

Summary of the Right to Change Policy Principles in Relation to Children¹

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1. Right to Housing

We believe that Housing is a basic human right, that this right should be enshrined in Bunreacht na hÉireann and that the obligation on the State to adequately house people should thereby be enforceable by the Courts.

As a direct result of the State's failure to deal with this issue our country is now living through a homelessness epidemic. Having a home is a social and economic right. Without it, a person has no security of person or identity. A progressive policy will develop a range of housing models to vindicate this right, starting with the ending of homelessness and the clearing of social housing waiting lists. The current crisis in rents should be addressed through rent controls and market based rent supplements in the short-term but in the long term the state needs to intervene in the market to mobilise the investment required to modernise the sector, including the provision of income-related rental accommodation to low and average income earners. The State also needs to commence a national home building project. People should also be offered the opportunity to own their homes through limited equity ownership or non-speculative housing. Housing policy should be based on need and choice, not speculation.

People will be offered homes through a range of innovative models including limited equity ownership, or nonspeculative housing, cooperative housing and community interest tenancies.¹ A new planning framework will incorporate anti-speculative policies (e.g. the Kenny Report) and socialise unused and derelict sites that will support sustainable housing development. We will provide adequately for Traveller accommodation needs in a culturally appropriate manner. Housing policy should be based on need and choice, not speculation and capital accumulation.²

2. Right to Health

Healthcare is a human right, from 'the cradle to the grave'. As such this Health policy encompasses physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing, child care and elder care. Access to quality healthcare should not be dependent on income. The long-standing policy whereby successive governments promote and incentivise the private healthcare industry is inefficient and discriminatory against those on low incomes. The role of government should be to create a universal healthcare system free at the point of entry which provides the highest possible level of care for all citizens, irrespective of social or economic factors.

The current healthcare crisis in Ireland, where hundreds lie on hospital trolleys and tens of thousands wait more than 12 months for appointments must be addressed. Any future government must acknowledge errors in past policies and invest in the mental and physical wellbeing of the nation, instead of a private industry. A well-funded and efficient public

¹ Right to Change, Policy Principles for a Progressive Irish Government < <http://www.right2change.ie/policy-principles-progressive-irish-government> > accessed 15 February 2016

² ibid 5.

healthcare system would provide economic and social benefits for individuals and wider society in general.

— the right of access to all healthcare services regardless of income will be vindicated through free primary health and dental care, heavily subsidised prescription medicine and access to tertiary and outpatient services free at the point of use. In addition, we will substantially increase investment in nursing home care and mental health services.

— this policy provides for the right to accessible, high quality affordable care, including respite care, for vulnerable adults

The care of the vulnerable elderly and vulnerable children is increasingly commercialised. The complete absence of a public care infrastructure and the commercialisation of personal care coincide with a rise in forms of employment that are forcing people to live in ways that are so time pressed that they have no time to care for those they love. The rise in precarious, insecure, and/or 24/7 working, long costly commutes and emigration make 'caring' unsustainable over time.³

We will validate the importance of unpaid caring in families and communities in a constitutional amendment that removes the gender-biased article 41.2.2 (that assumes that only women are carers) and replaced by a care-recognition article that is gender neutral; a significant investment in caring in the community including supports for carers, and a new child-raising allowance that allows parents to spend more time raising their new-born children.⁴

3. Right to Education

Everyone has the right to education. The provision of education should be truly free – without the necessity for 'voluntary contributions' – up to at least primary degree level.

The provision of professional and technical education should be affordable and available to all and should be equally accessible.

Three basic priorities for any new government should be:

1. To reduce the ratio of students to teachers from among the highest levels in the EU to the lowest.
2. The restoration of and increased provision of Special Needs Assistants (SNA's) – which should be seen as an investment in the most vulnerable of our children.
3. Investment in early childhood education should be provided in line with a progressive childcare policy which would facilitate the option for parents to enter or leave the workforce.⁵

4. Right to Equality

The right to equality encompasses social and economic rights which are implied and un-enumerated rights in our Constitution. These rights should be protected in legislation which will address the issues of poverty.

Many people still face workplace and service-related discrimination based on disability, gender, age, colour, sexual orientation, Traveller status, ethnic origin, family status, marital status and

³ ibid 6.

⁴ ibid 7.

⁵ ibid 8.

religious/other beliefs. We will run major education and mobilisation campaigns to end discrimination both in the workplace and in services generally, and we will introduce stronger sanctions for breaches of equality legislation; we will repeal Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act; we will democratise the national and secondary school systems.

Over 4,000 people are consigned to Direct Provision centres, including over 1,500 children. Detainment in these Centres represents a form of institutional abuse that denies adults and children basic human rights. We will end the system of Direct Provision and we will ensure that the children of asylum seekers suffer no discrimination in relation to health or education due to their parent's asylum status.⁶

5. Right to National Resources



Income Supports: A major reform of income supports to provide security for people in paid work and out of employment is required: pay-related unemployment and sickness benefit; pay related state pensions; enhanced family supports (maternity benefits, paid paternity benefit, care and family leave and child-raising allowances). A priority will be the introduction of a '*cost of disability*' payment and the ending of child poverty and deprivation which focuses on access to adequate resources and quality services along with enhanced labour market and social protection supports for one-parent families. We will bring all social protection payments up to the Minimum Essential Standard of Living over the medium-term. These reforms require moving from a welfare system based on poverty-avoidance and means-testing to a system based on social solidarity and mutuality through an enhanced social insurance system and universal payments in which everyone benefits including the full participation of the self-employed. To this end Basic Income strategies will be actively explored.

This effective *New Social Contract* will be funded by a longterm phasing in of an enhanced *social wage*, or employers' social insurance, to the average paid by employers in other European countries.⁷

⁶ ibid 10.

⁷ ibid 12.