

**Social
Democrats**

European Manifesto 2024

For a Social Democratic Europe

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Vote Social Democrats.

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Key Points

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to uphold the rule of law, safeguard democracy, and protect the rights of citizens at European level.
- Advocate for Ireland's military neutrality and safeguard our opt-outs from EU common defence policies.
- Lobby for rapid emissions legislation and emissions reduction targets in line with scientific recommendations.
- Support EU-level strategies for the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by the end of the decade.
- Seek the recognition of a Palestinian state at EU level and promote efforts to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.
- Seek to unlock all potential funding streams that could help increase supply, and improve the affordability, of housing in Ireland.
- Work to change any EU rules that reduce the State's ability to provide social and affordable housing, and fight for reforms to EU State Aid rules to ensure essential public services like housing can be delivered by the State.
- Fight to defend and strengthen trade union and workers' rights.
- Work to strengthen safe, legal and regular migration pathways, and to enhance rights, protections and supports for asylum seekers within the EU.
- Oppose border externalisation policies, as well as multi- and bi-lateral agreements with states that are considered unsafe.
- Help to design a Common Agricultural Policy focused not only on food production, but on creating sustainable farm incomes, reducing emissions and food waste, and improving soil quality.
- Advocate for revision of the EU Fiscal Rules to ensure member states are not prevented from taking necessary action against high unemployment, climate change, and economic, social or environmental crises.
- Oppose the agenda of privatisation of public services that leads to wealth extraction, and benefits only small groups of elites.
- Demand an integrated anti-poverty strategy for the EU that will end homelessness by 2030, halve child poverty by 2030, and eliminate it by 2040.

Introduction

Last year Ireland marked half a century of participation in the European project.

Membership of the EU has been a rich source of progress for Ireland, from the transformative social changes to the roads and other infrastructure that European funding has helped to build.

The integration of elements of European law into Irish law has brought social progress that we may have had to wait much longer to see initiated, or which may not have happened at all.

Significant economic benefits have accrued to Ireland too. Most notably, access to the Single Market and various structural funds did much to assist our infrastructural development at a time when the Irish economy was something of a poor relation in Europe.

We believe EU membership and shared European values are central to our national interests and provide Ireland with a platform to actively promote our foreign policy objectives within a European bloc of friendly nations.

The European Parliament has long been an important part of Irish democracy. As we seek solutions to the climate catastrophe, housing crisis, the growth of artificial intelligence and the rise of far-right politics, it is more important than ever that we send strong voices to Brussels who will fight for progressive values and policies.

Our MEPs will work to safeguard democracy and the rule of law, and promote a progressive vision for Europe; a Social Europe, based around the principles of fairness, equality, human rights, protection for workers, and high environmental standards, with a stronger role for the State to counterbalance the market and to better regulate the economy.

We will endeavour, through the processes and institutions of the EU, to deepen cooperation among member states in the pursuit of peace, prosperity, social justice, and well-being for all EU citizens.

Climate and Nature

The next five years will be crucial for the planet and those of us who inhabit it. Electing Social Democrat MEPs would ensure a stronger voice on climate action in Brussels over that five-year term.

Real coordination at EU-level is essential to allow member states to meet their climate obligations. The European Union must be a global leader on climate action if we are to have any hope of securing a liveable planet.

Years of climate denial and delay have left us in a situation where a fast transition to a carbon-free society is the only option on the table. Already, an increasing number of severe weather events including fires, floods and droughts are afflicting the EU and world at large.

The EU's 2030 climate target is to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 per cent (relative to 1990). In February 2024, the European Commission recommended reducing the EU's emissions by 90 per cent by 2040. Reducing net emissions in this way will put us on course towards climate neutrality by 2050.

We need a continent-wide energy system based fully on renewables in the next two decades. EU support funding for the development of clean, sustainable and affordable energy, including community wind and solar energy projects at a local level, will be imperative if we are to succeed. Investing in a cleaner greener economy and rapidly reducing fossil fuel dependence will strengthen European security and climate resilience.

We must work to restore natural habitats and biodiversity as set out in the Nature Restoration Law. Action on climate change must be combined with action on ecosystem preservation. The EU also has a role in improving air quality standards across the continent.

We need to ensure that the EU leads by example internationally on climate justice and action to protect nature. Europe has proven that it can bring back species from the brink of extinction, clean up rivers, and protect habitats. But success will ultimately depend on who is elected to the European Parliament.

It is therefore important that Ireland sends to Brussels MEPs that will take the climate crisis seriously. The Social Democrats' voting record in the Dáil on this

issue shows how seriously we take this, unlike many other Irish parties in Dublin and in Brussels.

We will also work to ensure that this green transformation is not done at the expense of social cohesion. Climate adaption that leaves people and regions behind has the potential to ensure the entire project fails.

Most of all, our MEPs will work to ensure the creation of, and support for, EU-level strategies for the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by the end of the decade, working for a fast, fair and just transition to a sustainable economy that supports decent work and operates within planetary boundaries.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to ensure that all policy decisions prioritise people, their communities, and the environment.
- Lobby for rapid emissions legislation and emissions reduction targets in line with scientific recommendations.
- Work to bring forward the EU's climate neutrality target and a commitment to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible.
- Support EU-level strategies for the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by the end of the decade.
- Push to include the right to a clean environment in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- Work to restore natural habitats and biodiversity as set out in the Nature Restoration Law. Action on climate change must be combined with action on ecosystem preservation.
- Push the EU to build an energy system based fully on renewables by 2040, and ensure energy projects are developed in a way that minimises their impact on nature.
- Seek additional EU support and funding for the development of clean, sustainable and affordable energy, including wind and solar power.
- Support further regulation, as well as technical and financial support, for the development of Community Energy initiatives at local level.

Such formats increase support for renewable energy projects, whilst giving tangible benefits for individuals, families and communities.
- Support green hydrogen as an 'alternative' fuel reserved for backup in the power system, heavy industry, and long-distance transport (both sea and air) where full electrification may not yet be feasible.
- Acknowledge the tax-free status of aviation and maritime fuel as what it is: an effective subsidy for both industries that should be factored into economic analyses of the costs and impacts of the industry.

We will call for the reversal of the Energy Taxation Directive, which prevents the taxation of aviation and maritime fuel.

- Oppose public money, at State and European level, for infrastructure that would further lock the continent into fossil fuel dependency.
- Seek the increased regulation of the financial industry within the EU so to reduce and eliminate money flows supporting the fossil fuel industry.

Recently published research shows that European banks have provided more than €300 billion of financing to fossil fuel and agribusiness activities in the Global South in the years since the Paris Agreement.

- Push for a minimum percentage of public money being spent to meet the 'green financing' classification.
- Support an EU endorsement of the need for a global Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty; a global agreement to phase out fossil fuels.
- Support the principle of 'the polluter pays' – ensuring that such measures

are done in a socially fair way – and advocate for the funds raised to directly assist transition.

- Push for improved air quality standards at European level.
- Strengthen regulations and enforcement to fight marine pollution, including chemical and plastic pollution.
- Make the discarding of waste directly into the ocean unlawful in EU Territorial waters.
- Seek additional funding for the EU Solidarity Fund, to focus on the green transition and also help prepare for natural disasters.
- Acknowledge that while EU-level funding and direction is important, so too is allowance for the green transition to be shaped and led at more local levels; national, regional, and municipal.

Workers' Rights

The Social Democrats want to help create a Social Europe; an EU where workers' rights are respected, workers are properly paid for their work, and workers and families have a better work/life balance.

For decades, the share of national income going to workers has been declining across the continent. As employment has become more precarious, the number of working poor in the European economy is on the rise.

The Social Democrats are focused on empowering workers through supporting the growth of trade unions and improving workers' rights legislation, at home and at a European level. These are some of the most powerful tools we have for reducing economic inequality.

Strengthening workers' rights is fundamental to social democratic politics.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to defend and strengthen trade union and workers' rights, including the right to organise, union access to workplaces, the right to bargain collectively, and the right to strike.
- Fight for legislation recognising platform workers as employees, with a right to a minimum wage, collective bargaining, and employment conditions/protections to which workers are legally entitled.
- Seek to build on the European Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions, so that workers in precarious work or in bogus self-employment arrangements have better protections.
- Support the unionisation of new or non-standard forms of work to guarantee the rights of all workers.
- Work to revise EU procurement rules so that organisations that respect workers' and trade union rights are favoured.
- Encourage the EU to take stronger action to eliminate the gender pay gap, including by ensuring swift transposition across the EU of the Directive on Gender Pay Transparency.
- Seek to make easier the recognition of professional qualifications across the bloc.
- Aim to build on the European Directive on work/life balance, including enhancing flexibility around working hours to allow families to manage caring responsibilities.
- Work to expand EU occupational health and safety legislation, and support efforts across the EU to introduce a four-day working week.

Migration

Migration has the potential to benefit all of society, including by mitigating labour shortages (a significant economic challenge in many EU countries) and enriching cultures and communities.

Across the world, refugees are desperately fleeing conflict, persecution, or hunger. Many are looking towards Europe for sanctuary but tragically many men, women and children are drowning in the Mediterranean, while those who do make it to EU soil often do not receive the reception they are entitled to.

People seeking safety and protection increasingly face detention, brutal and illegal pushbacks, and violence at the hands of smugglers and border authorities.

EU countries have ended their search and rescue missions. Often, humanitarian ships that have rescued refugees and migrants from dangerous boats have been blocked from docking at EU ports.

Across the continent, far-right elements exploit this suffering, dragging mainstream parties to the right and normalising migration policies that are both dysfunctional and unsustainable.

The failure of EU countries to prevent refugees from drowning and to provide safe and legal pathways to asylum is a disgrace. In October 2019, Fine Gael MEPs voted against a European Parliament resolution calling for improved search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean to save refugees from drowning. (The resolution was defeated by just two votes.)

At the European Parliament, our MEPs will work to strengthen safe, legal and regular migration pathways, and enhance rights, protections and supports for migrants and asylum seekers within the EU.

The establishment of legal and accessible migration channels is necessary to end suffering and exploitation, including through human trafficking. We need a migration code that provides visa opportunities for family reunification and work at different skills levels. We want to make it easier for newcomers to the EU to work and integrate through access to language support, education and employment opportunities.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to strengthen safe, legal and regular migration pathways, and to enhance rights, protections and supports for asylum seekers within the EU.
- Oppose border externalisation policies, as well as multi- and bi-lateral agreements with states that are considered unsafe, do not respect human rights, or do not comply with the rule of law.
- Oppose so-called “migration deals”, with third countries, where the EU essentially pays other countries to keep out migrants, unless there has been a thorough human rights assessment.

Making development cooperation with third countries conditional on so-called ‘migration management’ is unethical. Refugees and asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable people in

our societies, we cannot allow them to be exploited for geopolitical gain.

- Call for an EU-funded Search & Rescue Missions in the Mediterranean, and aim to strengthen the humanitarian mandate of Frontex.

The EU should have an explicit goal to save lives in the Mediterranean.

- Fight for an end to laws that have effectively criminalised the provision of humanitarian assistance to asylum seekers.
- Work for a migration code that provides visa opportunities for family reunification and work at different skills levels.

We want to make it easier for newcomers to work and integrate through access to language support, education and employment opportunities.

Defence, Neutrality, and Foreign Policy

We believe EU membership and shared European values are central to our national interests and provide Ireland with a platform to actively promote our foreign policy objectives within a European bloc of friendly nations.

Our interactions with the nations of the world in an era of increasing globalisation is a critical element in sustaining Ireland's security, and in contributing to our economic growth and the prosperity for our people. No country can face the prevailing security threats alone.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Promote our values of an inclusive, fair and just society with dignity, respect and equality for all citizens; values which define who we are as both a nation and a people.
 - Advocate for Ireland's military neutrality and safeguard our opt-outs from EU common defence policies.
- The Social Democrats believe Ireland should maintain our current form of neutrality, which can be described as politically aligned, but non-membership of military alliances or mutual defence arrangements.
- Seek to leverage at an EU-level Ireland's history of non-colonialism, our international reputation in peace keeping, and military neutrality, in exhorting the primacy of diplomacy to prevent conflict.
 - Seek the recognition of a Palestinian state at EU level, and promote efforts to achieve a two-state solution on the basis of 1967 borders. We believe the two-state solution offers the only prospect of an enduring peace between Israel and the Palestinian people.
- This will also involve the creation of a shared capital for the two states in Jerusalem, and the ending of the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands.
- Seek to overcome EU-level impediments to the enactment of the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018 and the Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill 2023.
 - Advocate for the suspension of the EU trade deal with Israel until the Israeli government complies with international law.
 - Support the supply of aid and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, and sustain efforts at EU-level to ensure accountability for war crimes committed against the people of Ukraine.
 - Support the principles of the United Nations Charter to help find a diplomatic solution and enable a lasting peace for Eastern Europe.
 - Challenge the use of the EU's international cooperation budget as an instrument to advance geopolitical and primarily foreign policy objectives, instead ensuring that aid is distributed on a principled basis; those principles must include fairness, justice, human rights, and sustainability.

Housing

The Social Democrats believe that housing is a fundamental right, needed to ensure people can live dignified lives without financial hardship, precarity or stress. **We want to transform housing in Ireland by delivering high quality homes at an affordable cost.** Several aspects of EU policy affect, or can affect, the delivery and regulation of housing at national level.

For example, the EU can have a role in regulating institutional investors, and the short-term letting sector.

Eurostat's designation of the debt of Ireland's Approved Housing Body (AHB) sector as being 'on the public books' acts as a headwind to public investment in housing. Recently proposed reforms of the EU Fiscal Rules seem unlikely to improve matters. Expediting the removal of AHBs from calculations of public debt will be a priority for our MEPs.

As well as this, many EU schemes could be used to develop new social housing in Ireland, or to increase the quality of the existing housing stock. There are literally tens of billions of euros available for the construction or renovation of homes in Ireland. However, few of these potentially lucrative funding streams are being utilised.

The Fiscal Rules

The EU Fiscal Rules require member states to keep their national debt-to-GDP ratio below 60 per cent, and ensure that annual budget deficits do not exceed 3 per cent of GDP. If these obligations are not respected, corrective measures must be taken. While there are recent examples of flexibility, these rules still have the potential to have a chilling effect on necessary public investment.

Ireland has a system of social and affordable housing provision that is strongly linked to the State, particularly around funding and oversight. Eurostat – the EU's statistical agency – has judged that debts incurred by these housing providers should be considered part of the national debt.

While it is clear that Irish local authorities (city and county councils) and the Department of Housing are indeed arms of the state, this ruling also currently extends to AHBs which are not public bodies. Therefore, when the government

provides loan financing to an AHB to develop social housing, it is adding to its own debt and potentially (depending on debt and deficit levels) necessitating spending cuts or debt reduction measures elsewhere. The equivalents of AHBs in countries like Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands are not considered part of the public debt and so do not face the same funding constraints as in Ireland.

By the Commission's own estimates, the funding gap for renovation of homes in the EU to meet climate targets is at least €115 billion per year. Given such a gap for lower income households who cannot self-finance renovations, there is a clear need for state intervention that the Fiscal Rules make exceedingly difficult.

Regardless of how AHBs are accounted for, the Fiscal Rules are not well aligned with investment to achieve vital public policy goals, including the provision of affordable housing. The European Commission has faced increased calls in recent years to adapt its economic governance, including the Fiscal Rules, to better allow member states invest in meeting essential policy objectives; most notably hitting their ambitious greenhouse gas emissions targets. Our MEPs will continue to call for this in Brussels.

Ireland must find a route to remove AHBs from calculations of public debt to ensure the sector is better able to ramp up investment during the coming years.

Regulating Investment Funds

The European Union can have a role in investment fund regulation, regulating speculative flows of capital into housing and halting the negative financialisation of housing by real estate funds buying up homes.

Residential housing across the continent is becoming an increasingly attractive asset class for investors. This is thanks in part to national government policies which have ostensibly had the goal of assisting ordinary people, but have had the unintended consequence of essentially de-risking investment in housing by these funds. These consequences include pushing up house prices and restricting affordability to a decreasing field of potential homebuyers, and supporting rent-paying households and thereby ensuring stable returns for housing investors.

Recent European initiatives under the Capital Markets Union will likely see a further increase of residential housing under institutional ownership.

The Social Democrats want an end to favourable tax landscapes for institutional investors in the Irish property system, and a ban on the purchasing existing homes. We need a levy on investment funds to ensure they contribute to resolving a housing crisis that has earned them excessive profits for years. It is not acceptable for wealthy funds to be able to outbid ordinary homebuyers, whilst paying minimal tax on their extravagant income. Stopping the further financialisation of housing requires European-level coordination regulation.

Short-term Lets

The increased use of homes suitable for individuals and families to live in long-term as short-term tourist accommodation has caused problems in a number of areas in Ireland. Government has shown a reluctance to take strong action, given that the EU has a role in regulating the sector.

If in Government in Ireland, we want to require short-term rental platforms such as AirBnB and Booking.Com to request that all entire properties in Rent Pressure Zones show proof of planning permission change; something for which we would legislate. We would insist these platforms take down all listings that don't display a valid licence number - a licence number that would be issued to all permitted lets.

EU Funding Streams for Home Construction

There are a number of potentially lucrative EU funding streams which could be used to build homes in Ireland.

The **InvestEU** programme supports investment in areas such as sustainable infrastructure, social investment, and skills development, which can include the construction of social and affordable housing. The programme can provide a public guarantee fund for investments seen as risky (thereby providing access to finance on more favourable terms¹), or can directly invest in projects where there is a funding gap. While InvestEU has potential to play an important role in providing cost-rental homes, to date it has not yet been used by social housing providers in Ireland.

¹ Social housing providers looking to diversify their funding options could use InvestEU to 'de-risk', or to bridge potential funding gaps left by the private sector, allowing for financing that otherwise may not happen.

While the **European Regional Development Fund** (ERDF) does not have a specific mandate related to housing, it can provide funding for projects that contribute to social inclusion and sustainable development, which may include investment in social housing. It has already supported initiatives to improve housing conditions, mainly renovating homes, and increasing energy-efficiency.

The **European Social Fund Plus** (ESF+) supports employment and social policies across the EU. Like the ERDF, the ESF+ does not have a specific policy or mandate related to social housing, but it can provide funding for projects that aim to improve social inclusion and access to affordable housing. A shortage of skilled labour in the construction sector has been identified as inhibiting renovation of the housing stock in Ireland. ESF+ funding can help address this issue and train the next generation of construction workers.

Horizon Europe (the EU's research and innovation funding programme for 2021-2027) can also support investment in social housing through projects aimed at improving housing conditions.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Seek to unlock all potential funding streams that could help increase supply and improve the affordability of housing in Ireland, and reform those streams to simplify access.
- Work to change any EU rules that reduce the State's ability to provide social and affordable housing.
- Fight for reforms to EU State Aid rules to ensure essential public services like housing can be delivered by the State.
- Call for increased flexibility in how investment in public housing is accounted for in the national debt and EU budgetary rules.
- Seek to include housing exclusion indicators in the EU Semester (the biannual economic, fiscal, employment and social recommendations to Member States).
- Work for a regulation regime for investment funds in the property market that ensures they pay a fair level of tax, and their negative social influence is greatly reduced.
- Work to reduce the impact of short-term rental platforms on availability and affordability of housing.
- Support skills development with social service providers, local authorities and actors from the social and affordable housing sector.
- Support a single market for housing finance, that would help reduce the cost of mortgages, and potentially of house building.

Agriculture

Farmers should be able to make a living from their crucial work while at the same time farming in a way that protects nature, enhances biodiversity, and minimises emissions. That they cannot do so represents a failure of policy, not of farmers.

No group stands to lose more from climate change and biodiversity loss than farmers. But many already do not receive a fair price for what they produce.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) must support the necessary changes in how food is produced. It should promote an agricultural model that produces healthy food, provides stable and sustainable farm incomes, enhances food security, and improves environmental sustainability.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to make our food systems more resilient and support local production in line with the principles of food sovereignty and security.
- Help to design a CAP focused not only on food production, but on creating sustainable farm incomes, reducing emissions and food waste, and improving soil quality.
- Support a shift away from food production based on pesticides, monocultures, and animal suffering, and towards larger investment into organic farming and other more sustainable practices.
- The current system subsidises an industrial agricultural model that is overly dependent on fertilisers, animal feed and fossil fuels, including from outside the EU.
- Campaign to reduce the use of chemical pesticides to protect human health, improve soil quality, and enhance biodiversity.

This includes a ban on glyphosate.
- Oppose unfair competition to European farmers from products that do not respect the same standards that they adhere to, including from countries outside the EU.
- Address the negative impact our agricultural system has on developing countries.
- Ensure that agricultural policymaking at EU level has a stronger focus on animal welfare.

Fisheries

Europe's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) must encourage a transition towards low-impact fisheries, with a transparent and fair system of quota distribution, and a sustainable seafood consumption. This transition must be planned in close cooperation with fishers and coastal communities. Europe needs to end overfishing and phase out harmful fishing practices.

Article 17 has been one of the most neglected elements of the CFP. It requires EU member states to allocate fishing opportunities using transparent and objective criteria with a focus on social, environmental, and economic criteria. This includes, for example, the use of fishing gears with low environmental impact and reduced energy consumption.

Article 17 offers the opportunity to incentivise sustainability by providing for priority access to fishing opportunities for environmentally low-impact fishing, while delivering social and economic benefits.

It can be used to ensure a just transition to a low carbon, low environmental impact, and socially just fishing fleet across the EU and in Ireland, something which is of critical and urgent importance if we are to meet our climate and biodiversity obligations set at national, European and global level.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Work to make our food systems, including fisheries and seafood imports, more secure and resilient, including by supporting local production.
- Work with all fleet segments to develop and publish transparent and objective criteria of an environmental, social and economic nature and to deliver a fair transition to low-impact, low-carbon fishing.
- Support low-impact approaches to fishing, and coastal communities.
- Ensure that the Common Fisheries Policy is used to support the inshore sector on a proportionate basis.
- Call for strong regulation of aquaculture (such as offshore fish farms) and aquaculture imports. The EU imports approximately 70 per cent of seafood consumed.
- Work to effectively protect Marine Protected Areas, including from harmful fishing practices.

Regulating Artificial Intelligence

Law and politics are playing catch up with artificial intelligence (AI) and its consequences. There are major areas of concern related to the development of AI, including:

- Civil Liberties Infringements
- Labour Displacement
- Bias and Discrimination
- Barriers to Justice
- Misinformation
- Intellectual Property
- Climate, and even
- Existential Risk.

Big tech firms are the only global actors with the data, staff, and computing capabilities to drive progress in this area. This creates an unhealthy dynamic between member states and multinational corporations where much of the development of the technology that affects our lives is being done elsewhere. There is a critical need for global regulators to join forces in harnessing the societal impacts of AI, and potential for the EU to be a global legislative leader.

Meanwhile, the potentially positive impacts of AI are being lost in the discussion:

- Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness in Industry
- Technological Advancements for the Consumer
- Fairer Distribution of Labour across the Population, and
- Improvements in work/life Balance.

Social Democrat MEPs will provide the balanced leadership that is required to ensure we don't stifle European innovation while also expanding the scope of influence on AI regulation beyond just industry, to include citizen's concerns.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Build on the 2023 Artificial Intelligence Act for stronger regulation of the development of AI in Europe, with particular attention to the relationship between large technology companies and member states.
- Monitor the use of AI by member state governments, particularly in the areas of surveillance, facial recognition, censorship, and civil liberties.
- Impose sanctions where member states are wrongfully deploying AI to infringe on civil liberties.
- Investigate the potential labour displacement that the development of AI will bring about, and explore frameworks and mechanisms to deal with it, including EU-wide labour creation and redistribution, basic income, shorter-working weeks, and retraining.
- Develop law and policy that addresses the risk areas of artificial intelligence in relation to bias and discrimination, including with meaningful consultation with minority and marginalised groups.
- Develop law and policy that addresses the risk areas of artificial intelligence in relation to intellectual property, copyright, and the climate crisis.
- Investigate the broader existential risk posed by the development of AI that can ultimately threaten us as a species, and develop law and policy to mitigate.
- Ensure that the progress of automation and AI doesn't remove or distort access to, or affect administration of, justice.
- Develop and implement EU-wide citizen information and awareness programmes to bridge the digital divide, increase digital literacy, and mitigate the rise of misinformation.
- Increase cybersecurity efforts to prevent AI-based hacking attacks, with a special emphasis on protecting critical infrastructure.
- Update and enforce legislation to promote the safe use of digital technologies by children, address the digital divide, and promote digital skills.
- Ensure the design and use of AI systems is transparent.
- Collaborate with US, Asian and global leaders to ensure a unified response to the development of AI in regulatory terms, and position Europe as the legislative leader in this area.

Safeguarding Democracy

In the face of mounting challenges to democracy, the Social Democrats will stand firm in our commitment to defend democratic values and principles.

Recent years have seen a rise in threats such as disinformation, far-right extremism, and political corruption, posing significant risks to the integrity of democratic institutions across Europe. In Ireland, the rise of the far-right has been seen in violent attacks to public property and marginalised groups – a stark reminder that the rise in extremism can take hold anywhere.

Now is the time to come together to protect the democratic institutions and fundamental rights that are at the heart of social democracy.

Safeguarding Democracy

Democracy is the cornerstone of our societies, and its preservation is non-negotiable. Our MEPs will work to uphold the rule of law and protect the rights of all Irish citizens at European level.

By fostering an inclusive and pluralistic political environment, we will ensure that democracy remains resilient in the face of emerging challenges.

Strengthening Democratic Institutions

Social Democrats MEPs will work to protect the most important elements of democracy for Irish citizens in the European Union, including the rule of law. Recent demonstrations motivated by far-right extremist rhetoric in Ireland show that every member state is susceptible to the rise of the far-right.

We must act to halt the growth of extremist rhetoric, and ensure freedom and democracy are protected for European citizens.

Promoting Civic Engagement

Citizen participation is essential for the vitality of democracy. Building on successful models like the Conference on the Future of Europe, we will actively seek to engage citizens in the policymaking process.

As well as implementing the key actions from the Conference in the next legislative mandate, mechanisms such as the European Citizen's Initiative should be promoted as opportunities for citizens to have a direct input into policymaking.

The Social Democrats will work to ensure that democratic mechanisms, including Citizens' Assemblies, are expanded further to empower individuals to contribute to shaping EU policies that directly impact their lives

Combatting Disinformation and Ensuring Media Transparency

Disinformation poses a grave threat to the integrity of democratic elections and public discourse.

In the next European Parliament, the Political Transparency Regulation must be fully implemented to help safeguard the democratic process from manipulation and foreign interference.

Our MEPs will work to enhance media transparency, ensuring that European citizens have access to accurate information about the sources and funding behind political content online.

Tackling Corruption and Enhancing Accountability

The Social Democrats are committed to ending 'golden circle' politics and improving accountability in political life.

We are committed to rooting out corruption at all levels of government and governance, and will establish robust mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in political decision-making.

Instances like 'Qatargate' emphasise that corruption continues to influence how decisions are made at EU level. Whilst the hard work to ensure an independent ethics body was created in the previous mandate was successful, the body must be implemented to the highest possible standard to restore faith in the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

Economic Policy

Policy set in Brussels has important consequences for the Irish economy, and the effectiveness of economic decisions taken by the Irish government. The Social Democrats believe that increased flexibility is required to ensure that the EU's fiscal rules and other economic levers do not inhibit important and necessary state investment or contribute to low economic growth.

For example, while the goal of the Stability and Growth Pact is to maintain fiscal stability within the Union, the Pact's suspension to allow for the economic repercussions of Covid-19 was tacit acceptance of its limitations and was evidence of the need for increased flexibility on a more permanent basis.

Given that members of the Eurozone no longer control their own monetary policy, fiscal policy is government's only significant policy lever with which to react to economic or social shocks. Any mechanisms that limit governments' ability to spend during an economic slump risk intensifying recessions and hampering growth.

It is not only economic shocks that require fiscal flexibility and the ability to react according to circumstances. Ireland has been facing, for a number of years, a raft of crises in different policy areas – most notably in health and housing. We have also committed to taking extraordinary and unprecedented action to re-shape our economy and society to meet our international climate-related obligations.

Yet in spite of the obvious need for significant government intervention in these areas, Ireland, and other countries as well, continues to be constrained in its ability to borrow to finance even the most productive and socially necessary investments. Our MEPs will fight to change this.

We also believe that the mandate of the European Central Bank is in need of revision. A focus solely on price stability is too narrow. There are other economic concerns that must also be taken into account, particularly achieving full employment.

Social Europe is under threat from economic policies that seek to erode good pay and conditions for workers and prioritise the interests of large corporations over citizens. The resulting economic inequality has been exploited by nationalists and populists on the right who have stoked public anger and fear.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Advocate for revision of the Fiscal Rules to ensure States are not prevented from taking necessary action against high unemployment, climate change, and economic, social or environmental crises.
- Campaign for a revised mandate for the European Central Bank, to include full employment alongside price stability.
- Fight for reforms to EU State Aid rules to ensure essential public services, such as housing, can be delivered by the State.

We will also seek increased flexibility in how investment in public housing is accounted for in the national debt and EU budgetary rules.

- Put the rights of European citizens before the economic freedoms of corporations.
- Oppose the agenda of privatisation of public services that leads to wealth extraction and benefits only small groups of elites.
- Work to reform the European financial system so that it enables rather than inhibits the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

This will involve reform the European Semester, and Multiannual Financial Framework.

- Examine the possibility of an EU-wide wealth tax to combat inequality and fund a green transformation.
- Advocate for a Europe-wide financial transactions tax to generate revenue whilst simultaneously curbing financial speculation.

- Examine the possibility of making the European windfall tax on energy companies permanent to prevent profiteering in future energy crises.
- Build on the appointment of an EU SME Envoy to set out a substantive EU SME Strategy, enshrining the SME 'Think Small First' Test across the European Commission and other institutions.
- Advocate for revision of Green Financing legislation to ensure it aligns with EU Climate targets across all sectors and work to remove the bottlenecks and contradictions within different regulations and directives.
- Monitor the development of EU trade agreements to ensure they include binding standards around the environment, human rights, workers' rights, and consumer protection.
- Oppose special commercial courts and private arbitration to deal with trade disputes, as part of trade agreements.
- Support measures across European member states to mandate closure of the kinds of tax loopholes that syphon revenue from developing countries.
- Actively engage with the next iteration of the European Expert Group on Social Economy and the delivery of the EU's Social Economy Action Plan to help build an economy that is better for people and the planet.
- Shine a light on the activities of lobbyists in Brussels who work to water down and/or block important and necessary environmental and social reforms.

Tackling Poverty

Everyone has the right to have their basic needs met through a combination of income and public service provision. As social democrats we believe in a strong social safety net that protects people at times of difficulty and those unable to provide for themselves.

In 2022, 95.3 million people in the EU were noted by Eurostat to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, equivalent to 21.6 per cent of the population. According to UNICEF, one in four children – 20 million children – in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion; an increase of almost one million since 2019.

The *Europe 2020* target, set in 2010, of taking 20 million people out of poverty or social exclusion was missed by a very wide margin. Groups facing a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion include single households, migrants, and people with lower education, as well as their children.

Our MEPs will work towards the creation of a Social Europe that prioritises equality, poverty reduction, decent employment, supports for disabled people, and security in old age.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Demand an integrated anti-poverty strategy for the EU that will end homelessness by 2030, halve child poverty by 2030, and eliminate child poverty by 2040.
- Ensure that EU economic policy has a focus on eliminating poverty and social exclusion.
- Safeguard and accelerate recent progress on children's rights and increase investment in important services for children.
- Demand adequate funding for the European Child Guarantee so that all children have appropriate access to healthcare, nutrition, education, care, and accommodation.
- Recognise the importance of trade unions and collective bargaining in overcoming low wages and in-work poverty, helping to reduce income inequality, and improve wellbeing, health and other social outcomes.
- Address inappropriate EU governance structures (particularly fiscal ones) that prohibit or inhibit important public investment by national governments.
- Work to make the European Pillar of Social Rights enforceable through legislative initiatives, aiming for equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion.
- Support additional funding for National Statistical Organisations so that data gaps can be filled and marginalised groups such as older people, women and girls, disabled people, Traveller and Roma people, and migrants and asylum seekers can be reached.

Other European Policies

Below are a number of other EU-level policy priorities we hold as a party across areas including violence against women, disability rights, education, and enhanced democratisation.

In Brussels, our MEPS will:

- Exercise pressure to deliver a rigorous Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive on business and human rights, and support the Global Treaty for Business and Human Rights.

Very large corporations wield considerable influence and frequently manage to avoid genuine accountability for significant human rights violations. Companies should have a responsibility to respect human rights, workers' rights, and environmental standards wherever they operate.

- Support a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women by pushing for the development of a comprehensive EU legislative framework that addresses all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Push for the fulfilment of state obligations under the Istanbul Convention.
- Where appropriate, support the transfer of powers to local, regional and national government in line with the principles subsidiarity and that decisions affecting people should be made as close as possible to them.

- Push for the expansion of FP10 – the next EU Research Fund (2027+) – and for it to be ring-fenced, with a particular focus on underpinning the Pillar 1 programme that funds discovery research.

- Support increased funding for the Erasmus programme.

- Work with the disability movement to ensure the fulfilment of the EU's Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and work with any re-established Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament on issues related to disability and the UN CRPD.

- Work for a fairer energy pricing system, improving on the current system where linking electricity prices to the cost of gas (the marginal producer) means that prices don't fall proportionately when renewable energy generation increases.

We need a comprehensive European strategy that will ensure consistent availability of sustainable energy at stable and affordable prices.

- Support a proposal that would see the European Parliament granted the right to initiate legislation.

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