








PRE-BUDGET
SUBMISSION
2024



KEY PRIORITIES

-  **YFG** calls on the Government to introduce a Young Persons Tax Bracket of 15% in order to support young people starting off in their careers and ease the generational wealth gap.
-  **YFG** calls on the Government to further reduce Student Contribution Fees to under €1,000 per year.
-  **YFG** calls on the Government to provide free period products in all publicly funded schools, in order to tackle period poverty in young people.
-  **YFG** calls on the Government to create a Culture Pass scheme whereby all 18 year olds would be given a €100 voucher to spend on cultural events.
-  **YFG** calls on the Government to introduce a reduced rate of Capital Gains Tax of 12.5% for disposals of second hand properties to qualifying first time buyers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Young Fine Gael National Executive would like to offer our utmost gratitude to the members of the Pre-Budget Submission Subcommittee; Matthew Talbot, Art O'Mahony, Rachel Kerley, Oisín Brennan, Kenneth Henry, and Craig Hogan for their hard work and dedication over the past number of months. We'd also like to thank all of the members and branches that contributed their proposals to this document, without whom this would not have been possible.



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FOREWORD



Dear Minister,

It is an honour to present to you Young Fine Gael's 2024 Pre-Budget Submission. Despite numerous ongoing difficulties, Ireland's economy remains

incredibly resilient. Prudent governance by Fine Gael since entering government in 2011 has allowed Ireland to thrive through the challenges of Brexit, COVID-19, and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

This presents an opportunity to address and tackle many issues in this year's Budget. Throughout this document there are many ideas and suggestions for how the Government can support individuals & families, organisations, and businesses, and ensure Ireland remains a thriving economy.

We placed a particular focus on including revenue-raising measures in our submission this year, which we believe should be considered to aid in implementing the other expenditure items.

As we enter an impending election cycle, Fine Gael must be ambitious in selling a positive message to the young people of Ireland. Founded to be the conscience of the Fine Gael party, it is our job in Young Fine Gael to continue to push for positive change for young people, and we will be unapologetic in doing so.

Le meas,

Eoghan Gallagher
President of Young Fine Gael



Dear Minister,

For this year's Pre-Budget Submission we wanted to empower the general membership to make a greater contribution to this document than in previous

years. We held a fantastic event in Leinster House where members were invited to come and share their ideas on what they wanted to see in the document. The event was greatly attended and there was a fantastic discussion on what the members wanted to see prioritised in this year's Budget, all of which has fed into our policy proposals.

As you read through this document you will also notice that several of our recommendations were actually proposed by our local branches. Our branches are the lifeblood of the organisation so it was vital that they were empowered to come together and make submissions to the National Executive on what their members feel should be prioritised this year.

Finally I'd like to thank the Pre-Budget Policy Subcommittee who have put in so much work to get this document ready. Without their dedication we could not possibly have put this document together.

Le meas,

Daniel Lynch
Director of Policy Development



REVENUE RAISING MEASURES

Our Pre-Budget Submission is filled with revenue raising measures to help finance our spending proposals. They are clearly labelled throughout the document and we have highlighted some of them below.

YFG calls on the Government to raise the pension age to 67 and to raise it again to 68 by 2028

While we welcome Minister Humphrey's recent Flexible Pension reform as a meaningful step in tackling the pension crisis, Young Fine Gael maintains that our pension system is unsustainable in its current form due to an ageing population and that raising the retirement age now is the only way to prevent the system from collapsing in a few years.

YFG calls on the Government to increase the rate of Vacant Home Tax to five times the rate of Local Property Tax

VHT is an excellent means of not only raising revenue but also ensures that residential properties aren't being hoarded for market speculation during a housing crisis. Increasing VHT from three times the rate of LPT to five times the rate would further incentivise property owners to either sell or rent their vacant homes.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a Plastic Bottle Environmental Levy

Young Fine Gael believes that the Government should introduce a tax on single use plastic bottles in order

to incentivise more sustainable consumer practices. The levy on plastic bags was hugely successful in changing consumer behaviours and promoting more environmentally friendly practices and we believe a similar success could be achieved with single use bottles.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a ten cent levy on Chewing Gum

Local Authorities spent circa €20m cleaning up gum litter in 2003. Young Fine Gael believes that the burden of this cost should be carried by the chewing gum industry and not the taxpayer. We believe that a levy should be imposed on chewing gum and that all revenue raised from this levy should be redistributed to the Local Authorities to offset the cost of removing gum litter.

YFG calls on the Government to impose excise duty on e-cigarettes in line with standard tobacco cigarettes

There has been a sharp rise in the use of e-cigarettes/vapes over the past 18 months. Though smoking in young people has seen a sharp decline in recent years, the emergence of vaping threatens to undo all the progress we have made in this area. By applying excise duty to e-cigarettes the government would not only financially disincentivise smoking but would also send a clear message that vaping is not a safer or healthier alternative to cigarettes.

TAX AND FINANCE

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a Young Persons Tax Bracket

Key Priority

As the party who are proud to represent the squeezed middle, we must now recognise the potential emergence of a squeezed generation. Young Fine Gael believe a Youth Tax Bracket of 15% for those under 30 should be introduced to help hard working young people deal with high costs of living, help save for a mortgage, etc. A ceiling of €70,000 should apply, at which point an individual enters the regular tax system. This has been proposed by Partido Social Democrata, Fine Gael's sister party in Portugal.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a middle income tax band of 30%

As the party of Enterprise and Reward, putting money back into the pockets of hard working taxpayers should be a priority for Fine Gael in the upcoming budget. Young Fine Gael believes that the sharp increase in income tax from 20% to 40% is too steep. We believe that a middle income tax band of 30%, covering income between €40,000-€60,000, is necessary to ease the burden on the 'Squeezed Middle.'

YFG calls on the Government to abolish the minimum €500 liability of earnings for Self Employed PRSI payers

Under the current system self employed persons earning over €5,000 must pay 4% of their income or €500 in PRSI, whichever is greater. This means that a self employed

person earning €5,000 is liable for the same amount of PRSI as someone earning €12,000. Young Fine Gael believe this is arbitrary and unfair, and that it should simply be replaced with a 4% tax rate on all income above €5,000.

YFG calls on the Government to create a Sovereign Wealth Fund

The creation of a sovereign wealth fund would turn the unexpected windfall income from corporation tax receipts into a fixed income stream for future generations. Creating a sovereign wealth fund would allow Ireland to turn the windfall into regular income for the country's future generations. Norway has seen great success since establishing their Sovereign Wealth Fund to invest revenue from their energy sales and a similar system could be replicated here very easily.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a tax break for employers who provide profit-free housing to their employees

The owners of Walsh Colour Print, and Educate.ie based in Castleisland, made headlines in December 2020 for building three houses on a site they own and selling them to their employees on a non-profit basis.¹ This allowed them to retain their staff and empowered their employees to purchase their own homes at an affordable price. Young Fine Gael believes that the success of this project could be replicated across the country if sufficient incentives were in place, and as such are calling on the Government to explore significantly reducing the tax liability of such sales.

1. Sheehy, P. (2020) Best Christmas present ever' as Kerry couple build homes for employees, RTE.



YFG calls on the Government to increase the Revised Entrepreneurial Relief from €1 million to €5 million

Increasing the lifetime limit on the Revised Entrepreneurial Relief from CGT from €1 million to €5 million would not be a big cost to the exchequer. It would be a driver of Foreign Direct Investment into Ireland, and would promote entrepreneurial activity in the Irish economy. This would be hugely beneficial and would likely lead to more tax being generated than lost.

YFG calls on the Government to reduce funding to the NGO sector by 10%

Revenue Raising Measure

The government spends approximately €6 billion each year on the NGO sector. While many organisations that receive State funding provide vital public services, YFG believes tax payer money should not be spent on funding advocacy groups. As such we are calling for a review of NGO funding with the aim of cutting spending to groups that are not providing essential and necessary public services.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

YFG calls on the Government to expand automatic enrolment into the pension system to those aged 18 and over

Young Fine Gael welcomes the introduction of the auto-enrolment pension system as a crucial step in tackling the pension crisis and safeguarding retirement opportunities for future generations. In order to maximise retirement savings for young people we believe the system should apply to all workers over the age of 18 earning over €20,000 per annum.

YFG opposes any increase to Job Seeker's Allowance in Budget 2024 given Ireland's record employment figures and labour shortages

The Taoiseach described the current state of the Irish economy as one where there is 'a job for everyone who wants one.' We are experiencing full employment and labour shortages so there is absolutely no need for any increase in Job Seeker's Allowance.

- Kerry, Clare & Wexford YFG

YFG calls on the Government to implement the recommendations of the Disability Capacity Review to allow people with disabilities the opportunity to (re)-enter the workforce without the risk of losing their welfare entitlements

According to the government's Cost of Disability Report the costs associated with disability are between €9,000-€13,000 per year. Disability Allowance should act to offset these costs but due to the restrictive means

test it often prevents people who could be working and paying tax from pursuing employment. The risk of losing welfare entitlements, such as a medical card, forces many people with disabilities to stay out of the workforce, inadvertently creating a poverty trap for disabled people.

YFG calls on the Government to allow new mothers with cancer or other serious conditions to defer their maternity leave whilst receiving treatment

The Maternity Protection Act 2004 states that anyone who is diagnosed with cancer or any other serious illness during pregnancy must use their maternity leave to cover their treatment. This denies new mothers the opportunity to spend much needed time with their baby. As men are allowed to defer paternity leave due to illness the State are effectively denying the same rights to mothers that are afforded to fathers.

YFG calls on the Government to extend the rights to social protection afforded to Ukrainian refugees to include refugees from the Afghan Crisis

At the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Ukrainian Refugees in Ireland were granted crucial rights to social protection. Afghan Refugees fleeing the Taliban's ascent to power to contrast, have only been granted the right to work without any of the social protection entitlements afforded to refugees from Ukraine. Young Fine Gael believes that treating these conflicts differently is unfair and calls for harmonisation of entitlements for refugees of both conflicts.



HEALTH

YFG calls on the Government to amalgamate the Department of Health with the Health Service Executive (HSE)

Revenue Raising Measure

This restructuring of our health service has been proposed by multiple senior officials in both agencies, including Tony O'Brien. Amalgamating both bodies would streamline our health system, ending the duplication of work and creating a more accountable, agile structure.

YFG calls for the removal of VAT on condoms and menstrual cups

Currently, there is a 13.5% and 23% VAT rate on condoms and menstrual cups respectively. Condoms are proven to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections, and the high VAT rate has been described by Irish Health as a 'tax on safe health'.

YFG calls on the Government to provide free period products in all publicly funded schools

Key Priority

Under the Programme for Government, Fine Gael pledged to provide 'a range of free, adequate, safe, and suitable period products in all educational publicly-funded settings.' While we welcome the introduction of free period products in universities and HEIs, we urge the Government to extend these supports to primary and secondary schools in order to alleviate period poverty for young people.

YFG calls for the expansion of post graduate training schemes for doctors

Currently, every year in Ireland there are approximately

1200 doctors graduating from college. In 2021, 848 doctors were approved to enter into the "Initial Specialist Training" schemes. Each year there are more people graduating as doctors than there are progressing further into their chosen disciplines within medicine. The expansion of training scheme places available to qualified doctors would greatly impact the number of doctors retained in HSE hospitals. Not being able to train in Ireland is a strong pushing force for some of our doctors leaving. In late 2020 there were 153 consultant posts in psychiatry either not filled or being filled on a temporary basis. In the same year, there were less than 70 doctors taken into the initial training scheme for psychiatry.

- *Wexford YFG*

YFG calls on the Government to fund the development of a National Healthcare App based on the NHS model

In the UK the NHS App has been a great success in streamlining healthcare services. On the app patients can digitally access their medical records, book appointments online, manage prescriptions, search for trusted advice on conditions and treatments, and even register your organ donation decision. The Irish Government should develop a similar app for the HSE in order to provide ease of access for services.

YFG calls on the minister for health to introduce a free annual women's health check up carried out by GPs for 15 to 20 year olds

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that girls begin seeing a gynaecologist between the ages of 13-15. These

checkups are vital in order to diagnose menstrual disorders, ovarian cysts, and other conditions early.

YFG calls on the Minister for Health to establish dedicated endometriosis clinics across Ireland

While YFG welcomes the announced model of presumed diagnosis for endometriosis, we believe that more is needed to tackle the long waiting times for treatment. Patients can be left waiting up to thirty three months for surgery in the public system. Compare this to the private system where someone can have their initial consultation, their surgery, recovery and follow up appointment all within 6 months.

YFG calls on the Government to establish a Community Defibrillators Grant to allow public access AEDs be installed in local communities

There is a severe lack of Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), particularly in rural communities. In order to increase the availability of these life saving devices, the Government should invest in a grant scheme where local community groups would apply for funding in order to install public access defibrillators. The scheme application criteria could require the AEDs to be registered to the National Ambulance Service, and to be housed in a secure AED cabinet to prevent vandalism.

YFG calls on the Government to initiate a public information campaign to educate young people on the warning signs of suicide and how to support their peers

The HAND's (Help, Address, Navigate, Discuss) initiative would have a suicide prevention focus and would teach young people in secondary schools how to spot signs of signs of antisocial/avoidant behavior in their peers, how to support their friends and discuss issues like mental health and bullying, and how to approach getting help for their friends.

-Kerry YFG

YFG calls on the Government to extend the free contraception service for women up to the age of 35

The recent decision by the Government to provide free contraception to women between the ages of 17-26 has been a fantastic initiative, however setting the cut off point at 26 is needlessly restrictive. Extending the cut off point to 35 would qualify a huge cohort of young women to benefit from the scheme and would greatly improve sexual health.

- Wicklow YFG



AGRICULTURE & RURAL AFFAIRS

YFG calls on the Government to reduce the rate of Stamp duty on agricultural land

In Budget 2018, stamp duty for commercial property was raised from 2% to 6%, and subsequently to 7.5% in Budget 2019, due to the recovery in the prices for property. However, whilst exemptions apply for young, trained farmers, agricultural land is not fully exempt. Young Fine Gael proposes that agricultural land be removed from the definition of commercial property and instead be re-designated into the residential stamp duty rate of 1% up to €1 million and 2% thereafter.

YFG calls on the Government to invest in capital allowances for smart farming

The potential for smart farming technology to improve farming efficiency and productivity, in areas such as sensors and mobile-phone applications to monitor crop growth, is immense. To accelerate the transition to smart farms, the Government should consider expanding the current Accelerated Capital Allowances categories to include smart farming IoT investments.

YFG calls for the retention of existing Agricultural reliefs for Young Farmers

Tax reliefs form a vital part of government support to young people entering agriculture. With one third of farmers now over 65², it is vital that all supports currently in place are rolled over. Most importantly the extension to the tax relief of lease agreements and an extension of consanguinity relief to December 2027.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a Farm Transfer Scheme

Guarantee tax free income for landowners on the condition of land being transferred outside of the family with the new owner having a green cert and an approved business plan by Teagasc submitted to the department.

YFG calls on changes to the administration of the TB Eradication Scheme

Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to change the TB Eradication Scheme to ensure farmers are paid the market value of reactors, which test positive for TB and have to be slaughtered, rather than the arbitrary cap paid at the moment. Currently, there is a ceiling of 3,000 placed on the compensation that can be received per animal with limited exceptions of one breeding bull. This means that breeders of pedigree animals which may have imported the best available genetics from across the world do not receive a fair market price for their valuable stock. All farmers ought to receive adequate compensation when an animal is a reactor in a TB test and this must be the true market value of the animal.³

YFG calls for an increase in the Sheep Improvement Scheme to €15 per ewe

The Sheep Improvement Scheme is a targeted scheme for sheep farmers. It provides much-needed additional support to sheep farmers, which is required to encourage young farmers to enter and continue sheep farming, and ensure that this type of farming is viable going forward. The average Sheep farm income in 2021 was €20,794,

2. Q&A with the Minister for Agriculture, Irish Independent, p.4 August 8th 2023.

3. Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine. TB Compensation Arrangements Booklet Kildare: Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine.

an increase of 16% on the 2020 level.⁴ The scheme currently allows for €12 per breeding ewe and a €15 per head payment would require an additional € 5 million per annum.

YFG calls on funding to be made available to implement the findings of the Wool Feasibility Study and in particular incentivise the use of sheep’s wool in insulation

The newly formed wool council needs to be properly resourced to implement the findings of the wool feasibility study report as a roadmap to develop pathways towards maximising the true potential of Irish wool into the future and to help drive increased returns for this sustainable by-product. Additionally, the Government must prioritise the exploration of how grant aid could be best used to incentivise the use of wool as an insulation material. Feasibility studies in other European countries like Italy suggest the viability of such products once Government supports are in place.⁵

YFG calls for the introduction of an Ash Dieback Compensation Scheme

The recent epidemic of Ash Dieback has decimated Irish ash stocks and has had a severe impact on the forestry sector. Forestry plays a major role in creating a more carbon neutral agricultural industry and the programme for Government pledges to ‘actively promote and support farm forestry/rewilding options that do not impact on agricultural production and support biodiversity and habitat creation,’ however the lack of Government supports for farmers affected by this crisis dissuades farmers from entering the sector.

YFG calls for the establishment of a voluntary limited Dairy Cow Reduction Scheme

It is YFG policy to ensure there is no reduction in the National Herd whether by force or by stealth. Therefore, we reject the Dairy Vision Working Group’s proposal

Measure 5 which recommends that the Government

“Consider the potential of an incentive scheme to encourage dairy farmers to voluntarily reduce or exit from the production of ruminant breeding livestock for a minimum number of years. It should be open to farmers under such a scheme to reduce completely or partially their breeding ruminant numbers in return for an appropriate incentive.”⁶

This would effectively permanently remove land from agricultural production. We seek a balance between renewal of the dairy industry as well allowing for a voluntary reduction scheme. This is especially important given the imminent changes to the Nitrates Derogation.⁷

We call on the introduction of a scheme with the following conditions

Reduction:

Needs to be limited e.g a max of 10% cows per year with a maximum of 25% in 3 years. (Base year can work off 5 year average previous to the application of the scheme)

Compensation:

Cows should be compensated in 3 bands to reflect the differing value of each animal. Having a flat rate rather than individually valuing each animal would make the scheme easier and more efficient to implement.

Herd Type	Compensation Level
Pedigree Registered	Top
Herd Plus	Middle
Non Herd Plus	Low

-Patrick Hogan Branch (Galway East) YFG

4. Teagasc (2022) Teagasc releases details on farm performance for 2021 [Press Release] 21 Sept.
 5. M. Parlato, S. Porto, and F. Valenti, (2022) ‘Assessment of sheep wool waste as new resource for green building elements’, Building and Environment, (225) Nov.
 6. Government of Ireland (2022) Report of Food Vision Dairy Group on Measures to Mitigate Greenhouse Gas Emissions From the Dairy Sector. October 2022 p.47.
 7. O’Sullivan K. (2023) ‘ICOS warns of reduced milk supply as it objects to dairy exit scheme’, Irish Examiner 9 Aug.



HOUSING

YFG calls on the Government to increase Flat Rate Expenses Allowances for members of the construction sector

The costs associated with buying tools and safety equipment is a major burden on apprentices entering the construction industry. In order to offset these costs and incentivise more people pursuing construction, the Government should increase the tax relief provided for construction workers who purchase their own equipment.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a Construction Worker Temporary Visa scheme

In order to ease the skill shortage in construction, the Government should create a new Visa scheme to attract construction workers from non-EU countries, similar to the H-2B visa in the United States.

YFG calls on the Government to establish a Housing Development Fund designed to offer low-interest loans to developers and house-buyers

Access to capital is a major barrier to many housing developments, particularly in relation to apartment developments.⁸ Established as an independent body, the Housing Development Fund would work in harmony with the Land Development Agency to maximise housing development and delivery, and would greatly increase consumer choice and enhance competition in the lending market.

YFG calls on the Government to fund the holding of plebiscites in all City and Council Councils in 2024 in order to create directly elected mayoral offices

A directly elected mayor with executive functions is essential to ensuring strong local government, capable of delivering results in housing, planning, and transport. Young Fine Gael is calling for an election for a directly elected Mayor of Limerick and plebiscites in all other Local Authorities to coincide with the Local and European Elections next year.

YFG calls on the Government to fund a Citizens Assembly on the Future of Local Government

Young Fine Gael believes that a national conversation about Local Government is sorely needed in order to empower local authorities and create more agile forms of government. We're calling on the government to establish a Citizens Assembly with a broad mandate to examine the reintroduction of town councils, among a myriad of other issues.

YFG calls on the government to introduce a reduced rate of Capital Gains Tax for disposals of second hand properties to qualifying first time buyers

The standard rate of Capital Gains Tax is 33%, offering a reduced CGT liability of 12.5% to anyone selling a second hand property to a first time buyer would greatly incentivise sellers to sell their homes to young people trying to get on the property ladder as opposed to major investment funds.

-Wexford YFG

8. Home Building Finance Ireland ('HBFI') Section 24 Review May 2023

EDUCATION

YFG calls on the Government to reduce Student Contributions to under €1,000 per year

Key Priority

A 2018 report by the European Commission shows that Ireland has the highest university fees in Europe.⁹ While Young Fine Gael welcomes the reduction of fees that have taken place since then, we maintain that further reductions are required in order to make the cost of education affordable for families.

Calls for the Government to extend SUSI grants to cover part time courses

The SUSI Grant is a crucial support for so many students, without it many people would not financially be able to pursue education. The grant however only applies to students in full-time education, and part-time students are not covered. This represents a huge barrier to many people from pursuing education who simply can not study full time, be that due to financial, personal or family circumstances. Carers for example, are prohibited from enrolling in full time education or they lose their carers allowance, consequently carers who are also studying part-time can not apply for SUSI.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce counsellors in primary and secondary schools

Young people in primary and secondary schools are at the most emotionally vulnerable point in their lives. It is crucial that young people are supported through these periods in schools by professionals trained in providing emotional supports for children and teenagers.

YFG calls on the Government to allow qualified guidance counsellors without education degree access to fixed term contracts

There is a national shortage of guidance counsellors in the Irish Education System. One way to alleviate this issue would be to offer fixed term contracts to the cohort of qualified guidance counsellors that don't possess Education degrees and as such are not registered with the Teaching Council. At present they are not entitled to the same benefits as a registered teacher.

-Wicklow YFG

YFG calls for the rates of pay for Special Needs Assistants working on July Provision or similar programs to be equalised

Currently, SNAs receive approximately one third of the amount that a teacher earns for carrying out identical work. We believe that addressing this issue would increase the uptake of SNAs around the country on the program.

9. European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, (2019) National student fee and support systems in European higher education : 2017/18



CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

YFG calls on the Government to significantly invest in offshore and onshore wind energy production for both Irish consumption and resale across Europe

There is capacity for Ireland to produce 6 - 10 times its energy demands.¹⁰ Ireland should use the Law of Comparative Advantage and focus on wind energy production ahead of other sources of renewable energy such as solar. Ireland has the potential to be a world leader in renewable wind energy production and we should utilise this opportunity as best we can.

- *University of Galway YFG*

YFG calls on the Government to invest in supports for Community Energy Groups

Community Energy Groups such as Aran Island's Energy Co-op are paving the way on green energy and are serving their local communities as they do it. Reliable and multi-annual sources of core funding for community energy groups are currently lacking and should be made more available, with a more targeted approach to emphasising and incentivising the benefits of co-operative electricity generation.

YFG calls on the Government to dedicate significant capital funding to installing EV charging points across the country

A major barrier for many people considering buying electric vehicles is the scarcity of charging points. The ESB currently operates and maintains over 1,350 public charge points across the island of Ireland. Young Fine Gael believes that this figure should be increased to 5,000 over the next five years.

YFG calls on the Government to implement the Deposit Return Scheme for plastic bottles, and cans

Under the Deposit Return Scheme a levy of 15c would apply to all plastic bottles, and aluminium and steel cans that hold 500ml of liquid or less, while 25c levy would apply to containers of over 500ml. This levy would then be refunded upon returning the container to be recycled.

YFG calls for the establishment of a results based targeted scheme that would be voluntary which would aim to increase by a minimum of 25% red and amber listed breeding bird species over the next 10 years

RSPB NI and BirdWatch Ireland compile an annual report on the population of endangered birds, Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI), in which they categorise bird species into three distinct groupings (red, amber, and green) based on their level of endangerment. There are currently 54 red listed species of birds, and 79 amber listed species. It is crucial that the government invests in preserving these creatures for future generations.

- *Patrick Hogan YFG (Galway East)*

10. McGee, H. (2022) 'Wind energy from Ireland's Atlantic coast could power almost 50m homes in Europe, says Ryan', Irish Times 22 Nov.

TRANSPORT

YFG calls on the Government to stop penalising people for paying their motor tax in more frequent instalments

Motor Tax can be paid either in one lump sum or in smaller more regular instalments, however the State charges more to taxpayers who chose to pay in regular instalments instead of annually. The half-year payment is 55.5% the annual rate, the quarterly payment is 28.25%, and the monthly payment is 10%. This policy penalises people who can't afford to make a single annual payment, and as such is inherently unfair on people struggling financially.

YFG calls on the Government to invest in the training of additional driving testers to reduce waiting times for driving tests

The average waiting time for Learner drivers for a driving test pre covid was 10 weeks however since the pandemic, waiting times have risen dramatically. In Galway West, there are a total of six centres where driving test waiting times are over 30 weeks. Drogheda, Co Louth, is 38 weeks. Shannon, Navan, and Limerick Woodview are all 32 weeks. Learners will be waiting for a test until Summer 2024 in some test centres. Greater focus and investment within this area by the Government would allow waiting times to adjust to pre pandemic levels.

- *Dublin West YFG*

YFG calls on the Government to prioritise capital investment in upgrading the rail network

Ireland's rail network requires significant capital investment in order to make it an attractive transport option for commuters. Among these much needed developments are the reinstatement of the Wexford to

Waterford rail line, the twin tracking of the Dublin to Sligo rail line from Boyle to Mullingar, and the construction of the Western Rail Corridor.

YFG calls on the Government to change the maximum age for the Young Person Leap Card from 23 to 25

In order to facilitate more people using public transport, and to support young people who are only starting out on their careers, the Young Person Leap Card should be extended to cover young people up to the age of 25.

YFG calls on the Government to provide funding for the implementation of debit card transactions on all public transport

We live in an increasingly cashless society; many people no longer carry cash and even fewer carry change. Private buses across the country allow customers to purchase their tickets with their debit card, by denying commuters the same option on public transport the State is making public transport significantly less accessible.

- *Wicklow YFG*

YFG calls on the Government to expand Night Bus Services to cities outside of Dublin

In many major Irish cities there are no viable public transport options at night. There is a shortage of taxi drivers, making it very difficult for many people, particularly young people, to get home safely after a night out. Young Fine Gael believe that Night Bus Services need to be expanded to Limerick, Galway, and Cork, with the potential to expand the services further where viable.

- *University of Galway YFG*



MEDIA, HERITAGE & GAELTACHT

YFG calls on the Government to create a Culture Pass scheme which would be made available to all 18 year olds on their birthday

Key Priority

Under this scheme €100 would be allocated to an individual to spend on cultural events, of which they have two years to spend it. The Culture Pass has two aims, to encourage young people to attend live cultural events, and to give a boost to the arts industry. Roughly 60,000 people turned eighteen from April 2017 to April 2018 and if this figure is similar for the next few years the Government will only have to spend at an absolute maximum of six million euros (if every recipient is cashed in) per year.

-Rathdown YFG

YFG calls on the Government to establish a unit within the Department of Media responsible for the oversight and approval of project-funding for public service broadcasting initiatives, replacing the television licence fee

Revenue Raising Measure

This new model of funding would allow smaller broadcasters, such as local radio stations, receive project-funding for initiatives deemed to be considered "public service broadcasting", as per the department's terms of reference.

YFG calls on the Government to split RTÉ into two separate organisations, essential and commercial, privatising the commercially-viable aspects of RTÉ

Revenue Raising Measure

RTÉ provides a vitally important service to the people of Ireland, however recent scandals have highlighted

the fact the organisation is currently bloated and unaccountable. The only option as far as YFG is concerned is to create a slimmer RTÉ focused on public service broadcasting, and to trim off all unnecessary commercial aspects such as RTÉ 2FM.

YFG calls on the Government to relocate RTÉ from Donnybrook in order to rezone the land for residential purposes

Revenue Raising Measure

Since 1961 RTÉ has resided on a 31-acre site in Donnybrook. This area of land is located in prime Dublin real estate and in a time of housing crisis this represents a severe waste of land. RTÉ should relocate to a less central location so the land can be rezoned as residential and sold for development. This would not only increase the available land for new housing in Dublin but would also raise significant revenue for the broadcaster.

YFG calls on the Government to cap 'top-talent' salaries at RTÉ, ensuring no salary exceeds that which is paid to the Minister for Media – €195,000 a year

Revenue Raising Measure

The Chair of the RTÉ board, Siun Ni Raghallaigh, herself has stated that she believes RTÉ is 'bidding against itself,' in relation to top presenters' fees. The annual salaries of RTÉ's top ten best paid presenters causes public uproar every year and continues to diminish trust in the broadcaster. Taxpayer money should not be squandered on unnecessarily high salaries for television and radio presenters.

JUSTICE & DEFENSE

YFG calls on the Government to increase prison capacity through funding a new national prison

In July of this year prison officials described the current levels of overcrowding in Irish prisons as being an 'extremely high-risk situation.' In many prisons there are four prisoners per cell, and the Irish Prison Service reported that there are over 180 people in custody sleeping on mattresses.¹¹ Major capital investment is required, to not only ensure that we protect our communities but also to ensure the highest standard in our prisons.

YFG calls on the Government to introduce a Garda Cadet Programme

College students who have completed their degrees should be incentivised to enter An Garda Síochána in leadership and intelligence roles where on completion of the Cadetship the ranks of Detective Garda or Sergeant

would be granted, similar to Cadetship within the defence forces. This would allow greater specialisation within the leadership of the Gardaí, and empower garda recruiters to headhunt highly qualified individuals to join the gardaí.

YFG calls on the Government to implement the recommendations of the Defence Commission

In the context of an evolving global landscape it is vital that the defence forces are a dynamic force capable of responding to new threats and modern security challenges. The Report on the Commission of the Defence Forces (2022) sets out a series of recommended reforms to the resourcing and operations of the defence forces. We are now calling on the Government to allocate the required investment to implement the reforms proposed under Level of Ambition 3.

11. Phelan, C. (2023) 'Prison overcrowding at record levels with four to a cell in some facilities', *Irish Examiner*, 19 Jun.



ENTERPRISE, EMPLOYMENT & WORK-LIFE BALANCE

YFG calls on the Government to harmonise the minimum wage requirement for all workers, ending the two-tier system affecting young workers

The idea that two people can be doing the exact same job with the exact same qualifications but one is entitled to a minimum wage of €11.30 and the other is only entitled to a minimum wage of €7.91 is completely unfair, and a clear example of age discrimination.

YFG calls on the Government to increase investment in the National Childcare Scheme in line with promises made last year to cut childcare costs by 50%

The Pobal 'Early Years Sector Profile 2020/21' showed that the average cost of childcare in Ireland was just shy of €187 per week last year. Though childcare costs were reduced significantly under the last Budget, childcare remains a massive financial burden on hard-working families. Last year changes to the National Childcare Scheme reduced the cost of childcare by 25%, Young Fine Gael are now calling on the Government to stand by its commitment to cut child care costs by a further 25% this year.

YFG proposes that the €2 million fund to run the Ireland Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) competition to support Ireland's next generation of entrepreneurs and businesses be reinstated

IBYE was a fantastic government support for enterprise, allowing successful businesses to heighten their profile and raise private capital. Since 2019 however the initiative has been cancelled, denying many young entrepreneurs the opportunity to gain national recognition. Supporting enterprise is a key Fine Gael value and restoring this project would send a clear message that Fine Gael is backing new businesses.

-Rathdown YFG

YFG calls on the Government to guarantee apprentices minimum wage

Under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, apprentices are exempt from the minimum wage. This means that there are many apprentices providing much needed work earning well below minimum wage. Given the shortage of tradespeople, the Government should be making apprenticeships as attractive as possible but the fact that a 1st year apprentice in the construction sector could be earning less than €6.50 an hour does not attract young people to the sector.



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