



JCFJ
JESUIT CENTRE
FOR FAITH & JUSTICE

Pre-Election Asks

“To be just, it is not enough to refrain from injustice. One must go further and refuse to play its game, substituting love for self interest as the driving force of society.”

Pedro Arrupe SJ

Introduction

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice exists to promote justice for all through theological reflection, social analysis and research, action, education, and advocacy. As Ireland prepares for a General Election, we face a series of wicked challenges. Rising inequality; the housing and homelessness crisis; destruction of our Common Home through climate change; biodiversity loss and unsustainable resource extraction and use; war and conflict; and our failure to treat all those impacted — including migrants and refugees — are intersecting and complex issues which cannot be grappled with separately.

“Integral ecology” is a source from which we can weave a coherent, compelling, and convincing narrative to counter business as usual. Through this lens, we do not face a series of crises in parallel, some social and others environmental. Rather, they are all expressions of the same fundamental failure to recognise the dignity of our neighbour and the dignity of the world in which we find ourselves.

Here we propose policy directions and steps that will serve justice and the common good in the next Dáil, grouped around our four interlocking areas of concern: the housing and homelessness crisis, the climate and biodiversity collapse, economic ethics, and penal policy. These recommendations are not utopian but can all be delivered. They do not represent everything that can be said on these particular topics, never mind all that must be said across the breadth of Irish society. Our thinking about housing serves as the frontline of our environmental mitigation. And our thinking about how the Just Transition is not just an ecological question but an economic one. And thinking about economics serves as the ground for all our criminal justice deliberations. In this way, we avoid siloed, abstract policy-making that leaves the electorate disenchanting and disconnected.

The spectre of extremist voices loom large as we approach the General Election. It is clear that there is a growing boldness to the Far Right in Irish society. We understand politics through the ancient definition — the conversation we sustain to share the things we love in common.

Responding to the threat of anti-democratic extremism with flat, procedural politics will be a dead-end. We maintain that the most effective measure to overcome this threat is the ambitious pursuit of the loves we share in common. This is possible through the provision of high quality services — beginning with housing — in a form that is accessible to everyone.

This is not just a question of political strategy, but basic justice. These voices that trample others dignity have space to move because our current system does not recognise the dignity of everyone. The 4,400 children without homes testifies to that. The next Dáil must address these fundamental challenges directly and ambitiously. To fail to honour the dignity of our neighbours - regardless of where they were born - runs the risk of Irish society facing existential threats from within. Business as usual cannot be the way forward.

Our 12 Pillars for a Just Society

Housing Policy

1. Implement “Vienna Model” Cost Rental

- Ensure rents are less than 35% of household disposable income
- Triple Housing for All cost rental target for 2030 from 18,000 to 54,000 homes
- Resource local authorities to increase their provision of cost rental homes.

2. Address Vacancy and Dereliction

- Accurate vacancy records to be developed by each local authority
- Resource Revenue to monitor and robustly enforce the collection of Residential Zoned Land Tax which should increase annually: from 3% in Year 1; 6% in Year 2; 9% in Year 3; and onwards
- Develop funding mechanisms to bring Vacant ‘Above the Shop’ Units back into usage for housing and reverse the trend of urban decay in our cities and towns.

3. Implement Kenny Report Recommendations on Development Land Prices

- Utilising compulsory purchase for the State to obtain land, which is eligible for Residential Zoned Land Tax, for the development of affordable, publicly-owned housing.

Interconnection: *High-density public-housing makes possible high-impact public transport*

Environmental Policy

4. Maintain and Grow Active Transport Funding

- Increase investment in active transport to €400m per annum to reflect inflation
- Roll out School Streets and Safe Routes to Schools to every school
- Increase spending ratio to 3:1 between new public transport infrastructure and new roads
- Significantly increase public and active transport spending outside of Dublin particularly progressing a light rail transport system in Galway and Cork and a metropolitan rail system in Limerick.

5. Holistic Commitment to Nature Restoration

- Amend the mandate of Coillte and Bord na Móna toward climate and biodiversity action
- Capitalise on nature based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation
- Publish and implement the Marine Protection Area legislation.

Our 12 Pillars for a Just Society

Environmental Policy (cont.)

6. Sustainable Agriculture Reforms and Just Transition for Farmers

- Prepare for a future without nitrates derogation by supporting farmers to sustainably reduce stocking rate
- Increase supports for farmers looking to rewild large proportions of their land, where appropriate
- Legislate against below-cost buying and selling of food.

Interconnection: *The provision of basic services to all to ensure a just transition*

Economic Ethics

7. Towards the Provision of Universal Basic Services

- Full implementation of Sláintecare
- Continue to expand pre-school care
- Overhaul third level education so it is free for the student
- Comprehensive public transport.

8. Appoint an Ombudsman for Future Generations

- Pass the Commission for Future Generations bill to establish an independent commission
- Examine the feasibility of implementing processes to overcome the short-termism that is rife in our policy culture.

9. Critically Consider the Externalities of the Gambling Industry

- Commit to rigorous assessment of the impact of the Gambling Regulation Bill 2022, especially as it relates to families struggling with gambling addiction and children.
- Prohibit the advertisement of gambling services in public spaces, broadcasting channels, and online.
- Initiate research into the social, economic, and cultural consequences of prominent and widespread retail betting outlets across the country.

Interconnection: *The need for widespread, high-quality drug rehabilitation services in the community*

Our 12 Pillars for a Just Society

Penal Policy

10. Single-cell Occupancy for Women's Prisons

- Legislate for a legal capacity of women in prison ensuring single-cell occupancy, based on current design capacities of Limerick (56 rooms) and Mountjoy Female (88 rooms) prisons.
- Develop a problem-solving court for women.
- Women presenting to court, who are homeless and/or suffering an addiction, should be offered a Housing First home and/or a residential drug treatment placement before imprisonment is considered.

11. Independent Prison Ombudsman for Prisoner Complaints

- Create a statutory instrument from the Department of Public Expenditure to allow prisoners to access the Office of the Ombudsman with complaints.
- Provide additional resources to the Office of the Ombudsman to adjudicate on prisoner complaints and conduct investigations, as required.

12. Full Implementation of Nordic Model, Focusing on Prevalence of Human Trafficking in Sex Industry.

- Investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, seeking adequate penalties for convicted traffickers in human persons.
- Develop and offer specialised accommodation to trafficking victims that are safe, high-quality and appropriate.
- Criminalisation of paying for sex to curtail the demand for trafficking and exploitation of women.

Housing Policy

Implement “Vienna Model” Cost Rental

Through the hard days when Ireland was one of the poorest countries in Europe, we were able to provide people with homes. As our prosperity has grown, so too has homelessness and precarity. The dire state of our housing provision has a range of profoundly negative effects on our economic productivity but to start the conversation there is to make a dreadful mistake. First and foremost, the homelessness numbers - especially child homelessness - are a moral scandal. It is intimately linked to the rise of Far Right protests because on a fundamental level, a State that cannot house people is a State that is failing to deliver its part of the Social Contract.

The ideological capture of the housing sector is evident by how the 2020-2024 government rolled out something it called “Cost Rental” that had appeared to be little more than “vaguely affordable” housing. We need a firm commitment to restore capacity to local authorities and fund them to build public housing to be owned by the public, on land owned by the public, to serve the general public at differential rates indexed to income, not just residual sectors of the “market”.¹ Properly supported, this “Vienna model” would resolve the crisis, serve to lower emissions, encourage socially diverse communities, establish a solid foundation for educational attainment and enterprise, reduce the boom/bust dynamics in our economy, and take the ground from underneath the feet of the anti-democratic Far Right movements.

Address Vacancy and Dereliction

While the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant and the Vacant Homes Tax are welcome developments, they remain piecemeal interventions. A systemic response to vacancy would begin with the development of a robust understanding of vacancy (as against relying on self-assessment) and an accurate record of vacancy in every local authority. The rate of vacancy is a scandal in the midst of this prolonged housing crisis, but it has a long-term deleterious effect on communities. The next

government should ensure that a holistic, cultural opposition to vacancy is embodied across the country.

Implement Kenny Report Recommendations on Development Land Prices

For over fifty years we have had at our disposal a mechanism that would limit the land speculation and rent-seeking that so exacerbates the Irish housing market. It is decades past time to enact Justice Kenny’s 1973 recommendation² and allow local authorities to purchase land at “existing use value” with a surcharge of 25%. This would allow local governments to better plan and develop sustainable and thriving communities and would dampen the boom/bust cycle built into our present housing provision system.

The JCFJ has long maintained that housing policy is our frontline in terms of climate adaptation and mitigation. The development of high-density, high-quality public housing enables the development of highly effective public transport. To that end, we now turn to Environmental Policy...

1. Adams, Keith et al., “Tenant State of Mind: How Cost Rental Public Housing Can Reverse the State’s Transformation to a Tenant” (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2022), <https://www.jcfj.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tenant-State-of-Mind-Web-1.pdf>.

2. Justice Kenny, et al., “The Kenny Report: Report to the Minister for Local Government” (An Gúm, 1973), <https://www.jcfj.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Report-to-the-Minister-for-Local-Government-Committee-on-the-Price-of-Building-Land.pdf>.

Environmental Policy

Maintain and Grow Active Transport Funding

The past several decades have seen unbalanced investment in transport infrastructure. Vast numbers of roads have been constructed while public and active transport remained unimproved. While this Government has shifted this balance in investment in sustainable transport, more is needed. Sustained and increased investment in active and public transport, connecting communities in cities, towns and villages, is vital to reduce and eliminate traffic violence,³ cut our greenhouse gas emissions, reduce congestion and improve our air quality. It is also important to ensure investment in public transport, including light rail systems, are located outside of the Dublin region to ensure balanced development and access to public services.

Safe routes to school is a policy which must take priority. Ensuring students can safely reach schools, both in urban and rural areas, independent from parents driving them is the first step in creating a culture in which walking, cycling and getting public transport is seen as a real alternative to driving. While safe routes to school have been government policy for several years the full benefit has not been realised. Many schools remain dangerous to access resulting in sustained high levels of students being driven to schools. In addition, even in schools which have been involved in the programme, there remains the issue that safe access is usually observed in the final leg of the journey with less emphasis on safety along entire routes.

Holistic Commitment to Nature Restoration

Ireland's biodiversity and ecosystems are in poor ecological condition. A constructive discussion around land use and the importance of protection of biodiversity is a difficult but important action. The passing of the EU Nature Restoration Law mandates that this work begins and is an incredible opportunity to accelerate Ireland's journey towards respecting, conserving and restoring our biodiversity and ecosystems.

The first step in this is to amend the mandate of Coillte and Bord na Móna toward climate and biodiversity action. The State needs to take the lead in restoration and nature based climate solutions, including natural regeneration of woodlands and restoration of wetlands for flood and drought amelioration. Showcasing balancing land utility and biodiversity can help ensure public acceptance and engagement. As an island nation our seas are an incredibly important part of our culture, biodiversity and economy. Publishing and implementing the Marine Protected Area legislation is vital to ensure we restore our fisheries to healthy stocking rates as well as ensure our oceans are able to continue to capture and store carbon.

Sustainable Agriculture Reforms and Just Transition for Farmers

In Ireland, farmers are some of the most impacted communities from climate change. The looming fodder crisis as well as the expected poor yields in the tillage sector, brought about by an incredibly wet winter and spring and cooler temperatures in summer, typifies the impact an unstable climate will have. It is also important to recognise that emissions from agriculture make up the largest proportion of Ireland's GHG emissions. Practices and policies, including short term relief for fodder, as well as guaranteed long term support to change practices which are more resilient to climate change, while reducing emissions, including agroforestry and rewilding on suitable land are created with the farming community. Agricultural impacts on water quality are also undeniable. With a decision on nitrates derogation coming in 2025 farmers need to be supported through this transition period of either dramatically reducing the impact of agriculture on water quality or sustainably reducing stocking rates to be in line with the Nitrates Directive. Ensuring the long term viability of farms in a vital part of the Just Transition for farmers. Banning below-cost selling of food in Ireland would begin to make this reality.

One of the areas where the environmental crisis is already biting is around fuel poverty. Thinking about how we can ensure that those most vulnerable do not suffer further leads us to think about economic ethics...

3. Traffic violence refers to collective road deaths and injuries which occur as a consequence of our transport system. Reducing reliance on the car is a proven way to reduce traffic deaths and injuries. For more details see: "Angie Schmitt, 2020, Right of Way: Race, Class, and the Silent Epidemic of Pedestrian Deaths in America," Washington, Island Press.

Economic Ethics

Towards the Provision of Universal Basic Services

Ireland has been accurately described as a neoliberal State for decades, albeit with local variations. After the pandemic and with the rise of various populist movements in the UK, the USA, and parts of the EU, it is likely that we are in one of those pivotal times when the economic consensus comes under profound pressure.

One advantage of the prevailing culture around economic policy in Ireland has been its pragmatism. Rather than commit fully to an ideological position, it is wise for the Irish State to move towards the provision of Universal Basic Services⁴ fully implement Sláintecare, continue to expand pre-school care, overhaul third-level education so it is free for the student, and guarantee that all the provisions that are required for a flourishing life are available. Clearly, the commitment to non-residual public housing is a component in this, as would cheap and comprehensive public transport. Such an approach would reweave the social fabric, promoting social equity and cohesion by providing a safety net that covers the fundamental needs of all individuals. Policies that incrementally and consistently move towards this provision represent the State's best possible response to its current prosperity, considering the challenges that it may face in the medium/long term.

Appoint an Ombudsman for Future Generations

With that "polycrisis" in mind, one mechanism by which a longer-term perspective can be built into our terminally short-term political discourse is through the adoption of some form of Future Generations protocol. As already role-modelled by Wales, and being actively pursued in the European Union, we strongly affirm the Commission for Future Generations bill brought forward by Marc Ó Cathasaigh in the last Dáil. The development of this mechanism would not just serve to deepen our political vision beyond

media cycles and Dáil terms but will serve as a catalyst for richer ethical considerations of well-being in our society, which all too often is reduced to measuring the growth of GDP or GNP.

Critically Consider the Externalities of the Gambling Industry

While urban vacancy is increasingly ubiquitous in Irish towns and villages, there is one kind of retail enterprise that seems to be flourishing: bookies. While recent research suggests that there are as many as 12,000 families directly afflicted by problem gambling, the reality is that there are unconsidered externalities around the normalisation of this industry. "The house always wins" and the disproportionate presence of such establishments in areas of social and economic disadvantage and the prevalence of gambling addiction associated with those living in deprived areas and those who are unemployed means that the house is winning at the expense of the poorest in our society. The next government should critically consider if there is more than a bottom-line economic argument to be had about the costs of this industry.

And if we think about how we handle addiction, how can we not consider our criminal justice system...

4. Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 'Manifesto for a Green New Deal' (Dublin: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2020).

Penal Policy

Single-cell Occupancy for Women's Prisons

Ireland has a prison overcrowding crisis. The number of prisoners has increased by 37% in three years, now exceeding 5,000 men and women. Considering female prisoners, there are now over 250 women in prison; a staggering rise of 70% since 2021.⁵ Despite a new women's prison opening in Limerick last year, overcrowding remains most intense in female prisons.

Understanding that poverty and addiction are the predominant roots of female offending, the negligible risk posed to public safety, and the different requirements for female imprisonment, single-cell occupancy should be introduced for women. In reality, this would ensure a cap of 144 on the number of women held in our prisons - 56 rooms in Limerick and 88 rooms in Mountjoy Female - at any given time. Precedence for a legal limit to a carceral institution is Oberstown Children Detention Campus. This would represent a modest step against planned prison expansion based on the faulty rationale of future demographics, and resist the harms caused to children through maternal imprisonment. Additional resources should be diverted from the capital budget to community support and a 'problem-solving' court model of justice. Increasing the standard remission to 33% and special remission to 50% would bring down the female prison population at the stroke of a pen.

Independent Prison Ombudsman for Prisoner Complaints

When prisons are operating well beyond capacity, the risk of minimum international standards not being met increases exponentially. If a prisoner is treated unfairly or their basic needs for dignity are not being met, can they access an independent body to consider their complaint and ensure that the matter is resolved? The answer is no. At present, two avenues for prisoner complaints exist; an internal prison mechanism or a letter to the

Inspector of Prisons once they have exhausted the internal system. But the Inspector can offer little satisfaction to prisoners for complaints as they only exercise an oversight function on procedure. This gap in prison accountability could be quickly rectified with a statutory instrument permitting our prisoners access to the General Ombudsman. Access to the Office of the Ombudsman is crucial for oversight - independent, can publish reports and propose binding recommendations - and a vital safeguard for prisoner dignity as restrictive regimes are implemented to manage overcrowding.

Full Implementation of Nordic Model, Focusing on Prevalence of Human Trafficking in Sex Industry.

Poverty and sexual exploitation are deeply intertwined.⁶ When the conditions for "low risk, high reward" continue, human traffickers will continue to exploit economic precarity to bring women and young girls into systems of prostitution.⁷ Nationally, reports of predatory landlords seeking "sex-for-rent" demonstrate further this exploitative interconnection. Six years after Ireland introduced the Sexual Offences Act 2017 - removing the selling of sex as an offence and introducing two new offences for the purchaser - only two people received fines for paying for sex in 2023. Further to this, in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons report, Ireland was again designated Tier 2 country status as the minimum standards to eradicate human trafficking have not been implemented.

As the Irish Government continues to develop its rhetoric on combating gender-based violence, we propose that this commitment to a full implementation of the Nordic Model, both criminalising the buyer of sex and supporting the person providing the service. This commitment would prevent the commercialisation of the person, further recognising the role of poverty in the sexual exploitation and violence against women.

5. Through expansion and the doubling-up of single cells in 2019, the official capacity for female prisoners is now 202 spaces.

6. At the 56th session of the UN Human Right Council, Reem Alsalem, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls stated that "[i]t is clear that the system of prostitution entails severe human rights violations, including physical, psychological, and economic violence ... prostitution sexualizes and racializes poverty."

7. Legislation explicitly identified the trafficked person as victims within systems of prostitution.

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice
is an agency of the Irish Jesuit Province.

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