



Programme for a Just Recovery

About Uplift

Uplift is a people-powered campaigning community made up of 250,000 people across the island of Ireland who take coordinated action for progressive social change. Our core values are environmental sustainability, deep and transparent democracy, social justice and equality. Uplift members come from every town and province - from Malon to Mizen head.

We are not party political, but we care deeply about driving social change and believe that by strengthening the relationships between people affected by issues, and the people who make decisions, we will bring about a more just society for all.

We speak to all political parties equally and without prejudice in the spirit of cooperation, accountability and deep democracy.

About our Programme for a Caring Government

Uplift regularly uses surveys to poll members on key issues that affect their lives. While COVID-19 has presented huge challenges to most people in Ireland, members are also looking beyond the end of this crisis - to the new Ireland that can emerge.

The following policy principles that we are proposing are based on extensive surveying of thousands of Uplift members. We have divided our results into three main categories, which Uplift members have consistently named as top priorities for a new Government.

Section 1: Building a Thriving Health System

There is clearly a strong agreement across political parties that our health system needs to radically transform in order to be able to deliver the care that people in Ireland need. Indeed, both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have recognised in manifestos that more nurses and frontline staff need to be recruited, that there is a pressing need for more step-down and Primary Care services, and that 24/7 Mental Health care needs to be a priority. [1]

However, while the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the incredible job that health workers and front line staff do, it has also demonstrated where our health system is lacking.

Here are the policy proposals for building a thriving health system, backed by Uplift members, in order of priority:

- 1. Step up recruitment of specialists:** We welcome Fine Gael's commitment to "the recruitment of 1,000 frontline staff" including clinical and diagnostic workers. [2] to strengthen our health system. However, there is a pressing need for more key diagnostic and clinical specialists i.e. psychologists, occupational therapists, endocrinologists and speech and language therapists etc. Uplift members believe it is worth investing in competitive salaries and work packages in order to drive recruitment, retention in order to reduce waiting times and deliver better services.
- 2. Keep private hospitals in public ownership and introduce a one-tier health system:** It is admirable that for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis, the caretaker government led by Fine Gael decided that there would be no inequality in the standard of care given to public or private patients. We also commend Fianna Fáil's policies to bring private resources into a one-tier health system for the long term public good.
- 3. Build and resource more primary healthcare centres:** As has been rightly recognised by both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil manifestos the key to taking pressure off our hospitals is through delivering more diagnostic, outpatient, community, and mental health services through the Primary Health Care System. We are also calling

for more Primary Health Care centres to be opened nationally - prioritising the areas with most need.

- 4. Introduce 24/7 Mental Health Care Nationwide:** This has rightly been identified as a priority by both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, though delivery of these services has been too slow and too many lives have been lost as a result. 24/7 Mental health care can be made available through local primary care services, or where they don't exist, through existing psychiatric care teams.

- 5. Nurses need a salary increase.:** Uplift members support spending €300m per annum in order to pay nurses at a higher rate. As the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted, recruitment of nurses is possible given the right circumstances. However to meet Fine Gael's target of "5,000 additional nurses" [3] for our health service, we need to ensure that we are offering competitive salaries and working conditions so that those recruited during the COVID-19 crisis are retained, and that more can be recruited in the coming years.

- 6. Introduce free GP care for everyone - like the NHS:** It is commendable that both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael manifestos are seeking to expand on who free GP care is offered to. However, we know that GPs are a powerful weapon in the fight against ill health, and often the first point of contact when people fall either mentally or physically ill. Removing the barriers to this care at the point of use will mean a healthier Ireland, where conditions are diagnosed and treated earlier.

Section 2: Delivering a People's Housing Plan

Uplift members have been engaging with elected politicians on the policy principles proposed in 'The People's Housing Plan.

The People's Housing Plan is a vision for the future of Irish housing based on the lived experience of over 3,000 people in Ireland and the policy expertise of professionals who actively work in the fields of housing and homelessness, policy and research. [4]

This week, we re-poll members on the measures put forward in the People's Housing Plan, along with other measures specifically related to COVID-19.

Here are the policy proposals for ensuring everyone on this island has a safe, warm home, backed by Uplift members, in order of priority:

- 1. Introduce a rent waiver scheme for people who cannot pay rent because of COVID-19:** It is essential that renters are not met with huge rent debts or eviction notices once the immediate threat of COVID-19 passes. It is much welcomed that banks have agreed to facilitate a mortgage holiday for mortgage holders, but the same must be extended to renters. This is why a rent waiver scheme is so necessary for people who cannot pay.
- 2. Stop the sale of public lands to private developers:** The sale of public land to private developers cannot continue if we want to deliver high quality, affordable and fully public homes over the next five years. Both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have supported the sale of valuable public lands. However, a Behaviour and Attitudes poll conducted on behalf of members showed that 94% of people across Ireland support building public homes on public land. [5]
- 3. Build fully accessible public homes and Traveller accommodation, at least 100,000 over the next five years:** There are currently over 71,000 people on the public housing list, yet only 4,000 new public homes were built in 2018.[6]. While the Housing Assistance Schemes delivers 'social' housing through the private rental sector, it does not deliver secure and affordable homes. [7] This can only be done through either the building of new public homes, or through the acquisition of new public homes through purchase – either compulsory purchase of vacant property or purchase of private property at affordable rates. People in receipt of HAP continue to be in insecure rental situations, where the landlord may choose to evict them for any reason.
- 4. Reduce the number of vacant homes and land banks by introducing a higher tax and through the Government buying suitable sites and properties:** Right now, local authorities can apply a 7% tax on vacant sites, but it's not enough to work quickly. A higher tax of 30% on unused land banks and vacant properties would: 1. Increase supply quickly: There are over 245,460 vacant homes across the country. Many of these could be brought to the market quickly if it became less profitable to keep them empty. [8] As it stands, people are paying 30% more rent on average

than during the Celtic Tiger peak due to a lack of supply. [9] We need to make it more profitable for developers to bring homes to the market, than to leave them vacant while prices soar and homelessness grows. The revenue from a 'use it or lose it' tax could be ring fenced to be put towards public build of affordable homes.

- 5. End institutionalised living like homeless hubs and Direct Provision:** Ireland's institutionalisation of human beings has to end. To our national shame, we are still dealing with the effects of institutional abuse on people who were incarcerated in mother and baby homes and religious schools. We are repeating that pattern today through the system of direct provision, emergency accommodation and homeless hubs. We must end these systems as a matter of urgency and instead give people the privacy, dignity and opportunities they deserve.

Section 3: Delivering a Just and Sustainable Recovery

- 1. Introduce a 'Green New Deal':** It is essential that when we begin to recover and emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, that people have opportunities to return to decent employment. This means a public programme that builds energy efficient homes and retrofits existing ones to lower BEIR ratings and save on household fuel consumption and costs - we welcome plans to expand this by 10x by Fine Gael. [10] However, a Green New Deal also means investing in building a much stronger public transport system that allows people to access services and work in a much more energy efficient manner.
- 2. Invest in new renewable public energy programmes and ban the exploration and importation of fracked gas and oil:** There are also huge employment and revenue opportunities in renewable energy. Indeed, Scotland, which has a similar capacity for wind energy, saw their renewable energy industry contribute £5.9 billion to Scotland's economy and provided 21,400 people with decent employment. [11] This industry should be developed in Ireland as a public good and a public revenue generator. We must suspend licenses for the exploration of gas and oil and rapidly transition from the importation and use of fossil fuels.
- 3. Ban single use plastics and introduce a bottle deposit scheme:** Plastic bottle deposit schemes have been massively successful in countries like Germany. It is

also popular with people in Ireland with 78% percent of people polled by Behaviour and Attitudes on behalf of Uplift supporting a scheme. [12]

4. Make services free at the point of use - health, childcare, education ie.

Universal Basic Services: Universal Basic Services offer a practical, efficient and affordable solution to the increasingly unaffordable services. While Fianna Fáil's plan to *"expand Ireland's childcare sector by investing in providers, supporting staff, and reducing core operating costs"* and Fine Gael's plans to *"increase the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme to 42 weeks per year over the course of the next five years"* [13] are step in the right direction - a much more ambitious programme to deliver high quality and efficient public services that are universal and free at the point of use is necessary to make sure everyone has an opportunity to thrive in Irish society.

5. Offer capital grants to small businesses and self employed people that help

them become more energy efficient: Small to medium sized Irish businesses account for 70.5% of our total employment, exceeding the EU average by 4%. [14] However, it is these businesses that will be most hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. That's why a recovery stimulus grant scheme, that supports businesses to invest in their sustainability and growth, whilst also becoming more energy efficient and lowering the carbon output, is essential to a just recovery for everyone living in Ireland.

References

- [1] [Fine Gael](#) & [Fianna Fáil](#) Manifestos

- [2] [Fine Gael](#) Manifesto

- [3] [Fine Gael](#) Manifesto

- [4] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [5] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [6] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [7] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [8] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [9] Uplift: [The People's Housing Plan](#)

- [10] [Fine Gael](#) Manifesto

- [11] Business For Scotland: [How Scotland is leading the world's renewable energy revolution](#)

- [12] The Guardian: [Bolder Bottle Deposit Scheme could be worth £2 Billion](#) & Uplift: [Behaviour and Attitudes Poll Results Plastic Bottle Deposit Scheme](#)

- [13] [Fine Gael](#) & [Fianna Fáil](#) Manifestos

- [14] European Commission: [Review of SMEs by Country](#)

