

FIRST PROGRESS REPORT

**A PROGRAMME FOR
A PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT
2016 - 2021**

December 2016

Introduction

The Programme for a Partnership Government was published on 11 May with the aim of tackling the most pressing challenges Ireland faces so as to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society. It sets out a new and collaborative approach to doing business, one which is inclusive of partners in Government, the Oireachtas and wider society.

Work on the implementation of the Programme for Government is ongoing across all Departments and this progress report sets out the progress made to date including delivery on the 100 Day Actions and measures recently announced under Budget 2017. The Finance Bill 2016, which includes Budget announcements, is currently before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Government will continue to deliver on its ambitious programme of work which has one simple objective at its core, to make people's lives better in every part of Ireland.

This progress report, which will be laid before the Oireachtas, is in addition to the Programme for Government Annual Report to be published in May following the Government's first year in office.





Reforming how the Government and the Dáil conduct business

- An All-Party Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Dáil Reform issued a Report to the Dáil in May 2016 setting out a programme of reform for how the current Dáil will operate. A number of their recommendations have already been introduced with others due to be introduced over the next number of months
- In this Dáil for the first time the members of Dáil Eireann elected the Ceann Comhairle directly by secret ballot
- This led to the establishment of a cross party Dáil Business Committee, chaired by the Ceann Comhairle, giving more power for parliament to plan its own business including agreeing the weekly agenda for the Dáil
- All Oireachtas Committees have been established and committee chairs appointed using the D'Hondt system. Under the new system, 13 of the 19 core Committees are chaired by Opposition members
- Votes are now grouped on Thursday afternoons to encourage a more family-friendly policy
- A Budget Oversight Committee has been established to allow the Oireachtas play a greater role in the budgetary process
- A Parliamentary Liaison Unit has been established in the Department of the Taoiseach to facilitate the enhanced relationship between the Government and the Oireachtas
- A revised and updated Code of Practice to improve oversight and governance of state bodies was published in August 2016
- The Citizens' Assembly has been established and is independently chaired by Ms Justice Mary Laffoy. The Assembly, which held its inaugural meeting in October and its first plenary meeting in November, will consider a range of issues over the coming year, the first being the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution.
- The Government has approved the General Scheme and priority drafting of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill
- In October 2016 a Public Service Pay Commission was established to provide, on an advisory basis, evidence based objective analysis in relation to public service pay. It is scheduled to provide its first report in Q2 2017

- The second progress report on the Civil Service Renewal Plan was published in July. Measures advanced include a Common Governance Standard, career and mobility opportunities, and strengthened performance management

Housing

- The Taoiseach appointed the first ever Minister for Housing to ensure that priority would be given to addressing the issues of housing and homelessness
- A special Cabinet Committee on Housing, chaired by An Taoiseach, was established to oversee the development and implementation of the Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness
- The Special Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, established in April 2016, presented its final report on 17 June 2016. The Committee heard from over 35 groups and accepted over 80 written submissions from the public and interested stakeholders
- *Rebuilding Ireland*, an Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness was launched on 19 July 2016 setting out 84 actions under five pillars to increase housing supply by 25,000 new homes every year by 2021, as well as 47,000 new social housing units, through an investment of some €5.5bn
- Monthly updates on housing activity will be published and overall progress reports on the Plan will be published on a quarterly basis
- The first quarterly progress report on the Action Plan was published in November. Of the 33 actions targeted for delivery in Q3, 27 have been completed or progressed in line with commitments and timelines
- A Help-to-Buy Scheme was announced in the Budget to assist first-time buyers obtain a deposit to purchase a new-build property or to build their own home. The scheme, which applies from 19 July 2016 to end 2019, provides a rebate of income tax paid of up to 5% of the value of a new home to a maximum of €20k. The rebate is available for homes up to a purchase price of €600k if purchased between 19 July and 31 December 2016, and on homes with a value up to €500k if purchased from 1 January 2017
- New Central Bank lending rules mean that from 1 January 2017 first time buyers will only require a 10% deposit when purchasing a home. Lenders can also provide up to 5% of total first time buyer lending at lower deposit levels
- A €200m Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund for 2017- 2019 has been established to provide access infrastructure to facilitate the opening up of private development on major housing sites. It is anticipated that provisional allocations will be announced before the end of the year

- NAMA is on schedule to deliver its target of funding the delivery of 2,500 residential units in 2016 towards achieving the target of 20,000 residential units by 2020. Funding the delivery of further 3,500 units is targeted for 2017.
- In July, the Central Bank announced new increased protections for variable rate mortgage holders aimed at increasing lenders transparency on variable rates

Homelessness and the Rental Sector

- In October, the detail and progress on the Social Housing pillar under the Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness was outlined including, projects approved since May which will see 800 homes delivered, the introduction of a new 'Buy and Renewal Initiative' to support Councils and AHBs to purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation and also the launch of the Repair and Leasing Scheme which is being piloted in Waterford and Carlow before national rollout in 2017
- In July, eight sites located in Cork, Galway, Waterford, Clare, Kildare and Roscommon, were announced for development of social housing through Public Private Partnership, with a capital value of approximately €100m
- The tax relief for landlords who provide accommodation to tenants in receipt of social housing supports has been maintained
- From 1 July 2016, the rent limits under the Rent Supplement and the Housing Assistance Payment schemes were increased in both urban and rural areas reflecting local rents
- The capacity of local authorities to make discretionary enhanced payments has been extended to all authorities operating the Housing Assistance Payment
- An allocation of €1.2bn was announced in the Budget for social housing programmes, a 50% increase on 2016, which will meet the needs of 21,000 families in 2017. Measures include supporting the delivery of 4,450 units, and supporting an additional 15,000 households through HAP
- In September, the detail and progress made in the Homelessness Pillar in the *Rebuilding Ireland* Action Plan was published and includes an expansion of the Rapid Build programme to deliver 1,500 units by the end of 2018 and the expansion of HAP Homeless Tenancies and measures to increase social housing
- The 2017 budget for homelessness has been increased by 40%, from €70m to €98m, which will provide for 3,000 exits from emergency accommodation through a range of funding mechanisms
- A new service, Abhaile, was launched on 3 October to provide free independent financial and legal advice for people at risk of losing their homes. As part of the new service, which is accessed through MABS, a 'duty solicitor' is available to provide assistance at court for unrepresented

borrowers facing repossession proceedings

- Additional funding was announced in the Budget to the Legal Aid Board to improve the provision of legal advice to vulnerable families who are insolvent and in mortgage arrears
- The Threshold Tenancy Protection Service has been extended to Galway City and Counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, the urban areas where the housing pressures are most acute
- Budget 2017 introduced the phased restoration, to all landlords, of full interest deductibility to be initiated by increasing the level from 75% to 80% in 2017
- The income ceiling under the Rent-A-Room Scheme was increased in the Budget by €2,000 bringing it to €14,000 per annum
- The scope of the Living City Initiative was expanded in the Budget to include landlords as well as removing the cap on maximum floor size
- The Planning and Development (Housing) and Residential Tenancies Bill 2016, which includes measures aimed at enhancing housing supply and the functioning of the private rented sector, was published on 2 November with a view to enactment before year end

Economy and Jobs

- Ireland is projected to achieve a debt to GDP ratio of 76% by the end of the year, down from a peak of over 120% during the crisis. The Government has set a new domestic target of a debt to GDP ratio of 45% to be reached by the mid to late 2020s depending on economic growth
- The Action Plan for Jobs continues to drive actions on employment creation and by Q3 there is an almost 90% completion rate of the 284 measure to be implemented in that timeframe
- The unemployment rate fell to 7.3% in November 2016
- An additional 48,500 people are at work in the first nine months of 2016 with the APJ target of 50,000 for 2016 is expected to be exceeded.
- The latest CSO figures show the number of people in employment now exceeds 2 million for the first time since the end of 2008. This is the 16th consecutive quarter of employment growth
- Progress on the eight Regional Action Plans will be published twice yearly. The first Progress Reports, covering the period to end-June 2016, are being finalised and will be published shortly. CSO figures showed the unemployment rate fell in all eight regions in the year to Q3 2016

- A Labour Employer Economic Forum has been established to bring together representatives of employers and trade unions with Government to discuss economic, employment and labour market issues. The inaugural meeting took place on October 5th and was chaired by An Taoiseach
- To support regional economic development, the IDA capital budget was increased in the Budget by 22% enabling three more new regional Advanced Facilities to be progressed. Capital funding has also been increased by 22% for Local Enterprise Offices and 12.5% for Enterprise Ireland
- The Start Your Own Business scheme will be extended for a further two years to continue providing support to long term unemployed persons who wish to create new businesses
- The Entrepreneur Relief A, Capital Gains Tax is to be reduced from 20% to 10% and will apply to the disposal, in whole or in part, of qualifying assets up to an overall limit of €1m of chargeable gains
- The Earned Income Tax Credit is being increased by €400, benefitting over 147,000 self-employed individuals generating business activity across the country
- The second report of the Low Pay Commission was published in July 2016. In line with their recommendation, Government announced an increase in the national minimum hourly rate to €9.25 with effect from 1 January 2017
- The three lowest USC rates were reduced by half a per cent in the Budget. The ceiling of the band on the reduced 2½% USC charge has also been raised to €18,772 to ensure that the salary of a full-time worker on the minimum wage will remain outside the top rates of USC
- By end September, over 10,600 SMEs, operating across all sectors of the Irish economy, have benefited from €458m of Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland loans.
- In July, €1.85m was announced for 15 LEOs to aid micro enterprises and start-ups and promote job creation
- The latest Credit Guarantee Scheme figures show that in Q3 2016 over €4.3m was sanctioned for 29 SMEs with a total of over €60.7m sanctioned to date, supporting the creation and sustainability of 2,428 jobs in the economy
- Two new €500,000 Competitive Start Funds were announced (in June and September), to support start-up activity in the manufacturing & internationally traded services sectors, and the agricultural and manufacturing sectors
- Ireland moved from 16th to 7th place in competitiveness performance in the IMD Annual World Competitiveness Yearbook 2016, published in May and up one place to 23rd in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report published in September

- CÚRAM, a Science Foundation Ireland Research Centre in Medical Devices was officially launched in September bolstering Ireland's position as one of the top med-tech clusters in the world. CÚRAM represents investment of €49m over six years with a further €19m leveraged from the EU's Horizon 2020 programme
- €40m in research funding was announced in August under SFI's Investigators Programme supporting world-class research in key priority areas for Ireland
- In July, Enterprise Ireland announced details of a programme of ministerial-led trade missions and events to support Irish exporters win new business and expand into new markets in the aftermath of the BREXIT referendum. The 68 events between July and December 2016 include 26 ministerial-led trade missions
- CSO figures show that the value of Irish exports increased by 5% in the nine months to September 2016
- A Tourism Action Plan 2016 – 2018 was published earlier this year and in the first nine months of 2016 there was a +11.6% increase in overseas visits to Ireland compared to the same period in 2015. In the first two quarters of 2016, the tourism industry had an earnings increase of 9.5% (excl. Fares) when compared to the same period in 2015

Rural Development

- On 6 May, the Taoiseach appointed a new Minister with responsibility for regional development and rural affairs. A new Cabinet Committee on Regional and Rural Affairs has also been established and work has begun on developing a new Action Plan for Rural Ireland which will be published before the end of the year.
- The 2016 Town and Village Renewal Scheme was launched in August with €10m being made available to support the regeneration of rural towns and villages across Ireland. Successful projects were announced in early November. A total of 172 towns and villages will benefit this year under the scheme with a particular focus being placed on supporting smaller towns, with populations of less than 5,000
- A number of measures were announced in the Budget to help rural communities and balance regional development including, trebling of funding to €12m for the Town and Village Renewal Scheme; an additional €8m for National rural Development Schemes; €5m for CLÁR; €40m for the LEADER programme; and increased funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Funding Agreements have been signed in 27 of the 28 sub-regional areas designated for LEADER which opens access to €250m in funding for enterprise development, job creation and the development of sustainable community infrastructure across rural Ireland.

- A new €5m phase of the Rural Economic Development Zones initiative was announced at the end of September. Under the 2016 scheme, every county in the country will receive approval for at least one REDZ project
- The Wild Atlantic Way continues to be developed with the Derrygimlagh Signature Discovery Point opening in July 2016 and the Connemara Cultural Centre at Pearse's Cottage opened in November. Grants were also awarded in July for the development of the Connemara Greenway and towards Phase 1 of the development of new visitor facilities on the Great Blasket Island
- In July, over €3.6m in funding was announced for Greenway projects in counties Kildare, Meath, Longford and Westmeath
- A number of milestones have been reached in relation to the National Broadband Plan including the completion of the Pre-qualification process, a decision reached on the ownership model, and formal dialogue commenced with the 3 qualified bidders who have indicated they will propose a predominantly fibre-to-the-home solution involving a network spanning up to 100,000km of road and up to 96% of the land area of Ireland.
- The Taskforce on Mobile Phone and Broadband Access was established in July. Four sub-groups have also been established to examine issues such as Planning, Consumer Issues, Access to Infrastructure and Network Enhancement. The Taskforce will report to Government by the end of the year with a series of actions which can be taken in the short to medium term to improve access to mobile phone and broadband services.
- Two Regional Broadband Action Groups have been established with all 31 Local Authorities and are meeting bi-monthly
- A Post Office Hub Working Group was established in July 2016 to examine how Post Offices could act as community hubs. The Group has concluded its work and is finalising its report
- The It Makes Sense loan scheme, which provides low-cost loans to low-income families as an alternative to money-lenders, has been made available to credit unions across Ireland
- The Credit Union Advisory Committee's Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Commission on Credit Unions Report was published in July
- 71 community and voluntary organisations have been approved for funding under the 2016-2019 Scheme to Support National Organisations. The total funding of over €16.5m will be paid out over the 3-year lifetime of the scheme
- A new €9m Arts and Culture Capital Scheme 2016, to run from 2016-2018, was launched in July and applications are now being evaluated

Health, Mental Health and Disabilities

- An All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Health Care was established in June to develop a 10-year plan for of the health service. An interim report was published in August
- The Waiting List Action Plan 2016 was launched to reduce the number of patients waiting over 18 months on the Inpatient/Daycare waiting list by 50%, while the Endoscopy Waiting List 2016 initiative will outsource endoscopy procedures to benefit 3,000 patients currently waiting over 12 months. In addition a further €15m was provided in the Budget 2017, rising to €50m in 2018, to the National Treatment Purchase Fund to address the waiting list issue
- As announced in the Budget, an additional €497m has been provided for health in 2017 bringing total spending to €14.6bn which will help deliver new developments and services including waiting lists, children with disabilities and older people
- As part of the Budget, medical card coverage will be provided for all children in receipt of a Domiciliary Care Allowance, benefiting in the region of 10,000 children
- The extension of the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines commenced on 1 December 2016
- Additional funding has been provided in the Budget for disability services including, supports and services for all 18 year old school-leavers with a disability, emergency residential supports, speech and language and occupational therapy, and improvements to meet regulatory standards
- Capital funding of €20m is being made available to the HSE in 2016 to relocate some 160 people currently living in 14 institutions around the country into more suitable accommodation
- The Task Force on Personalised Budgets was established in September with a remit to make recommendations on a personalised budgets model for people with a disability
- A National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health which was established in August has agreed key success factors for its work and met with service user's parents and frontline staff. The first in a series of consultations with young people have been held.
- The award of the contract for the construction of the new National Forensic Mental Health Service in Portrane has been approved and additional funding of over €50m has been allocated for this purpose in 2017
- As announced in the Budget, all weekly benefits including the Blind Pension, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, Disability Allowance, and Invalidity Pension will increase by €5 per week from March 2017. The dental and optical benefits available under the Treatment Benefit Scheme will be expanded from October 2017

- Budget 2017 provides for the extension of entitlement to the Treatment Benefit Scheme (from March 2017) and the Invalidity Pension Scheme (from December 2017) to self-employed workers
- In July, a new four-year agreement was signed with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association that will keep prices of medicines in Ireland on a downward trajectory and will save up to €600m in cumulative savings from IPHA companies over the period with potential for more than €150m in savings from non-IPHA companies
- A Rapid Expert Review on the National Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2016 was published in September. The review provides a top-level overview of the strategy and will inform the work of developing the new strategy which will take effect in 2017
- The Misuse of Drugs (Amendment) Act 2016, enacted in July, amends and extends the law relating to the prevention of the misuse of certain dangerous or otherwise harmful drugs
- The agreement reached with the IMO on rural practice is being implemented
- The independent clinical review on the provision of a second catheterisation laboratory at University Hospital Waterford was published in September
- The European Union (Manufacture, Presentation and Sale of Tobacco and Related Products) Regulations 2016 come into force 20 May 2016. The Regulations provide for more stringent rules for tobacco and related products including measures for labelling and the regulation of electronic cigarettes

Children and Youth Affairs and Older People

- Two weeks paternity leave is now available for fathers with effect from 1 September 2016
- Since September 2016, the Early Childhood Care and Education programme has been expanded to provide 15 hours of free preschool per week for all children from the time they turn three until they go to school
- A new Single Affordable Childcare Scheme will be introduced from September 2017 which will provide means-tested subsidies, based on parental income, for children between 6 months and 15 years and universal subsidies for all children aged 6 months to 3 years
- New childcare regulations came into operation in June 2016 to underpin a number of key reforms to the sector to improve quality standards including, registration and inspection of a pre-school service, management and staff, care of children, and safety including first aid provision
- Provisions were made in the Budget to maintain all local Area-Based Childhood programmes to tackle child poverty in 2017 and additional funding provided to TUSLA (€37m) and for youth work programmes (€5.5m)

- An extra €16m was provided in 2016 to create an additional 3,200 full-time equivalent community childcare subvention places
- A National Youth Strategy Lead Team was established in July to co-ordinate, progress and monitor implementation of the National Youth Strategy
- The Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Youth Strategy secured funding of €400,000 in Budget 2017, to support the Strategy development process and commence implementation.
- A new Youth Employability Initiative was announced in June with funding of €600,000 for 2016 for programmes targeting disadvantaged young people to improve their employability. Over 1,000 young people aged 15-24 will participate in 28 projects
- The State pension is to increase by €5 per week from March 2017. The Living Alone Allowance and Free Travel have been protected
- As provided in the Budget, the monthly cap on prescription charges for those over 70 is to be reduction from €25 to €20
- The Home Carer's Credit has been increased in the Budget by €100, further assisting one income families who care for children or the elderly in the home. Additional funding has also been provided for homecare, including home help and home care packages
- Funding for the Community Alert Programme has been doubled to €350,000 and now incorporates a new €100,000 rebate scheme for local groups registered under the Garda Text Alert Scheme. The funding will also provide for the re-launch of the Crime Prevention Ambassador Scheme.
- A cross-sectoral group was established in June to oversee implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. An Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016 – 2025 was also launched in September to reverse obesity trends, to prevent health complications

Education

- The Department of Education's Strategy Statement and Action Plan for Education was published on 15 September with a particular focus on disadvantage, skills, and continuous improvement within the education service
- An additional €458m was provided in the Budget to fund an extensive programme of recruitment in 2017. An additional 2,400 teaching posts will be met through 900 additional resource teachers and 1,500 mainstream teaching posts including 100 guidance counselling posts. An additional 115 Special Needs Assistant posts have also been provide for from January 2017

- An additional 860 Special Needs Assistants are being provided during the second half of 2016, representing a 7% increase in the total numbers
- Funding was also provided to strengthen school leadership with additional deputy principal posts for schools with enrolments of 700 students and over, totalling 170 posts
- 200 experienced school leaders have received training to support newly appointed principals in 2016/2017 school year
- The report of the review group on STEM education in schools was published in November, along with an action plan incorporating 21 actions to be implemented immediately
- The Access and Inclusion Model, which provides supports for children with a disability to access the ECCE programme, was introduced in June 2016 to allow parents and providers to plan for September enrolments. Funding of €15m was provided in 2016 and full implementation is underway
- Changes in the Budget include an additional teacher for all one-teacher island primary schools and capacity of one-teacher mainland schools to apply for an additional teacher in certain circumstances
- An additional €36.5m was allocated in the Budget for the higher and further education sector in 2017
- The report of the Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education was published in July and has been referred to the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills
- As outlined in the Budget a consultation process is being initiated on the design and operation of an Employer-Exchequer investment mechanism in relation to higher education to operate from 2018 onwards
- An independent expert was engaged in July to review the obstacles to lone parents participating in and completing higher education. Their report is expected by the end of the year.
- €2.7m was announced in September for the Programme for Access to Higher Education Fund to support disadvantaged students under the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education. Additional funding of €8.5m announced as part of the Budget to support over 3,000 students from disadvantaged groups to attend higher level education
- Springboard+ 2016 was launched on 15 June 2016 and will provide for 5,825 free higher education courses across the country. Over 90% of the courses (excluding entrepreneurship courses) contain work placement elements

- 25 participants successfully graduated from the 10-week pilot Defence Forces Employment Support Scheme in August and an evaluation of the pilot scheme is now underway
- The Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2016 was published in July to provide families with fairer access to their local schools
- The commencement in July of the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Acts 2001-2015 means that for the first time any person will be able to make a complaint to the Teaching Council about a registered teacher
- Looking at Our School 2016, a new quality framework for school self-evaluation was published in August 2016
- By the end of 2016, 29 new schools and 19 large scale extensions will have been completed. These large scale projects, together with projects delivered under the Additional Accommodation Scheme will provide an additional 20,000 permanent school places
- An additional €95m has been provided in the Budget for 2017. The target for 2017 is to deliver in excess of 20,000 additional school places
- The patronage of 9 new post-primary schools was announced in November, 8 of which will be multi-denominational, to be established in 2017 and 2018
- The Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 was launched in October setting out how Gaeltacht schools will be supported to provide high-quality, Irish-medium education
- In October, the EIB agreed a €200m investment loan which will support the construction, enlargement and modernisation of 71 schools over the next 4 years

Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality

- The Government has approved that by 2021 the Garda workforce should comprise a total of 21,000 personnel; to include 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Garda Reserve members and 4,000 civilians
- A new recruitment campaign for members of An Garda Síochána was launched in September with successful candidates expected to enter the Garda College from mid-2017
- Funding has been provided in the Budget for the recruitment in 2017 of 800 Garda recruits and up to 500 civilians to support the wide ranging reform plan in train in An Garda Síochána. Approximately 300 appointments will also be made to the Garda Reserve.
- The new Proceeds of Crime Act 2016 provides for the reduction of the threshold value of property which can be detained and seized by CAB from €13,000 to €5,000

- The Garda Commissioner has requested the Policing Authority to oversee a review of the boundaries of Garda districts
- Following Government approval in June, work has commenced on a pilot scheme to re-open six Garda stations
- The process for selecting and training members for a new Armed Support Unit is underway and will be completed by the year end. Competitions have also commenced to fill vacancies in specialist units. Additional funding has also been provided to allow for sustained pressure to tackle gangland crime and the continuation of Operation Thor
- A Joint Strategy, by the Probation Service, the Prison Service and An Garda Síochána, was recently launched for the enhanced management of offenders
- The inaugural meeting of the monitoring committee of the newly launched National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence took place in June 2016 and began the first formal monitoring of actions under the Strategy. The first round of monitoring of the Strategy has been complete.
- In September, the contract was awarded for a new national campaign to increase the awareness of domestic and sexual violence
- Over 500 refugees have been received from Lebanon under the Resettlement Programme. Initial language training and orientation programmes have been provided, and to end November, 380 refugees have already been housed in the community. A further 278 refugees are due to arrive in spring 2017.
- Ireland will receive 240 applicants from Greece by year end under the Relocation Programme. 110 people have been relocated so far with further refugees arriving each month
- In August, UN Agreement was reached on Irish –led negotiations on a Global Approach to helping Refugees and Migrants. The agreement has a strong human rights focus, with clear undertakings by UN member states to protect the human rights of all refugees and migrants, regardless of status
- Work is being progressed in the key area of accommodation for those in Direct Provision including improvements to quality of living space for families in accommodation centres; and the introduction of facilities within accommodation centres which will allow families to cook for themselves

- EU funding of €5.5m was announced in September for projects to support women entrepreneurs and for initiatives targeted at women who are currently detached from the labour market, but wish to take up paid employment
- 88 projects have been identified in the White Paper on Defence with substantial progress on overall governance and implementation of projects for immediate action

Agriculture, Marine and Climate Change

- A number of measures were announced as part of the Budget to assist the farming and marine sector including, the extension of farm restructuring relief from end 2016 to end 2019; an increase in the farmer's flat-rate addition from 5.2% to 5.4%; a 'step out' of income averaging provision for farmers; the introduction of an income tax credit of €1,270 for fishermen; and an additional 500 new places on the Rural Social Scheme
- To further support farmers, farm income and other income from off-farm self-employment will be assessed at 70%, down from 100%, for Farm Assist. Child-related income disregards are being restored. From March 2017, the Farm Assist Allowance is to increase by €5 per week.
- The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland has invited banks and non-bank finance providers to take part in a new Agri-Cashflow Support Loan Scheme that will make €150m available to farmers at low-cost interest rates of 2.95% to support primary producers in the aftermath of Brexit
- Funding under the Rural Development Programme has been increased by 21% to €601m for 2017 to further support the agri-food sector.
- *Steps To Success 2016*, the first progress report of Food Wise 2025, was published in July 2016 with achievements including: market opening secured for beef in the USA, Canada, Iran (reopened), extension of market access for beef and sheep-meat in the Philippines: and roll-out of the Rural Development Programme
- The Grocery Goods Regulations came into force on 30 April 2016. Large grocery goods retailers and wholesalers have identified liaison officers to work on this
- A major agri-food trade mission to Asia took place in September focussing on the development of new market opportunities in China, Vietnam & South Korea. A further trade mission took place in early November to North Africa.
- An agricultural attaché has been appointed in Abu Dhabi and Bord Bia has opened new offices in Warsaw and in Singapore

- In June 2016, the Turkish live cattle market was opened and to date 8,240 cattle have been exported
- Agreement has been reached in granting access for Irish sheep-meat to Iran, the second largest consumer market in the Middle East and North Africa
- A Mart Modernisation Scheme was opened in May which will primarily assist farmers in the purchase of breeding stock for participation in the Beef Data Genomics Programme
- The application process for Beef Knowledge Transfer groups was opened in May. Over 568 groups have registered with some 9,649 farmers
- In August, a €500m EU Aid package was agreed for dairy farmers, which is designed to support market stabilisation across the EU's dairy sector through voluntary supply reduction and exceptional aid
- The application process for Sheep Knowledge Transfer Groups is open with 212 groups registered with 3,556 farmers
- In May, €5.4m in funding was awarded to 154 projects under the Scheme Investment Aid for the Development of the Commercial Horticulture Sector
- Under the Fodder Aid Scheme which targets farmers affected by flooding, 391 applications were received, of which 330 have received compensation totalling over €660k
- In October, Ireland ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change which sets out a global action plan to restrict the impact of emissions on global warming
- To progress actions to mitigate the effects of climate change, measures announced in the Budget include, funding towards the establishment of a National Dialogue on Climate Change; €100m to be invested in energy projects, funding for the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme and the Better Energy schemes; and VRT relief on electric vehicles and electric motorcycles extended for a period of 5 years
- A review into the options available to improve the availability of flood insurance was submitted for inclusion in the overall report of the Interdepartmental Flood Policy Coordination Group which has been submitted to Government
- A voluntary Home Relocation Programme has been announced to assist those worst affected homeowners whose primary residences flooded during last winter and had flooded in previous years

- Under the €430m being provided for Flood Risk Management, there are 12 major flood defence schemes underway throughout the country, with a further 23 schemes at design or development stage

Relations Worldwide

- A new Cabinet Committee on Brexit has been established to oversee the overall Government response to the outcome of the referendum, including both the economic impact and the negotiations at EU level
- The Government commenced an all-island Civic Dialogue on Brexit at a conference in Dublin on 2 November. The Dialogue provides an opportunity for civic society groups, business groups, NGOs and the main political parties on the island to come together and discuss the implications of the referendum result for Ireland
- The Taoiseach met with Prime Minister May in July and numerous ministerial visits were made to the UK in the run up to the EU referendum on 23 June. Most visits included trade promotion elements as well as political and Irish community contacts
- The Heads of Missions from across Ireland's network of 80 Embassies and Consulates attended a Departmental Conference in August to debate and consider the implications of the UK vote to exit the EU for our external relationships and to strengthen our capacity to respond effectively
- The Government will continue to work with other like minded EU states to prepare for an EU without the UK in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum
- As part of the 2016 Centenary programme, further commemoration events took place in recent months including those in respect of the Battle of the Somme and Roger Casement
- A presentation ceremony took place on 4 December to award a 1916 medal to a representative number of Defence Force Personnel. A further two ceremonies will take place before the end of the year
- During 2016, additional funding is being made available to support greater regional and local access to material held in the National Collections under the Mobility of Collections Scheme
- An international agreement was signed in September between the Irish and British Governments to provide for the establishment of an Independent Reporting Commission which will have an important role in the work to bring an end to the remaining vestiges of para-militarism in Northern Ireland