclusive, resilient, and smart region	**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING **6** CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION **7** AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY **11** SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES **12** RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

This brief, comparative exercise demonstrates how the RSES complements the delivery and impact of the SDGs at regional level. However, while the SDGs inform the high-level RSES plans, reflecting an ambition towards the 2030 Agenda, and these are referred to in some local, county development plans, a limited awareness and understanding of the UN SDGs at local level exists.

The NWRA considers, therefore, that a more targeted, localised exercise of promoting and informing stakeholders of the UN SDGs, geared specifically at local bodies and local authorities is needed. Broadly, a coordinated approach to promoting the SDGs would improve an active engagement and practical use of the SDGs, guaranteeing their local relevance. The NWRA, as a public sector body with a regional mandate regards itself as a key ally in this process.

Further initiatives of the NWRA that support the implementation of the SDGs include a monitoring exercise and its role in managing a major investment package which is co-funding by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund:

The **Regional Development Monitor** (RDM),[343] which was developed by the 3 Regional Assemblies, is an online data platform that aims to monitor the implementation of the three RSESs and examine whether sustainable development is being delivered across the three NUTS 2 Regions of Ireland. In total, around 60 socio-economic indicators have been included on the RDM, with the monitor using many of the relevant indicators used to monitor the implementation of the SDGs.

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343   https://rdm.geohive.ie/

For the funding period of 2021 to 2027, the NWRA will be the Managing Authority of the **ERDF Northern and Western Regional Programme**, which will invest just over €217 million in projects which will – amongst other things – support the implementation of SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy, SGD 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, SGD 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SGD 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 13 – Climate Action.

3.2.   What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

This whole-of-government approach to the implementation of the SDGs, which is led by the DECC with each Minister taking responsibilities for those SDGs that are relevant for their mandate, has its merits, but also lacks a regional approach and awareness of regional sensitivities or structures through which to promote the application or understanding of the SGDs.

In practice this means that public bodies working at local level have had little engagement with the SDGs both in terms of understanding these and applying local policy through this lens. Despite being a key objective of the 2022 National Implementation Plan, the framework provided by the 2030 Agenda is yet to be meaningfully embedded into the work of local government.

3.3.   What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

A suite of targeted actions at regional and local level can help increase the awareness and take up of the SDGs locally. These activities could include local information sessions, training and workshops on the use of SDGs which are targeted at local policy- makers, public and civil servants, among others. Furthermore, all national targets and efforts to achieve the SDGs must be underpinned by local level consultations employed through local structures. To this end, local authorities could be encouraged to utilise the representative structures of local Public Participation Networks (PPNs). PPNs are an essential, consultative forum and since the Local Government Reform Act (2014) have become a statutory structure to increase community engagement, to embed Active Citizenship and enable the community voice to be heard. A localised approach to ensure an inclusive and partnership approach to the SDGs, as suggested above, must be reflected in all related implementation plans.

3.4.   What is Ireland doing well?

The high-level, continued commitment to implementing the SDGs, is evidenced through the preparation and launch of the National Implementation Plan for the SDGs in 2022, as well as the engagement generated through the VNR and these efforts are commendable. Similarly, governmental support of the Coalition 2030 and the establishment of an SDG National Stakeholder Forum, which meets regularly, are also positive developments which demonstrate dedicated responses. The efforts would benefit from the integration of a regional and local focus.

3.5.   What could Ireland improve on?

A coordinated action plan to ensure all centralised plans set at national level are also translated and take effect at regional and local level would be beneficial. See 3.3. for details.

3.6. Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind[344]?

Ensuring that no one is left behind as Ireland lays the path for future growth requires responsive policies and planning. An inclusive and community, orientated approach to regional and local development is integral in designing policies that are reflective of local needs. The 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs are an important framework through which to design responsive policies. **To ensure they reach their full potential more efforts need to be invested in ensuring an improved regional and local uptake of the SDGs.**

Pavee Point

Introduction

Pavee Point welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Government's Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As minority ethnic groups, Travellers and Roma are among the most marginalised and excluded individuals in Ireland. They experience stark health inequalities, poor accommodation conditions, poverty, low educational attainment and literacy levels, high levels of unemployment and intersectional forms of discrimination and racism[345].

1.   What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Pavee Point, as a member of Coalition 2030, is committed to supporting Ireland to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Pavee Point works from a community development perspective and promotes the realisation of human rights and equality for Travellers and Roma in Ireland. This focus on human rights extends to all of those included in the SDGs, with a particular focus on poverty, education, and health & wellbeing. An area we are paying increasing attention to is climate action. In 2022, Pavee Point developed its own climate action plan in consultation with Community Work Ireland. This plan contains actions at three levels to tackle environmental degradation from a climate justice perspective; at an organisational level, a community level, and a national level. This plan aims to address the disproportionate impact of climate change, while also building awareness of the relevance of climate action to Traveller and Roma communities.

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344   Leave no one behind (LNOB) is a key, accompanying pledge contained within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It represents the shared commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. LNOB not only entails reaching the poorest of the poor, but requires combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, and their root causes. LNOB stems from the realisation that a major cause of people being left behind are persistent forms of discrimination, including gender discrimination, which leaves individuals, families and whole communities marginalized, and excluded. The current iteration of Ireland VNR is focused on the theme of 'Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind'. For more info on the LNOB framework see: https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB%20 equality%20framework-A4-web-rev3.pdf (accessed 14 Feb 2023).

345   All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010)

2.   What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

There is an urgent need to improve the availability of data on the SDGs progress. The State has previously committed to developing a system of ethnic data collection across state departments and agencies, and Pavee Point welcomes the announcement to develop a National Equality Data Strategy[346]. However, there is currently very little statistically reliable data on the situation of Travellers and Roma in Ireland. The urgency to develop and implement ethnic data collection is particularly pertinent following the COVID-19 pandemic as we seek to understand the impact this has on fulfilling the SDGs, especially for ethnic minority groups.

3.   What could Ireland improve on?

a. No Poverty (Goal 1): The State's application of the European Directive 2004/38 through the Habitual Residence Condition policy has a discriminatory impact on the ability of many Roma to access social protection even after having lived in the country for several years. This excludes many Roma children from receiving Child Benefit, a universal payment for all children in the State. Furthermore, the discrimination that Traveller and Roma communities face impacts on their employment opportunities and their access to quality housing as a result, with a 2021 report finding that 39% of Travellers are effectively homeless[347].

b. Good health & Wellbeing (Goal 3): Pavee Point welcomes the recent publication of the National Traveller Health Action Plan to tackle Traveller health inequalities. However, the State must ensure a whole-of-government approach is taken to implement these actions. As the health status of Traveller and Roma communities cannot improve without adopting a social determinants of health perspective.

c. Quality Education (Goal 4): The development of a National Traveller Education Strategy, a Programme for Government commitment made in 2020, remains an urgent and outstanding priority. The State has indicated that a consultation process for its development will be initiated by the end of this year – however, Pavee Point remains concerned about the potential of this being further postponed.

d. Climate Action (Goal 13): The State must ensure that the voices of ethnic minority communities, including Travellers and Roma, are included in climate actions. Pavee Point is aware of the escalating issue of energy poverty in Ireland, and its disproportionate impact on the Traveller and Roma communities. Energy costs are now +34% higher than December 2016[348]. Fuel poverty is a common issue among Travellers, as the community is dependent on traditional sources of fuel, such as turf or wood, to heat their homes. Other common and inefficient heat sources are gas cylinders and electric heaters. A 2019 report by Traveller MABS revealed that all Traveller clients of the service were in fuel poverty with the average percentage of household disposable income taken up by fuel costs amounting to 21%. This is double the 10% measure for fuel poverty[349]. Broadly, the Government's current policies and structures make it difficult for Travellers and Roma to switch to using low-emission alternatives, whether that is in respect to fuels or transport. For example, Traveller-specific

346   Minister O'Gorman announces the development of a National Equality Data Strategy
347   3 The Traveller Community & Homelessness (2021)
348   Call for New Energy Poverty Strategy
349   Traveller MABs Energy Poverty Report (2019)

accommodation is typically located outside of city centres, near high-speed national roads where there is a lack of public transport links, as well as walking and cycling infrastructure[350]. This significantly reduces or eliminates the opportunities for these communities to choose active travel, which further entrenches their existing health inequalities.

4.   Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

a. Empower Civil Society: Political leadership from the top is vital, however, so is the resourcing and partnership with local actors on the SDGs. Communities need to be true partners in the achievement of the SDGs, particularly ethnic minority communities like Travellers and Roma, who are most affected by the failure to fulfill the goals.

b. Collection of Disaggregated Data: As stated above, this needs to be prioritised across Government departments to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and the outcomes for Travellers and Roma.

c. Mainstream & Targeted Initiatives: These should be developed in consultation with Travellers and Roma to mitigate carbon emissions, facilitate active lifestyle choices, and provide appropriate infrastructure. For example, a targeted initiative could be the introduction of a SEAI retrofitting grant/scheme for Travellers living in trailers to avail of.

Philanthropy Ireland

Philanthropy Ireland acknowledges and welcomes the initiatives of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) unit. We believe that our submission will shed light on the philanthropy sector's significant contribution towards SDGs in Ireland and highlight philanthropy's potential in furthering SDGs and supporting impact to 2030.

What is the philanthropy sector doing to support the achievement of the SDGs?

Ireland has been consistently recognised as the most generous country and it is estimated that there are 159 Irish entities dedicated to philanthropy, or about one per 30,000 Irish citizens. Annual contribution by philanthropic organisations in Ireland, in 2020 was estimated to be €79.4 Million.

Philanthropy has immense potential to be a driver of change in Ireland and its support has made significant strides towards meeting the targets of SDGs. At Philanthropy Ireland, we analysed 1500+ social initiatives in the country that were supported by 24 philanthropic organisations between 2018 and 2021. The results indicated that nearly **1200 initiatives** that received a total grant support of over **€110 Million** contributed towards advancing **14 of the 17 SDGs**.

The below table presents the philanthropic support extended to further the cause of 14 SDGs between 2018 and 2021. More information on the initiatives can be found here: https://philanthropy.ie/pi-map/

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350   Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 | Dublin City Council

SDGs	Funding amount
1. No Poverty: Access to basic human needs of health, education, sanitation	€2,013,229
2. Zero Hunger: Providing food and humanitarian relief, establishing sustainable food production	€371,534
3. Good Health and Wellbeing: Better, more accessible health systems to increase life-expectancy	€35,925,554
4. Quality Education: Inclusive education to enable upward social mobility and end poverty	€34,382,303
5. Gender Equality: Education regardless of gender, advancement of equality laws, fairer representation of women	€2,724,087
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth: Creating jobs for all to improve living standards, providing sustainable economic growth	€5,015,775
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: Generating employment and income through innovation	€40,000
10. Reduced Inequalities: Reducing income and other inequalities, within and between countries	€10,979,016
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities: Making cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable	€2,821,304
12. Responsible Consumption and Production: Reversing current consumption trends and promoting a more sustainable future	€4,919,178
13. Climate Action: Regulating and reducing emissions and promoting renewable energy	€195,244
14. Life Below Water: Conservation, promoting marine diversity and regulating fishing practices	€44,644
15. Life on Land: Reversing man-made deforestation and desertification to sustain all life on earth	€102,287
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Inclusive societies, strong institutions and equal access to justice	€658,515
€100,192,670	

Collaboration: Need of the hour for Ireland's SDG implementation

Public-private partnerships: Public and private funding could be channelled towards social initiatives and innovation that address sustainability challenges in a structured and systemic manner. Collaboration is not just beneficial, but essential. There is a need for collaborative and targeted funding initiatives with impact driven approach to designing sustainability solutions.

Experiences of public and private investment show that collaboration can drive impact, positively addressing some of the most pressing social needs. Successful partnership models have taken many forms: match funding partnerships such as that with Rethink Ireland (who have created a cumulative social fund of €72m since 2016); seed investment such as that made by government in 2000 into Community Foundation Ireland (who in 2022 alone disbursed

over €25m in grants); service agreements, effecting the work of Genio in areas including mental health and homelessness; co-investment such as that with The Atlantic Philanthropies on 19 projects in youth, children, dementia and disability. These are all models of significant collaborative success on issues of significant social challenge and need.

These are also examples of how philanthropy has been a key lever in collaborative efforts between Government, not-for-profits and philanthropic organisations, in addressing social challenges. There is real potential and need to advance such initiatives in support of strategic SDG implementation and achievement.

Pobal

Introduction

Pobal works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies toward achieving social inclusion and development. The role of Pobal today is to provide management and support services to 38 programmes in the areas of Social Inclusion and Employment, and Early Years and Young People. We administer these programmes on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Transport, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice, and a number of EU bodies. Pobal allocated a total of €765 million on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU in 2021.

We work in the areas of social inclusion, early childhood care and education, community development, peace and reconciliation, equality, labour market supports and education and training.

Pobal's activities and priorities are shaped by the context and policies set out by Government. In May 2020, Pobal's Board formally adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and as an organisation, Pobal has worked to deliver on the ambitions of the SDGs, both on a corporate level and through the programmes it delivers.

Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals

Pobal's vision 'to create an equal and inclusive society in partnership with Government and Communities' is in harmony with Principle 2 of Agenda 2030, to Leave No One Behind. Through the programmes it delivers, Pobal supports all of the SDGs across the '5 Ps': People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnership. Pobal-administered community supports and services programmes such as the national social inclusion programme, SICAP; the Community Centres Investment Fund (CCIF); initiatives to support employment and enterprise such as CSP and the Community Climate Action Programme (CCAP) are just a few examples of Pobal's work which responds to several SDGs.

SDG Data capture and reporting

Ireland's SDG implementation is being delivered through the contributions of many organisations to several of the 17 SDGs, but much of that achievement is not recorded or acknowledged formally.

In order to support better capturing of Ireland's progress towards the SDGs and implementation of targets, there is a need to consider the assessment of government programmes' potential contribution to Agenda 2030 as standard. Equally there is a need to develop a consistent approach to the integration of SDG alignment in Pobal's programme specifications, application guidelines, applicant supports/events and appraisal guidelines. All Departments should be encouraged and supported in this regard. Monitoring and reporting templates could be designed to collect this data and opportunities explored for how this data can be meaningfully utilised.

Localisation

There is a still much work to do to translate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into local actions and impacts that contribute to the global achievement of the SDGs. An inclusive and localised approach to the SDGs can bring them to life and lead to greater public engagement with the goals. Pobal is well placed to support efforts under Strategic Objective 2 of the 2nd National Implementation Plan, relating to the integration of the SDGs into Local Authority work to better support the localisation of the SDGs, with potential to integrate initiatives in all Pobal programmes that build SDG knowledge and capacity for localisation amongst local authorities, LCDCs and related stakeholders. Similarly, to bring the SDGs to life, there is a need for greater SDG knowledge and engagement within the community and voluntary sector. Pobal has scope to support that effort through the many programmes it administers which support community and voluntary organisations. For example, Pobal is co-funded by the Justice agencies (the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service) to support the employment of a co-ordinator to implement the Department of Justice's criminal justice sector employment strategy, 'Working to Change'. The Department of Justice have indicated that this is a model that is working well as it allows Pobal to act as an intermediary across public agencies and private partners. We recommend that there is a need for a resource to support public bodies and local government in doing more than simply aligning their objectives to the SDGs and the impact would be greater if a consistent approach could be applied.

Leaving No-one Behind in Planning and Decision-Making Processes

Social inclusion is at the heart of what Pobal does, and Pobal-managed programmes SICAP, the Seniors Alert Scheme and the Dormant Accounts Funded Engagement Project, to name but three, are all key elements of Ireland's Agenda 2030 implementation mechanisms, to realise the commitment to Leave No one Behind. Ireland is doing well through programmes such as these and can do more to 'build back better while leaving no one behind' by ensuring that this commitment is reflected in participatory planning and decision-making processes. An example of the principles and practice that are laid out in the recently launched A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making - Pobal could be helpful in this regard. The development of the Guide was led by Pobal with support Community Work Ireland, Irish Local Development Network and the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Dormant Accounts Fund. It is designed to support inclusive local consultation and engagement processes and focuses on engaging marginalised communities and the organisations that represent them. The guide is a useful contribution to the 2nd SDG National Implementation Plan objective to further incorporate the 'Leave No One Behind' principle into Ireland's Agenda 2030 implementation and reporting mechanisms. Ireland can make best

use of the resource by incorporating the guidance into training and toolkits to make sure that community engagement processes are inclusive, meaningful and effective. It can support their implementation by matching the guidance with the necessary resourcing of participatory processes at local level.

Pobal HP Deprivation Index

Pobal provides an important national service by way of commissioning the Pobal HP Deprivation index. Every five years, following the national census, Pobal commissions the updating of the Pobal HP Deprivation index. This index has become widely regarded as Ireland's primary geographic social gradient tool. This tool enables Government to form policy and allocate funding based on robust empirical data on which areas and communities are in greatest need of state support and intervention. The data is freely available on Pobal's website and is currently used for various purposes such as:

- Resource allocation modelling related to aspects of the Just Transition Fund addressing the diversification and transitioning of local economies towards climate neutrality.

- Analysis and resource targeting within the Health Service Executive

- Designation of DEIS schools by the Department of Education.

- Allocation of funds under LEADER, Social Inclusion & Community Activation programmes and Early Years Capital Grants by Pobal.

- Allocation of funds under the Sports Capital Grant.

Rethink Ireland

What are you/your organisation/your sector doing to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Since 2016, Rethink Ireland has been partnering with the Government, companies, families, individuals and foundations to collectively act to create lasting change by supporting innovative and new ways of thinking. Together we have created Funds worth over €92 million to help these innovations rise to the challenges of our most pressing social and environmental issues. Through these Funds, we provide cash grants and business supports to enable successful social innovations to develop and maximise their impact through our venture philanthropy model. Our experience shows how effective philanthropy can be in achieving the SDGs. To date, we have supported a total of 381 projects and organisations to promote a more inclusive and sustainable Ireland. Our Awardees have reached over 550,000 people and have helped over 1,500 people into employment. You can read more about our Impact in our Impact Report. The below graphic shows the number of our Awardees currently working on the Sustainable Development Goals:
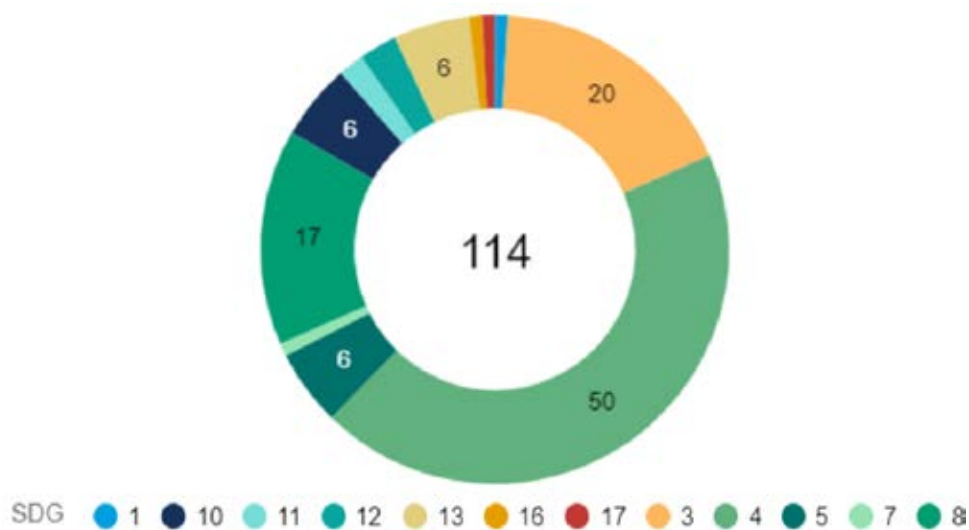
SDG ● 1 ● 10 ● 11 ● 12 ● 13 ● 16 ● 17 ● 3 ● 4 ● 5 ● 7 ● 8

What are your/your organisation's key observations related to Ireland's SDG implementation?

There is a great opportunity for Ireland to improve the SDGs implementation. The best way to strengthen and fast forward progress is to create public and private partnerships to spur social as well as climate innovation in order to scale the best solutions for Ireland. Success in this area depends on engaging all levels of society from local councils and communities to companies and civil society.

What would you/your organisation suggest Ireland do to further increase SDG implementation?

Awareness in the Voluntary Sector: While many third sector organisations progress the SDGs, it appears that they do not use the language of SDGs and do not track their progress against them. Increasing awareness of SDGs across the voluntary sector would help organisations to aggregate their impact and show their collective work under the 17 SDG areas. We encourage a bottom up awareness raising approach that promotes an interactive and informal way of discussing and measuring the SDGs. Furthermore, we recommend that clear guidance be issued for the sector in how they can work towards tailored targets and indicators, similar to those developed for the business sector in Business Reporting on SDGs. The SDGs are largely designed for nation-states and international organisations. When it comes to subnational entities both targets and indicators of the SDGs become less relevant.

Evidence-based policies: The aggregated data mentioned above could support the development and implementation of evidence-based policies. Consistent consultation and two-way communication with NGOs and other organisations that are addressing social issues in the country is key to creating long-lasting change with wide-spread societal buy-in. As discussed in the last SDG National Stakeholder Forum, there is strong support for correlating policies with the goals and making their implementation legally binding to be achieved by 2030 to ensure implementation.

Streamlining Funding to Support SDGs: Firstly, we suggest streamlining all state-funding to integrate SDGs. This would build awareness within the sector and would promote all funded organisations to adopt more sustainable business models. Secondly, we suggest encouraging philanthropy in this sector. Rethink Ireland backs changemakers who are striving to make our island more sustainable, inclusive and just, however, the sector is often overlooked as a key contributor. Progress could be achieved by establishing an SDG Impact Fund. By leveraging public and philanthropic funding, we can showcase and encourage SGD investment, whilst also supporting those projects who are best in class in tracking and measuring SDGs

What is Ireland doing well?

There is support and engagement in the SDGs from government and Business. There is a clear incentive for the business and public sector to invest in a framework that promotes sustainable development and growth for all. We are also encouraged to see that social innovation is recognised as key to stronger alignment with the SDGs.

What could Ireland improve on?

There are still a number of key stakeholders that are yet to fully buy into the SDGs; this includes the voluntary sector. In the research for this submission, we observed many people in the sector who are yet to adopt the language of SDGs and lack the understanding of how their work fits into the framework.

Finally, we recommend the creation of a dedicated SDG Impact Fund, as detailed above, to inject funding into the sort of bottom up social innovation that can support those furthest left behind and put social issues and inclusion at the forefront of these necessary changes that will take place between now and 2030.

Have you any ideas you would like to share on how Ireland can Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind?

Rethink Ireland is strongly aligned with the call to ensure that no one is left behind. While there is an urgent need to shift away from business as usual to address the climate crisis, we must ensure that this is not done at the expense of the most marginalised. Support for bottom-up social innovations that are scalable will enable us to meet these two urgent priorities.

Society of African Missions

As a faith-based organisation, concern for justice, peace and care for our environment are central to our identity and activities. Therefore, we support and advocate for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the equality, human rights and care for the environment that they embody, especially in relation to Africa and peoples of African origin.

Recently the SMA Justice Office collaborated with other religious congregations to make a joint submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child[351] in advance of the Review of Ireland with respect to Ireland's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We identified four concerns regarding children in Direct Provision centres which breach the Convention on the Rights of the Child and are contrary to the attainment of the SDGs:

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351   https://www.olaireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Input-to-the-State-Report-of-Ireland-Joint-Submission-OLA-PBVM-SMACFC-FPM-CMC-IPA-15-August-2022.pdf

1. There remain considerable barriers preventing a small cohort of children in Direct Provision accessing third-level education, including a requirement to pay expensive non-EU fees. This undermines Irish progress on SDG 4.3 and is in breach of article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2. Living conditions in Direct Provision Centres are detrimental for healthy child development. Risk of poverty, deprivation and social exclusion, arising from accommodation in an unfit Direct Provision system, undermine human development, health and wellbeing, contrary to the aims of SDGs 2.1, 3, 10.2.

3. The conditions in Direct Provision undermine family life and parenting in particular, which threatens healthy child development. The institutional and communal nature of the centres disempowers parents in child rearing and prevents children from enjoying basic aspects of ordinary life. This is contrary to the spirit of SDG 3 that seeks to ensure the healthy lives and well-being for all.

4. Direct Provision undermines the integration of children into wider society. The McMahon Report states, "children's development and self-esteem are impacted by a lack of opportunities for normal interaction"[352]. This is contrary to the objectives of SDGs 3, 4 and 10 and a breach of articles 22.1, 15.1 and 27.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We invite the SDG Unit to incorporate a commitment to address these concerns in the VNR for 2023 in order to Build Back Better while Leaving No One Behind – acknowledging that Children in Direct Provision are among the most marginalised in society.

We note that during the Review in Geneva, criticism was levelled against the Irish Government due to the lack of disaggregated data about human rights issues affecting children. In our own submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, we highlighted the fact that data on children currently in the Direct Provision system is "insufficiently detailed and comprehensive to assess accurately the risk of early-school leaving for this cohort of pupils. The absence of disaggregated data in this regard renders pupils living in Direct Provision almost invisible"[353]. This gap in data needs to be rectified so that remedial steps can be taken to allow the proper attainment of the SDGs.

Representatives of our collaborative joint-submission group attended the UNCRC review in Geneva[354]. Whilst there, and upon meeting Minister Roderic O' Gorman, they requested that he would forward the outcomes of the review for consideration by those charged with preparing the Voluntary National Review. This request is echoed here; it is important that recommendations arising from reviews conducted by the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies inform the implementation of the SDGs in Ireland.

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352   McMahon, Working Group to Report to Government on Improvements to the Protection Process, including Direct Provision and Supports to Asylum Seekers (McMahon Report), (2015), p. 191, paragraph 184

353   A Joint Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, par 90 https://www.olaireland.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2022/08/Input-to-the-State-Report-of-Ireland-Joint-Submission-OLA-PBVM-SMA-CFC-FPM-CMC-IPA-15-August-2022.pdf

354   January 24th & 25th 2023

We would hope that, when published, the VNR would be debated in the Dáil to raise awareness of the SDGs and to encourage a greater cross-party commitment and political-will to full SDG implementation. Additionally, as an administrative measure to integrate the SDG framework into policy-making across all government departments, we recommend that departmental objectives and actions be individually linked to the relevant SDGs in all policy and planning documents, especially budgetary documents.

Given the work and experience of the Society of African Missions, we recognise that achievement of the SDGs will be of great benefit to the continent. To assist this process, we request that Ireland reach our agreed Overseas Development Aid target of 0.7% of GNI well before 2030.

Next September, Ireland and Qatar will co-facilitate the consultations on the Political Declaration of the SDG Summit at the 77th United Nations General Assembly. This is an opportunity for Ireland to show leadership in promoting the SDGs. Then in July 2023 Barry Andrews MEP has responsibility for delivering the EU Voluntary Review at the forthcoming UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In order to copper fasten our credibility in advocating for the SDGs at the global level, Ireland must make this VNR count as an example of sincere government commitment to urgently do more to implement the SDGs both at home and abroad.

9.9 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

The following section contains the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's submission to the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on the second VNR of Ireland.

The independent observations of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission are included as a separate chapter in this VNR.

Ireland and the Sustainable Development Goals

Submission to the 2023 UN High-Level Political Forum on the second Voluntary National Review of Ireland

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

May 2023

Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Contents

Abbreviations

CSO	Central Statistics Office
CAP	Climate Action Plan
CCAC	Climate Change Advisory Council
CSDDD	Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive
DPOs	Disabled Persons Organisations
GNI	Gross National Income
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MESL	Minimum Essential Standard of Living
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
ODA	Official Development Assistance
Public Sector Duty	Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VNR	Voluntary National Review

List of recommendations

The Commission makes the following recommendations on the Sustainable Development Goals.

Data collection and disaggregation (SDGs 5, 10 and 17)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Develops the collection, reporting and use of disaggregated equality data in line with UN and EU guidance, and ensures the active participation of rights holders throughout the data planning, collection, dissemination and analysis processes.

- Actions the National Statistic Board's Priorities for Official Statistics 2021-2026.

- Conducts a review of the online SDG Data Hub, and addresses any gaps in the availability of updated and disaggregated data under each indicator through the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy.

Local adaptation and the Public Sector Duty (SDGs 16 and 17)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Ensures that all SDG training developed and provided under the Second National Implementation Plan includes learning and resources on the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and on the relevance of human rights and equality frameworks in informing SDG implementation.

- Actively progresses additional measures to ensure local adaptation of the SDGs, including through the allocation and development of sufficient budgetary resources, leadership and autonomy for Local Authorities.

Poverty (SDG 1, SDG 5)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Strengthens its system of data collection to capture regional, county and electoral-district level data on poverty and its root causes, informed by the direct participation of people living in poverty, including children and disabled people.

- Develops a national data set on food poverty.

- Ensures the proposed child poverty unit has a dedicated budget line, transparent targets and deliverables, and sufficient staff resources, and fully implements the 2023 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Welfare indexation (SDGs 1 and 10)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Adopts Welfare Indexation across social welfare policy development and reform, as a matter of priority, to ensure that welfare supports are indexed to wages.

- Establishes an appropriately funded, independent Indexation Commission - staffed by a relevant mix of experts from public and civil society organisations - to consider, calculate, recommend, and monitor and review indexation measures.

Adequate housing (SDG 11)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Progresses a constitutional referendum on the right to housing to ensure implementation of Target 11.1 of the SDGs.

- Revises the targets contained within *Housing for All* during its upcoming review in 2023 to ensure the Plan reflects updated population and homelessness data and the ongoing housing crisis, and includes necessary sanctions for any continued failure to deliver sufficient social and affordable housing.

- Places greater emphasis on evidence-informed targeted measures, in tandem with once-off measures, to forestall the impact of energy poverty on structurally vulnerable households.

Decent work (SDG 8, SDG 5)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Focuses on improving equality of access to decent work through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by actively engaging with structurally vulnerable groups to identify and dismantle structural barriers and intersectional forms of discrimination.

Living wage (SDGs 1 and 10)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Reconsiders the methodology used for its living wage calculation to ensure that it includes the active participation of rights-holders and is calibrated to existing social norms, evolving requirements and living costs.

- Expedites the timeline for implementing the living wage, and takes active measures to address concerns regarding increased costs to employers.

- Ensures that any exemptions to paying the living wage are strict, limited and exceptional, and take account of international human rights obligations.

Just Transition (SDGs 1 and 8)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Prioritises participation and social dialogue in the context of the Just Transition to address employment vulnerability.

- Prioritises community development in areas affected by climate action and digital transformation, including through pre-emptive workforce planning, supporting alternative and sustainable employment opportunities, and adequate social protection for job losses and displacement.

Collective bargaining (SDG 8)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Takes immediate action to address the ongoing absence of a statutory right to collective bargaining and the imbalance of power in the labour market in Ireland.

Climate action

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Fully assesses the impact of climate change on human rights and equality in Ireland, with a particular focus on structurally vulnerable groups.

- Actively considers and implements the final recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, including through Constitutional reform to expressly protect substantive environmental rights.

- Acts on the best scientific evidence available to mobilise the maximum available resources to prevent all current and foreseeable human rights harms caused by climate change, including by meeting all national, European Union and international targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

- Strengthens Ireland's adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related disasters, including by introducing climate change vulnerability assessments, with a focus on economic and geographic vulnerability, in the adaptation planning process.

International climate action and overseas development (SDGs 12, 13 and 17)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Takes active measures to increase allocation to climate financing and overseas development assistance in line with its requirements under Agenda 2030, taking into account Ireland's financial capacity and emissions record.

Business and climate justice (SDGs 12 and 13)

The Commission recommends that the State:

- Ensures full and expansive implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.

- Takes active measures to progress a successor National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights with time-bound and measurable goals, and a particular focus on human rights due diligence and governance to cover the entire value chain, both upstream and downstream, in line with international obligations.

Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ('the Commission') is both the 'A' status National Human Rights Institution ('NHRI') and the National Equality Body for Ireland, established under the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*. We have a statutory mandate to consult with such national and international bodies or agencies having knowledge or expertise in the field of human rights or equality as we see fit.[1] In our *Strategy Statement 2022-2024*,[2] we have committed to prioritising: Economic Equality; Justice; Respect and Recognition (including through the eradication of racism, ableism, ageism and sexism); Futureproofing; and the Public Sector Duty.

We welcome the State's invitation to the Commission to contribute to Ireland's second Voluntary National Review ('VNR') process,[3] particularly given the high level of convergence between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and human rights frameworks.[4] The 17 Sustainable Development Goals ('SDGs'), corresponding 169 targets and 230 indicators are underpinned by the cross-cutting human rights principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination.[5] Equality, rooted in the pillar 'leave no one behind' and expressly protected in SDG 5 (Gender Equality), is at the core of the 2030 Agenda, and is dependent on combating structural and systemic discrimination, and its root causes, across all sectors of society.

NHRIs occupy a critical space in advancing the 2030 Agenda, enshrined in SDG 16.a.1.[6] NHRI's independence, bridging role between domestic and international systems, and expertise in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of human rights standards

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[1] See Section 10(2)(h) of the 2014 Act. Additional functions include: the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Ireland under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; the independent National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings; and, pending ratification, the role of the Coordinating National Preventive Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

[2] IHREC, Strategy Statement 2022-2024.

[3] For further information on Voluntary National Reviews, see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/.

[4] Research conducted by The Danish Institute for Human Rights indicates that 92% of the SDG targets can be linked directly to international and regional human rights instruments and labour standards. See Danish Institute for Human Rights, Human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2018): p. 9.

[5] See The Mérida Declaration, The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), para 6.

[6] Indicator 16.a.1: Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles.

places them at the heart of the SDG 'web of accountability'. However, given the absence of formal status for NHRIs in SDG structures, Ireland's ongoing leadership is required to ensure that the founding vision of the 2030 Agenda to prioritise constructive dialogue and inclusive consultation with diverse stakeholders is realised.[7] We welcome calls by the Human Rights Council for all relevant UN mechanisms and processes, including the High Level Political Forum ('HLPF'), to enhance NHRI participation in their work.[8] Such reform should ensure full recognition of the formal and functional independence of NHRIs under the UN Paris Principles, and include the adoption of NHRI-specific practices and mechanisms to reflect our distinct role.

Effective awareness-raising and information campaigns around the SDGs are essential to foster partnerships with key stakeholders, as well as non-State actors and the general public.[9] We note that, while Ireland has progressed measures to improve awareness and general engagement with the SDGs,[10] evidence suggests an ongoing lack of understanding at local and community levels of specific goals, targets and indicators, and the complex ways in which they interconnect.[11]

Transparent and inclusive processes for the participation of rights-holders and civil society in SDG structures are also required, and we welcome the State's engagement activities to date, including the SDG Forums. As the Independent Monitoring Mechanism under the UN

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[7] Ireland co-led the 2030 Agenda negotiations alongside Kenya. See also, The Mérida Declaration, The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), para. 5.

[8] Human Rights Council, Resolution 51/31: National human rights institutions A/HRC/RES/51/31 (2022): p. 5.

[9] See for example, Target 12.8: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

[10] As contained within the Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals (2022-2024), measures to date include the SDGs National Stakeholder Fora, the SDGs Champions Programme and the annual national SDGs awareness week in September.

[11] An Irish Aid-supported audit of development education resources in Ireland found that while the SDGs were a common theme across resources published between 2017-2020, coverage of specific/individual SDGs is lacking, with 92% of resources concentrating on 58% of the SDGs, and 8% of resources concentrating on 42% of SDGs. See Development Education, Education, Action, Solidarity, NOW! An Audit of Development Education Resources 2017-2020 (2022): p. 8. Academic research, drawing on data collected during 14 interviews with civil society umbrella organisations, environmental groups, trade unions, and organisations that promote business interests in local communities in Ireland, further found that SDG awareness is generally low in Ireland across different spatial scales (local, regional, national). See also Banerjee, A.; Murphy, E.; Walsh, P.P. Perceptions of Multistakeholder Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Irish Non-State Actors. Sustainability 2020, 12, 8872. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12218872.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we emphasise the importance of direct and sustained engagement with disabled people and Disabled Persons Organisations ('DPOs') within participatory mechanisms at national and international levels.[12] While disabled people are recognised under the 'Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities', states should dedicate additional resources to further enhance the participation of disabled people in the VNR process, including the provision of accessible information and administrative support to DPOs.

Building on the momentum generated by the VNR process and Ireland's leadership role in the upcoming 2023 SDG Summit,[13] it is essential that the State reaffirms its commitment to accelerating action on the SDGs. As recognised by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda has reversed due to multiple interconnected crises and growing inequalities, including the Covid-19 pandemic,[14] economic uncertainty and rising poverty levels, the war in Ukraine, and the climate emergency.[15] These crises have put into sharp relief the need for future-proofing and sustainability at all levels,[16] including economic decision-making, to prevent further regression in rights protections. We note that Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan,[17] does not adequately embed Ireland's human rights and equality obligations or include any express reference to the 2030 Agenda.[18]

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[12] DPOs are defined as: 'those comprising a majority of persons with disabilities – at least half their membership – and governed, led and directed by persons with disabilities': CRPD Committee, Guidelines on the Participation of Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and Civil Society Organizations in the work of the Committee, CRPD/C/11/2 (April 2014), para 3. We note the pre-dominance of disability organisations that do not meet this definition in Ireland, particularly in the service provision sector. See UNCRPD Article 4.3 and CRPD General Comment 7 for more information.

[13] United Nations, SDG Summit 2023. Ambassadors Fergal Mythen (Ireland) and Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani (Qatar) have been appointed to lead consultations and co-facilitate negotiations on the Political Declaration.

[14] The Second National Implentation Plan notes that 'the pandemic disrupted implementation towards a large number of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress.' Government of Ireland, Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022 - 2024 (2022): p. 10.

[15] Human rights measures can rescue the SDGs, said High Commissioner Türk (19 January 2023).

[16] Tonne C., Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for accelerating sustainable development. *Environ Res.* 2021: p. 193.

[17] European Commission, Ireland's recovery and resilience plan (2021). The Recovery and Resilience Facility provides a significant investment of approximately €989 million to strengthen Ireland's sustainability and resilience post-pandemic, particularly in the areas of the green and digital transitions.

[18] Government of Ireland, Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021). See also section on 'Pandemic impact' in IHREC, Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the List of Issues on Ireland's Fourth Periodic Report (December 2021), p. 4.

Despite recent economic uncertainty and inflationary pressures, Ireland remains a relatively prosperous country. Large increases in net wealth across household groups have been recorded in recent years, however, there is a growing and notable concentration of assets among wealthier cohorts.[19] This is particularly concerning given that some current systems of measuring wealth in Ireland have been found to underestimate aggregate wealth and inequality.[20] In 2022, Ireland ranked second among EU Member States for GDP per capita.[21] However, this relative prosperity is not adequately reflected in Ireland's performance across all policy domains. For example, Ireland ranked 37th out of 59 countries in the Climate Change Performance Index 2023,[22] and was outperformed by EU Member States with the lowest GDP per capita, including Bulgaria, Greece, the Slovak Republic and Croatia.[23] Ireland's current level of child poverty is just below the EU average,[24] and it is ranked 14th among Member States for the percentage of the total population at risk of poverty or social exclusion.[25]

Our priority areas for Ireland's 2023 VNR process are set out below and require immediate action to ensure a sustainable future, firmly anchored in human rights and equality standards. These areas are informed by our Strategy Statement 2022-2024, and include monitoring and implementation, economic equality and climate action. Intersecting inequalities, including on the grounds of age, gender equality, ethnicity and disability, are also highlighted throughout. While it is not an exhaustive list, relevant SDGs and targets are linked to each priority area. As NHRI reports cannot be independently submitted to the UN in order to be formally considered as part of the HLPF, our observations are included as a

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[19] Central Bank, The Evolution of Irish Household Wealth, (2022). See Economic Equality section below.

[20] Economists have noted that current voluntary wealth surveys such as the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS), are limited in the form of infrequency of data collection as well as general data gaps. For example, the HFCS is only available for three points in time (2013, 2018 and 2020), and underrepresents the wealthiest 1% of households. As the HFCS survey is voluntary, response rates tend to decline with increasing wealth, leading to a high non-response rate at the top levels of wealth distribution. See Chakraborty, R. and Waltl, S., European Central Bank: Working Paper Series: Missing the wealthy in the HFCS: micro problems with macro implications (2018): p. 6; Central Bank of Ireland, Behind the Data (2022)

[21] Eurostat, GDP per capita, consumption per capita and price level indices, (2022). We note that economic analysis suggests some re-ranking is warranted to account for the distorting effects of multi-national firm activity on national statistics: Central Bank: Economic Letter- Is Ireland Really the Most Prosperous Country in Europe, (2021).

[22] Climate Change Performance Index, Ireland, (2022).

[23] Bulgaria had the lowest level of GDP per capita in the EU in 2021, followed by Greece, Slovakia and Croatia. See: Eurostat, GDP per capita, consumption per capita and price level indices, (2022).

[24] Eurochild, Country Profile 2022 Ireland (2022).

[25] Eurostat, Living Conditions in Europe-Poverty and Social Exclusion, (2022).

separate chapter in the State VNR report. As an A status NHRI, we demonstrate the highest standards with regard to independence in the context of our mandate, functions, use of resources, and international engagement. Our participation in this VNR process has ensured full protection of our independence, in line with SDG 16 and the UN Paris Principles,[26] and we welcome that Ireland has adopted an open drafting approach.

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[26] The UN Paris Principles state that NHRIs shall have the function 'to contribute to the reports which States are required to submit to United Nations bodies…with due respect for their independence': Principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions for protection and promotion of human rights (1993).

Approaches to SDG measurement and implementation

Data collection and disaggregation (SDGs 5, 10 and 17[27])

Central to measuring progress under each SDG is the availability of disaggregated data across all targets, informed by a human rights-based approach.[28] The considerable shortfall in equality data in Ireland impedes a thorough and accurate assessment of the extent to which the State is meeting its commitment to 'leave no one behind', and the identification and evaluation of the targeted measures required.[29] We welcome the prioritisation of improving access to ethnically disaggregated data across all policy domains in the recently published National Action Plan Against Racism.[30] The National Statistic Board has prioritised action to strengthen equality and human rights data in Ireland and included a focus on disability data, which reflects the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[31] The Central Statistics Office ('CSO') also plays a key role in the identification, management, and presentation of the data required for Ireland's report under the VNR process, and we welcome the establishment of the online SDG Data Hub.[32] However, we continue to have concerns about the monitoring of SDG implementation in Ireland due to persistent data gaps,[33] in line with the view of Coalition 2030 that the insufficient collection of disaggregated data acts as a blockage to progress.[34] In particular, we note the limited availability of disability-specific data on the Data Hub;[35] the

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[27] Including Target 17.18.

[28] OHCHR, A Human Rights Based Approach to Data (2018).

[29] See for example, IHREC, Submission to the Anti-Racism Committee: Developing a National Action Plan Against Racism (August 2021), pp. 13-18. We continue to recommend the full implementation of the European Commission's Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data, including on racial and ethnic origin, and in this regard note the importance of key national and regional frameworks, including the EU's Equality Data programme, the National Statistics Board (NSB), Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics 2021–2026 (p. 27) and the development of the national Equality Data Strategy.

[30] See Priority Actions 4.1-4.4 under Objective 4: Being Counted – Measuring the impacts of racism. Government of Ireland, National Action Plan Against Racism (2023): p. 26.

[31] See section 3.4 Wellbeing and Social Cohesion in Quality Information for All. National Statistics Board Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics 2021-2026 (May 2021): p27.

[32] Government of Ireland, Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) data hub. See also, https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/unsustainabledevelopmentgoals/.

[33] The report 'Measuring Progress: Sustainable Progress Index 2023' by Social Justice Ireland notes that 'in spite of best efforts to identify data for the SDGs, several indicator and data gaps persist, particularly for the environment SDGs.'

[34] Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, Sustainable Development Goals: Discussion (21 March 2023).

[35] Data is not available on the data hub under a number of disability related SDG indicators, including 4.5.1, 4.a.1, 8.5.1, 10.2.1, 11.7.1, 11.7.2 and 17.18.1.

ongoing classification of crime statistics as 'under reservation';[36] and the lack of timely, updated and comparable data sources.[37]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Develops the collection, reporting and use of disaggregated equality data in line with UN and EU guidance,[38] and ensures the active participation of rights holders throughout the data planning, collection, dissemination and analysis processes.**

- **Actions the National Statistic Board's Priorities for Official Statistics 2021-2026.**

- **Conducts a review of the online SDG Data Hub, and addresses any gaps in the availability of updated and disaggregated data under each indicator through the forthcoming Equality Data Strategy.**

Local adaptation and the Public Sector Duty (SDGs 16[39] and 17[40])

Local adaptation of the SDGs is essential to strengthen national implementation plans and programmes,[41] including through the adoption of multi-stakeholder partnerships, to ensure the holistic approach reflected in SDG 17.[42] Local government structures play a key role in

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[36] The quality of these statistics do not meet the standards required of official statistics published by the CSO: Ireland's UN SDGs - Goal 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions 2022.

[37] A 2018 paper by Social Justice Ireland raises its concerns about the unavailability of data on SDG indicators to enable analysis over time, in particular over the longer-term. Also, in some cases, the latest available data was dated as originating in 2012 and 2013. Social Justice Ireland, Data Considerations for the SDGs (2021). The availability of recent data continues to be an issue, with the majority of statistics available on the data hub dating from 2018-2019. See also, Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, Sustainable Development Goals: Discussion (21 March 2023). Research has commented on Ireland's heavy reliance on local-level indicators, which often provide limited information about a country's performance relative to that of its peers in an international context: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Framework for Achieving the Environmental Sustainable Development Goals: p. 12.

[38] Including on the grounds of age, sex, disability, geographical location, ethnic origin, nationality and socioeconomic background. This is in line with recent recommendations from the Committee on the Rights of the Child. See Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland, CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (2023), para 10(a). See also, the EU's Equality Data programme.

[39] Including Target 16.6.

[40] Including Target 17.16.

[41] Agenda 2030 expressly calls Governments and public institutions to work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organisations, volunteer groups, and others. United Nations General Assembly, Agenda 2030 (2015): para 45.

[42] Target 17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

adaptation, as through their proximity to societal inequalities and on-the-ground problems they are uniquely positioned to identify needs and resources at local level, develop partnerships with key stakeholders, and tailor appropriate policies and projects in real time.[43] As outlined in the Second National Implementation Plan, Local Authorities in Ireland demonstrate low levels of awareness and engagement with the SDGs, and links between their work and the 2030 Agenda are not explicitly made.[44]

We are of the view that the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty ('Public Sector Duty')[45] and its full and effective implementation by public bodies creates the foundation on which the State can accelerate progress on the SDGs, particularly given the strong correlation between the Agenda 2030 and international human rights frameworks.[46] While we welcome the State's commitment to strengthen capacity-building on the SDGs, including through bespoke trainings to Local Authorities,[47] additional measures are also necessary to ensure local autonomy, including the allocation of sufficient budgetary resources and leadership building.[48]

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[43] D. Satterthwaitem, "Successful, safe and sustainable cities: Towards a New Urban Agenda", *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance* (2017): pp. 3-18.

[44] Government of Ireland, Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022 - 2024 (2022): pp. 70-79. For example, the Departmental Guidelines circulated to Local Authorities in 2019 to inform the preparation of six-year Corporate Plans failed to expressly reference the commitment to Agenda 2030.

[45] Under Section 42 of the 2014 Act, public bodies have a statutory obligation (the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty) to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of members, staff, and service users in the performance of its functions. As part of the Duty, public bodies are required to 'Assess, Address and Report' – to undertake an assessment of the equality and human rights issues pertaining to its purpose and functions; to devise policies, plans and actions to address the issues raised in the assessment; and to report annually on progress and achievements. These requirements have to be set out in a strategic plan and reported on in annual reports. For guidance on implementing the obligations under Section 42, see IHREC, Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

[46] The successful implementation of the Goals requires the coordination of efforts through good public governance: https://www.oecd.org/gov/sustainable-development-goals-and-public-governance.htm.

[47] The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) delivered a training module to its members in 2022 focusing on local government and the SDGs. The AILG is the primary national body representing the 949 democratically elected local councils across Ireland and the 31 local authority members. AILG, AILG Opening Statement on the Challenge and Opportunity for Local Authorities in Climate Action (2022): p. 3. See also Government of Ireland, Ireland's Second National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022 - 2024 (2022): p. 74.

[48] Academics have noted that to overcome implementation barriers, the SDGs require local autonomy and discretion, resources, skills, commitment and leadership capacities, and community-focused efforts from local actors. See Ansell, C., Sørensen, E. and Torfing, J. (2022), "The Key Role of Local Governance in Achieving the SDGs", Co-Creation for Sustainability, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 9-22. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-798-220220002.

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Ensures that all SDG training developed and provided under the Second National Implementation Plan includes learning and resources on the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and on the relevance of human rights and equality frameworks in informing SDG implementation.**

- **Actively progresses additional measures to ensure local adaptation of the SDGs, including through the allocation and development of sufficient budgetary resources, leadership and autonomy for Local Authorities.**

Economic equality

Reducing economic inequality is central to the 2030 Agenda. Defined as the unequal distribution and redistribution of income and wealth, economic inequality manifests structurally in the unequal distribution of power and voice.[49] It has a particular impact on structurally vulnerable groups,[50] and affects their ability to live with dignity and security.[51] Economic inequality remains greater in Ireland, in terms of wage or salary, than in other high-income West European neighbours, including the UK, with 2022 Eurostat figures showing higher differences between top and bottom earners.[52] 2022 CSO data also indicates that the total income of the richest 20% in Ireland is four times that of the poorest 20%.[53] Furthermore, recent figures indicate that the richest 1% of Irish society owns 27% of wealth, and the poorest 50% owns only 1% of wealth.[54]

It is important to note the limitations of current methodologies for measuring income inequality in Ireland, with research suggesting that voluntary surveys, including the Household Finance and Consumption Survey, underestimate aggregate wealth within the wealthiest households, and fail to capture the nuanced inequalities experienced by structurally vulnerable groups.[55] According to a recent report, the way in which poverty is

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[49] ILO, Decent work for sustainable development (DW4SD) Resource Platform: Thematic Areas: 6. Equality

[50] For the purpose of this parallel report, we define a structurally vulnerable person as someone who is particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights due to political, economic, social and cultural structures. Instead of focusing on the personal characteristics of individuals and groups and viewing them as lacking agency or inherently vulnerable, 'structural vulnerability' refers to the structures in place which render certain sectors of the population particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses.

[51] Commission-supported research has found that structurally vulnerable groups are particularly impacted by economic inequality, and are overlooked and under-served in the Irish labour market, more likely to have lower pay, lower security and stability in work, and are more exposed to work-related discrimination. IHREC, Developing a National Action Plan Against Racism (2021), p. 43; See also IHREC, Submission to the Department of Social Protection's public consultation on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion: Mid-term Review (2022), p. 7.

[52] See the Nevin Research Institute, Wages in Ireland are more unequally distributed than in any other high-income EU country (2021): Table 1.

[53] Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022.

[54] Oxfam Ireland, Ireland's two richest people have more wealth – €15 billion – than half of the Irish population who have €10.3 billion (2023).

[55] Standard methods of measuring income inequality, including voluntary surveys such as the Household Finance and Consumption Survey (HFCS), rely on indicators such as 'Gini coefficient', an indicator long criticised for failing to capture the nuanced reality of structural inequality. For example, while the Gini coefficient measures wealth and income levels within a population, it does not capture income distribution within households. Similarly, experts note that it is incapable of differentiating different components of

officially measured in Ireland potentially excludes the nuanced experience of households with persons with a disability, as measurement of income alone does not account for the substantial extra costs of living.[56]

We are of the view that reducing this gap is crucial for social cohesion, social inclusion and improving the quality of life for those experiencing or at risk of poverty. Ireland's approach should also be informed by human rights[57] and rooted in intersectionality to capture systemic barriers and discrimination across multiple equality grounds. We note the current review of equality legislation by the State, with legislative proposals to be brought forward in 2023,[58] and have repeatedly called for the recognition of discrimination on the grounds of socio-economic status.[59]

Poverty (SDG 1[60], SDG 5[61])

As recognised under SDG 1, ending poverty in all its forms is necessary for sustainable economic growth and for improving people's lives and well-being.[62] Current Government policy is to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to 2% or less of the population by

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inequality, including inequality of education and health. See Uptáčik, M., Nežinský, E. Measuring income inequalities beyond the Gini coefficient. *Cent Eur J Oper Res* 28, 561–578 (2020); Harvard Business School, Income Inequality Is Rising. Are We Even Measuring It Correctly? (2022). Moreover, the HFCS risks underestimating figures for the wealthiest households, who exhibit a higher non-response rate to voluntary surveys, and relies on limited data across three specific points in time (2013, 2018 and 2020), all of whch predate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis. See Chakraborty, R. and Waltl, S., European Central Bank: Working Paper Series: Missing the wealthy in the HFCS: micro problems with macro implications (2018): p. 6; Central Bank of Ireland, Behind the Data (2022).

[56] Researchers have found that, due to the extra costs borne by households affected by disability, measures of low living standards using income alone can understate the true difference in living standards between households affected and those not affected by disability. See Roantree, B., M. Barrett and P. Redmond (2022). Poverty, income inequality and living standards in Ireland: 2nd annual report, Jointly-published Reports 1, Dublin: ESRI.

[57] The human rights-based approach provides a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress and often result in groups of people being left behind. See United Nations Sustainable Development Group, Universal Values Principle One: Human Rights-Based Approach (2023).

[58] In June 2021, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth announced a review of the Equality Acts, including the *Equal Status Acts 2000-2018* and the *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015*. For a recent update, see Houses of the Oireachtas, Legislative Reviews: Dáil Éireann Debate, Wednesday - 18 January 2023 (2023) See also, IHREC, Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts (2021).

[59] For example, see IHREC, Submission on the Review of the Equality Acts (2021), pp. 19-21.

[60] Including Targets 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5.

[61] Including Targes 5.4, 5.5, 5.c

[62] SDG 1: To end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030.

2025 (from a 2018 rate of 5.6%).[63] We note that in 2022, the consistent poverty rate was 5.3%,[64] the 'at risk of poverty' rate was 13.1%, and 17.7% of the population experienced enforced deprivation,[65] with all three figures reflecting an increase from the previous year.[66] One-parent families disproportionately experience poverty, with 14.1% living in consistent poverty and 31% at risk of poverty,[67] putting into sharp relief the gendered nature of poverty in Ireland, given that more than 86.4% of one-parent families in Ireland are headed by a woman.[68]

A recent poll carried out by the Commission reported that 58% of parents with children under 16 are worried that there will be some periods in the next twelve months when they won't have enough money to cover household food.[69] There is no data currently available to indicate whether the Government's target to reduce the at risk of poverty rate for disabled people will be met by 2025,[70] with evidence suggesting high rates of poverty for unemployed people with long-term illnesses.[71] There also remains a delay in developing the proposed new target for reducing the number of children experiencing consistent poverty by 2025,[72] despite the significant level of child poverty in Ireland.[73] The Committee on the

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[63] The consistent poverty rate represents people who are both at risk of poverty and experiencing enforced deprivation. See: Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025.

[64] The most up-to-date data available on poverty in Ireland is the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022 conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

[65] In 2021, the consistent poverty rate was 4%, the 'at risk of poverty' rate was 11.6% and 13.8% of the population experienced enforced deprivation See CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2021 (2022).

[66] See CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022 (2023). Further, 12.5% of households reported difficulties with making ends meet in 2022, and 5.9% reported great difficulty. CSO, Information Note - Revision to SILC Enforced Deprivation 2022 (2023).

[67] See CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022 (2023).

[68] One Family Ireland, Facts and Figures (2022).

[69] The data for IHREC's annual poll was collected by Amárach Research via an online poll between 10-21 November 2022, administered to 1200 participants aged 18 or over. See IHREC, Robust Support Continues for Refugees Says New National Survey on International Human Rights Day (10 December 2022).

[70] While disability is not recorded in the SILC survey, 35.2% of people unable to work due to long-term illness were at risk of poverty in 2022. This compares to an at risk of poverty rate of 5.8% for those that described themselves as employed. CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022 (2023).

[71] Government of Ireland, Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025 (2020): p. 17.

[72] For further information, see IHREC, Ireland and the Rights of the Child: Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Ireland's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (2022), p. 78.

[73] The number of children at risk of poverty rose from 13.6% in 2021 to 15.2% in 2022. See CSO, the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Poverty Statistics (2022). We note that the SILC statistics published highlight that Covid-19 income supports had a greater impact on the at-risk of poverty rate of younger respondents. The Children's Rights Alliance has recognised that while these interim measures helped to keep children and families afloat, it is clear that long-term thinking and systemic solutions are urgently needed in

Rights of the Child recently raised its 'serious concerns' about the large number of children living in poverty and food insecurity, and the barriers for ethnic minority groups in accessing child benefit payments due to the habitual residence condition.[74]

Improved data collection is essential for effective poverty reduction policies, as recognised across the indicators under SDG 1.[75] Despite this importance, we note longstanding gaps in poverty data in Ireland, with no poverty data at county level, no child poverty data at regional, county or electoral district levels, and no official indicator of food poverty at national or regional levels.[76] We are of the view that all measures, targets and monitoring and evaluation structures on poverty should be comprehensive, consolidated, aligned, and focused on impact measurement.[77]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Strengthens its system of data collection to capture regional,[78] county and electoral-district level data on poverty and its root causes, informed by the direct participation of people living in poverty, including children and disabled people.**

- **Develops a national data set on food poverty.**

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order to reduce the increasing level of child poverty. See also, Children's Rights Alliance, PRESS RELEASE: Over 180,000 childhoods clouded by poverty – Budget 2024 needs to be about ending child poverty (2023).

[74] Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland, CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (2023), para 34.

[75] International partners and experts have further noted that the measurement of poverty often relies on limited statistical data, for example household surveys, and does not capture the full extent of the issue and its underlying causes: ENNHRI, Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction and Measurement (2019) and O. De Schutter, A human rights-based approach to measuring poverty (January 2022). See also ATD Ireland, The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty – International Participatory Research (2022). Minister O'Brien also acknowledged at the Social Inclusion Forum that statistics may not reflect lived experience: Department of Social Protection, Report of the Social Inclusion Forum 2022 (2022), p. 6.

[76] Clare Public Participation Network, Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare (2022): p. 28.

[77] At the Social Inclusion Forum 2022, participants raised the need to address discrimination and victimisation of children in poverty by allowing spaces for meaningful participation: Department of Social Protection, Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2022 (2022), p. 7. We are of the view that further consideration of the current methodologies used is required, including longitudinal analysis, and such methodological choices concerning data collection and poverty measurement should be based on the direct participation of people living in poverty, including children.

[78] SDG Target 1.b: Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.

- **Ensures the proposed child poverty unit has a dedicated budget line, transparent targets and deliverables, and sufficient staff resources,[79] and fully implements the 2023 Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.[80]**

Welfare indexation (SDGs 1[81] and 10[82])

As noted by the Parliamentary Committee on Budgetary Oversight, the ad-hoc nature of the current system of taxation and welfare in Ireland has the potential to widen economic inequality.[83] Maintaining the adequacy of social supports is central to poverty reduction and building an equitable society with a robust safety net, in line with the core SDG commitment to 'Leave No One Behind'.[84] In line with SDG Target 1.3,[85] we stress the importance of taking protective measures, particularly in the context of the pandemic, to futureproof the social welfare system by embedding indexation into the welfare policy process.[86] This evidence-based policy measure has the potential to uphold living standards for the most structurally vulnerable members of society, offsetting the effect of cost of living increases. However, despite being considered in the Irish policy context for over three decades, the indexation of welfare payments is not yet a feature of Irish fiscal policy.[87]

The Commission recommends that the State:

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[79] In December 2022, Tánaiste Varadkar announced that a new unit will be set up in the Department of An Taoiseach to focus on reducing child poverty and improving well-being – the purpose is to coordinate cross-Government action on children and families. The Taoiseach has since noted plans for the new unit to be set up and running by the end of March 2023. See Houses of the Oireachtas, Select Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and Taoiseach debate - Thursday, 9 Mar 2023 (2023).

[80] Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland, CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (2023), paras 34-35.

[81] Including Target 1.3.

[82] Including Target 10.4.

[83] Select Committee for Budgetary Oversight, Report on Indexation of the Taxation and Social Protection System, (July 2022), p. 6.

[84] See Commission on Taxation and Welfare, Foundations for the Future: Report of the Commission on Taxation and Welfare (2022).

[85] Target 1.3: Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

[86] IHREC, Policy Statement on the Index-Linking of Welfare Payments (Welfare Indexation) (2023). Index-linking of welfare payments is the practice of increasing social welfare payments (including pensions), and/or tax credits and tax bands, in line with inflation.

[87] For further evidence and a detailed discussion of our positions and recommendations, see IHREC, Policy Statement on the Index-Linking of Welfare Payments (Welfare Indexation) (2023).

- **Adopts Welfare Indexation across social welfare policy development and reform, as a matter of priority, to ensure that welfare supports are indexed to wages.**

- **Establishes an appropriately funded, independent Indexation Commission - staffed by a relevant mix of experts from public and civil society organisations - to consider, calculate, recommend, and monitor and review indexation measures.**

Adequate housing (SDG 11[88])

Access to affordable, safe, secure, and decent standard housing is a core target of SDG 11.[89] We are of the view that economic, social and cultural rights, including housing, must be protected in the Irish Constitution, and backed by appropriate supplementary statutory protections and policy measures.[90] There is also a need to address gaps in existing data to accurately measure access to adequate housing in Ireland overall, and for structurally vulnerable groups in particular.[91]

Despite repeated commitments by Government,[92] Ireland continues to experience an ongoing structural housing crisis[93] and, as of March 2023, there were 11,988 people in homeless accommodation.[94] The Committee on the Rights of the Child also recently highlighted significant concerns about child homelessness in Ireland.[95] Progress in

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[88] Including Target 11.1.
[89] Sustainable Development Goals: https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/pages/goal11. There is a critical link between the right to adequate housing and the enjoyment of other related and interdependent rights, including the right to family life and the right to privacy: OHCHR and the right to adequate housing: https://www.ohchr.org/en/housing.
[90] IHREC, Policy Statement on the Incorporation of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Irish Constitution (February 2023), p. 4. See also, IHREC, Comments on Ireland's 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter (2022), p. 3. A recent poll carried out by the Commission reported that a majority of people in Ireland believe that housing is a basic human right (80%), which should be protected in the Constitution (64%). See IHREC, Robust Support Continues for Refugees Says New National Survey on International Human Rights Day (10 December 2022).
[91] H. Russell, I. Privalko, F. McGinnity and S. Enright, Monitoring adequate housing in Ireland, (IHREC and the ESRI, 2021), p. 65.
[92] See for example, Target 3.8 NRRP: to increase the provision of social and affordable housing. Through its National Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Irish Government has secured a significant investment from the European Commission to mitigate the public health, economic and social crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. See Government of Ireland, Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021).
[93] As recently recognised by the European Commission: European Commission, 2022 Country Report – Ireland (2022), p. 48.
[94] Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government, Homelessness Report (March 2023).
[95] The Committee on the Rights of the Child recently called for strengthened measures to phase out temporary and emergency accommodation schemes, and to significantly increase the availability of adequate and long-

responding to the housing crisis remains slow,[96] and the Government's delivery of annual housing targets under the *Housing for All 2021-2030* plan[97] has been inconsistent, with significant shortfalls in delivery throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.[98] Recent State figures demonstrate an underspend of the capital budget on housing of almost €1billion from 2020-2022.[99] Research has also highlighted that an increase in existing housing targets is needed to reflect ongoing deficits and emerging issues, including an increasing population.[100] We have serious concerns about the exacerbation of this crisis as the country continues to transition out of the pandemic, including due to the lifting of tenancy supports and protections.[101]

In addressing adequate housing, it is important to consider Ireland's transition to a carbon-neutral economy, and in particular, the high levels of energy poverty and increasing energy costs in Ireland.[102] Research demonstrates that those experiencing poverty are more likely to live in homes with low energy ratings,[103] and are more likely to rely on fossil fuels.[104] In particular, structurally vulnerable groups are more likely to live in energy inefficient housing and substandard accommodation, including people aged 60 and older,[105] people living in

term social housing for families in need. See Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland, CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (2023): at para 35(b).

[96] European Commission, 2022 Country Report – Ireland (2022).

[97] Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage: Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland, 2021.

[98] At the end of 2020, social housing delivery had reached just over 70% of the original target, with the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage referencing the public health restrictions as the reason for the delays. See IHREC, Comments by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the 18th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter (2021), p. 30.

[99] See for example, Houses of the Oireachtas, Departmental Expenditure Dáil Éireann Debate, Tuesday - 7 March 2023 (2023)

[100] While targets for social and affordable housing under Housing For All will increase from 9,000 social homes and 4,000 affordable and cost rental homes in 2022 to approximately 10,000 social homes and 6,000 affordable and cost rental homes annually, IBEC has recommended that around 20,000 social, affordable and cost rental units annually will be needed. See IBEC, Better Housing Better Business Report (2023), p. 9. See also, Dáil debates, Order of Business, Tuesday, 28 March 2023.

[101] The current eviction ban was lifted on 1 April. The ban was formerly in place from 30 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 ('the winter emergency period'), during which persons renting private accommodation could not be evicted, even if issued with a valid notice of termination.

[102] For further discussion, see IHREC, Policy Statement on a Just Transition (2023).

[103] Lower-rated homes have both higher emissions and higher fuel costs. Approximately 44.5% of rental properties in Ireland have a BER rating of D or lower. Moreover, upfront costs associated with accessing sustainable energy grants can act as a barrier for low income households. Social Justice Ireland, Energy Poverty and a Just Transition, (2021).

[104] Social Justice Ireland, Energy poverty and a just transition (2021).

[105] The majority of homes with a BER of E, F and G are occupied by people aged 60 or older. See Age Action, An Energy Guarantee for Older Persons: Policy Brief, (2022).

rural communities,[106] and minority ethnic communities,[107] including the Traveller community.[108]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Progresses a constitutional referendum on the right to housing to ensure implementation of Target 11.1 of the SDGs.[109]**

- **Revises the targets contained within *Housing for All* during its upcoming review in 2023 to ensure the Plan reflects updated population and homelessness data and the ongoing housing crisis, and includes necessary sanctions for any continued failure to deliver sufficient social and affordable housing.**

- **Places greater emphasis on evidence-informed targeted measures, in tandem with once-off measures, to forestall the impact of energy poverty on structurally vulnerable households.**

Decent work (SDG 8[110], SDG 5)

Improved equality of access to decent work and fair remuneration is integral to the advancement of economic equality,[111] as reflected across various targets under SDG 8. Ireland's focus on the labour market and job creation must ensure protection of the six key dimensions of decent work: access to work; adequate earnings; employee voice; security

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[106] Central Statistics Office, Domestic Building Energy Ratings (2022).

[107] Research demonstrates higher levels of energy poverty amongst minority ethnic communities, who also experience higher levels of housing discrimination, an additional barrier to accessing more energy-efficient homes. See European Commission, Discrimination against migrants in the Irish housing market, (2019); Sonal, J., Sawyer, S. & Hernández, D. Energy, poverty, and health in climate change: a comprehensive review of an emerging literature, *Frontiers in Public Health 2019*, pp. 357; Reames, T.G. Targeting energy justice: Exploring spatial, racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in urban residential heating energy efficiency, *Energy Policy* 97, 2017, pp. 549-558.

[108] Energy costs tend to be higher for Traveller families, exacerbated for those living on unauthorised sites with little to no energy infrastructure. See Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Accommodating Ethnicity: Addressing Energy Poverty Among Travellers Living in Mobile Homes and Trailers: An Exploratory Study, (2019).

[109] Target 11.1: By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services.

[110] Including Targets 8.1-8.8).

[111] A recent report by NERI notes that: 'In a European context, Ireland is an outlier in terms of earnings inequality, market income inequality and has one of the highest shares levels of low paid work in the EU': Dr P. Gallagher and C. Nugent, Temporary Employment, Low Paid Work and Job Security amongst Young Irish Workers (2022).

and stability of work; equality of opportunity for and treatment in employment; and health and safety.[112] The European Committee of Social Rights found Ireland in breach of nine labour rights articles under the Revised European Social Charter in 2023, including the right to just conditions of work, the right to a fair remuneration, the right to organise, the right to bargain collectively,[113] and the ongoing failure to recognise and respect pay transparency in practice.[114] We note that despite some progress,[115] the gender pay and pension gaps in Ireland stand at approximately 12.6% and 35% respectively.[116] Research further highlights the need to futureproof policy measures to ensure women's access to decent work is not disproportionately impacted by crises and pandemics, with evidence during the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrating that women had to reduce their working hours or take a break from paid employment due to home-schooling and caring responsibilities.[117] Women were also overrepresented in the sectors hardest hit by Covid-19 related unemployment, including hospitality, retail and care.[118]

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[112] F. McGinnity, H. Russell, I. Privalko and S. Enright, Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland (IHREC and ESRI) (2021).

[113] Situations of Ireland's non-conformity with the Charter include a failure to ensure a 'decent standard of living' for young workers on minimum wage; excessive restrictions on the right to strike, including that denied to the Gardaí and; for 'manifestly unreasonable' notice periods for workers and civil servants. See Council of Europe, European Committee of Social Rights: Conclusions 2022 (Ireland) (2023): p. 2.

[114] See Council of Europe, European Committee of Social Rights: Conclusions 2022 (Ireland) (2023): p. 21.

[115] We note the enactment in 2022 of the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021. The reporting obligations under the Act apply to private and public sector employers with 250+ employees. The Act widens the scope to employers with 150+ employees on or after the second anniversary of the regulations and to employers with 50+ employees on or after the third anniversary of the regulations. There will be no requirement on employers with less than 50 employees to report on the gender pay gap. See also IHREC, Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the List of Issues on Ireland's Fourth Periodic Report (2021), p. 24.

[116] PwC Ireland analysed the gender pay gap reports of up to 500 companies that published their reports under the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 by the first reporting deadline of 31 December 2022. The analysis identified a mean gender pay gap of 12.6% across Irish organisations, compared to Ireland's previous available national gender pay gap of 11.3% (2019) and an EU average gender pay gap of 13% (for 2020), based on Eurostat data. PWC, PwC's Gender Pay Gap analysis reveals a mean gender pay of 12.6% (2023). In 2019, the ESRI estimated that Ireland had a gender pension gap of approximately 35%. See ESRI, Ireland has a gender pension gap of 35 per cent (2019).

[117] IHREC, Comments on Ireland's 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter (2022), p. 15; IHREC, Submission to the Department of Social Protection's public consultation on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion: Mid-Term Review (2022), pp. 4-7.

[118] In the labour market, the impact of the pandemic appeared to affect men and women equally, however job losses for women were most widespread among the lowest-paid workers. Although women retained employment in some sectors where they have a high concentration, such as essential services and teleworkable jobs, other sectors where women are overrepresented such as hospitality and care saw far greater job losses during the pandemic than other sectors. Conversely, men's job losses were more evenly distributed. See Eurofound, COVID-19 pandemic and the gender divide at work and home (2022). See also: Brioscú, A., O'Reilly, J. D., and Coates, D. 2021. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Ireland's Labour Market: Insights

Specific groups in Ireland, including the Traveller community, continue to face high or systemic labour market barriers and are more exposed to workplace discrimination and job insecurity.[119] Furthermore, young people, non-Irish nationals, particularly Eastern Europeans,[120] single parent families, and those with low educational attainment are at a significantly higher risk of low hourly wages and low weekly work.[121] Overall, 6 out of 10 low paid workers are women.[122] Despite high labour force participation, poverty and deprivation rates increased between 2021 and 2022, and more than 1 in 8 people in employment experienced deprivation.[123] Research indicates that equality and social inclusion strategies in Ireland adopt an activation rather than a decent work approach to the employment of structurally vulnerable groups, including the Pathways to Work Strategy.[124]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Focuses on improving equality of access to decent work through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including by actively engaging with structurally vulnerable groups to identify and dismantle structural barriers and intersectional forms of discrimination.**

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through the Lens of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and the Characteristics of Impacted Workers. The Economic and Social Review, 52(2): 193-216.

[119] See IHREC and ESRI, Monitoring decent work in Ireland (2021). See also ESRI, Wages and working conditions in non-irish nationals in Ireland (2023); Joint Committee on key issues affecting the Traveller Community, Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community (2021), pp. 51-70; Michał Polakowski and Emily Cunniffe, Labour market integration of international protection applicants in Ireland (2023).

[120] New research from the ESRI found that while non-Irish nationals as a whole earned 22 per cent less per hour than Irish nationals, East European workers earned, on average, 40 per cent less than Irish workers in the period 2011-2018. The study also finds that migrant women face a double wage penalty: J. Laurence, E. Kelly, F. McGinnity, S. Curristan, Wages and Working Conditions of Non-Irish Nationals in Ireland (2023).

[121] F. McGinnity, H. Russell, I. Privalko and S. Enright, Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland (IHREC and ESRI) (2021), pp. x, 68-75. See also, Dr P. Gallagher and C. Nugent, Temporary Employment, Low Paid Work and Job Security amongst Young Irish Workers (2022).

[122] OECD, Decile ratios of gross earnings:Incidence of low pay.

[123] 13.1% of people were at risk of poverty in 2022, compared with 11.6% in 2021. 12.7% of employed people experienced enforced deprivation in 2022. CSO, Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022 (2023).

[124] IHREC and ERSI, Monitoring decent work in Ireland (2021), pp. 125-126. See also IHREC, Submission to the mid-term review of the Pathways to Work Strategy 2021 – 2025 (2023): p. 11.

Living wage (SDGs 1 and 10[125])

The direct applicability of 8 of the 17 SDGs[126] demonstrates the transformative effect the introduction of a living wage[127] could have on addressing income inequality and fulfilling the rights of workers to fair remuneration and a decent standard of living. The Minimum Essential Standard of Living ('MESL')[128] method for determining a living wage should be the foundation of all calculations to ensure the cost of living is the primary consideration.[129] The living wage must also provide workers with a dignified standard of living that goes beyond basic subsistence.[130] Lastly, the calculation of the income required to provide this standard must include the active participation of rights-holders to ensure that the living wage is calibrated to existing social norms, evolving requirements and living costs.

However, the Government has recently proposed the introduction of a living wage that will be tied to the threshold of 60% of the annual median income in a given year, and phased in incrementally by 2026.[131] We are concerned that this calculation of a living wage based on

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[125] Including Target 10.4.

[126] The SDGs directly applicable to the living wage are; Goal 1: No poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities.

[127] The Global Living Wage Coalition defines the living wage as '[r]emuneration received for a standard work week by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the workers and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events' See: Global Living Wage Coalition, What is a Living Wage? (2016).

[128] The MESL rate is typically calculated through the use of focus groups who identify goods and services it would be 'indecent' to live without. There are a number of stages of review, analysis and further consultation to ensure the basket of goods decided on is representative of the needs of workers. For more information, see the work of the Living Wage Technical Group, a civil society organisation that has been using the MESL approach to calculate the Irish living wage for several years now: LWTG (2022) Living Wage Update 2022/2023.

[129] There are two calculation methods most commonly cited when discussing implementing a living wage: the Fixed Threshold approach and the MESL approach. The Fixed Threshold approach involves fixing the living wage to a particular income threshold such as a percentage of the average or median wage, for example by ensuring that the living wage rate in a given year is never less than 60% of the median national income. The MESL approach, in contrast, is centred on the income necessary for all low-income workers to secure an agreed acceptable standard of living. We note that Ireland has opted for the fixed threshold approach based on the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission.

[130] Eurofound (2018) Concept and practice of a living wage, p. 15.

[131] The introduction of a living wage was informed by the Low Pay Commission's report and recommendations on the Living Wage and background research completed by Maynooth University, as well a public consultation in 2022. The first step towards introducing a living wage was the 80 cent increase to the National Minimum Wage on 1 January 2023 (to €11.30 per hour). The second step will be gradual increases to the National Minimum Wage until it reaches 60% of hourly median earnings. In 2023, it is estimated that 60% of median earnings would equate to approximately €13.10 per hour. See Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Tánaiste announces introduction of national living wage, 16 November 2022. From 2026, the

the fixed threshold of income distribution, without adequate consideration of recent record inflation and rental prices, energy price increases, and a procession of national and global crises, does not meet the standards of human rights and equality-based, effective or futureproofed policy-making.[132] This approach continues to resemble the setting of a minimum wage to enable people to narrowly escape in-work poverty,[133] rather than a living wage with the real potential of materially changing the standard of living of low-income workers.[134] The rate at which the higher wage is introduced should also ensure that the annual increases surpass inflation, and have positive short-medium term effects on the circumstances of low-income workers.[135] The Government should consider support schemes or reliefs for small businesses to mitigate concerns regarding their ability to absorb cost increases.

Finally, the exclusion of young people from receipt of the living wage raises concerns about age discrimination.[136] This policy position must be also reconsidered in light of the recent finding by the European Committee of Social Rights that the State is in breach of the Charter due to the failure to ensure a 'decent standard of living' for young workers on the reduced minimum wage.[137]

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living wage will be the wage "floor" and will be mandatory for all employers; that is to say the living wage will become the new National Minimum Wage.

[132] The Government has opted for the fixed threshold approach based on the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission. However, the State commissioned research papers state that the MESL approach is the one that aligns best with the spirit of the living wage. Methodological difficulties are briefly cited as a reason for not incorporating MESL into the Government's living wage calculation but these points are not expanded on in any sufficient detail (as noted above, the Living Wage Technical Group has been successfully calculating the living wage with this method for a number of years). The specific threshold of 60% was chosen explicitly because of what research was available. The living wage rates that the MESL approach normally calculates tend to be more in the range of 66-70% of the national median. See in particular, Department of Economics, Maynooth University, Research on the Introduction of a Living Wage in Ireland: Final Report (2022), pp. 48-49.

[133] Central Statistics Office (2021) Survey on Income and Living Conditions; An individual is defined as being at risk of poverty if their nominal equivalised disposable income is under the at risk of poverty threshold, i.e. 60% of the median nominal equivalised disposable income.

[134] See for example, Conor D'Arcy and David Finch (2019) The calculation of a living wage: the UK's experience, Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research 25(3) pg. 7-8 and Ciarán Nugent (2022) The Living Wage estimate is based on living costs. It should stay that way, NERI.

[135] European Commission, Economic forecast for Ireland (13/02/2023): Inflation in 2022 was 8.1% overall and is forecast to be 4.4% in 2023 and 2.1% in 2024. The Low Pay Commission may introduce the full living wage faster or slower than proposed (2026), depending on prevailing economic circumstances.

[136] The Commission has previously raised concerns over the current reduction of the national minimum wage for young workers in Ireland, despite international human rights obligations, including Article 4.1 of the Revised European Social Charter. See IHREC, Comments on Ireland's 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter (2022): p. 19.

[137] Council of Europe, European Committee of Social Rights: Conclusions 2022 (Ireland) (2023): p. 17.

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Reconsiders the methodology used for its living wage calculation to ensure that it includes the active participation of rights-holders and is calibrated to existing social norms, evolving requirements and living costs.**

- **Expedites the timeline for implementing the living wage, and takes active measures to address concerns regarding increased costs to employers.**

- **Ensures that any exemptions to paying the living wage are strict, limited and exceptional, and take account of international human rights obligations.**

Just Transition (SDGs 1[138] and 8[139])

Ireland's implementation of the 2030 Agenda must address employment vulnerability in the context of those who are at risk of economic displacement and unemployment due to digitalisation and the transition to a green economy. The impacts of transitioning to a digital and green economy are already being felt in Ireland, including in the Midlands region,[140] and this is set to continue across all sectors of the economy and society.[141] Workers are affected by job substitution, job elimination, job transformation, the digital divide,[142] and the broader impact of automation.[143] Employment vulnerability in the context of climate action disproportionately impacts structurally vulnerable groups, such as older people,[144] foreign-

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[138] Including Target 1.5.

[139] Including Targets 8.2-8.5.

[140] Considerable job losses occurred following the decision of Bord Na Móna to cease extraction by 2028, with hundreds more losses anticipated in the coming years. This has been highlighted by the Just Transition Commissioner. Fast-tracked closures in the peat industry raise further concerns over alternative employment opportunities for workers directly employed in the industry, as well as workers employed in industry adjacent enterprise. See Just Transition Commissioner, Just Transition Progress Report, (2020), p. 42.

[141] Just Transition Alliance, Joint Declaration (2022).

[142] One large employer in Ireland conducted research in 2020 which found that that 42 percent of Irish people describe themselves as being 'below average' for digital skills: Accenture, Bridging the gap – Ireland's digital divide (2020).

[143] United Nations, Just Transition of the Workforce, and the Creation of Decent Work and Quality Jobs (2021).

[144] Older people are more likely to be employed in carbon-intensive sectors; European Trade Union Institute, Why the EU's patchy 'just transition' framework is not up to meeting its climate ambitions (2022).

born workers,[145] workers with low educational qualifications,[146] and workers living outside of urban areas.[147] There are also concerns about the age demographics of workers in the Irish context, and lack of suitable employment opportunities for those affected as a challenge to re-training and upskilling.[148] The State's response should be human rights-based and incorporate high-impact targeted funding, with the greatest possible local impact.[149]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Prioritises participation and social dialogue in the context of the Just Transition to address employment vulnerability.**

- **Prioritises community development in areas affected by climate action and digital transformation, including through pre-emptive workforce planning, supporting alternative and sustainable employment opportunities, and adequate social protection for job losses and displacement.**

Collective bargaining (SDG 8[150])

Despite an explicit reference to collective bargaining in SDG 8,[151] there are ongoing barriers to the full realisation of this right in Ireland. As noted above, the European Committee of Social Rights recently concluded that Ireland's protection of labour rights does not fully conform with the Charter, including as the legal framework does not protect all workers against dismissal on grounds of trade union membership or involvement, and certain closed

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[145] Foreign-born workers tend to be employed in lower-paying and polluting sectors, with less access to training or upskilling towards a low-carbon economy; European Trade Union Institute, Why the EU's patchy 'just transition' framework is not up to meeting its climate ambitions (2022).

[146] Workers in the most affected sectors are more likely to have lower levels of education, a barrier to redeployment; Aarc, Report on the Challenges, Needs and Recommended Actions for the Most Affected Territory, EU Structural Reform Support Programme Report, (2022); p. 10.

[147] Dáil Debates, Early Exit from Peat for Electricity Generation: Statements (6 Nov 2019).

[148] Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), There are No Jobs on a Dead Planet: What a Just Transition Means for Workers (2017).

[149] National Economic and Social Council, Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland (2020), p. viii.

[150] Including Target 8.8.

[151] Indicator 8.8.2: Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status.

shop practices are authorised by law.[152] While Irish data on trade union membership is conflated with the membership of staff associations, Ireland has comparably lower rates of trade union coverage than Germany, France and Denmark, and structurally vulnerable groups are less likely to be members.[153] Trade union membership is also largely unaddressed in overall employment or equality strategies in Ireland.[154] We are of the view that Ireland is an outlier in respect of protecting an entitlement to engagement in collective bargaining, and a statutory framework is essential to protect the right effectively.[155]

We note the recent adoption of the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union,[156] particularly as regards the promotion of collective bargaining on wage setting across the EU.[157]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Takes immediate action to address the ongoing absence of a statutory right to collective bargaining and the imbalance of power in the labour market in Ireland.**

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[152] IHREC, Council of Europe finds Ireland in Breach of Labour Rights Obligations (2023); See Council of Europe, European Committee of Social Rights: Conclusions 2022 (Ireland) (2023). The European Committee of Social Rights concluded that Ireland is not in conformity with Article 6.4 (Collective Action) of the Revised European Social Charter on the grounds that: only authorised trade unions, their officials and members are granted immunity from civil liability in the event of a strike; the police are denied the right to strike; and an employer may dismiss all employees for taking part in a strike.

[153] Recent figures suggest that 34% of Ireland's workforce is covered by collective bargaining agreements, with employees born in Ireland being more likely to be a trade union member than employees born elsewhere. Younger workers are less likely to be members of a union or staff association: F. McGinnity, H. Russell, I. Privalko and S. Enright, Monitoring Decent Work in Ireland (IHREC and ESRI) (2021), p. 82. Recent research from the ESRI also found that non-Irish nationals are much less likely to be members of trade unions or staff associations (13 per cent compared to 34 per cent for Irish nationals): J. Laurence, E. Kelly, F. McGinnity, S. Curristan, Wages and Working Conditions of Non-Irish Nationals in Ireland (2023).

[154] See for example, the Migrant Integration Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020, National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021 and National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021. While the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024 sets out a commitment to develop trade union supports and employment opportunities, it does not focus on the access to trade union membership and recognition.

[155] Trade unions in Ireland have no statutory right to be recognised in the workplace for collective bargaining purposes and employees have no right to make representations to their employer through their union. There has been some legal regulation of collective bargaining, notably the *Industrial Relations Act 1946* and its successors, creating a sort of 'back door' collective bargaining system. For further discussion see IHREC, Comments on Ireland's 19th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter (2022), p. 30.

[156] European Council, Council adopts EU law on adequate minimum wages (2022).

[157] This Directive includes a legal obligation on member states with less than 80% of the workforce covered by collective bargaining agreements to adopt measures to increase coverage.

Climate action

Transformative climate adaptation and mitigation measures are critical to drive sustainable development[158] and to ensure the protection of human rights in Ireland and abroad. The recent 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's ('IPCC') Synthesis Report[159] has further underscored the urgency for climate action, with global warming now 'likely to exceed 1.5°C in the 21st Century', and every increment of warming resulting in exponentially greater climate risks.[160] Despite the clear imperative, we regret that Ireland's national mitigation and adaptation measures remain profoundly inadequate. As much as 85% of Ireland's energy needs are met by fossil fuels[161] and Ireland is the seventh worst performing country on climate change in the European Union.[162]

Ireland's previous Climate Action Plan ('CAP') 2021, now succeeded by the CAP 2023,[163] reported an overall implementation rate of 79%, with data from the Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland showing an upward trend of energy-related emissions.[164] We further note reports from the Climate Change Advisory Council ('CCAC')[165] in 2022 that having failed to meet its 2020 national, European Union, and international targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, Ireland continues to rely on allowances purchased from other Member States to meet its shortfall.[166] As noted by the CCAC, this approach is no longer acceptable as it deepens carbon lock-in, forgoes the benefits of transition and imposes a cost on the exchequer, and thereby ultimately on all citizens.[167] We stress that climate

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[158] UNFCC, Action on Climate and SDGs.
[159] IPCC, Synthesis report of the IPCC 6th Assessment (AR6: Summary for Policymakers (2023).
[160] IPCC, Synthesis report of the IPCC 6th Assessment (AR6: Summary for Policymakers (2023): p. 12.
[161] Environmental Research Institute, The Russian energy crisis and Ireland's reliance on fossil fuels (2022).
[162] Climate Change Performance Index 2021: Ireland.
[163] The Climate Action Plan 2023 was approved by Government and published on 21 December 2022. In March 2023, the Government published the Annex of Actions to accompany the Climate Action Plan 2023, outlining the steps Ireland is taking to respond to the climate crisis. Government of Ireland, Government approves Annex of Actions to Climate Action Plan 2023 (2023).
[164] Government of Ireland, Almost 80% of actions under Climate Action Plan completed, but upward emissions trend continues (2021).
[165] Independent statutory body established under Section 8 of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, whose role is to review national climate policy and advise the Government on how Ireland can move to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society by 2050.
[166] Climate Change Advisory Council, Annual Review 2022 (2022), p. 15.
[167] Climate Change Advisory Council, Annual Review 2022 (2022), p. 34.

change poses a catastrophic threat to human rights[168] and equality,[169] and all our rights connect to the health of our environment.[170] In March 2023, the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss[171] made a series of recommendations to the State, including that the Constitution be amended to provide for substantive environmental rights, such as the right to a clean, healthy, safe environment;[172] the right to a stable and healthy climate; and the rights of future generations to these or other environmental rights.[173]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Fully assesses the impact of climate change on human rights and equality in Ireland, with a particular focus on structurally vulnerable groups.**

- **Actively considers and implements the final recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, including through Constitutional reform to expressly protect substantive environmental rights.**

- **Acts on the best scientific evidence available to mobilise the maximum available resources to prevent all current and foreseeable human rights harms caused by**

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[168] In our 2022 Annual Poll, 61% of respondents agreed that climate change is a human rights issue. See: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Annual Poll 2022 (2022).

[169] See: Equinet, 2023 Work Plan (2022), p. 7.

[170] In July 2022, the High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and environmental degradatation: 'Every person, everywhere, has a right to eat, breathe and drink without poisoning their bodies in doing so, and to be able to live harmoniously with the natural world, without constantly growing threats of ecosystem collapse and climate catastrophe.' OHCHR, Bachelet calls for urgent action to realize human right to healthy environment following recognition by UN General Assembly (2022).

[171] The Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was launched in early 2022 and met on six occasions between May 2022-January 2023. In its Terms of Reference, it was mandated to consider a number of areas, including the international, European, national, regional and local dimensions to the biodiversity emergency; the threats presented by biodiversity loss and the opportunities to reverse this loss; and the main drivers of biodiversity loss, their impacts and the opportunity of addressing these drivers. The Final Report with the agreed 159 recommendations (73 high-level recommendations and 86 sectoral-specific recommendations) is available here: Citizens' Assembly, Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (March 2023).

[172] At present, the Irish Constitution does not include any reference to a right to a healthy environment. However, in 2017 the High Court determined that there was a constitutional right to an environment that is consistent with human dignity. The Supreme Court did not support this, but in a 2020 ruling made an observation that in other jurisdictions specific wording has been inserted into constitutions when they were being adopted or amended. The Supreme Court appeared to suggest that rather than the courts deciding the issue an amendment to the constitution could be considered. The right to a clean, health and sustainable environment has been explicitly recognised by the UN General Assembly in 2022. See Citizens' Assembly, Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (March 2023): p. 88; United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/76/L.75: the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly (2022).

[173] Citizens' Assembly, Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (March 2023): p. 16.

climate change, including by meeting all national, European Union and international targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Strengthens Ireland's adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related disasters, including by introducing climate change vulnerability assessments, with a focus on economic and geographic vulnerability, in the adaptation planning process.**

International climate action and overseas development (SDGs 12,[174] 13[175] and 17[176])

SDG Target 13.a requires Member States to achieve their targets under the Paris Agreement to assist developing countries in adapting to climate impacts.[177] While Ireland has committed to providing at least €225 million per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2025,[178] academics have highlighted that this falls significantly short of Ireland's 'fair share' amount of approximately €500 million per year, based on financial capacity and historic emissions.[179] We note that Ireland's climate finance measures form part of a broader policy framework on international development, *A Better World*, which also commits to increasing funding on climate action and to exploring innovative approaches to climate finance, further articulated in the whole-of-Government *International Climate Finance Roadmap 2022*.[180]

In 2021, Ireland's international climate finance accounted for approximately 10.2% of its official development assistance ('ODA') budget.[181] Under SDG Target 17.2, Ireland has

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[174] Including Target 12.6.
[175] Including Target 13.a.
[176] Including Targets 17.2-17.5.
[177] Target 13.a: Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible.
[178] Government of Ireland, Ireland's International Climate Finance Roadmap 2022: p. 3.
[179] In 2021, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provided an updated estimated of €612m based on more recent data. €545m represents the midpoint of this range. See ODI, 'A fair share of climate finance? Apportioning responsibility for the $100 billion climate finance goal' (2021).
[180] See Government of Ireland A Better World- Ireland's Policy for International Development, 2019.
[181] Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland's Climate and Environmental Finance Report 2021 (2021): p. 5.

committed to allocating 0.7 percent of its Gross National Income ('GNI') by 2030 to ODA.[182] While we welcome the increased allocation to the ODA in Budget 2023 to €1.233 billion (approximately 0.3% GNI), we note that Ireland's contribution is still behind the minimum required under Agenda 2030.[183]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Takes active measures to increase allocation to climate financing and overseas development assistance in line with its requirements under Agenda 2030, taking into account Ireland's financial capacity and emissions record.**

Business and climate justice (SDGs 12[184] and 13)

While international efforts at addressing climate change focus heavily on the obligations of states, businesses and multi-stakeholder partnerships also play a critical role in realising SDG 13. Effective governance and human rights due diligence is essential if Ireland is to successfully transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The new EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive requires larger companies and listed SMEs to publish regular reports on the social and environmental risks they face, and on how their activities impact people and the environment.[185] We also note ongoing negotiations on the proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive ('CSDDD'), which aims to improve corporate governance practices and require certain businesses to identify and, where necessary,

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[182] Goal 17.2 of Agenda 2030; See United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs: Sustainable Development, Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development, Accessed in October 2021; See also Government of Ireland A Better World- Ireland's Policy for International Development, 2019: p. i

[183] Houses of the Oireachtas, Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence díospóireacht - Tuesday, 14 Feb 2023 (2023). In 2022, the Government's allocation to ODA in the annual budget was €1.044bn (0.32% GNI). However, we note that this figure is not representative of the overall ODA expenditure as per 2017 reporting clarifications by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which allow for the inclusion of eligible first-year costs associated with the provision of services for refugees and asylum seekers. The OECD estimated Ireland's total ODA expenditure in 2022 at €2.33 billion (0.64% of GNI), attributable to the increase in spending on refugees and aid to Ukraine. Excluding the costs relating to Ukrainian refugees, the OECD figures for Ireland's 2022 ODA were €1.446 billion (0.4% of GNI). This figure includes eligible first-year costs for asylum seekers and refugees, not from Ukraine. It is notable that all three figures (Government budgetary allocation to ODA, ODA expenditure including costs relating to Ukrainian refugees in Ireland, and ODA including costs relating to non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland) are all below the 0.7% GNI target. OECD, Official development assistance (2023).

[184] Including Targets 12.1-12.8.

[185] On 5 January 2023 the Directive entered into force. See European Commission, Corporate sustainability reporting.

prevent, end or mitigate adverse impacts of their activities on human rights, including the environment.[186] However, we note civil society concerns about limitations in its scope and revisions to the proposed text,[187] including that the Directive, as currently drafted, focuses primarily on upstream due diligence in the context of a business's 'chain of activities', and not on downstream due diligence to cover an entire value chain.[188] The OHCHR has recently recommended the express inclusion of downstream due diligence in the proposed CSDDD, noting the importance of aligning the Directive to international standards such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.[189] Ireland's ongoing leadership role and expansive implementation of legal requirements in this area is vital.

We regret that Ireland's current business and human rights policy framework - the *National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights* - expired in 2020, and despite a review, a new plan has not been advanced.[190]

The Commission recommends that the State:

- **Ensures full and expansive implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive.**

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[186] In February 2022, the European Commission published its proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence. European Commission, Corporate sustainability due diligence.

[187] The Danish Institute for Human Rights has noted that the restricted number of companies in scope under the proposed Directive and provisions limiting the extent of the due diligence obligation, including by suggesting reliance on contractual means to exercise this due diligence, risk undermining its effectiveness as well as the legal certainty it sets out to create. See DIHR, Legislating for impact: analysis of the proposed EU corporate sustainability due diligence directive (2022); Trócaire, Irish human rights coalition criticises dilution by EU member states of crucial legislation aimed at ending global corporate exploitation and abuse (2022) and Oxfam Ireland, New EU corporate accountability law 'riddled with loopholes' (2022).

[188] Germanwatch has noted that to be effective, corporate sustainability due diligence must cover the whole value chain, both upstream and downstream. Whereas upstream focuses on the supply chain of a company, downstream is particularly important to address the potential risks of human rights and environmental impacts associated with a company's product or service after it is manufactured or delivered. See Germanwatch, Downstream due diligence: A must-have for the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (March 2023).

[189] OHCHR, Mandating Downstream Human Rights Due Diligence (2022).

[190] Department of Foreign Affairs, National Plan on Business and Human Rights (2017- 2020) (2017). Houses of the Oireachtas, Dail Debate, (December 2022). We note the launch of the online Climate Toolkit 4 Business to provide SMEs with support in calculating their carbon footprint, including a carbon calculator and template action plan: climatetoolkit4business.gov.ie/about.

- **Takes active measures to progress a successor National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights with time-bound and measurable goals, and a particular focus on human rights due diligence and governance to cover the entire value chain, both upstream and downstream, in line with international obligations.[191]**

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[191] The Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently recommended that the State ensure that the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights includes a specific focus on children's rights and has time-bound and measurable goals, in line with the 2021 review of the current National Action Plan. See Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland, CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (2023), para 13(a).

10 | Conclusion

Chapter 10: Conclusion

This Voluntary National Review reflects Ireland's strong economic recovery following the pandemic and our efforts to build back better while leaving no-one behind guided by the SDGs and Agenda 2030. It comprehensively demonstrates the extensive suite of national policies which continue to be introduced to support and address the SDGs and their associated targets. These policies also ensure delivery across areas of national importance and provide strategic frameworks for progress and success.

This VNR has also provided an accessible and inclusive space for our national network of stakeholders to review Ireland's progress, offering their feedback and input on how they perceive Ireland is doing in terms of progressing the SDGs. Where progress has been made, this has been acknowledged and where work remains to be done, this has been called out. For policy makers across government this is an important contribution, only by holding up a mirror to ourselves, can we properly reflect on how we as a State are progressing the transformative ambition set by the SDGs and how we are contributing to the delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

In this context Ireland's VNR also demonstrates how we are accelerating action towards achieving the SDGs, highlighting the contribution being made across Government on climate action and the circular economy, employment, education, health, housing, and Ireland's international support of the SDGs.

Ireland's first National Implementation Plan provided a framework for Ireland to work towards implementing the SDGs, including through the support of national policies which contribute to meeting the Goals, and the facilitation of multi-stakeholder participation. The timing of this VNR coincides with Ireland's second National Implementation Plan 2022 - 2024 for the Sustainable Development Goals setting out a whole-of-government approach to Agenda 2030. This new Implementation Plan is building on the structures and mechanisms from the first Plan, developing and integrating additional approaches in areas identified through review and consultation that require further action. As we enter the third Decade of Action for the SDGs, Ireland recognises the urgency of moving into the next phase of implementation and the actions identified in the new Plan are essential to this transition.

Many of the measures through which Ireland will achieve the SDGs will be actioned in the context of policies highlighted in this VNR, including the Economic Recovery Plan developed in alignment with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan with a focus on a jobs rich recovery and supporting the transition towards a decarbonised and digital economy.

The National Development Plan 2021 - 2030 sets out the investment priorities that will underpin the implementation of the National Planning Framework, through a total investment of approximately €165 billion and has been designed to ensure that it supports Ireland's climate ambitions. For the first time in Ireland, climate and environmental assessment of the National Development Plan measures has been undertaken, along with an assessment of the alignment of the National Development Plan as a whole with the principle of a green recovery.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 established our roadmap for taking decisive action to halve our emissions by 2030 and to set us on a pathway to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by no later than 2050. These targets were made legally binding by the Climate Action and Low

Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, also agreed in 2021. Our most recent Climate Action Plan 2023 builds on this with ranges of emissions reductions for each sector of the economy and the actions needed to deliver on our domestic climate targets. It also reflects the first statutory carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings approved last year.

Ireland's commitment to achieving the SDGs is an overarching goal of A Better World, Ireland's policy for international development cooperation and our international efforts to achieve the SDSs at country-level will continue to focus on key partner countries in order to reach the furthest behind first.

This VNR reaffirms that Government, businesses, communities, and individuals in Ireland are collectively mobilising our efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030. This moment represents a significant staging post on that journey as we prepare to leave a time of unparalleled crisis behind us, accelerating action for the achievement of the SDGs ensuring that no one is left behind- neither in Ireland nor across the world.
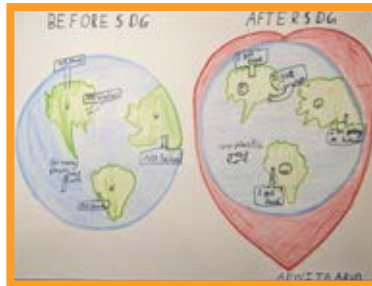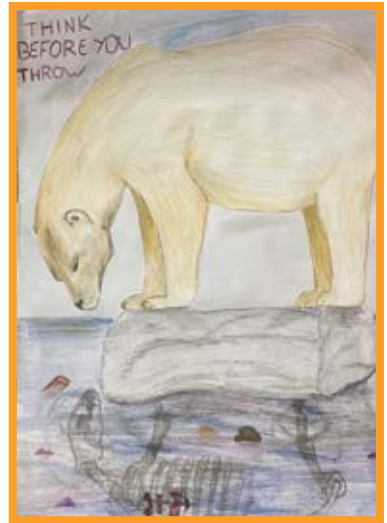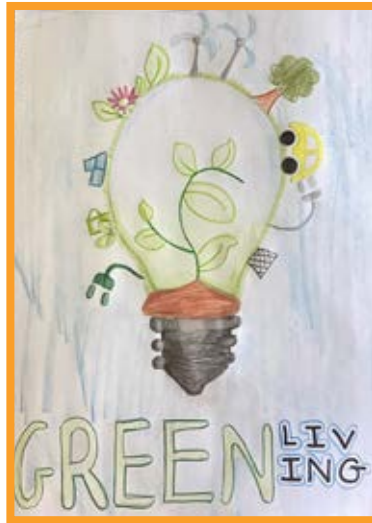
The artwork used within this Report was provided by the Sustainable Development Goals Junior Art Competition 2023, and selected by attendees of the most recent SDG National Stakeholder Forum held in April 2023