

## Age Action Reviews Six Party Manifestos

In the year before the general election, Age Action agreed on ten priority proposals that would provide the most support to older persons and make Ireland a better country in which to age. These proposals are based on our frequent engagement with our members and with older persons generally, as well as on research and on examples of best practice from other countries. Throughout the year we have engaged with political parties to advocate for the inclusion of these proposals in their manifestos and ultimately in the Programme for Government. In this document, we explain how parties have responded to these ten asks in their manifestos. While we focus on the ten recommendations we made, it is important to flag that the parties have content relevant to ageing and older persons beyond that, and each of the manifestos discussed have a specific section outlining how they will help older persons. We focus on the manifestos of six parties: Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Green Party, Sinn Féin, Labour, and the Social Democrats.

### 1. Appoint a Commissioner for Ageing and Older Persons, with a supporting legal framework and an independent budget, to ensure we are all treated fairly and with dignity as we age.

The **Labour Party** and **Social Democrats** commit to a Commissioner for Ageing and Older Persons.

**Fine Gael** commit to a Commissioner on Positive Ageing, which would do a lot of the same things as Age Action imagines the Commissioner for Ageing and Older Persons doing.

**Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin,** and the **Green Party** make no reference to a Commissioner.

2. Pass a law to benchmark and index the state pension so that its rate will always be at least equal to 34% of total average earnings to preserve its status as the bedrock of income in older age.

The **Social Democrats** and **Labour Party** both commit to benchmarking and indexation of the State Pension.

The **Green Party** talk about “increas[ing] social welfare payments in line with earnings and inflation”, which means indexation of all payments, including the State Pension, which is not discussed specifically in their manifesto.

**Sinn Féin** commits to something similar to benchmarking: establishing a ‘Social Welfare Adequacy Commission’ that would make recommendations to the Government every year about the social welfare rates including the State Pension, based on evidence. They also commit to increasing the state pension by €50.

**Fianna Fáil** and **Fine Gael** make no reference to benchmarking and indexation. Both parties commit to increasing the full rate of the contributory State Pension to at least €350 over the course of the next government.

3. Abolish the prevalent ageist practice of mandatory retirement, so that we all have the option to remain in or re-enter employment beyond age 65, as a step towards eliminating legally permitted age discrimination.

**Sinn Féin** say they will once again bring forward their lapsed Bill, “Employment Equality (Abolition of Mandatory Retirement Age) Bill 2022” which would remove the exception from the Employment Equality Acts that allows for mandatory retirement and abolish it for the vast majority of workers in Ireland.

No other party makes it explicit that they will abolish mandatory retirement. Some talk about the issue but do not go into detail on how they will do it or whether they are leaving themselves wiggle room.

**Fianna Fáil** say they will “Legally enable people who want to work beyond the age of 65 to do so.” But there is concern that this could still allow for mandatory retirement ages after 65, such as 66 or 70.

**Labour** say they will “Assess the prevalence of mandatory retirement clauses and ensure the removal of barriers to remaining in the workforce after 65 for those who wish to work beyond that age.” As with Fianna Fáil, it is unclear to what age people will be allowed to continue to work.

**Fine Gael** say they will remove mandatory retirement at age 65, implying it will remain at other ages.

**The Green Party** say they will “Enact the Employment (Restriction of Certain Mandatory Retirement Ages) Bill 2024.” This legislation is deeply flawed; it just changes the boxes employers have to tick in order to enforce mandatory retirement. It is unlikely to meaningfully protect people from mandatory retirement.

**The Social Democrats** do not mention mandatory retirement.

#### 4. Develop a comprehensive, all-of-government national ageing strategy, with a requirement for implementation plans in every relevant state agency, to eradicate ageism and to ensure that we prepare sufficiently for the demographic transition.

**The Labour Party** say they will “Relaunch the National Positive Ageing Strategy with an implementation plan and new funding.” The Positive Ageing Strategy had notable weaknesses, but with stronger funding and implementation it could be beneficial.

No other parties commit to a National Ageing Strategy.

#### 5. Deliver on the pledge of a strong, fully universal and accessible healthcare system that is tax-funded and free-of-charge at the point of use.

**Sinn Féin** and the **Social Democrats** commit to universal healthcare.

**Labour** and **Fine Gael** talk about implementing Sláintecare, which was originally envisioned as including universal healthcare. However they do not mention universal healthcare in their manifestos.

**Fianna Fáil** and the **Green Party** do not commit to universal healthcare or Sláintecare.

6. Implement an Energy Guarantee for Older Persons payment, targeting those in poorly insulated homes as well as those on lower incomes, as a tangible example of climate justice.

**The Labour Party** say they will ‘explore the creation of an Energy Guarantee payment for older persons’ which would be a first step towards its implementation.

Other parties make commitments in the area of energy poverty. However the general focus is on retrofitting and making homes more energy efficient rather than providing stronger income supports to help people cope with bills.

7. Prohibit ‘digital only’ services, fund digital skills training and adequately resource traditional alternatives such as desk and telephone services, as a step towards implementing a rights-based approach to accessing publicly funded services.

**The Social Democrats** and **Labour** commit to prohibiting digital only-services. The Social Democrats say that the Commissioner on Ageing and Older Persons will have a role in enforcing this, and Labour talk about preserving a certain standard of offline options for accessing public services, e.g. phone lines and desks.

No other party deals with digital exclusion in their manifesto. **Sinn Féin** does not discuss digital much at all, but does have a section on public service reform, while the **Greens**, **Fianna Fáil**, and **Fine Gael** discuss digital transformation in detail without engaging with the risks and downsides.

## 8. Introduce a care strategy using a human rights-based approach to improve, expand, and harmonize our care options.

While many parties make proposals in the area of long-term care in terms of nursing home capacity and home care hours, no party proposes a strategy for setting out the vision.

**Labour** does commit to a version of the statutory home care scheme that is rights-based and person-centred, and the **Social Democrats** also describe their vision of a home care scheme as ‘person centred’.

## 9. Implement policies to ensure that all of us can age in place in our homes and communities, in particular, support and protections for older persons renting, and the enforcement of universal design principles for all new builds.

The **Green Party** names ‘ageing in place’ and lays out how they will support it. These include increasing the living alone allowance; increasing home care hours; introducing an equity release scheme for retrofitting; ensuring a fifth of new builds are universally designed.

While **Fine Gael** does not use the language of ‘ageing in place’ they include a section on ‘Practical Housing Options for Positive Ageing’, with commitments such as increasing the value of the housing adaptation grants and improving transport connectivity to health services.

**Fianna Fáil** do not name ‘ageing in place’ but have a section called ‘Supporting People Living at Home’ the majority of which would be relevant to older persons. The commitments include expanding the care and repair scheme, increasing funding to the Housing Adaptation Grants, and designing a statutory home care scheme.

**Labour** commits to “ringfence a proportion of social housing for older people with adherence to universal design principles so that housing is age appropriate”. They talk about allowing older persons to “remain in their own home” with specific reference to expanding the Housing Adaptation Grants but do not talk about ageing



in place or independence in older age more broadly. Some of their other commitments are also relevant, such as a rights-based statutory home care scheme and delivering a total of 83,500 social housing units.

**Sinn Féin** does not talk about housing for older persons or supports for people to remain independent in older age, but some of their commitments are relevant, such as to expand home care.

10. Support the introduction of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to address the gaps in the existing human rights system by clarifying states' human rights obligations and responsibilities towards older people.

**Sinn Féin** and **Labour** commit to supporting the introduction of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

No other party makes reference to the convention.

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