



Social Justice Ireland

National Social Monitor

Sustainability Edition – September 2019



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Introduction

Sustainable development is defined as ‘development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’. It encompasses three pillars; environment, society and economy. A sustainable development framework integrates these three pillars in a balanced manner with consideration for the needs of future generations. Maintaining this balance is crucial to the long-term development of a sustainable resource-efficient future for Ireland. While growth and economic competitiveness are important, they should be considered in the context of sustainability, using a framework for sustainable development which gives equal consideration to the environmental, social and economic pillars.

Ireland has signed up to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and is committed to legally binding climate commitments in 2020 and 2030 and a national commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050. Ensuring development is sustainable socially, economically and environmentally will be key to achieving our environmental and sustainability targets.

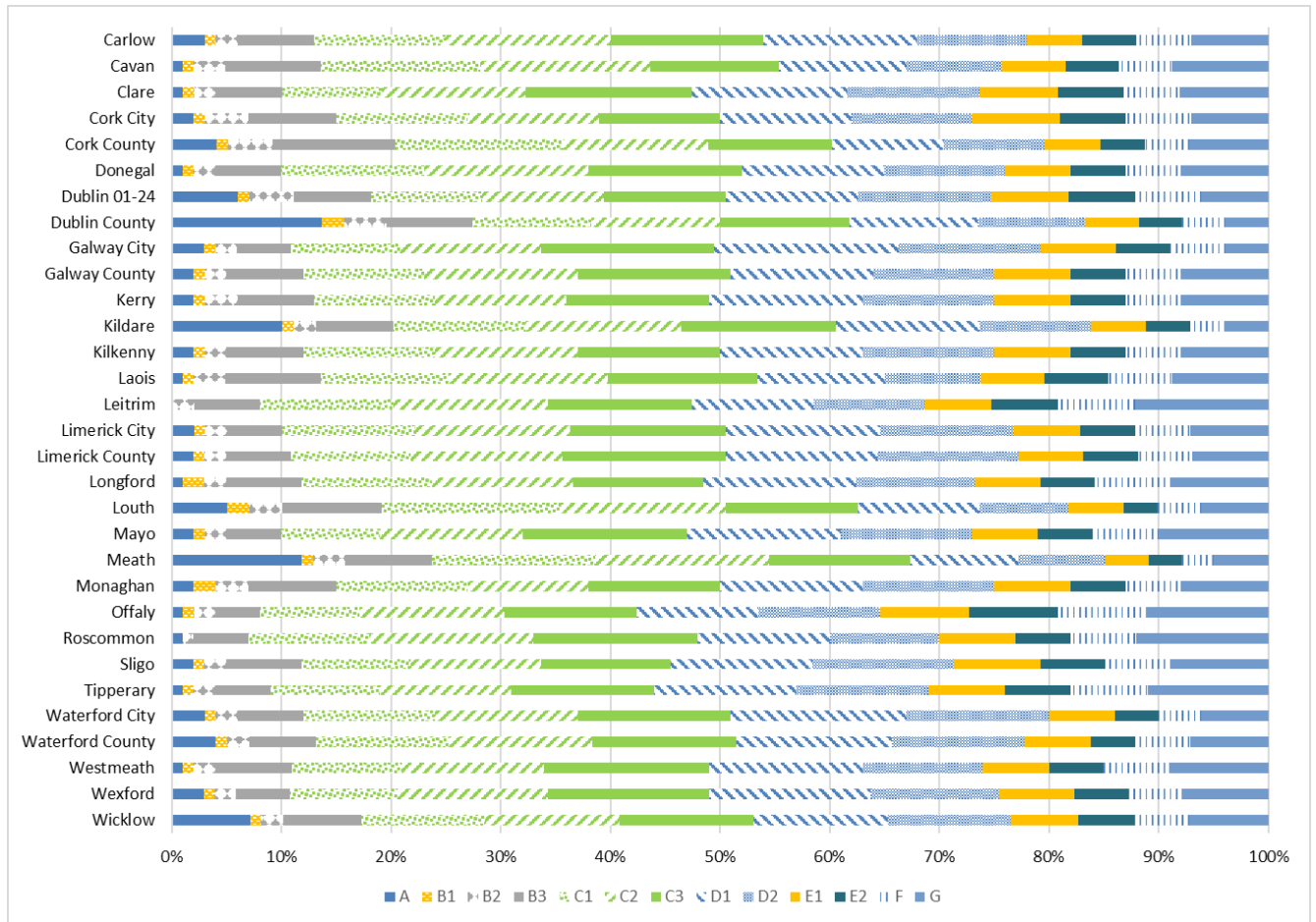
In this edition of our National Social Monitor, *Social Justice Ireland* examines the present situation on a range of policy issues using a sustainable development framework. We look at whether current policy on sustainability encompasses the three pillars of environment, society and economy and make proposals on how to transition towards a sustainable future. The issues presented are:

1. Housing and Homelessness
2. Health
3. Education and Skills
4. Rural Development
5. Work
6. Governance and Participation
7. Income Distribution
8. Taxation
9. Environment and Sustainability
10. Global Challenges

All of these issues have implications for Ireland’s economy and how the market performs. Crucially, however, they also have implications for the wellbeing of all of Ireland’s population and for society as a whole.

Housing

Chart 1.1: BER Rating by County, 2009 to 2019



Source: CSO, Domestic Building Energy Ratings Quarter 2 2019, Table 4

Housing



Defined as a set of conditions where “individuals or households are not able to adequately heat or provide other required energy services in their homes at affordable cost”, energy poverty affects almost 50 million people in the European Union, according to a report from the European Energy Network published in May 2019. In Ireland, almost 390,000 people went without heat at some stage in 2017 due to lack of money and over 210,000 were unable to keep their home adequately warm over a sustained period.

BER (Building Energy Rating) is an indication of the energy efficiency of a building (in units of kWh/m²/year). BER ratings are scaled from A (most efficient) to G (least efficient). The BER certificate indicates the annual primary energy usage and carbon dioxide emissions associated with the provision of space heating, water heating, ventilation, lighting, and associated pumps and fans. The energy use is calculated on the basis of a notional family with a standard pattern of occupancy (CSO, 2019). It is compulsory for all dwellings that apply for planning permission on or after 1st January 2007 to have a BER certificate. It is also mandatory, since January 2009, for all homes for sale or rent to have a BER certificate and advisory report.

According to the CSO’s Quarterly BER Energy Ratings Quarter 2 2019 report, there were 835,483 unique domestic BERs completed between 2009 and June 2019. While this does not cover every household in the country (with 1.66 million private households reported as occupied on Census night), it is highly indicative of the energy efficiency of dwellings in the country.

Households with a lower energy rating are more likely to use solid and fossil fuels in their heating. Almost 58,500 households have a BER rating of G – the least efficient rating. Of these, 14,682 households use coal, smokeless fuel, peat, wood pellets and chips, wood logs, or solid multi-fuel to heat their homes. By

comparison, of the 32,975 households with a BER rating of A – the most efficient – only 52 use this type of fuel (wood pellet and chips and wood logs. No data are recorded for use of coal, smokeless fuel, peat or solid multi-fuel in these homes).

In 2011 the Government published its first energy poverty strategy ‘*Warmer Homes: A Strategy for Affordable Energy in Ireland*’, and in 2016, the then Department of Communications, Energy and National Resources published ‘*A Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty 2016-2019*’. Both strategies set out a vision of eliminating energy poverty and contained actions to move towards energy efficiency. However, the grant schemes introduced to retrofit older, less energy efficient homes can be difficult to access for low income households who must pay the upfront costs themselves before being reimbursed from the schemes on completion of works. There are also few incentives for landlords to retrofit rented properties, with a 2017 report from Threshold estimating more than 55% of private rented homes have a low energy rating, contributing to the fuel poverty of private tenants.

The recent confusion regarding the status of the SEAI Deep Retrofit Scheme Pilot is concerning. Many of the key actions outlined in Government’s Climate Action Plan are based on retrofitting. To this end the closure of the deep retrofit pilot programme without a funded, large scale national retrofit programme to replace it at a time when Ireland is struggling to meet our climate targets is alarming.

In our Budget Choices 2020 briefing *Social Justice Ireland* proposed a retrofitting programme modelled on the Energiesprong programme in the Netherlands.

Policy Priority

- Allocate €130m in Budget 2020 for a retrofitting programme.

Health

Table 2.1: Instances of Lung Cancer and Diseases of the Respiratory System as principal cause of death: Numbers and age-standardised death rates per 100,000 population 2008-2017

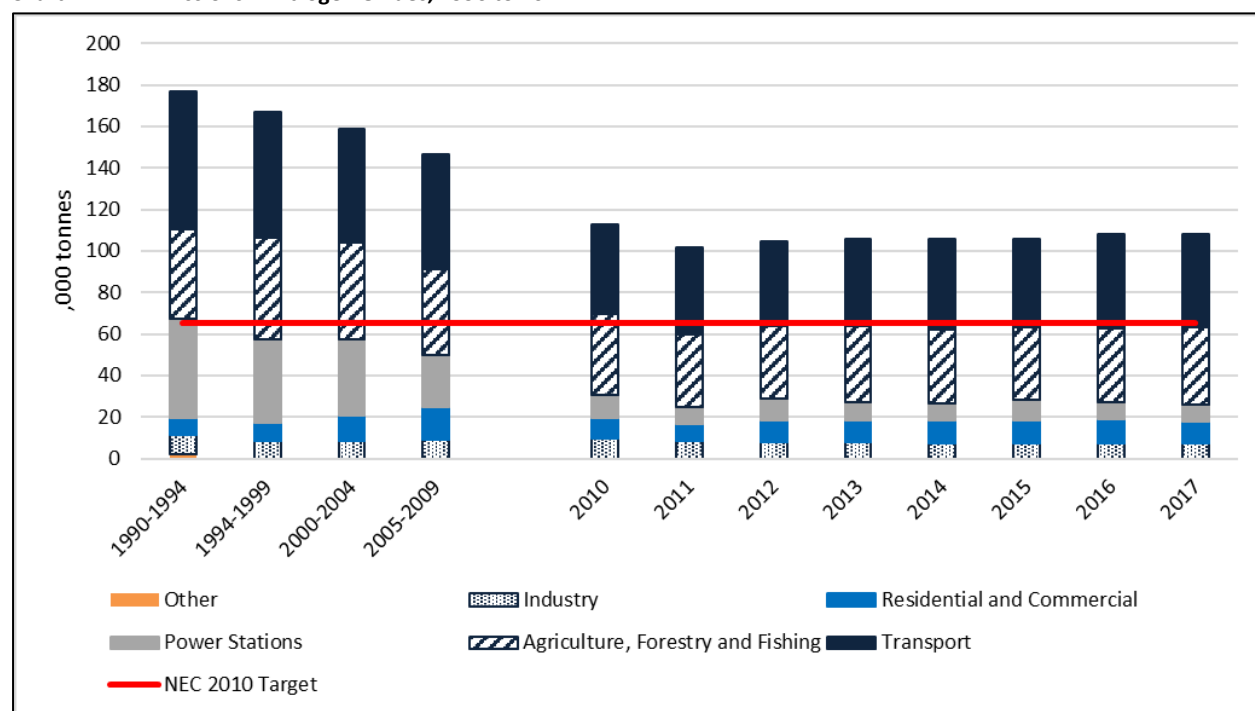
Cause		2008	2012	2016	2017(p)	% Change	
						2008-2017	2016-2017
Cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung	Number	1,681	1,801	1,911	1,926	+14.6	+0.8
	Rate	62.2	60.6	57.6	56.7	-8.8	-1.6
All Respiratory System diseases*	Number	3,522	3,497	3,935	4,079	+15.8	+3.7
	Rate	156.4	137.6	135.8	136.7	-12.6	+0.7
Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	Number	1,365	1,587	1,712	1,610	+17.9	-6.0
	Rate	57.3	59.8	57.3	52.3	-8.7	-8.6
Pneumonia	Number	1,356	1,086	1,086	1,109	-18.2	+2.1
	Rate	63.9	45.8	39.9	39.1	-38.7	-1.8

Source: Extracted from Table 2.4, Department of Health, Key Health Trends in Ireland 2018, p.24

Notes: (p) The figures for 2017 are provisional. They should be treated with caution as they refer to deaths registered in these years and may be incomplete.

*Excludes cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung.

Chart 2.1: Air Emissions – Nitrogen Oxides, 1990 to 2017



Source: Data from CSO, Environmental Indicators Ireland 2019, Air, 3.5 Ireland: Nitrogen oxide emissions 1990-2017

Health



According to a report published by the Irish Thoracic Society (ITS), ‘Respiratory Health of the Nation’¹, respiratory disease places a significant burden on individuals and the Irish health service, with respiratory disease accounting for the highest proportion of inpatient hospitalisations and bed days used in public hospitals compared to other diseases during the period 2009 to 2016. With respiratory disease more prevalent in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and a correlation between some lung diseases and social deprivation, respiratory health (as with most health issues) is an equality issue. Higher instances of smoking have a role to play; however so too does greater exposure to air pollution. Ireland’s mortality rate is declining, with people living longer and healthier lives, however according to the ITS Report, between 2008 and 2017 there was a 14.6% increase in the number of deaths associated with cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lung, and a 15.8% increase in deaths associated with other respiratory diseases in this period (Table 2.1).

A 2016 Report, produced by the European Commission², found that people in lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to be exposed to air and noise pollution. And while pollutant-dense cities may be attractive for a larger number of wealthy households, the health impacts of air and noise pollution are disproportionately felt among lower socioeconomic groups as they are also more likely to experience exposure to pollutants at work and while they commute.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)³, the levels of particulate matter in Ireland’s air are a growing concern, especially during winter months when households are more likely to burn solid fuels.

In larger urban areas and private cars are increasing the levels of nitrogen dioxide in the air. The EPA cites the World Health Organisation, who describe air pollution as the “single biggest environmental health risk”. WHO estimates that over 400,000 premature deaths are attributable to poor quality air in Europe annually. The number of premature deaths caused by air pollution in Ireland is estimated at 1,510. According to the EPA, Ireland’s emissions of nitrogen dioxides are “currently well above the 2010 limit in the EU Directive on National Emissions Ceilings”. It is expected that these emissions will be elevated while Ireland struggles to reduce its reliance on private motor cars. According to the CSO Environmental Indicators 2019, Ireland’s nitrogen oxides emissions (at 108,300 tonnes) remained 67% above the National Emissions Ceiling for 2010 of 65,000 tonnes, and only slightly lower than in 2016 (Chart 2.1).

An EPA report published in July 2019 looked at the levels of nitrogen dioxides in Dublin⁴, finding many areas “problematic” with some possibly over the EU limit (certain city centre streets, the M50 and the entrance and exit of Dublin Port Tunnel). Ireland needs to reduce its reliance on private transport, particularly in highly congested areas, and develop environmentally-friendly transport.

According to the ITS report referenced earlier, the majority of respiratory illnesses are treated at primary care level. It is therefore essential to invest in community-based primary care networks.

Policy Priorities

- Invest in environmentally friendly public transport.
- Invest in the implementation and ongoing development of Sláintecare.

¹ <https://irishtoracicsociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/RESP-Health-LATEST19.12.pdf>

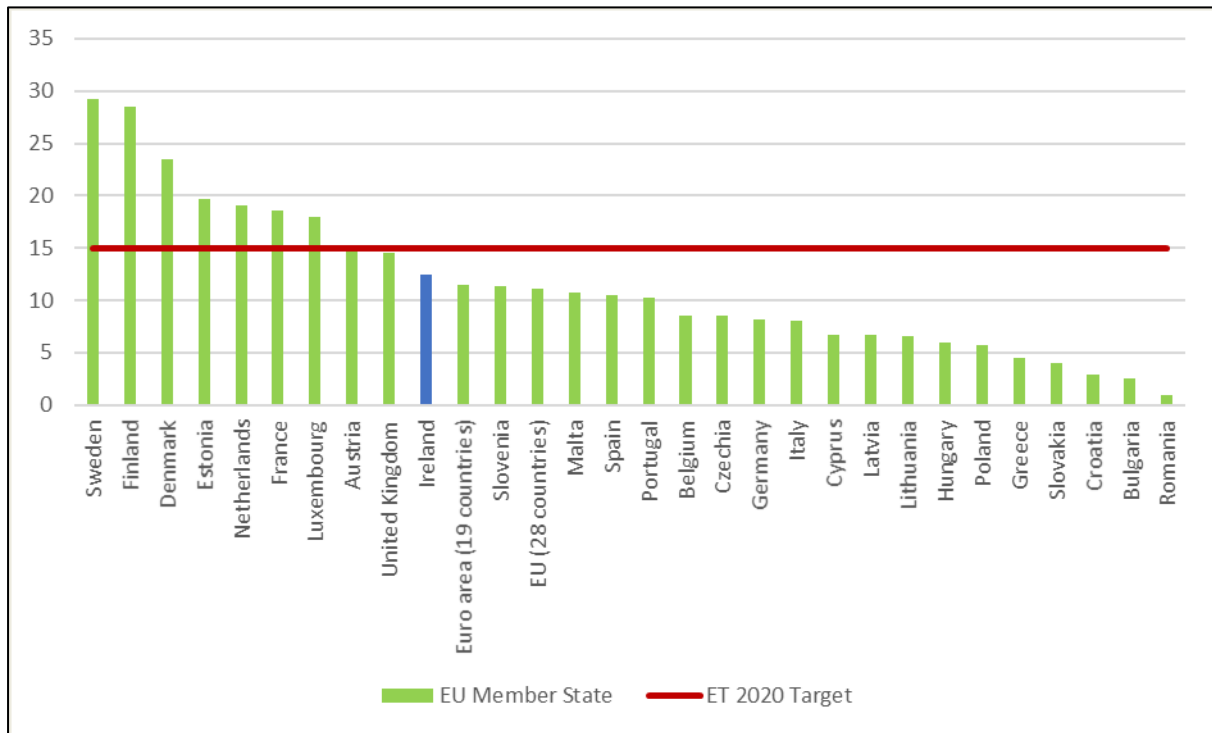
² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/air_noise_pollution_socioeconomic_status_links_IR13_en.pdf

³ www.epa.ie/irelandenvironment/air

⁴ https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/air/quality/Urban_Environmental_Indicators_2019.pdf

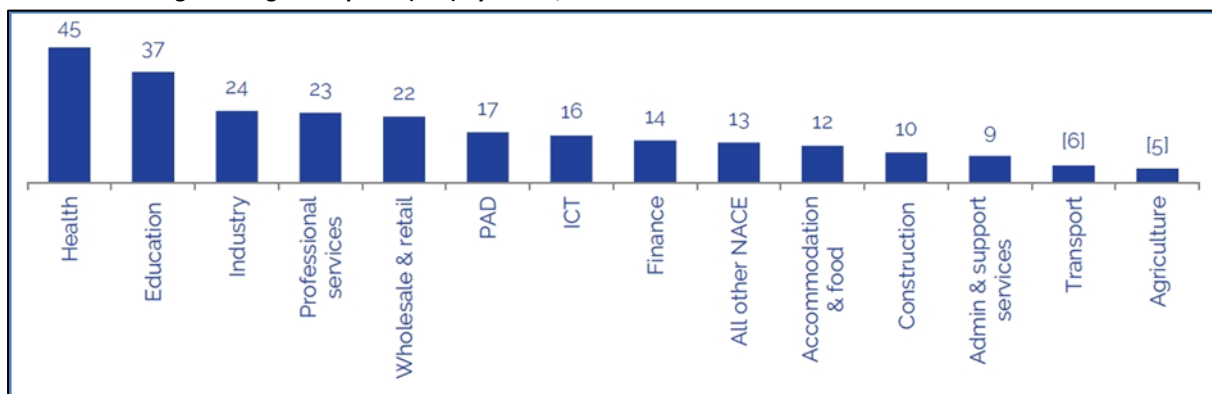
Education and Skills

Chart 3.1: Adult Participation in Lifelong Learning, 2018



Source: Eurostat, [sdg_04_60]

Chart 3.2: Lifelong Learning Participants (000) by Sector, Q4 2018



Source: SOLAS, Lifelong Learning in Ireland Quarter 4, 2018

Note: PAD: Public Administration and Defence

[...]values in square brackets are small and should be treated with caution

Education and Skills



Lifelong learning, that is participation in either formal or non-formal education and training, can play a key role in preparing working age adults for changes in work brought about by globalisation and a need for more sustainable practices. Ireland is currently ranked 10th among the EU 28 for participation in lifelong learning, with 12.5% of adults aged 25-64 participating in lifelong learning, compared to an EU 28 average of 11.1% (Chart 3.1). The Solas Report on Lifelong Learning in Ireland Q4 2018 (published in June 2019), indicates a lifelong learning rate of 13% among adults aged 25-64, or 334,300 people. Lifelong learning participants tended to be younger (more than a third were aged 25-34), and more than two-thirds (69%) held third-level qualifications. The highest lifelong learning participation rates were in Dublin (17%) and the West (13%) regions, with the lowest (8%) in the Border region. This is particularly significant in the context of Brexit, when Border communities are likely to feel the impact most acutely.

A higher proportion of employees engaged in lifelong learning are employed in sectors such as Health, Education and Professional services (Chart 3.2). These sectors are also more likely to have compulsory or employer-led continuous professional development programmes, a practice which could be applied to other sectors, with the support of employers.

The latest SOLAS Quarterly Skills Bulletin⁵ examines the position of Older Workers in the Irish labour market. Participation in lifelong learning declines with age, and those with lower educational qualifications are less likely to take part. This is the very group that lifelong learning policy should be targeting. The report finds that approximately one third (146,300) of older workers in Ireland (aged 50-

59) are employed in occupations that are under threat from technological change (elementary, administrative, sales and operative roles). Measures must be taken to protect this cohort, and one of the key policies that can assist in this area is lifelong learning.

Various agencies (European Commission, Expert Group on Future Skills Needs) identify generic skills and key competences as a core element of the lifelong learning framework. The *Action Plan for Education 2019* contains welcome commitments to Springboard+ and developing new traineeships and apprenticeships under Goal 4 which commits Government to developing the relationship between education, the wider community, society and the economy. These actions are to be welcomed but need to be developed and extended to all employees who wish to partake in further education.

Social Justice Ireland welcomed the Department of Education commitment to doubling the number of apprenticeships registered to 9,000 by 2020, with 26 new national apprenticeships approved for further development across a range of sectors including healthcare assistants. In order to meet this target Government must implement the five action areas identified in the review of apprenticeship participation undertaken by Solas and published in November 2018⁶. Particular focus must be given to increasing diversity of participation and developing and promoting new pathways to apprenticeships.

Policy Priority:

- Invest in lifelong learning opportunities, particularly for older workers and workers whose jobs are at greatest risk from automation.

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http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/15044_Solas_Older_Worker_Bulletin_Booklet_WEB.pdf

6

<http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/PathwaysApprenticeshipReviewNov18.pdf>

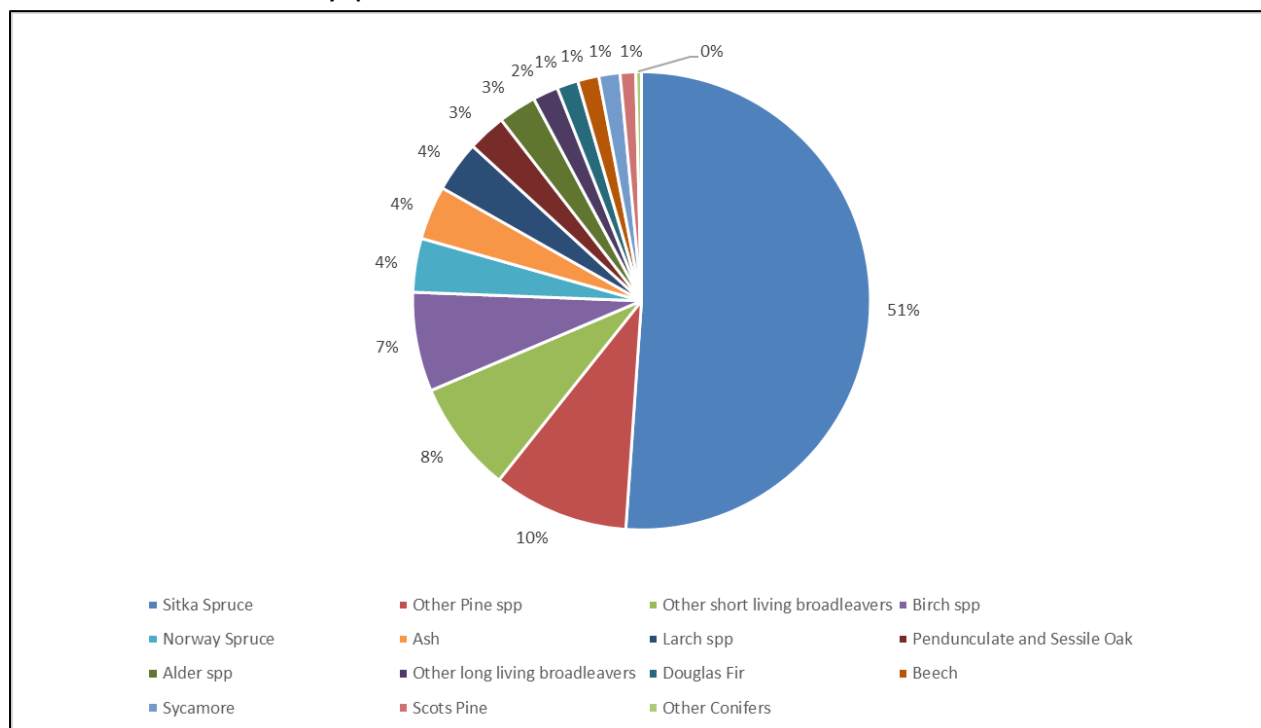
Rural Development

Table 4.1: Households with Internet Access by Region, 2010 to 2018 (% of households)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Region									
Border	60	66	75	75	75	83	82	83	85
Midlands	66	79	74	82	80	84	85	86	86
West	70	79	82	81	78	79	84	84	88
Dublin	78	84	86	87	88	90	91	94	94
Mid-East	81	87	87	86	86	87	89	92	92
Mid-West	73	77	79	80	80	86	87	86	88
South-East	65	71	79	81	79	80	85	87	86
South-West	70	76	78	81	80	82	86	88	88

Source: Extracted from CSO, Information Society Statistics Household 2018, Table 1(a)

Chart 4.1: Stocked Forest Area by Species



Source: Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Ireland's Forest Statistics 2019

Rural Development



Sustainable Smart Villages

Ireland is in 6th place on the 2018 Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), up from 8th place in 2017, and behind Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The DESI monitors how EU Member States perform in areas of digital connectivity, digital skills, online activity, the digitisation of businesses, and digital public services⁷. However, progress within Ireland has been intermittent at best, with some areas (particularly very rural ones) still without access to good quality broadband sufficient to foster this ‘essential life competence’. The rate of internet access in areas of higher population density (at 94% in Dublin and 92% in the Mid-East region) continues to outpace more thinly populated areas (e.g. the Border regions at 85%, or the Midlands and South-East, 86%). The rate of growth in internet access has been fastest in the Border region, however this was from a low base (rising from 60% in 2010 to 85% in 2018, see Table 4.1). These regional disparities must be addressed if Ireland is to fully implement the EU ‘Smart Villages’ initiative which seeks to enhance traditional and new networks and services through digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and the better use of knowledge.

Sustainable Forestry

Planting forests can help offset some of Ireland’s carbon emissions. Ireland currently has 770,020 hectares of forest land, or 11% of land use (excluding inland water bodies). Leitrim, with 18.9% coverage, has the highest forest area, followed by Wicklow (17.9%) and Clare (17.2%). Louth and Monaghan, with 2.9% and 4.6% respectively, have the lowest coverage.

Sitka spruce accounts for the majority of forest coverage, at 51% (Chart 4.1). Sitka spruce is not native to Ireland, but its planting has been heavily subsidised by Government due to fast growth rate comparative to native trees and its consequent high yield value. However, a 2007 report of the EPA⁸ warned of the impact of single-species plantations on biodiversity stating “...the closed-canopy phase of in the forest cycle under Sitka spruce ... is associated with an extremely impoverished ground flora”.

A recent IPCC report on Climate Change and Land⁹ highlights sustainable forest management as an important policy available to us to address the impacts of climate change. The report defines sustainable forest management as stewardship of forests and forest lands to maintain their biodiversity, productivity, vitality and regeneration capacity, thus ensuring that they can fulfil the ecological, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems. This has implications for Ireland’s forestry and land management policies. In order to protect biodiversity and provide a sustainable response to our carbon footprint, Government needs to incentivise greater planting of native broadleaves and ensure forestry policy is informed by the IPCC Report.

Policy Priorities

- Expedite the roll-out of the National Broadband Plan to support the implementation of the Smart Villages initiative.
- Incentivise the planting of native broadleaves to protect biodiversity and provide a sustainable carbon sink.

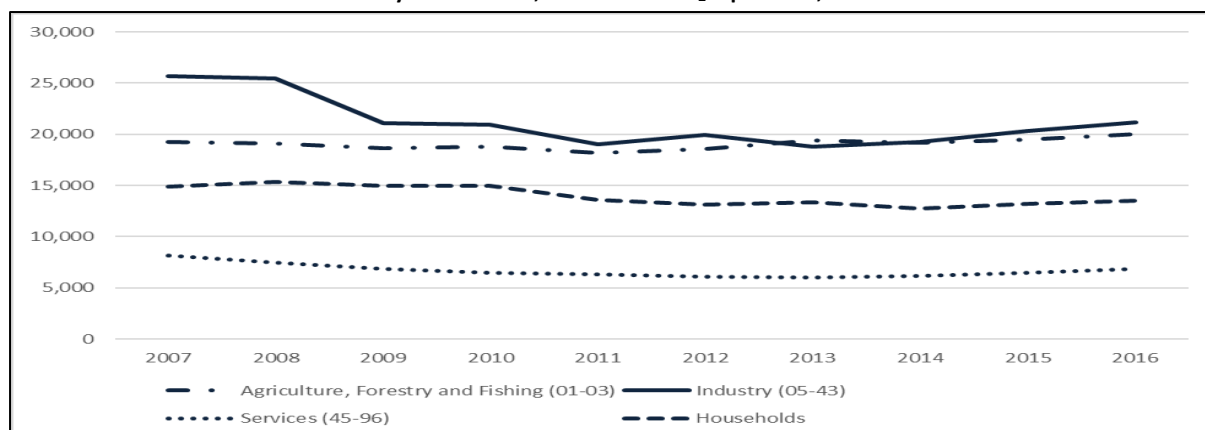
⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/tags/digital-skills_en

⁸

<https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/biodiversity/ERTDI%20Report%2051.pdf>

⁹ https://www.ipcc.ch/2019/08/08/land-is-a-critical-resource_srcl/

Work

Chart 5.1: Greenhouse Gas Emissions by NACE Sector, '000 tonnes CO₂ equivalent, 2007 to 2016

Source: CSO, Environmental Indicators

Table 5.1: Population aged 15 years and over and at work by Means of Travel and County

	On foot	%	Bicycle	%	Public Transport*	%	Private Transport^	%	Not stated	%	Total	Commuting 1 hour +	%
Carlow	1,638	8	235	1	402	2	16,995	83	1,109	5	20,379	2,864	14
Cavan	1,834	7	126	0	439	2	24,332	87	1,300	5	28,031	3,809	14
Clare	2,913	6	499	1	620	1	38,558	86	2,254	5	44,844	2,993	7
Cork City	9,965	21	1,874	4	5,537	11	28,064	58	2,908	6	48,348	1,702	4
Cork County	9,669	6	1,275	1	4,064	2	145,001	87	5,833	4	165,842	13,109	8
Donegal	3,646	7	275	1	729	1	46,058	86	2,965	6	53,673	3,477	6
Dublin City	51,600	21	26,374	10	57,228	23	95,427	38	20,952	8	251,581	19,189	8
Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown	6,858	8	5,795	6	22,027	24	53,149	59	2,991	3	90,820	8,573	9
Fingal	7,028	5	3,338	3	27,002	21	85,004	66	6,412	5	128,784	19,744	15
Galway City	5,430	17	1,870	6	2,629	8	20,691	64	1,950	6	32,570	1,457	4
Galway County	3,442	5	628	1	1,378	2	60,360	88	3,023	4	68,831	7,311	11
Kerry	4,812	9	839	2	596	1	44,225	82	3,288	6	53,760	3,625	7
Kildare	5,632	6	1,253	1	9,425	10	72,427	79	2,812	3	91,549	17,098	19
Kilkenny	3,185	9	559	1	498	1	31,783	85	1,316	4	37,341	3,212	9
Laois	1,883	6	246	1	1,333	4	26,057	83	1,761	6	31,280	5,553	18
Leitrim	697	6	50	0	132	1	10,097	87	692	6	11,668	1,170	10
Limerick City and County	7,095	10	1,137	2	2,005	3	58,317	81	3,802	5	72,356	4,342	6
Longford	1,193	8	144	1	247	2	11,770	83	784	6	14,138	1,478	10
Louth	4,963	10	1,038	2	3,021	6	36,824	77	2,232	5	48,078	6,572	14
Mayo	3,828	8	389	1	400	1	40,153	85	2,225	5	46,995	3,844	8
Meath	4,281	5	559	1	5,613	7	65,642	83	2,693	3	78,788	15,189	19
Monaghan	1,751	7	122	1	301	1	20,348	86	1,030	4	23,552	2,294	10
Offaly	2,097	7	409	1	725	3	23,604	84	1,363	5	28,198	3,953	14
Roscommon	1,097	5	153	1	332	1	21,083	89	1,047	4	23,712	2,446	10
Sligo	2,092	9	311	1	359	1	20,087	83	1,217	5	24,066	1,260	5
South Dublin	6,566	6	4,789	4	18,296	16	80,829	70	5,443	5	115,923	12,997	11
Tipperary	5,057	9	508	1	745	1	49,135	85	2,439	4	57,884	5,571	10
Waterford City and County	3,996	9	588	1	787	2	34,837	83	2,014	5	42,222	2,872	7
Westmeath	2,788	8	471	1	1,142	3	27,271	82	1,473	4	33,145	5,044	15
Wexford	4,232	8	437	1	784	1	44,896	85	2,182	4	52,531	6,124	12
Wicklow	3,812	7	546	1	5,773	11	42,554	78	2,199	4	54,884	11,050	20
Totals	175,080	9	56,837	3	174,569	9	1,375,578	73	93,709	5	1,875,773	199,922	11

Source: CSO, Statbank [E6011] and [E6023]

Notes: *includes bus, minibus or coach, train, DART or LUAS

^includes motorcycle or scooter, motor car (driver and passenger), van, other incl. lorry

Rounding may affect totals

Work



According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) per person are amongst the highest of any country in the world. In 2017, the Agriculture, Energy and Transport industries were responsible for 72.4% of all GHG emissions in Ireland. While decreases were seen in the Energy (-6.9%) and Transport (-2.4%) sectors in 2017, the Agriculture (+2.9%), Manufacturing Combustion (+3.1%), Industrial Processes (+4.1%) and Commercial and Public Services (+6.7% each) sectors all experienced increases, continuing a pattern since 2014 (Chart 5.1).

Agriculture: Short Food Supply Chains

At 33.3% of GHG emissions and rising, it is imperative that the Agriculture industry innovate to reduce its climate impact. According to the European Network for Rural Development¹⁰ partnership approaches for strengthening local food markets have been shown to be effective as rural development tools. They can be initially more expensive to the end consumer. However, they are significantly less harmful to the environment, with less transport and packaging, and food is more sustainably produced.

The possibility of a crash-out Brexit is of particular concern for Ireland's food supply. Short supply chains, with few steps between farm and fork, make sense not only from a climate change perspective, but also in securing continuing food supply and jobs in local communities.

Transport: Flexible Work

Almost 200,000 people (11%) aged 15 and over who work spend an hour or more in travel time. Wicklow has the highest proportion of workers in this category (20%), followed by Meath (19%) Kildare (19%) – traditionally the Dublin commuter belt - and

Laois (18%). At least 10% of workers spend an hour or more commuting in 18 areas, reported in Census 2016 (Table 5.1).

Almost 1.4 million people (73%) aged 15 and over who work travel by private transport. In this case, the areas with the highest proportion are Roscommon (89%), Galway County (88%), Cork County (87%), Cavan (87%) and Leitrim (87%), with 22 areas reported in Census 2016 having more than 80% of its workforce commuting this way. Public Transport accounts for just 9% of commutes – highest in the Dublin areas where public transport is more readily available (Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, 24%; Dublin City 23%; Fingal 21% and South Dublin 16%), with Cavan and Leitrim faring the worst at less than 1% each.

Long commutes in private motor vehicles mean greater congestion on the roads, meaning greater levels of pollution, and is found to have negative impacts on both mental and physical health. With innovations in technology to allow virtual meetings and access to remote servers, a willingness from employers to provide more flexible work arrangements for their staff would benefit both the environment and staff wellbeing, which would in turn lead to greater staff retention. Of course, there are industries where remote working is not possible, such as the services and hospitality sectors. This requires Government to prioritise its commitment to develop the public transport fleet and public transport options (in line with our environmental and climate commitments) outside of Dublin.

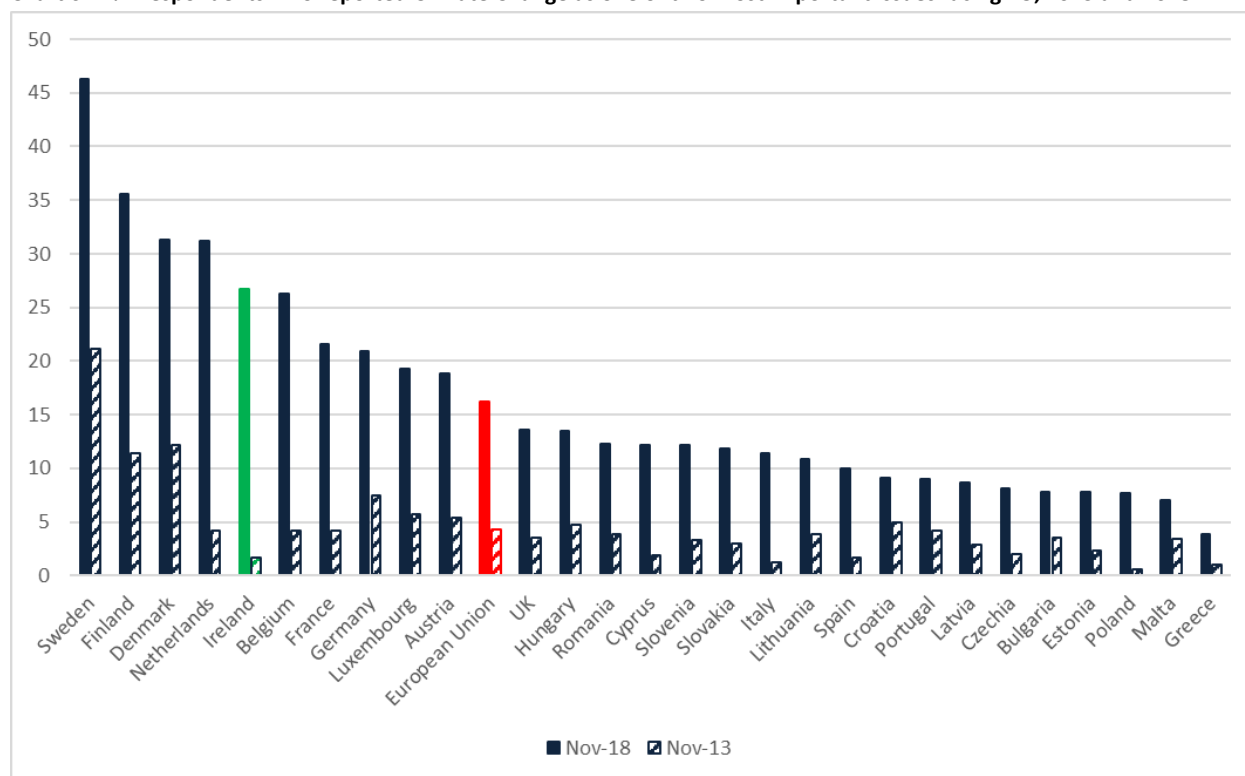
Policy Priorities

- Invest in short supply chain food production.
- Increase public transport in rural areas.
- Incentivise employers to create flexible working arrangements.

¹⁰ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/local-food-and-short-supply-chains_en

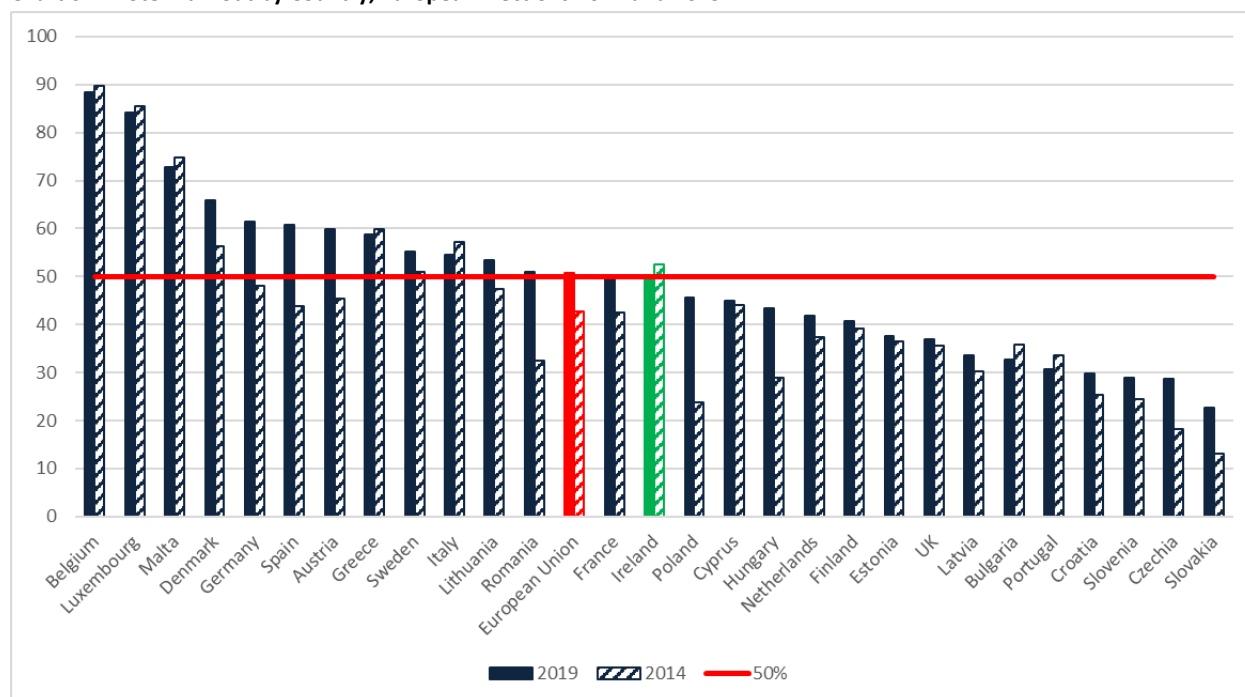
Governance and Participation

Chart 6.1: % Respondents who reported Climate Change as one of two most important issues facing EU, 2013 and 2018



Source: Eurobarometer

Chart 6.2: Voter Turnout by Country, European Elections 2014 and 2019



Source: www.election-results.eu

Governance and Participation



Climate change has become a political issue in recent years, sparking widespread protests and demonstrations calling on Governments worldwide to take measures to reduce their country's carbon footprint and meet international targets.

According to Eurobarometer, a European-wide survey investigating in depth the motivations, feelings and reactions of selected social groups towards a given subject or concept, climate change was reported as the fourth most important issue facing the EU in November 2018 at 16%. This follows Immigration (40%), Terrorism (20%) and the state of Member States' public finances (16%). This contrasts with results from the November 2013 survey, in advance of the European Elections in 2014, when the Economic Situation (45%), Unemployment (36%), the state of Member States' public finances (26%) and Immigration (16%) were reported as the top four concerns. Taking each country's response to this question individually, every country's perception of the importance of the challenge of Climate Change has increased since November 2013 (Chart 6.1). The Netherlands has seen the greatest increase in the intervening years, with 26.97 percentage points to 31.21%, followed by Sweden with a 25.1 percentage point increase to 46.23% and Ireland with a 25.03 percentage point increase to 26.76%. Overall, the perception of the importance of climate change as an issue for the EU increased by an average of 11.99 percentage points from 4.28% in November 2013 to 16.27% in November 2018.

This increase in importance was also evident in the results of the latest European Elections held in May 2019, where the Greens / European Free Alliance seats increased from

52 following the 2014 elections to 74 in 2019 – an increase of 42% and the largest percentage increase of any political group.

Voter turnout for the European Elections 2019 increased in all but eight countries (Chart 6.2) and was over 50% in 13. Ireland's voter turnout was disappointing in that it decreased below 50% between 2014 and 2019, at just 49.7%. Voting is compulsory in five Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Greece. This is clearly successful in both Belgium and Luxembourg, who both had a voter turnout of over 80% (with 88.47% and 84.24% respectively). Greece has had moderate success with this policy, with above-average turnout of 58.69%, however both Cyprus and Bulgaria had voter turnout of less than 50% (43.97% and 35.84% respectively).

The European Parliament has been given a clear mandate to address climate change and environmental issues. This is not the sole remit of the Greens / European Free Alliance, but of all parties to ensure that policies concerning the use of resources are sustainable and work towards reducing our carbon emissions. These must be linked to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and contain ambitious performance indicators to address inequality.

Policy Priorities

- Implement the Circular Economy Package¹¹.
- Formulate targets to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and develop clear pathways to meet these targets.
- Fully implement the European Climate Change Programme.

¹¹ See Chapter 11 of *Social Justice Ireland's Socio Economic Review 2019*, Social Justice Matters available

here
<https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/socio-economic-review-2019>

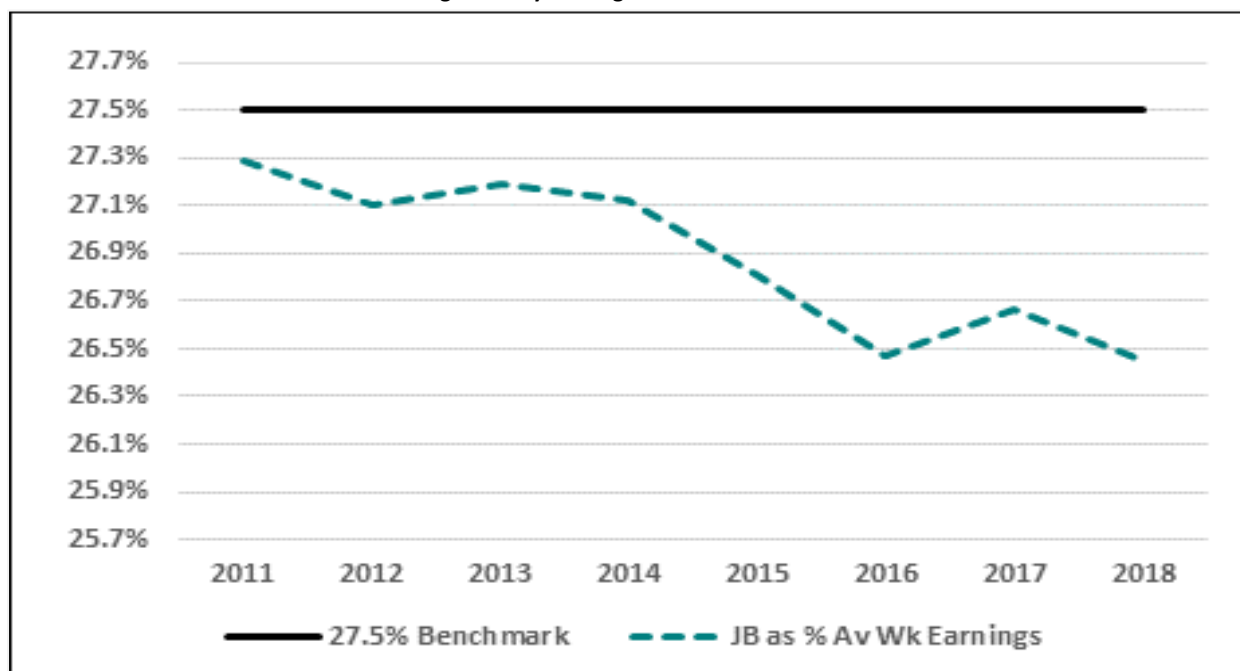
Income Distribution

Chart 7.1: Living Wage and National Minimum Wage, 2014 to 2019



Source: livingwage.ie and the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, Social Impact Assessment 2018, *National Minimum Wage*

Chart 7.2: Jobseekers’ Benefit as % of Average Weekly Earnings v Benchmark



Source: Social Justice Ireland’s presentation at our seminar to launch Budget Choices 2020

Income Distribution



Those experiencing poverty and deprivation are most likely to be impacted by the environmental changes, and least likely to have the capacity to mitigate against them. For example, any increases to the carbon tax must be coupled with a Just Transition programme to support those on low incomes who are more likely to be reliant on solid fuels to heat the home, and less likely to be able to afford the upfront insulation costs which must be paid in advance of a sustainable energy grant being issued.

The Living Wage

The Living Wage establishes the average gross salary which will enable adults in full time employment (39hrs per week) and without dependents across Ireland to afford a socially acceptable standard of living. It provides for needs, not wants, and differs from the National Minimum Wage (NMW) in that the calculation is evidence-based and built on budget standards research, while the NMW is not (and never has been) based on the cost of living, or ever been linked to changes in the cost of living over time. While the gap between the Living Wage and the NMW has closed slightly (Chart 7.1) (from €2.80 in 2014 to €2.50 in 2019). While there are proposals to increase the NMW to €10.10, this equates to a 30c increase, compared to a 40c increase in the living wage and will still not provide a minimum essential standard of living.

In principle, the Living Wage is an income floor, representing a figure which allows employees to afford the essentials of life. Earnings below the living wage suggest employees are forced to do without certain essentials so they can make ends meet.

The new Living Wage of €12.30 represents a 40c per hour increase over the 2018 figure. Modest changes in the cost of household

goods decreased the cost of the weekly minimum expenditure. A reduction in the Universal Social Charge (USC) paid by an employee on the Living Wage also impacted on the calculations as the amount of USC collected from these employees decreased.

However, the effects of these decreases in living costs and increases in post-tax income were outweighed by increases in some areas of expenditure, most notably housing (rent) costs.

Indexation

Those outside of the labour market and reliant on social transfers are even less likely to be able to afford a minimum standard of living than those on the NMW as consistently demonstrated in research by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice¹².

Just over a decade ago, Budget 2007 benchmarked the minimum social welfare rate at 30% of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE). Today that figure is equivalent to 27.5% of the new average earnings data being collected by the CSO. Applying this benchmark using CSO data for 2018 and ESRI projections for wage growth in 2019 (3.2%) allows us to compare this benchmark with current welfare rates (Chart 7.2).

In 2019 the updated value of 27.5% of average weekly earnings equals €212, implying a shortfall of €9 between current minimum social welfare rates (€203) and this threshold.

Policy Priorities

- Develop a 5-year plan to achieve parity between the National Minimum Wage and Living Wage.
- Index social welfare rates to 27.5% of average earnings, an increase of €9 in Budget 2020.

¹²

https://www.budgeting.ie/download/pdf/mesl_2019_update_report.pdf

Taxation

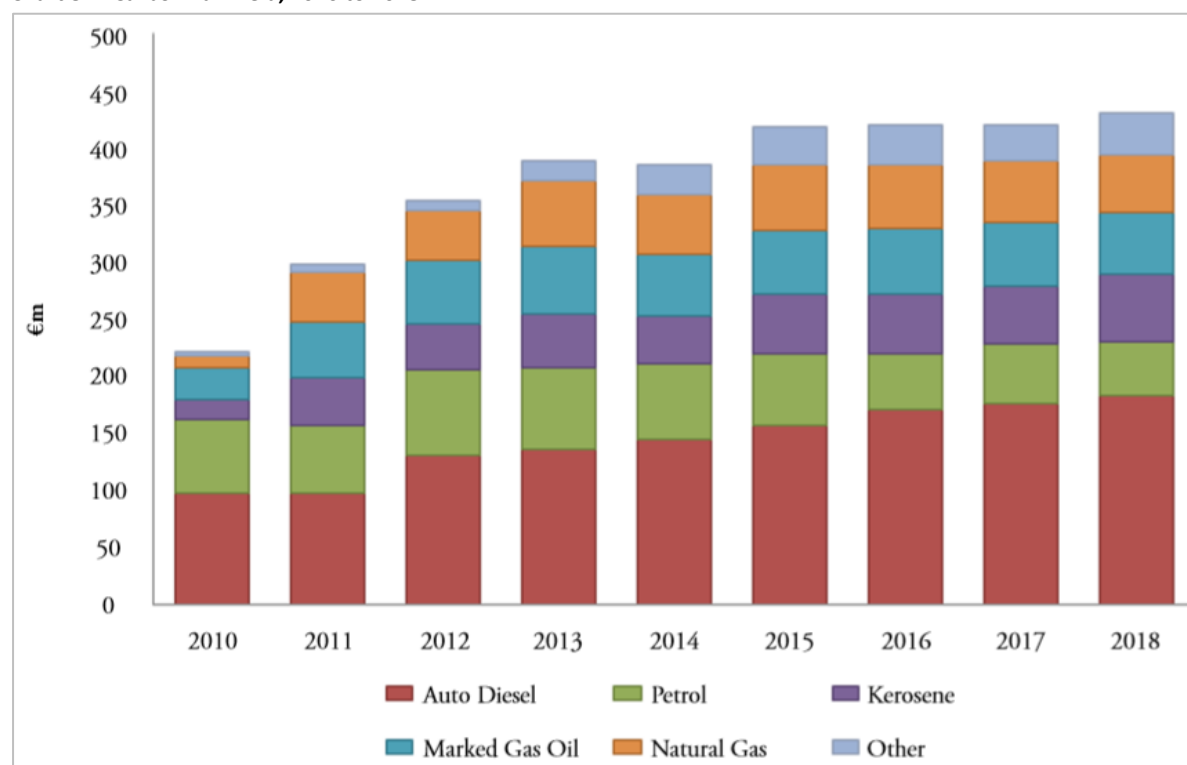
Table 8.1: Potentially Environmentally Damaging Subsidies by Activity, 2012 to 2016

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Fossil Fuel Supports	2,260	2,315	2,380	2,479	2,505
Agriculture and Food Supports	1,904	1,760	1,739	1,462	1,490
Transport Subsidies	10	15	60	65	82
Fishing and Aquaculture Supports	12	22	27	29	16
Total*	4,186	4,111	4,207	4,035	4,093

Source: CSO, Research Paper: Fossil Fuels and Similar Subsidies 2012-2016, June 2019

Note: *Due to rounding, totals may not correspond precisely with the sum of the categories

Chart 8.1: Carbon Tax Yield, 2010 to 2018



Source: Parliamentary Budget Office briefing 'An Overview of Carbon Pricing', PBO Publication 35 of 2019

Taxation

Environmentally Damaging Subsidies



Tax reliefs - or tax expenditures, as they are sometimes known - are policy tools for reducing an individual's tax liability. They are usually used to encourage specific economic or social activity by giving a “tax break” to individuals engaging in certain types of behaviour. They can be politically appealing as they allow policymakers to encourage certain types of activity, or spending in a particular area, without increasing direct government expenditure or incurring an additional administrative burden.

However, unlike direct government expenditure, tax reliefs are not subject to annual assessment as part of the budgetary process. It is therefore concerning that the CSO has recently estimated¹³ that, between 2012 and 2016, over €4 billion per annum was forgone through potentially environmentally damaging subsidies - €2.5 billion in direct subsidies and preferential tax treatment supported fossil fuel activities in Ireland, while a further €1.6 billion supported other potentially environmentally damaging activities in the Agriculture, Transport and Fisheries sectors (Table 8.1).

The CSO report also compares the amount collected through environmental taxes, such as the plastic bag levy and carbon tax, and the revenue foregone through potentially environmentally damaging subsidies and found that, in 2016, €5.1 billion was collected in environmental taxes, and €4.1 billion was foregone.

The largest beneficiary of these subsidies is the Agriculture sector which received potentially environmentally damaging direct subsidies of €1.2 billion in 2016.

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https://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/rp/fossilfuelandsimilarsubsidies/Fossil_Fuel_and_Similar_Subsidies.pdf

Carbon Tax

Carbon tax was introduced in 2009 and has seen revenue increase year on year, with revenue in 2018 amounting to €431 million (Chart 8.1). In a briefing exploring the alternative ways for pricing carbon, the Parliamentary Budget Office¹⁴ referred to the Climate Change Advisory Council's call to increase carbon tax to help reduce CO₂ emissions and combat climate change. They also reviewed publications in this area which suggested introducing a Cap and Trade system to allow trading of carbon allowances and the introduction of a shadow price of carbon in the cost-benefit analysis of capital projects.

In our submission to the Department of Finance on options on the use of revenue raised through an increase in carbon tax, *Social Justice Ireland* recommended that carbon policy ensure that the cost of climate action does not fall disproportionately on low income households and called on Government to use any additional revenue generated to fund a Just Transition programme of supports. It also argued that carbon tax can only ever be a small part of a programme to address climate change.

Policy Priorities

- Review current tax reliefs and subsidies to ensure they represent value for money and are not regressive or environmentally damaging.
- Invest revenue generated through carbon tax in income supports for low income and energy poor households, energy efficiency schemes, retrofitting, community energy advisors and public transport as a minimum.

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https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBudgetOffice/2019/2019-07-04_an-overview-of-carbon-pricing_en.pdf

Environment and Sustainability

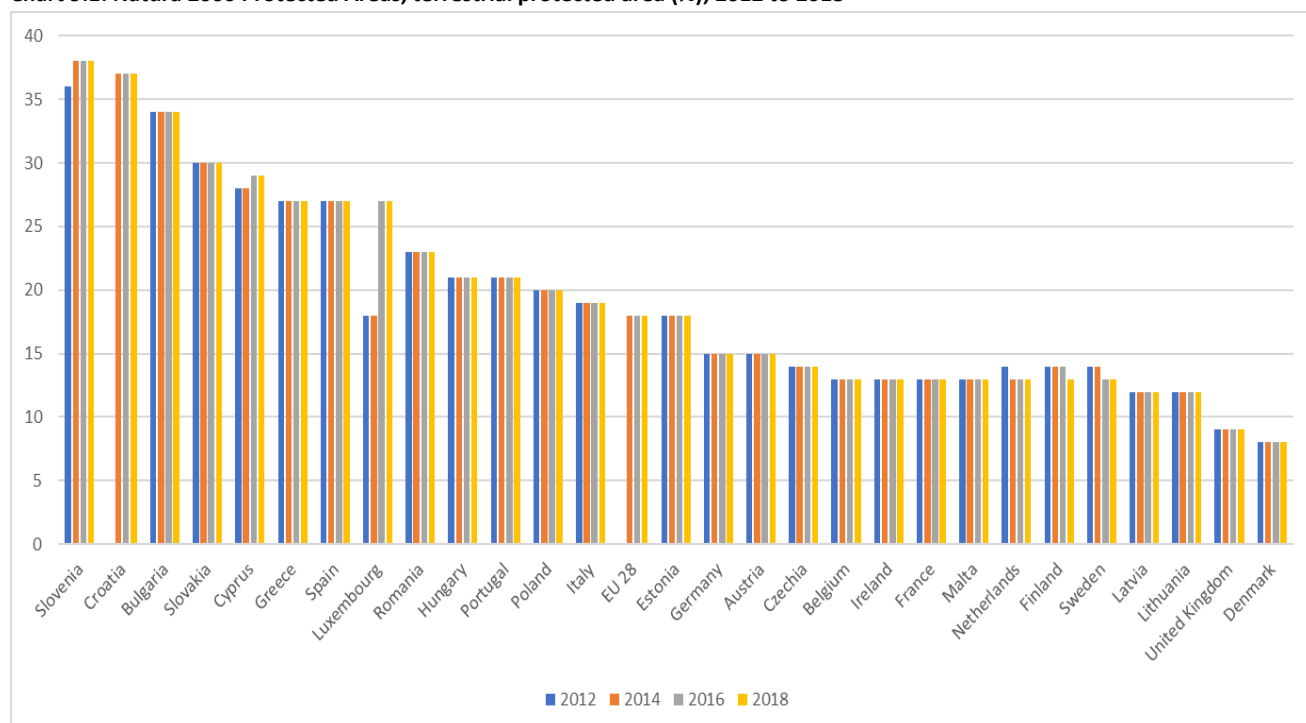
Table 9.1: Kerbside Collected Household Waste Composition

Waste Categories	MRW %	MDR %	OW %	2016 National Profile %
Plastics	18.6	19.5	3.8	17.2
Papers	10.1	34.3	4.1	15.3
Organic Waste (non-garden)	13.6	2.3	28.2	12.5
Cardboards	3.8	24.9	0.0	8.5
Fines (<20mm)	11.5	1.9	6.4	8.6
Organic Waste (garden)	2.5	0.1	55.7	7.6
Textiles (excl. nappies)	10.3	3.3	0.5	7.6
Nappies	10.1	0.3	0.5	6.7
Metals	4.7	4.6	0.3	4.2
Unclassified Combustibles	5.6	2.8	0.2	4.3
Glass	3.2	2.1	0.1	2.6
Unclassified Incombustibles	2.3	0.8	0.2	1.7
Hazardous Municipal Waste (excl. WEEE and Tubes)	1.2	0.6	0.0	0.9
Composite beverage cartons	0.6	1.7	0.0	0.8
Wood	1.1	0.5	0.1	0.8
WEE and Tubes	0.9	0.4	0.0	0.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: EPA, Household Waste Characterisation Campaign – Final Report, 2018

Note: MRW = Mixed residual waste; MDR = Mixed dry recyclable; OW = Organic waste. All three streams are then combined to form a national profile.

Chart 9.1: Natura 2000 Protected Areas, terrestrial protected area (%), 2012 to 2018



Source: Eurostat [env_bio1]

Environment and Sustainability



In June 2019, the Irish Government published its Climate Action Plan 2019. This was an opportunity for Government to show ambition and leadership and implement the brave social, economic and environmental policies required to deliver on our national ambition for a low carbon future. Many of the headline policies outlined as part of the plan are welcome, including;

- the elimination of non-recyclable plastic (as can be seen in Table 9.1, plastics make up the largest proportion of kerbside-collected household waste)
- improved Microgeneration Scheme
- increased retrofitting,
- focus on Community Capacity Building, Just Transition and participation
- the establishment of a Just Transition Review Group within the National Economic and Social Council.

It is disappointing, however, that the increased agricultural emissions as a result of pursuing a policy of herd expansion is not addressed, and neither is the aviation sector called upon to play a significant role in delivering reduced emissions in the area of transport.

Social Justice Ireland welcomed the pathways outlined in the plan; however detail on implementation is sparse. There will be intense lobbying from many vested interests which must be resisted at a political level. If this plan is to truly deliver, then Government must put the national interest ahead of short-term sectoral interests.

Protecting the vulnerable and those most at risk of impact from the changes required to transition to a low carbon economy is vital. Climate policy and mitigation must be

delivered simultaneously for a just transition. People and communities must be supported to make the required changes outlined in the Climate Action Plan 2019. To this end *Social Justice Ireland* proposes a number of policies that could form part of a green Budget 2020¹⁵.

Policy Priorities

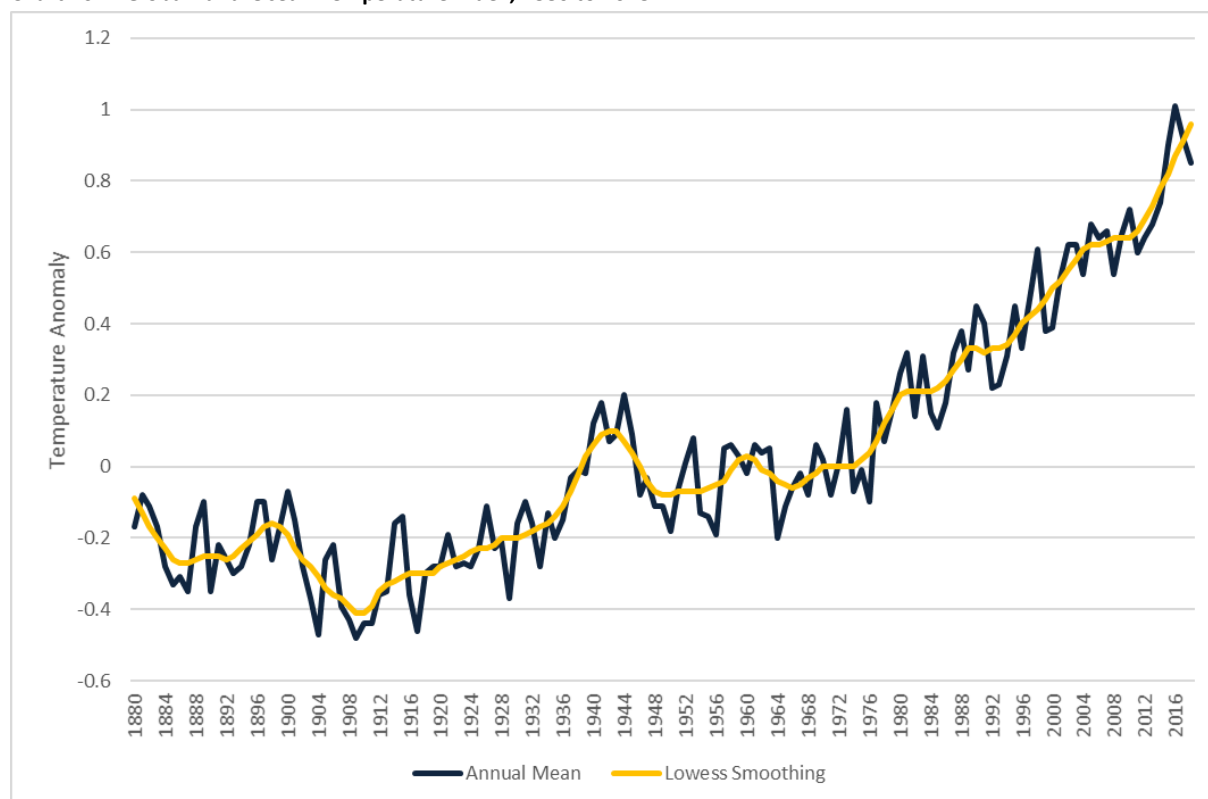
- Increase the rate of carbon tax by €10 per tonne of CO₂ emitted, and use the €212m raised in 2020 to invest in a Just Transition Fund.
- Increase Excise Duty on Diesel by 6c per litre and decrease by 6c on petrol to raise €102m in 2020. Increase commercial diesel rebate to compensate those most affected in year one.
- Remove the PSO subsidy for peat and direct that money (€118m) towards renewable energy schemes.
- Introduce a Commercial Air Transport Tax, to raise €210m in 2020¹⁶.
- Increase the Aggregate Levy of €2.50 per tonne to raise €75m per annum.
- Invest in a retrofitting programme and Community Energy Advisors.
- Put a 15c levy on single-use coffee cups to raise €96m in 2020.
- Invest in a Deposit and Return Scheme for Sealed Beverage Containers.
- Develop a Circular Economy Package.
- Invest in National Biodiversity Centre & National Parks and Wildlife: €10m (Ireland has joint 4th lowest percentage of terrestrial protected areas in the EU 28 – Chart 9.1)
- Increase the Electric Vehicle Grant by €1000.
- Increase investment in re-charging infrastructure for Electric Vehicles.

¹⁵ Fully costed details of all of these proposals are available in [Budget Choices 2020](#)

¹⁶ Further details here: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/its-time-price-flying-reflected-true-cost>

Global Issues

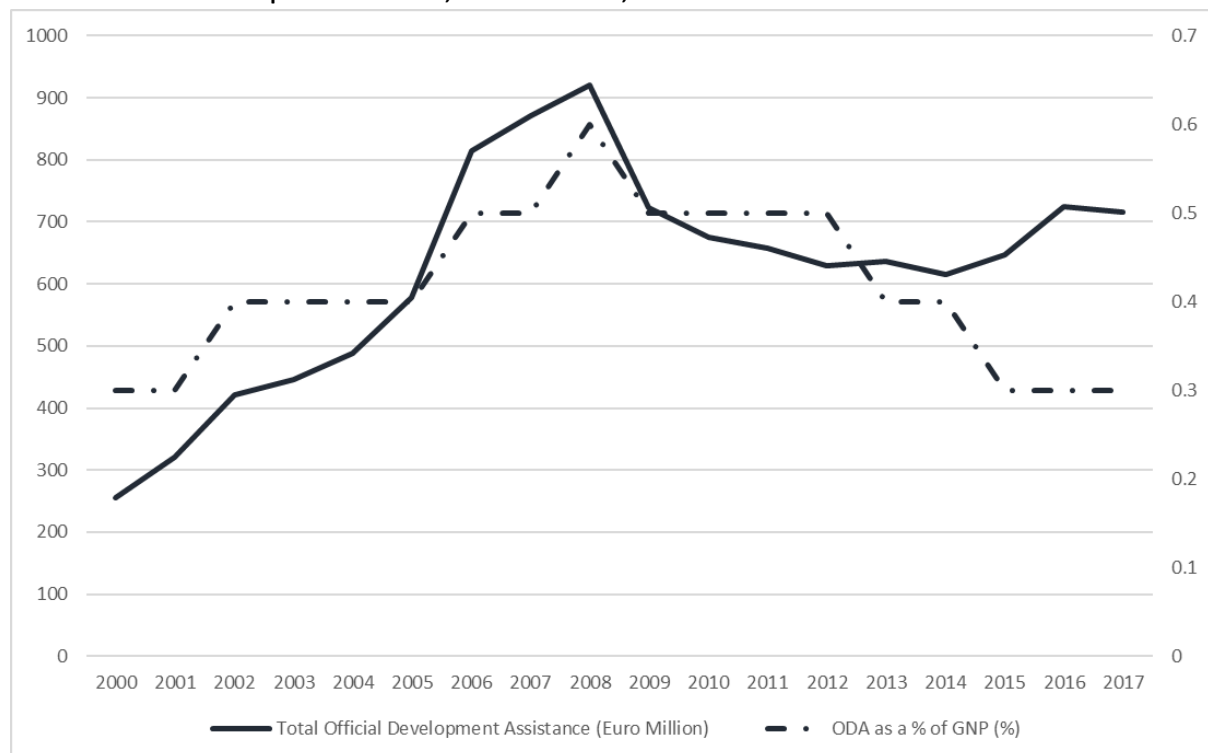
Chart 10.1: Global Land-Ocean Temperature Index, 1880 to 2018



Source: NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS)

Note: Change in global temperatures relative to 1951-1980 average temperatures

Chart 10.1: Official Development Assistance, in €m and %GDP, 2000 to 2017



Source: CSO, Statbank [GO117]

Global Issues



According to NASA, 18 of the 19 warmest years have all occurred since 2001, with the exception of 2016 (Chart 10.1). They indicate that there is a 95% probability that the current warming trend is the result of human activity since the mid-20th century and proceeding at a rate that is unprecedented.

Climate change will have the greatest impact on those living in poverty, who have the least capacity to protect themselves. Yet they are responsible for just a fraction of global emissions. The report '*Climate Change and Poverty*'¹⁷ by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights notes that even if current targets are met, tens of millions of people will be pushed into poverty. It contains a number of stark messages on climate change:

- Climate change threatens to undo the last 50 years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction;
- It could push more than 120 million more people into poverty by 2030;
- The unrealistic best-case scenario of 1.5°C of warming by 2100 will see extreme temperatures in many regions and many will have to choose between starvation and migration;
- It has immense, but largely neglected, implications for human rights and also for civil and political rights as governments struggle to cope with the consequences of climate change and to persuade their people to accept the major social and economic transformations required;
- States are failing to meet even their current inadequate commitments to reduce carbon emissions and provide climate financing, while continuing

to subsidise the fossil fuel industry with \$5.2 trillion per year.

One of the conclusions of the report is that a robust social safety net will be the best response to the unavoidable harms that climate change will bring. Governments must decouple economic well-being and poverty reduction from fossil fuel emissions.

Social Justice Ireland welcomes the publication of this report. Its findings should influence the direction of Ireland's ODA policy. Though ODA has increased in recent years, it is still below 2008 levels as a proportion of national income (Chart 10.2). It is imperative that the richer nations of the world, including Ireland, take the lead on climate change. The Irish Government should renew its commitment to meet the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of national income to ODA by 2025 and set a clear pathway to achieve this. The majority of Irish ODA is focused on developing countries and the Irish Government must ensure Irish Aid engages and fosters climate change planning in future planning. It must also take a far more proactive stance on ensuring that Irish and EU policies towards countries in the Global South are just. The consequences of inaction are clearly set out in the UN Report: "we risk a 'climate apartheid' scenario where the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer".

Policy Priorities

- Develop key performance indicators for each of the SDGs as part of a review of the National Implementation Plan for the SDGs.
- Frontload ODA investment between now and 2025 to bring our commitment in line with the Global Ireland strategy.

¹⁷ https://srpoverty.org.files.wordpress.com/2019/06/unsr-poverty-climate-change-a_hrc_41_39.pdf

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of 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 societies as a whole.



Acknowledgement

The work is partly supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Scheme to Support National Organisations and Pobal.



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