

# Sustainable Development Goals and a Global Pandemic – Improving Ireland’s Progress

The COVID-19 crisis will impose its heaviest tolls on the most vulnerable, both nationally and internationally. Our recovery must look beyond pure economic growth to a more sustainable society for all.

In 2015, the UN proposed and adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on 169 targets and over 230 indicators. In January 2016, the SDGs came into force. The SDGs are designed to refocus efforts towards policies that directly help people and communities in the long run. They aim to provide both a pathway out of poverty for about a billion people in the world, and a pathway to a sustainable future for all countries and peoples.

The social and economic response to the current crisis demands the type of thinking that led Ireland to have a crucial role in the development of the SDGs. While we have not performed as well as we could in progressing the 2030 Agenda in recent years, now is the time to do better.

In February 2020, Social Justice Ireland published its Sustainable Progress Index 2020 (authors: Clark, Kavanagh and Lenihan). It examines Ireland’s performance on the SDGs in the context of its peers in the EU – the focus is the EU15 countries. Comparing relative performance among countries from a similar regional or income group is valuable.

## Data and Method

Data collection for the analysis was far-ranging. The UN Indicator Set (2017) is the starting point for data selection and

the final indicator set is as closely aligned as possible with this list. (For full details on methodology see Clark, Kavanagh and Lenihan, Sustainable Progress Index 2020).

## So How does Ireland Compare?

Table 1 presents the results of Ireland’s ranking by each SDG. We can see that Ireland scores well on SDGs relating to Quality Education (SDG 4) and Peace and Justice (SDG 16). However, Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7); Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12); Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG9); Climate Action (SDG13); and Life Below Water (SDG 14) all score in the bottom third and Ireland faces significant challenges in achieving the objectives of these SDGs.

The remaining SDGs are in the middle (ranked 6-10), implying there is still scope for improvement. Going forward, it is critically important to continue to monitor all relevant indicators under SDG to track progress towards these goals.

## Government Policy and the SDGs

The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted both the deficits in current policy thinking and the need for a new way of thinking and a new Social Contract. This Social Contract should be aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals to work towards a recovery where no one is left behind.

On the following page, we set out a series of policy priorities for Ireland at a national level to move towards a more sustainable future.

Table 1 Ireland’s Position on the SDGs

 <b>1 NO POVERTY</b> Rank 9/15	 <b>2 ZERO HUNGER</b> Rank 9/15	 <b>3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING</b> Rank 7/15	 <b>4 QUALITY EDUCATION</b> Rank 2/15	 <b>5 GENDER EQUALITY</b> Rank 10/15	 <b>6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</b> Rank 8/15	 <b>7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY</b> Rank 11/15	 <b>8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</b> Rank 9/15	 <b>9 INDUSTRY INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE</b> Rank 11/15
 <b>10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES</b> Rank 9/15	 <b>11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES</b> Rank 8/15	 <b>12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION</b> Rank 13/15	 <b>13 CLIMATE ACTION</b> Rank 13/15	 <b>14 LIFE BELOW WATER</b> Rank 11/15	 <b>15 LIFE ON LAND</b> Rank 9/15	 <b>16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS</b> Rank 5/15	 <b>17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS</b> Rank 8/15	 <b>SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS</b>

**Table 2: Policy Proposals at National Level**

SDG Number	Policy Proposals	SDG Number	Policy Proposals
<b>1</b> NO POVERTY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a Basic Income, Refundable Tax Credits and Living Wage.</li> <li>Benchmark all social welfare payments to at least 27.5% of the Average Weekly Wage as a move towards a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.</li> </ul>	<b>10</b> REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully implement the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 and review the targets set out annually.</li> <li>Fully implement the recommendations of the UN CERD.</li> <li>Expedite legislation on hate crime and hate speech.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> ZERO HUNGER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fund research on food poverty through stakeholder groups such as the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, St. Vincent de Paul and MABS.</li> <li>Expand the 'hot school meals' programme, particularly for schools and pre-schools in disadvantaged areas.</li> </ul>	<b>11</b> SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aim to make 20% of all housing social housing in line with other European countries.</li> <li>Shift investment from Family Hubs to Housing First as a long-term strategy to eliminating homelessness.</li> <li>Support community programmes such as sports initiatives playgrounds, recreational centres and libraries to sustain communities.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement the Sláintecare Strategy and invest in primary care networks.</li> <li>Increase the number of community beds.</li> <li>Increase supports to carers.</li> <li>Increase home care package provision and introduce legislation for a right to homecare.</li> </ul>	<b>12</b> RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce a circular economy package for Ireland across all areas of economic activity.</li> <li>Research cradle-to-cradle development.</li> <li>Place a levy on single-use plastics.</li> <li>Invest in the development of short supply chains.</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> QUALITY EDUCATION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make combatting educational disadvantage a priority.</li> <li>Commit to increasing investment in Early Childhood Care and Education by 0.1 per cent of GDP annually to meet the OECD average by 2025.</li> <li>Develop a framework to deliver sustainable funding revenues for higher education over the next five years with a roadmap to 2028.</li> </ul>	<b>13</b> CLIMATE ACTION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a Just Transition Dialogue.</li> <li>Develop a comprehensive mitigation and transition programme to transition to a low carbon economy.</li> </ul>
<b>5</b> GENDER EQUALITY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce legislation to support flexible and remote working.</li> <li>Deliver high-quality community childcare.</li> <li>Individualise and equalise social welfare payments.</li> <li>Introduce a Universal State Social Welfare Pension.</li> </ul>	<b>14</b> LIFE BELOW WATER 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully implement the National Integrated Maritime Plan.</li> <li>Regulate harvesting and end over-fishing.</li> <li>Implement policies to restore fishing stocks to sustainable levels.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b> CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to provide support and advice to farmers to improve water quality under the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advice Programme</li> <li>Invest in Ireland's waste water system.</li> </ul>	<b>15</b> LIFE ON LAND 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase afforestation of native trees and reduce planting of Sitka spruce.</li> <li>Develop environmentally sustainable farming practices.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b> AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upgrade the national grid and invest in infrastructure necessary to support a transition to renewable energy.</li> <li>Invest in research and development for the use of renewable energy in our public transport systems.</li> </ul>	<b>16</b> PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase Social Dialogue and expand the National Economic Dialogue to a range of other policy areas.</li> <li>Restore funding to the Community and Voluntary Pillar.</li> <li>Increase funding for civil legal aid.</li> </ul>
<b>8</b> DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt policies to address youth unemployment.</li> <li>Recognise that the term "work" is not synonymous with "job".</li> <li>Develop a new National Index of Progress that looks beyond economic growth to include environmental and social factors.</li> <li>Introduce shadow national accounts, and assign value to natural capital and ecosystems in our national accounting systems.</li> </ul>	<b>17</b> PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing ODA as % of GNI, with a move towards the UN Target of 0.7% of GNI by 2025.</li> <li>Adopt targets and a reporting system for the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>Tag all Government policies and policy proposals with the relevant Goal(s).</li> <li>Focus on securing policy coherence – several aspects of current Government policy are at odds with the SDGs</li> </ul>
<b>9</b> INDUSTRY INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in initiatives that strengthen social infrastructure – schools, primary care centres, social housing and so on.</li> <li>Support a minimum corporation tax of 6% so that large corporations and MNCs contribute to the sustainability of the community in which they are situated.</li> </ul>		

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think tank and justice advocacy organisation that advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for society as a whole.

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