



Goal 8

Decent Work and Economic Growth



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Smaller businesses feel the impacts of increases in costs and changes to regulation far more than larger companies. These small and micro businesses account for more than 99% of the Irish economy, they are the heart of our domestic economy, employing more people than any other sector.

The new Government must improve the environment for Irish business, through measures that support competitiveness and ensure that the “Think Small First” principle must become embedded in Irish policy making. Ireland’s taxation system should recognise innovators, investors and entrepreneurs as key contributors to growth, taxing them fairly.

SMEs who trade across borders need additional supports to ensure that they are appropriately diversified to prepare for Brexit, and so that they can capitalise on the trading opportunities offered by the European Union.

While for many people employment is a positive element in their lives, providing purpose and financial independence, for others, the workplace is inaccessible for a variety of reasons. Whether through the inadequate supports for those with disabilities or the fact that 98% of those with caring responsibilities are women. Investment by the State in affordable, quality childcare needs to be sustained and increased over the coming years. This must be partnered with a strategy for flexible workplaces which supports working families.

Additional funding for education, from primary to tertiary, is essential to our economic competitiveness. Any new Government must work closely with industry and employers to ensure that the correct investments are being made throughout the education system so that life-long learning is prioritised, skills gaps are addressed, and increased labour force participation is supported.

It should be as administratively easy as possible for businesses to access skills and training provision for their employees. Additionally, employers must be able to address skills gaps with the employment of migrant workers through a system that is robust and can process these requests as efficiently as possible.

Supporting Entrepreneurs and SMEs

- Incorporate the ‘Think Small First’ principle across all Government departments through implementation of the SME Test to ensure that new and existing legislation does not have unintended impacts on SMEs
- Improve conditions to enable greater access to Financial, Venture Capital and Private Equity markets to grow
- Continue to make incremental increases to the entry point to the higher rate of income tax on a multi-annual basis
- Gradually reduce the Capital Gains Tax rate of 33% so that it is in line with competitor countries
- Increase the lifetime limit of €1 million in qualifying capital gains under the Entrepreneur’s Relief to €10 million Review and simplify the reliefs which are available, such as Retirement Relief, and integrate it within a more expansive Entrepreneurs’ Relief
- Introduce a mechanism where entrepreneurs can apply for a “small business rollover”, which would support serial entrepreneurship
- Conduct further review and reform of the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) to ensure that it is accessible and user-friendly

Inclusive and Accommodating Workplaces

- Every local authority should support existing co-working and digital hubs and drive development of new regional digital hubs where they don’t exist
- Actively support SME and start-up enterprises which relocate to affordable regional locations
- Introduce a national strategy on flexible and remote working
- Establish a working group to develop a strategy to reform current workplace conditions so that practical remote and flexible working policies can be adopted by businesses of all shapes and sizes. Membership should be comprised of business, insurance industry, the HSA, unions and policy makers

- Conduct a review of existing employment legislation and health and safety legislation
- Develop a strategy on how to support age-friendly workforces and longer working life
- Develop a national strategy to support labour participation and inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities
- Amalgamate all current supports in the Reasonable Accommodation Fund banner into one overall grant and guarantee that funding for specialised equipment is received and controlled by the employee
- Progress the strategy to introduce Auto-Enrolment in pensions

Productivity and Skills

- Increase resources, both in staff and funding, to Regional Skills Fora, in line with population, to support their efforts to address skills needs around the country
- Target investment at training for line-mangers and employers on how to implement SME-friendly, agile and flexible policies in the workplace
- Continue the rollout of increased apprenticeships and traineeships
- Increase funds for targeted training in sectors like construction and hospitality
- Conduct research into the construction sector’s future skills needs
- Introduce Start-Up Visas for migrant entrepreneurs
- Increase investment in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service
- Improve the use of the National Training Fund to support in-work training and education
- Continue to support Skillnet to ensure full geographic coverage
- Commit to a review of the existing third level funding structures so that a sustainable long-term funding model can be put in place that will address the current and capital funding needs of these institutions

- Increase investment in entrepreneurship and innovation education for students in transition year
- Increase investment in career guidance at second level to ensure reduction of occupational segregation, promotion of apprenticeships and alignment with Future Jobs in the economy

Trading Across Borders

- Support the continued expansion of comprehensive SME-friendly trade agreements, particularly in Australia, New Zealand and Asia Pacific
- Publish an annual Action Plan for Trade Deals to improve SME engagement with free trade agreements which includes strategies and clear targets for SME engagement in with these new markets
- Continue to advocate for the importance of rules-based international trade and the necessity of the WTO
- Develop a trade strategy that leverages our diaspora in key markets
- Ensure financial support for viable importers and exporters of goods and services negatively impacted by Brexit
- Introduce targeted vouchers for SMEs impacted by Brexit to obtain specific advisory services that will aid them to prepare for impacts of a new trading relationship with UK
- Support the Chamber Network in providing customs training to exporters seeking to upskill in the areas of customs regulation and documentation
- Expand the current customs training programmes targeted at SMEs
- Promote the benefits and opportunities in the Digital Single Market by investing in supports for e-commerce, digital infrastructure and digital entrepreneurship

Competitiveness and Investment

- Commit to maintaining Ireland's 12.5% rate of Corporation Tax
- Lobby at EU level to maintain the status quo of EU Council unanimity on issues of taxation
- Continue to advocate a global approach when it comes to reforming international taxation, particularly for intellectual property
- Ensure ongoing investment in our legal and judicial systems to improve cost and efficiency of dispute resolution
- Increase resources to the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in our legal system
- Develop a National Aviation strategy which will consider how best to support the commercial growth of regional airports, improve access and develop new routes
- Continue to invest in state agencies, such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA, Failte Ireland and InterTrade Ireland
- Ensure that there is a commitment from the IDA to increase the number of visits and jobs created to meet the objectives of the NPF, RSEs and MASPs
- Publish a strategy, with appropriate funding to support SMEs that are not catered for by either EI or the LEO network
- Expand and resource the Western Development Commission to include counties that are also included in the Atlantic Economic Corridor