



## **NYCI General Election Manifesto**

# **“Quest for the Best”**

**“Make Ireland the best country in which to be a young person”**

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## **Background**

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for 49 voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. Our member organisations work with and for up to 380,000 young people aged 10 to 24 years in every community in Ireland with the support of 40,000 volunteers and 1,400 paid staff. NYCI functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act) and is represented on the National Economic and Social Council. The work of NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

## **Introduction**

Ireland has been through difficult times since 2008. As noted by the National Economic and Social Council *“young people are hit hardest by the crisis.”*<sup>1</sup> One element of the work of the next Government is to repair the damage done by the policies and actions undertaken during the crisis. NYCI welcomes the commitments in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 *“Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures”*<sup>2</sup> and the imminent publication of the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020. Many of the recommendations in the document, if fully resourced and implemented, will have a positive impact on the lives of young people. The next Government should aspire to do more than that. We believe Ireland can aim higher. We want our country to begin and complete *“the quest for the best and to make Ireland the best country in which to be a young person.”*

## **Context**

Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe with one-third under 25 years, with 10-24 year olds representing 18.3% of the total population of 4.59 million<sup>3</sup>. These numbers are predicted to grow, with the number of 10-24 year olds increasing by 13% between 2015 and 2020. This positive demographic trend provides many opportunities for our economy and society, however, it is incumbent on the next Government to plan and put in place strategies to ensure this increased number of young people have access to the supports and services they need.

## **Manifesto**

This General Election Manifesto puts forward a range of proposals to improve the lives of young people, to support them to achieve their full potential and ultimately to make Ireland the best country in the world in which to be a young person. The recommendations and details underpinning our proposals are outlined below.

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<sup>1</sup> The Social Implications of the Crisis: the Evidence and the Implications, NESC May 2013

<sup>2</sup> Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

<sup>3</sup> CSO Annual Population Estimates

[http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Annual%20Population%20Estimates/Annual%20Population%20Estimates\\_statbank.asp?sp=Annual Population Estimates&Planguage=0](http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Annual%20Population%20Estimates/Annual%20Population%20Estimates_statbank.asp?sp=Annual Population Estimates&Planguage=0)

# Summary of Recommendations

This is a summary of the NYCI proposals for the next Programme for Government;

## **Youth Policy**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to retain the position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at cabinet rank and maintain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
- NYCI calls on the next Government to fully resource the implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020

## **Youth Work Services**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to increase investment in current youth work funding by €15 from €58 in 2014 to €73 per young person by 2020, this equates to an investment in current spending of €73.1m by 2020
- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce a revised Youth Capital Grants Scheme with an annual budget of €1m
- NYCI calls on the next Government to invest €1m per annum in the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme

## **Social Inclusion**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance to those under 26 years to €188
- NYCI calls on the next Government to commit to the introduction of a Living Wage

## **Education and Training**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to review current implementation of the Youth Guarantee and set out ambitious targets for delivery of the initiative from 2016-2020
- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop a National Strategy for a Comprehensive Guidance Service

## **Employment**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to undertake a review of JobBridge with a view to reform and enhance the scheme
- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce a “Fair Work Certificate” which employers seeking to avail of public funds for job creation would be required to hold

## **Housing and Accommodation**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce rent controls so that annual rent increases cannot exceed the Consumer Price Index
- NYCI calls on the next Government to give greater security to tenants

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure that the Aftercare Bill as proposed is amended to guarantee a right to housing for young people leaving care
- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure that aftercare supports are provided to young people on the basis of need irrespective of how long they have been in the care system

### **Health**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure effective implementation of “Connecting for Life”, Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020
- NYCI calls on the next Government to implement the provisions of Public Health (Alcohol) Bill with regard to marketing and advertising, price and supply in line with the recommendations of the National Substance Misuse Strategy Group report and to phase out the sponsorship of major sporting events by the drinks industry

### **Democracy and Participation**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to bring forward a referendum to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Dáil and Presidential elections and referenda and to bring forward legislation to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in local and European elections
- NYCI calls on the next Government to extend voting rights to the Irish abroad
- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish an Electoral Commission

### **Arts**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop and implement an action plan which would guarantee each child growing up in Ireland equality of access to the arts (both in and out of school) and tackle economic, geographical and educational disadvantage as barriers to participation and deliver on the arts access promised to each child as part of the five National Outcomes for Children contained in “Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures”
- NYCI calls on the Government to fully implement the 'Arts in Education Charter' and to further develop the Charter to incorporate non-formal education and youth arts and to deliver on its responsibilities to this sector as recommended in the document

### **Pensions**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure the concerns and needs of young workers on low wages and in precarious employment are taken into account when the proposed auto-enrolment into pension schemes is introduced

### **Sustainable Development**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop an ambitious national plan of action to monitor and implement the Sustainable Development Goals

## **1. Youth Policy**

### **Minister and Department of Children and Youth Affairs**

The establishment of the Department for Children and Young People in 2011 and the appointment of the first ever Cabinet level Minister was a significant development. This ensured that the needs, concerns and voice of young people are given greater political priority and prominence in public policy. This Department is also playing a greater role in policy development and coordination, and ensuring that youth policy is integrated across Government. We call on the next Government to give a commitment to retain the position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at cabinet rank and maintain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

### **National Youth Strategy 2015-2020**

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 has its basis in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014-2020<sup>4</sup> and in particular its young person specific commitments. NYCI welcomes the development of Ireland's first Youth Strategy which addresses the needs of the total youth population, with a particular emphasis on young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing the poorest outcomes.

The document sets out a number of priority actions to be undertaken by Government Departments, state agencies and the youth and broader community and voluntary sector. While NYCI would prefer the strategy to be more ambitious, we are of the view that, if fully implemented, it would positively impact on the lives of young people. Therefore, NYCI is calling on the next Government to support the National Youth Strategy and ensure its implementation.

### **Proposals**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to retain the position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs at cabinet rank and maintain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, to ensure that the existing positive developments are maintained and furthered
- NYCI calls on the next Government to fully resource the implementation the National Youth Strategy 2015-2020

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp\\_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf)

## 2. Youth Work Services

### Investment in Youth Work Services

As we emerge from the economic and social crisis, one of the positive indicators is our growing youth population. Between 2015 and 2020 the number of young people aged 10-24 will grow by an estimated 13%.<sup>5</sup> This also will create challenges, however, with adequate resources the Youth Work sector is well placed to support young people to reach their potential and make Ireland the best country in the world in which to be a young person.

Youth organisations are active in almost every community reaching over 383,000 young people. As detailed in the Indecon Report<sup>6</sup> youth organisations are particularly active in supporting young people from economically or socially disadvantaged communities, with 53% of all participants coming from these areas. Youth organisations work in a range of areas such as promoting active citizenship and supporting the participation of young people in education and training as demonstrated in the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot project.<sup>7</sup> They also deliver programmes to promote positive mental health, school completion, Garda diversion and to prevent substance misuse. The track record and credibility of the youth sector is also demonstrated by the high levels of participation by young people here in youth services. Ireland has the highest level of involvement in youth services in the EU with 26% of young people active in a youth club.<sup>8</sup>

The Indecon Report<sup>9</sup> found that for every €1 invested in youth work the economic benefit/costs saved by the State in the long run are €2.20. This study demonstrates that investment in youth work not only supports young people to reach their full potential and become active citizens. It also reduces long-term costs for the State in relation to the health, justice and welfare services for young people. The funding provided also provides support to the 40,000 volunteers who work with young people.

The current expenditure for youth work services from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has fallen by almost 31.7% since 2008 from €73.1m to €49.9m in 2015. This has placed enormous strain on youth services at a time when the numbers and needs of young people are growing. In 2008, the spending on youth work services was €76 per young person; by 2014 this has fallen to €58 per young person. Based on estimates of the youth population in 2020 we would propose a €15 increase to €73 per young person in current expenditure by the end of the term of the next Government. This would bring investment in youth services up to €73.1m by 2020 which we believe is a modest increase in light of the

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<sup>5</sup> Population Estimates, CSO,

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=PEA11&PLanguage=0>

<sup>6</sup> Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, November 2012

<sup>7</sup> Policy and Practice Report, Key Learning from the Ballymun Youth Guarantee Project

<https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Key-Learning-Ballymun-Youth-Guarantee-Project.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> European Commission 2011, "Youth on the Move" - Analytical Report of Flash Eurobarometer Number 319a).

<sup>9</sup> Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, November 2012

increased youth population, additional commitments and regulatory requirements and inflation over the next five years.

Another consequence of the severe cuts has been the limited capital funding available to develop new physical infrastructure, renovate existing facilities and to acquire equipment, such as IT and digital equipment to enhance the services and supports to young people and better engage with them. We welcome the allocation of €500,000 for a Youth Capital Funding Scheme earlier this year. This fund was limited to small works and therefore excluded larger projects. We would propose that a revised Youth Capital Fund should be developed with clear priorities of €1m per annum over the lifetime of the next Government.

A unique characteristic of youth work services in Ireland is the contribution of thousands of volunteers who give their time and expertise to working for and with young people. The Indecon Report found that there were 40,145 volunteers in the youth sector and estimated that they give 5.5 million hours annually valued at between €47m (minimum wage rate) and €139m (average hourly rate)<sup>10</sup>. While volunteers work unpaid, youth organisations invest in training and paid staff supports to recruit and retain volunteers. The Government has also provided some supports to local volunteer led youth groups through the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme. This scheme assists local voluntary youth clubs to meet expenses such as rent, insurance, programme costs etc. The maximum grant given is €3,000. This scheme is an effective way to support local volunteers to meet some of the costs of delivering youth services in their areas. Therefore we are calling on the next Government to invest €1m per annum in the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme in the years 2016-2020.

### **Proposals**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to increase investment in current youth work funding by €15 from €58 in 2014 to €73 per young person by 2020, this equates to an investment in current spending of €73.1m by 2020
- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce a revised Youth Capital Grants Scheme with an annual budget of €1m
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## **3. Social Inclusion**

### **Social Protection for Young People**

Article 40.1 of the Irish Constitution states that *“All citizens shall, as human persons, be equal before the law”*<sup>11</sup> and yet successive Government decisions have resulted in young people under 26 years on Jobseekers Allowance being entitled to lower social welfare rates

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Economic\\_Benefit\\_Youthwork\\_2012.pdf](http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/Economic_Benefit_Youthwork_2012.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.constitution.ie/Documents/Bhunreacht\\_na\\_hEireann\\_web.pdf](https://www.constitution.ie/Documents/Bhunreacht_na_hEireann_web.pdf)

than those over 26 years. The most recent data indicates that 66% of the almost 40,000 young people in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance in February 2015 were on €100 a week, 15% were on €144 with just 19% on the full rate of €188 per week.<sup>12</sup> In 2014, NYCI published the results of a poll which found that 4 out of 10 young people on Jobseekers' Allowance were struggling to make ends meet.<sup>13</sup> This is not surprising as the Vincentian Partnership found that the cost of a single adult living as part of a household was €184<sup>14</sup> in 2014 and this does not take into account the financial burden on young people who are not living with parents or family. There is also increasing anecdotal evidence that the cuts are leading to homelessness among young people.

The cuts in welfare were partly justified on the basis that they would incentivise young people to take up education, training and work experience opportunities rather than remain unemployed for many years. NYCI is also concerned about young people becoming long term unemployed, but the only way to address this issue is to provide sufficient quality education and training places rather than cutting social protection. The best way to prevent young people drifting into long term unemployment is to implement the Youth Guarantee where all young people on the live register for 4 months or more are guaranteed an education, training and/or work experience opportunity.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to restore the full rate of Jobseekers Allowance to those under 26 years to €188

### **Living Wage**

While we welcome the reduction in youth unemployment we are concerned about the growing number of young people on low pay and in precarious employment. Unfortunately many young people are struggling to survive financially and although most aspire to succeed and progress in their careers, the impact of recession has thwarted such aspirations. It is imperative that we find a balance between competitiveness and competition, and income adequacy and living standards.

The most recent data from the NERI Institute<sup>15</sup> found that 39.1% of young people aged 18-29 years in the labour force were on the minimum wage. We are very concerned at the high number of young workers on such low wages. While the Government are discussing changes

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<sup>12</sup> Dáil Question 176 March 24<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-03-24a.155&s=%22under+25+%22+section%3Awrans#g156.q>

<sup>13</sup> NYCI Briefing Paper on Jobseekers' Allowance  
[http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI%20Briefing%20Paper\\_RedC\\_Jobseekers%27%20Allowance\\_Final.pdf](http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI%20Briefing%20Paper_RedC_Jobseekers%27%20Allowance_Final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-cR3V9wzdLJSnpCVVRsSTVBeXc/edit?usp=sharing&pli=1>

<sup>15</sup> A Profile of those on the Minimum Wage, NERI Working Paper Series, July 2015  
[http://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/a\\_profile\\_of\\_those\\_on\\_the\\_minimum\\_wage\\_neri\\_wp27.pdf](http://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/a_profile_of_those_on_the_minimum_wage_neri_wp27.pdf)



to the minimum wage, we believe this does not go far enough to discuss the problem of low wages.

NYCI supports the introduction of a living wage to tackle low pay in Ireland. The NERI Institute paper<sup>16</sup> on the impact and challenges of introducing a living wage concluded that, all things considered, the social benefits of a living wage exceeded the inherent challenges of implementation. Last year the Living Wage Technical Group was established to determine a Living Wage for Ireland.<sup>17</sup> The group determined a living wage figure for 2014 and put forth very compelling arguments to support the implementation of a Living Wage. NYCI endorses the recommendations contained in the Report of the Living Wage Technical Group and proposes the gradual introduction of a Living Wage in Ireland. We welcome the recent decision of Government to hold a Living Wage Forum. It is important that this is the start of a process towards the introduction of a living wage.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to commit to the introduction of a Living Wage in Ireland

## **4. Education and Training**

### **Youth Guarantee**

NYCI was among the first organisations to call for the introduction of a Youth Guarantee in Ireland in 2011. We welcomed the decision of Government to support a Youth Guarantee and their leadership during the Irish EU Presidency in delivering an EU Council recommendation<sup>18</sup>. This recommended that member states guarantee a quality offer of an education, training and/or work experience opportunity to young people who were unemployed for four months or more. We also supported the delivery of the Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot which ended last December and which has been positively evaluated. In January 2014 the Government published a National Implementation Plan in order to draw down EU funds for 2014 and 2015.

While we accept the initiative would be phased in over time we are disappointed with the pace of implementation to date. According to the plan the Government was supposed to deliver 28,500 education, training and work experience places. However, the most recent data<sup>19</sup> indicates that only 23,313 places were provided. This is just over 700 more places in addition to those provided in 2013 based on analysis undertaken by NYCI. Also we are

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/neri\\_wp\\_impacts\\_chall\\_liv\\_wage\\_2014b.pdf](http://www.neriinstitute.net/download/pdf/neri_wp_impacts_chall_liv_wage_2014b.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> The figure is the average gross salary which will enable full time employed adults (without dependents) across Ireland to afford a socially acceptable standard of living.

<sup>18</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013H0426(01))

<sup>19</sup> Dáil Question 68, May 28<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-05-28a.174&s=%22pilot+scheme%22+section%3Awrans#g175.q>

concerned that only 9,073 young jobseekers<sup>20</sup> have completed a personal progression plan which is an integral part of the Youth Guarantee. Therefore we are calling on the next Government to review the implementation of the Youth Guarantee and to set out ambitious targets for the delivery of the Youth Guarantee from 2016-2020.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to review current implementation of the Youth Guarantee and set out ambitious targets for delivery of the initiative from 2016-2020

### **Career and Life Guidance for Young People**

The Education Act 1998 places a legal obligation on schools to provide guidance to students. Since 2011, however, there have been significant cuts to career guidance in schools which has reduced the supports to young people, in particular one-to-one sessions. Both formal and informal guidance and advice can be invaluable for young people in making key choices about their future career and life. A study<sup>21</sup> published by the Higher Education Authority in 2014 found that 7,000 students or 16% did not progress from first to second year at third level in 2011. This would indicate that even before the cuts imposed in 2012 took effect there were deficiencies in the career guidance system. A 2014 ESRI report<sup>22</sup> noted that some students expressed concerns about the absence of options other than Higher Education in career guidance at second level.

Guidance and counselling is not only important in the school setting, it is also important for young people who are seeking further education, training and employment. The Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot evaluation<sup>23</sup> highlighted the importance of good quality career advice and comprehensive holistic guidance to young jobseekers. Likewise the National Implementation Group arising from the EU Structured Dialogue Process on Youth Policy which comprised of twenty young people deliberated on the issue of guidance and counselling. They recommended that a new strategic approach was required for the provision of guidance services. They proposed that guidance should assist young people as they navigate through education, training and in pursuit of employment. They called for a young person centred service that is good quality, supports their development and is accessible when they need it most. NYCI endorses this view and calls on the next Government to develop a National Strategy for a Comprehensive Guidance Service.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop a National Strategy for a Comprehensive Guidance Service

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<sup>20</sup> Dáil Question 72, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-07-07a.189&s=%22personal+progression+plan%22+section%3Awrans#g190.g>

<sup>21</sup> A Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education Institutions 2010/11 to 2011/12, Higher Education Authority, 2014

<sup>22</sup> Leaving School in Ireland, A Longitudinal Study of Post School Transitions, ESRI 2014

<https://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/RS36.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/Key-Learning-Ballymun-Youth-Guarantee-Project.pdf>

## 5. Employment

### JobBridge

NYCI believes that internships have a role to play in supporting young people to gain the skills and confidence to secure employment, but only if properly structured and regulated. We supported the proposal to introduce “JobBridge” the National Internship Scheme in 2011. Since then 40,993 jobseekers have participated on the scheme, of which 11,346 were under 25 years<sup>24</sup>. We have however raised concerns about the nature, operation and management of the scheme. In February 2015 we published a report “*JobBridge: Stepping Stone or Dead End?*”<sup>25</sup> that explored the views and experiences of young people aged 18-25 who participated in the scheme. Our conclusion was that JobBridge requires significant reform to enhance the experience of participants and increase progression into secure employment.

NYCI’s report provided data and analysis on young people’s experiences of JobBridge. The survey of participants found that 57% were satisfied with their internship, with 31% dissatisfied, that there was a 100% dissatisfaction rating among those who stated they were compelled to participate by the Department of Social Protection and that 45% would recommend JobBridge to another jobseeker, with 31% saying they would not. Also 68% stated that they agreed the scheme gave valuable work experience, however 44% agreed with the statement that the internship was used for free labour. In terms of progression to employment 27% secured full time employment and 14% secured part time employment following their internship, with 31% remaining unemployed.

In summary the findings of our research were mixed, while a majority of participants were satisfied following participation, the research identified a number of deficiencies and a lack of quality. These ranged from poorly designed internships, inadequate mentoring, instances of unacceptable treatment of interns and a lack of rights and clarity on rights. Other issues which emerged included insufficient monitoring, job displacement and inadequate income support.

Arising from our research we called for a review and reform of JobBridge. As the economy recovers and employment grows we must make sure schemes such as JobBridge are of a high quality and are supporting participants into employment. We set out ten recommendations to enhance the scheme and address the deficiencies.

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<sup>24</sup> Dáil Question 68-71, July 7<sup>th</sup> 2015 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-07-07a.183&s=%22jobbridge%22+section%3Awrans#g185.q>

<sup>25</sup> JobBridge “Stepping Stone or Dead End”, NYCI February 2015 <http://www.youth.ie/JobBridge>

## **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to undertake a review of JobBridge with a view to reform and enhance the scheme.

## **Fair Work Certificate**

There is increasing concern about the changing nature of the labour market, with a significant growth in precarious employment and what others refer to as “contingent” labour. Those engaged in internships, temporary work, part-time jobs, zero-hours contracts and sub-contracting comprise an ever growing segment of the labour force. This trend particularly impacts on young people, women and migrants. Many young workers are having the traditional entry into well-paid and secure employment elongated and frustrated by the proliferation of internships and temporary jobs on minimum and low wages. This trend had accelerated since the onset of the economic recession in 2008. A 2013 Eurofound report found that the number of young people aged 15-24 in temporary employment in Ireland increased from 11.2% in 2004 to 34.9% in 2012.<sup>26</sup>

Government has limited powers to interfere in employment contracts except where laws, for example, such as on minimum wages are flouted. This does not mean that Government does not have any leverage. At present Government provides wage subsidies, employment incentives, enterprise grants, tax breaks and other financial supports to private employers to support job creation. The investment of public funds in job creation is welcome, but only where it supports good quality employment and decent work. Public funds should not be subsidising low wages, precarious work and poor quality employment. Therefore we are calling on the next Government to introduce a “Fair Work Certificate” which employers seeking to avail of public funds for job creation and maintenance would be required to hold. This would be similar to the Tax Clearance Certificate, which companies/organisations must hold if they wish to avail of public grants/funds. The criteria for such a certificate would have to be explored and determined, but could be designed to ensure that public funds are only supporting decent pay, and stable and good quality employment.

## **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce a “Fair Work Certificate” which employers seeking to avail of public funds for job creation and maintenance would be required to hold

## **6. Housing and Accommodation**

### **Private Rented Sector**

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<sup>26</sup> Eurofound (2013) *Young People and Temporary Employment in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

The housing situation in Ireland has reached crisis proportions. Currently many young people living in Ireland are either unable to afford to move out of home or they struggle to access affordable housing. The current demand for housing has placed a significant burden on housing sectors across the board. The supply and provision of affordable, quality housing is a complex issue with many factors at play. As house prices begin to rise once again, first time buyers struggle to buy their first home and many remain in the private rental sector. The private rental sector is squeezed with limited supply and increasing demand, which in turn has pushed rental prices up significantly in the last year.

The most recent data indicates that there were 305,377 households in the private rented sector in 2011<sup>27</sup> with the percentage in the sector increasing from 11% in 2002 to 19% in 2011. The majority of those renting are young (18-34) and single (63% and 61%) respectively. Property rental prices continue to rise in urban areas, increasing by 15% in the year up to June 2014, and in the Dublin commuter counties by 11%.

With a growing housing demand and very little new supply, there are some severe pressures in the private rental sector in Dublin and in other cities. Affordability and security of tenure are key issues for many young people currently renting. Many renters are vulnerable to eviction or rent increases. In other countries like Germany and Denmark, PRS residents enjoy a high level of security of tenant. Such a model should be adopted in this country and could be phased in as new developments start to be built.

Rental controls should be introduced to cap the rental prices in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). To ensure that rent control does not compromise supply, it is important that rent control is accompanied by reform of the tax relief on rental income to ensure landlords continue to provide their properties to the rental market. The City of Berlin have recently introduced rent caps prohibiting landlords from charging new tenants more than 10% above the local average. We propose that rent should be regulated so that annual rent increases should be limited to the Consumer Price Index.

At present private rental agreements between landlords and tenants are governed by the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004. This legislation provides some security for the tenant after the initial 6 months period, subject to break periods every four years which allow the landlord to end the tenancy, if they so wish. Even during the four years there are a number of circumstances where the landlord can terminate the tenancy, such as sale of property, required for own/family use, refurbishments.

Of course, young people are not a homogenous group and while some are more mobile than others and would prefer not to be tied into a very long lease, there are young people who have families and would prefer better security of tenure with the option to negotiate a

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.nesc.ie/en/publications/publications/nesc-reports/private-rental-sector/>

long-term lease. For these young people, the option of negotiating a long-term lease should be available after the initial 6 month period of the tenant's residence. After the initial 6 month period the tenant should be entitled to negotiate a long-term lease. This would require abolishing the 4 year cycle of tenancy renewal.

### **Proposals**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to introduce rent controls so that annual rent increases cannot exceed the Consumer Price Index
- NYCI calls on the next Government to reform the Residential Tenancies Act, 2004 to give greater security to tenants

### **Youth Homelessness**

The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2015, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, identifies 'economic security and opportunity' as a national outcome for children and young people up to the age of 25. Despite this homelessness amongst young people in Ireland is a significant problem as they have difficulty accessing affordable and quality housing in the private rental market and/or social housing sector. The current high rates of youth unemployment and cuts in social welfare for young people in successive budgets has made it increasingly difficult for young people to afford to leave home and live independently. Likewise these cuts have made it very challenging for young people leaving care to access housing. Furthermore there are a myriad of issues that a young person can experience in their young lives that can lead them into homelessness, for example, family relationship breakdown, mental health problems, child abuse, substance misuse, etc. Therefore youth homelessness is increasing.

In 2014 the Government published the General Scheme and Heads of the Aftercare Bill, which is designed to improve the statutory aftercare provisions for young people leaving the care system. It will place a duty on the State to provide an aftercare plan for each eligible young person leaving the care of the State. However we are concerned that the proposed legislation does not guarantee housing for young people leaving care. A joint working protocol between TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, and the Local Authorities has to date, failed to ring-fence properties for young people leaving care. Instead, these young people are left to the mercy of the market and local authority schemes. Addressing the housing needs of care-leavers is a fundamental aspect of aftercare support. Some care-leavers may be ready to progress to independent living, while others will require a more supportive setting initially. Both options must be available as international and Irish research has found that periods in State care constitute a significant pathway into long-term homelessness.

Another key issue which the legislation must address is the eligibility for aftercare. Some young people who were not in care for more than a year prior to reaching 18 years are

being refused aftercare support. This means they have to access adult homeless services, which can have very negative consequences. Therefore some very vulnerable young people who should be in receipt of aftercare support are being excluded for administrative reasons rather than on the basis of need. Therefore the Aftercare Bill must ensure that supports are provided on the basis of need rather than solely based on time spent in the care system. The legislation should facilitate professional discretion and assessment in this regard.

While improving the statutory basis for aftercare is to be welcomed, NYCI believes that young people must also be meaningfully supported to secure long-term accommodation. Young people must be able to access the support services they need when facing homelessness. For example, the emergency out of hour's social work service should be expanded to be more widely available. Further investment must also be made into services which assist young people in sustaining their accommodation and remaining out of homelessness. These include mental health, addiction, and employment services. Investment in such services is a crucial preventative measure to ensure young people remain in secure accommodation.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure that the Aftercare Bill as proposed is amended to guarantee a right to housing for young people leaving care and to invest in services which assist young people in sustaining their accommodation and remaining out of homelessness
- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure that aftercare supports are provided on the basis of need and subject to professional assessment and discretion rather than solely based on time spent in the care system

## **7. Health**

### **Mental Health and Suicide Prevention**

Mental health continues to emerge as a very important issue in consultations with young people. NYCI supports the provision of both universal and targeted measures to promote positive mental health among young people alongside the provision of services for young people with mental health difficulties. NYCI through the National Youth Health Programme delivers the ASIST programme which trains those working with young people to become more ready, willing and able to help those at risk of suicide.

Excellent work has been undertaken by a range of organisations to address the stigma surrounding mental health difficulties and to support young people to reach out for help when in need. However much more needs to be done to support young people and reduce the incidences of self-harm, suicidal attempts and death by suicide. Findings from research

by the Royal College of Surgeons<sup>28</sup> demonstrated that by the age of 13 years, 1 in 3 young people in Ireland are likely to have experienced some type of mental health difficulty. By the age of 24 years, that rate had increased to over 1 in 2. Of particular concern is the fact that the suicide rate for young people aged 15-19 years is the fourth highest in the EU<sup>29</sup>.

We welcome the recent publication of “Connecting for Life”, Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020<sup>30</sup>. However to be effective this strategy will require political leadership, inter-organisational coordination and cooperation and sufficient resources. It is vital that the next Government ensure all these elements are in place over the next five years if we are to reduce self-harm, suicidal behaviour and death by suicide.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure effective implementation of “Connecting for Life”, Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020

### **Alcohol Misuse**

Alcohol is not an ordinary commodity. When access to alcohol is more widely available and sold very cheaply in supermarkets with sophisticated and unregulated advertising and marketing, there are bound to be social and economic costs and consequences. Too often young people are branded as the problem. They are not the problem, but are just responding to the environment we as a society have created.

We believe that the balance in current public policy on alcohol has swung too far in favour of the drinks industry’s interests and as a result is contributing to and facilitating unhealthy levels and patterns of alcohol consumption amongst the general population. It is also failing to adequately protect children and young people under 18 from alcohol-related harm. As a result Ireland has one of the highest levels of alcohol consumption and binge drinking among young people in Europe. The 2011 ESPAD Report<sup>31</sup> of 15 and 16 year olds across 36 European countries, found that in the 30 days prior to the survey; 20% of 16 year olds were weekly drinkers, 52% of girls and 48% of boys had drunk alcohol, 40% had 5+ drinks on a single drinking occasion and 23% had one or more episodes of drunkenness. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption for young people under 18. Young people who begin to drink before the age of 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence at some time in their lives, compared to those who have their first drink at 20 or older<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> The Mental Health of Young People in Ireland, RCSI, 2013

[http://www.rcsi.ie/files/psychiatry/20131009042046\\_PERL%20ResearchReport\\_041013\\_PRI.pdf](http://www.rcsi.ie/files/psychiatry/20131009042046_PERL%20ResearchReport_041013_PRI.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> National Office for Suicide Prevention (2013) Annual Report. Health Service Executive. Available at:

[http://www.nosp.ie/annual\\_report\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nosp.ie/annual_report_2013.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Connecting for Life, Ireland’s Strategy to Reduce Suicide, 2015-2020 [http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Connecting-for-Life\\_LR.pdf](http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Connecting-for-Life_LR.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.espad.org/Uploads/ESPAD\\_reports/2011/The\\_2011\\_ESPAD\\_Report\\_FULL\\_2012\\_10\\_29.pdf](http://www.espad.org/Uploads/ESPAD_reports/2011/The_2011_ESPAD_Report_FULL_2012_10_29.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012: P67

[http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16908/2/Steering\\_Group\\_Report\\_on\\_a\\_National\\_Substance\\_Misuse\\_Strategy\\_-\\_7\\_Feb\\_11.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16908/2/Steering_Group_Report_on_a_National_Substance_Misuse_Strategy_-_7_Feb_11.pdf)



While we welcome the decision of the current Government to publish the draft Heads of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, it is vital that the next Government proceed to legislate (if the legislation is not passed) and implement the key provisions in the legislation in the areas of marketing and advertising, price and supply in line with the recommendations of the National Substance Misuse Strategy Group report<sup>33</sup>. We also believe that the next Government should phase out the sponsorship of major sporting events by the drinks industry.

We strongly welcome the introduction of minimum pricing as the evidence confirms that increase in price greatly reduces alcohol consumption and in turn alcohol-related harm among young people who are particularly price sensitive. We also support the regulation of alcohol advertising and marketing, including a ban on outdoor advertising and a 9pm threshold for alcohol advertising on TV. We welcome the proposal to commence Section 9 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2008 and to introduce the structural separation of alcoholic products from other products in mixed trading premises, such as supermarkets, convenience stores, petrol stations. We were disappointed that the current Government did not progress the recommendation to phase out the sponsorship of major sporting events by the drinks industry and believe the next Government must do so to protect young people.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to implement the provisions of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill with regard to marketing and advertising, price and supply in line with the recommendations of the National Substance Misuse Strategy Group report and to phase out the sponsorship of major sporting events by the drinks industry

## **8. Democracy and Participation**

### **Extend Voting Rights to 16 and 17 year olds**

NYCI has been advocating for the extension of voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 years since 2009, when we launched our “New Age in Voting” campaign. In January 2013 the Constitutional Convention following a submission and presentation from NYCI voted to support the introduction of voting rights for 16 and 17 year olds. The Government accepted this recommendation and up until December 2014 committed to bringing forward a referendum to allow 16 and 17 year olds citizens to vote. In January 2015 the Government reneged on this commitment.

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<sup>33</sup> National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2012  
[http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16908/2/Steering\\_Group\\_Report\\_on\\_a\\_National\\_Substance\\_Misuse\\_Strategy\\_-\\_7\\_Feb\\_11.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16908/2/Steering_Group_Report_on_a_National_Substance_Misuse_Strategy_-_7_Feb_11.pdf)

While we are disappointed with the Government decision, NYCI is committed to campaigning and advocating for the introduction of the right to vote at 16. We will continue to argue for a change in legislation to extend voting rights for the local and European elections and call for a referendum to allow young people aged 16 and 17 to vote in referendums and Dáil and Presidential elections. We are calling on the next Government to hold a referendum in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Convention on extending voting rights to young people and also to legislate to allow young people aged 16 and 17 years to vote in local and European elections.

### **Votes for Emigrants**

According to the most recent estimates from the CSO 407,800 people, of whom 165,300 were aged 15-24 years emigrated from Ireland in the 5 years to April 2014<sup>34</sup>. Ireland is currently among a minority of European states which does not extend voting rights to Irish citizens abroad. The UCC *Émigré* study<sup>35</sup> revealed that the majority of the Irish population support emigrants' right to vote in presidential (79%) and general elections (69%). While we acknowledge that there may be constitutional and practical issues with regard to the extension of voting rights to the Irish abroad we believe these can be overcome. A number of proposals have been made to allow Irish citizens abroad to vote in Presidential and Seanad elections and referendums. The Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs has also recently come out in favour of extending voting rights to the Irish abroad.<sup>36</sup> Therefore NYCI is calling on the next Government to bring forward the necessary constitutional amendments and/or legislation to facilitate Irish citizens abroad to vote in Presidential and Seanad elections and referenda.

### **Electoral Commission**

NYCI has actively promoted the participation of young people aged 18 years or over in the electoral process for many years. We have consistently organised campaigns to encourage and support young people to register to vote and to vote in all elections and referenda. We welcome the fact that voter turnout among young people aged 18-25 years has increased in recent years. The 2011 CSO report on voter participation<sup>37</sup> found that 62% of young people aged 18-25 years voted in the 2011 General Election compared to 50% in the 2002 General Election.

While many aspects of the electoral system currently function well, one component of the system, namely the voter registration system is not fit for purpose in our view. The current system is under resourced, inconsistent and inaccurate. It was designed at a time when the

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<sup>34</sup> CSO Population and Migration Estimates, August 2014.

<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2014/#.VaVujk3JD4h>

<sup>35</sup> "Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity" UCC 2013 The research revealed that the majority of the Irish population support emigrants' right to vote in presidential (79%) and general elections (69%) in some form or another.

<sup>36</sup> Joint European Affairs Committee, Houses of the Oireachtas, November 2014, Voting Rights of Irish Abroad

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2011/voterq22011.pdf>

vast majority of the population were born, raised and lived in the one area and remained there all of their lives. It was not designed or administered to easily capture a population which is highly mobile, especially a young mobile population. Our analysis would suggest that the means by which the register is currently compiled and organised is leading to the exclusion of greater numbers of young people. This is demonstrated by independent research by NYCI in both 1999 and 2014 which shows that the number of unregistered young people has doubled in 15 years. In 1999, 14% of young people aged 18-25 years not registered to vote<sup>38</sup> compared to 30% aged 18-25 years who were not registered to vote in a poll conducted in 2014<sup>39</sup>.

Therefore NYCI supports the establishment of an Electoral Commission and calls on the next Government to set up this body which in the first instance will prioritise the reform of the electoral register and work to increase the number of registered voters, in particular young voters. However it is vital that such the Electoral Commission is adequately resourced to undertake this important task. We also believe that the Commission should have both the capacity and resources to undertake research and to directly and indirectly support voter engagement and participation campaigns. There is limited data and research on how best to promote and support citizen engagement in the electoral process.

### **Proposals**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to bring forward a referendum to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Dáil and Presidential elections and referenda and to bring forward legislation to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in local and European elections
- NYCI calls on the next Government to extend voting rights to the Irish abroad
- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish and provide adequate resources to an Electoral Commission

## **9. Arts**

### **Access and Participation in the Arts**

Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that *“Member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.”*<sup>40</sup>

Inequality of access is the major issue in relation to arts provision for Irish children and young people, affecting the quality of their education and their social inclusion. It is one of

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<sup>38</sup> NYCI (2009) *The Truth About Youth* Dublin: NYCI

[http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/The\\_Truth\\_About\\_Youth%2009.pdf](http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/The_Truth_About_Youth%2009.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI%20Briefing%20Paper%20on%20Voter%20Participation\\_DM.pdf](http://www.youth.ie/sites/youth.ie/files/NYCI%20Briefing%20Paper%20on%20Voter%20Participation_DM.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Article 31.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

the dimensions under which disadvantage and poverty is demonstrated. Growing Up in Ireland states that by age 9, only 47% of children and young people are participating in recreational activities after school. Participation strongly relates at that point to maternal education and family income.<sup>41</sup> This means that a child's access to the arts will be dependent on not only their privilege, but the privilege their parents experienced growing up. The Irish Times last year quantified afterschool activities as costing families up to €4000 per annum<sup>42</sup>.

The absence of a strategic approach to provision and planning and the lack of adequate funding means that a young person's access to the arts can often be determined by whether or not they are lucky enough to be in an area in which there is strong local provision, and, if not, whether they can access transport or their parents can pay for alternative provision instead. In a country internationally renowned for the quality of its contribution to world culture, it is not acceptable that only children and young people in families with the financial means have access to, among other things, music, drama, dancing, drawing and literature. While data is not available on the amount of time the average Irish child spends in non-formal arts activities, The OECD benchmarks Ireland as 11<sup>th</sup> in Europe in terms of percentage compulsory tuition time devoted to the arts and this figure has not grown since 2001.<sup>43</sup> Importantly, this time does not include time spent with peers and with family in arts activities outside of formal education. We are calling on the next Government to develop and implement an action plan which would guarantee each child growing up in Ireland equality of access to the arts and will tackle economic, geographical and social barriers to participation (e.g., where children and young people live, their family environment, cost, transport, and the availability of local cultural infrastructure etc.).

In January 2013, the Government launched the Arts in Education Charter. This agreement places new responsibilities on Government Departments, agencies, cultural institutions and arts organisations to provide and promote arts education to children and young people both in formal and non-formal education. It is important that the next Government commit to fully implement this. While welcoming the document, NYCI believes it needs to take into account the role of the youth arts sector in supporting the participation of young people in the arts in out of school settings. In this context it is important that Government develop and expand the Charter to incorporate non-formal education and youth arts in order to deliver on a recommendation in the Charter. This stated that *"policy-makers and education providers, nationally and locally, should understand the wide range of practice encompassed within the generic term "education" and ensure that investment in arts-in-education practice*

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<sup>41</sup> Growing Up in Ireland The National Longitudinal Study of Children The Lives of 9 Year Old Executive Summary, ESRI Government Publications, 2012

<sup>42</sup> Conor Pope The Irish Times October 2014 <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/consumer/costs-add-up-for-parents-as-season-of-activities-kicks-off-1.1929313>

<sup>43</sup> Winner, ET, Goldstein and S Vincent – Lancrin Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts Education, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing (2013)

*is not achieved at the expense of growing other complementary arts and education practices in formal, non-formal and informal settings*".<sup>44</sup> Therefore we are calling on the next Government to further develop and expand the Charter to include non-formal education and youth arts in line with the recommendation in the document.

## **Proposals**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop and implement an action plan which would guarantee each child growing up in Ireland equality of access to the arts (both in and out of school) and tackle economic, geographical and educational disadvantage as barriers to participation and deliver on the arts access promised to each child as part of the five National Outcomes for Children contained in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures
- NYCI calls on the Government to fully implement the 'Arts in Education Charter' and to further develop the Charter to incorporate non-formal education and youth arts and to deliver on its responsibilities to this sector as recommended in the document

## **10.Pensions**

### **Pension Policy for Young Workers**

NYCI recognises the need to address the inadequacy of current pension provision among workers, especially younger workers. The recent OECD review of Irish pension policy<sup>45</sup> found that only 13.1% of young workers aged 20-24 years had a pension, rising to 38.8% among those aged 25-34 years. We note that the current Government are examining the introduction of an auto-enrolment system whereby workers would be automatically enrolled in a pension plan, but would have the right to opt out for a designated period. One model is the New Zealand Kiwi Saver system, where employers must enrol new employees into the scheme and individuals have two months to opt out. The minimum contribution is 2%, which is deducted from employee earnings, and an employer contribution of 2% of salary is added. The New Zealand government also fully matches employee contributions up to NZD 10 per week, and "kick-starts" each individual account with NZD 1 000.

While we support increasing pension coverage, it is vital that any new policy takes into account the reality that many young workers are on low wages and in precarious employment. There should be strong consumer protection to ensure young workers are aware of their rights to withdraw and not subject to exorbitant fees and charges. As in New Zealand, both employers and the state should also make a contribution.

### **Proposal**

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<sup>44</sup> Arts in Education Charter, Department of Education and Skills/Department of Arts, Heritage and Culture p12 <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Arts-In-Education-Charter.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> OECD (2014), *OECD Reviews of Pensions Systems: Ireland*, OECD Publishing.

- NYCI calls on the next Government to ensure the concerns and needs of young workers on low wages and in precarious employment are taken into account when proposed auto-enrolment into pension schemes is introduced

## **11.Sustainable Development**

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The Sustainable Development Goals are a set of universally-applicable goals and targets, negotiated and agreed by the world's 193 countries which were formally adopted by the UN in September 2015. They are aimed at eradicating poverty, addressing environmental degradation and climate change, and building a more peaceful, fair and sustainable world. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets will succeed the Millennium Development Goals, which expire at the end of 2015. The SDGs cover such diverse areas as agriculture, education, gender equality, health, justice, employment and environmental degradation. These issues particularly impact on young people with those under 24 years of age constituting nearly 40% of the world's population. Of these approximately 238 million young people live in extreme poverty—that is, they live on less than \$1 a day; with 462 million young people surviving on less than \$2 a day.<sup>46</sup>

Ireland and Kenya were appointed to lead the negotiations towards the final agreement at the September World Summit. While Ireland is playing a key role at international level, it is important to ensure implementation of the SDGs domestically. Young people are seen to be the 'torch bearers' and having a central role to play in their successful implementation. Therefore NYCI is proposing that the next Government make an explicit reference to the global Sustainable Development Goals as the overarching framework for decision-making in Ireland. This also requires that we develop an ambitious national plan of action to monitor and implement the Goals and Indicators contained in the Sustainable Development Goals that can inspire the rest of the world and position Ireland as a global leader in innovation, equality and green growth.

### **Proposal**

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop an ambitious national plan of action to monitor and implement the Sustainable Development Goals

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<sup>46</sup> Youth and the State of the World, Global Roundtable Working Group on Youth