

Owning Your Own Home



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Delivering 200,000 new homes by 2025 and ending long-term homelessness.

The housing crisis is a social and economic emergency and is one of our main priorities if elected to government. Fine Gael has consistently failed to get to grips with the scale of the problem. Tenants face unaffordable rents, homelessness continues to grow unabated and a generation of young people are unable to buy a home. Fine Gael has abandoned supporting home ownership as a core objective and left an entire generation at the mercy of a rip off rental market.

Our central goal in government will be to build homes and ensure people have a secure roof over their heads and this will be our central goal in government.

Our Goals

- ✓ Increased home ownership rates
- ✓ Build 200,000 new homes including 50,000 new build social housing units and 50,000 new affordable units
- ✓ End the rip off rental market
- ✓ Eliminate long-term homelessness

6 key strands to get bricks and mortar into the ground.

- 1. Strengthening Home Ownership**
- 2. Cutting construction costs**
- 3. Penalising hoarding and underuse of land and property**
- 4. Build Social and affordable homes**
- 5. Helping Generation Rent**
- 6. Ending Homelessness**

Strengthen Home Ownership

1. Introduce a 33% top up Special Savings Incentive Scheme for over 125,000 first time buyers over the next five years.

Fianna Fáil is committed to supporting first time buyers in securing a good quality home to start their families. We will introduce a first-time buyer's saving scheme to help people starting out get the money together for a deposit on their new home. This involves a 33% top up on individual's special deposit savings account. For every three euro you save, the State will add another euro to help you meet your deposit up to a maximum of a €10,000 top up. The scheme will be capped at our target of 25,000 households per annum with appropriate limits on savings. We have estimated the maximum cost at €250m per annum. All homes not just new builds will be eligible. All homes will be eligible subject to a €500,000 cap.

- ✓ We will establish a 33% top up First Time Buyers Special Savings Incentive Scheme.

2. Retain & expand funding for the Help To Buy scheme

To ensure stability in the property market and as part of our commitment to strengthening home ownership we will retain and expand funding to the Help to Buy scheme. We will ensure recipients are also eligible for the First Time Buyers SSIA scheme potentially boosting aspiring home owners by up to €30,000 in total. This measure will cost an additional €100m in spending.

- ✓ We will retain the Help to Buy scheme and expand its funding.

3. Build 50,000 new affordable homes by 2025

Building more affordable homes is crucial to boosting home ownership levels. Our policy will be focused on increasing supply with 250,000 new homes including 50,000 more affordable homes for average income workers.

We will ensure the rapid implementation and expansion of the Affordable Home scheme up to 2025 to build homes available for purchase for below €250,000. This will be significantly increased over five years and will operate in conjunction with the new Land Development Agency. The estimated full year cost is €500m.

- ✓ We will ramp up and deliver 50,000 homes available to buy at below €250,000 across Ireland.

4. Help first time buyers by reforming the planning system for Cuckoo Funds

The increased number of Cuckoo Funds snapping up whole housing estates and apartment blocks is creating an unprecedented level of competition for first time buyers. These are largely concentrated in Dublin and are effectively pushing first time buyers out of buying their own homes.

- ✓ We will introduce legislation to ensure that no single buyer can bulk purchase entire developments unless they are designated Build to Rent in the Housing strategy.

Cutting Construction Costs

1. Reduce Development Levies on condition of construction being completed within 3 years to stimulate construction

Providing incentives for accelerating construction will play an important part in ramping up construction levels to reach the 30,000 new private homes per annum level required to tackle the housing crisis. We need a “Dunkirk” style approach encompassing small and medium builders not just large ones. A targeted development levy reduction directly linked to competed construction within a three-year time frame

will help ensure developers move forward quickly with new construction projects. Subject to a €5,000 cap this will cost some €112.5m per annum.

- ✓ We will reduce development levies to stimulate construction.

2. Streamline regulations to make it easier to convert above the shop spaces

There are thousands of above shop unit properties in town and city centres across Ireland that are underutilised. We will enable the expedited development of certain classes of residential developments including those requiring change of use conversion from commercial or industrial to residential and residential refurbishment in upper floors and in older structures.

It is intended the ‘One-Stop-Shop’ Approval system will streamline regulatory hurdles to the conversion and refurbishment of existing structures in urban areas to residential use, without compromising on quality and safety.

- ✓ We will establish a special planning and building control approval process in each planning authority.

3. Enhance Skills and Capacity in Construction Sector by increasing training places for apprentices in construction and electrical sectors

The construction sector will need significant extra capacity to build 40,000 units per annum. This will require significant additional numbers of skilled workers. We will increase the number of apprenticeship places to ensure there is a steady flow of capable workers working in the construction projects. To meet the labour and skills demands of the ramped-up home building targets we will provide for 10,000 apprenticeship places. We will:

- ✓ Target 10,000 apprenticeship places in the construction sector per annum. This will cost of €45m in further spending.
- ✓ Introduce a new shared apprenticeship model where employers band together to hire trainees.

1. Reform and expand Home Building Finance Ireland.

Access and cost of securing funding for development projects is a major barrier to achieving required output levels. A heavy reliance on cash reserves is constraining the capacity of the industry to expand and ramp up building output.

We need a “Dunkirk” style approach to building that encourages small and medium builders to undertake housing projects. This would also assist in increasing the number of apprenticeship places. Small builders would be enabled to jointly take on an apprentice, making it more feasible for many of these SMEs and increasing apprenticeship places.

- ✓ We will reform and expand Home Building Finance Ireland to provide finance to small scale developers unable to access banking or bond finance.

2. Address probate delays

Probate takes too long in Ireland. This delays the sale of family homes left to relatives. Some 30,000 people pass away every year in Ireland with up to 86.6% of them owning a home leaving some 26,000 homes effected by delays in probate.

This may contribute to our relatively high vacancy rate of 183,000 homes across Ireland. We will work to streamline the probate system with the aim of reducing waiting times and lowering the legal costs involved. This will involve:

- ✓ Access for lay applicants
- ✓ Simplified structure for low threshold inheritance claims
- ✓ Simplified Revenue Inheritance Tax claims forms

Build Social and Affordable Homes

1. Directly Build 50,000 new social housing units by 2025

Fianna Fáil is committed to building 50,000 new social

housing units by 2025. The average cost of building a two-bedroom social housing unit is €250,000. The key task facing the next government is replacing the spin obsessed cynicism of Fine Gael with a renewed focus on actual new build units not turnkey, leasing and acquisitions.

This means utilising a fresh range of measures to remove barriers to supply and ensuring targets are met.

- ✓ We will directly build 10,000 new social housing units per annum at an additional cost of €570m per annum above current spending levels.

2. Cut through Local Authority Red Tape

Faced with an unprecedented housing crisis we need to ensure Local Authorities have the powers and resources to get building again. Fine Gael has refused to remove red tape that means social housing proposals have to jump through hoops before they are shovel ready. Rather than blaming local authorities, we will work with them on a root and branch reform of the process to get social housing construction moving.

- ✓ We will raise the discretionary spending threshold from €2m to €6m.

3. Introduce a new model of State Supported ‘Affordable Rental Housing’ for middle income households

Developing sustainable communities must involve a broad range of households. The current application of sustainable community guidelines is restricting the capacity of Local Authorities and Voluntary Housing Associations from developing significant scale housing estates.

A new Affordable Rental system will change this and increase access to affordable rental units for ordinary households. Nobody should pay more than one third of their net income on housing needs We will accelerate the roll out of the current pilot project following years of delays.

This will be done through the existing Served Sites Fund and a further €50m investment to build over 1,000 affordable rental units per annum.

- ✓ We will roll out a cost rental model for average income households.

4. Develop Housing Association Finance

Housing Associations are a key vehicle in delivering more units to meet social housing demands. They are currently restricted by limited access to finance and a lack of economies of scale and new Eurostat rules that places them on-balance sheet. We will establish a Special Purpose Vehicle in line with Central Bank approval to facilitate Credit Union investment in large scale Housing Associations around the sector.

- ✓ We will work to get Housing Associations off balance sheet and enhance access to finance.

5. Introduce a new Vacant/Derelict Home Refurbishment Scheme

The total available Local Authority housing stock has been eroded by the large number of vacant homes across the country. Local Authorities should allow families on the waiting list to move into these homes and refurbish them.

We will also replace the failed Repair & Lease and Buy & Renew schemes with a new €50m fund that cuts through red tape.

- ✓ We will launch a new €50m Vacant Fund to bring vacant and derelict homes back into use.

Penalising the Underuse of Land and Property

1. New Taxation measures to ensure best land use

Effective taxation tools are needed to incentivise proper development and the maximum use of land. The Vacant Site levy introduced by the government is far too limited to genuinely drive on development and does not cover underutilised lands. We need to strengthen it by increasing the penalty on land hoarding to help stimulate development.

- ✓ We will reform and increase the Vacant Site Tax to 14% to ensure it tackles land hoarding and penalises speculation.

2. Reform and consolidate planning & Compulsory Purchase Order laws

The current legal framework for planning is dispersed and fragmented making it increasingly difficult to decipher. In addition, CPO laws are slow and cumbersome preventing Local Authorities from assembling appropriate sites for development. We will:

- ✓ Clean up the legal landscape of planning and ensure the effective operation of our planning system so that more homes can be provided in a faster manner.
- ✓ Clarify laws and Local Authorities powers on compulsory purchase orders of vacant properties.

3. Restrict short term lettings platforms

AirBnB has helped to open the tourism industry and help generate additional revenue for home owners. However globally it is having a negative impact on rent levels as more and more units are shifting into short term lets rather than secure rental tenures.

Fine Gael has not backed up its press release politics with actual resources for Local Authorities to enforce new regulations. We will back up local authorities with specific staff for enforcing new rules. In addition, a standardised approach to enforcement will be rolled out nationally and unit ownership identification strengthened.

- ✓ We will allocate €10m to fund some 200 staff to tackle the problem across Ireland.

4. Ensure Pyrite & MICA funding is fully drawn down

We will maintain existing and protect existing allocations of funding for the Pyrite Remediation scheme and MICA redress scheme over the next five years. We will ensure the details of the MICA scheme is expedited, easily accessible to affected households and funding is fully drawn down.

- ✓ We will ensure that Pyrite and MICA funding is protected and fully drawn down.

5. Put in place loan funding to help address apartment defects

The remit of Home Building Finance Ireland should be expanded to encompass loan finance to Owner Management Companies who are undertaking remedial work on defective buildings. These owners who purchased in good faith deserve additional support.

Furthermore, rogue builders should have no place in our construction sector. We will:

- ✓ Revise the remit of HBFI to expand funding to Owner Management Companies including clarity around access and conditions.
- ✓ Place a bar on the awarding of publicly funded construction project tenders should be introduced to prevent such contracts from being awarded to developers/builders or associated construction professionals found to be in serious breach of building standards or fire safety regulation.

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Helping Generation Rent

1. Launch a new deal for renters

The rental market is where the housing crisis is at its worst. The sector remains overwhelmingly the primary source of homelessness. Average rent levels have long since passed boom time peaks and are far outstripping wage levels, creating great hardship for low- and middle-income workers.

It also a major issue for our economic competitiveness,

as employees cannot find affordable places to live. FF will launch a new deal for renters, with the priority goal of dramatically increasing the supply of affordability of rental accommodation, enhancing tenant certainty and security. We will:

- ✓ Introduce a €600 rent tax credit for all private renters.
- ✓ Strengthen implementation of Rent Pressure Zones.
- ✓ Overhaul the RTB by doubling its resources to undertake active investigations into breaches of tenancy laws.
- ✓ Create a National Rent Deposit Scheme with a “life time deposit” that moves with the tenant until they withdraw it.
- ✓ Roll out a national Affordable Rent Scheme.
- ✓ Improve quality of accommodation with a Local Authority Quality Certificate.
- ✓ Ban Co-Living.

The total full year cost of these measures is €164.6m.

2. Keep landlords in the system

Many landlords are leaving the rental system further reducing supply and driving up prices. We need to attract and retain decent landlords in the rental market.

In the short term this is crucial to get to grips with the rental crisis while helping renters save up for their own place. We will:

- ✓ Treat Local Property Tax as a deductible expense to help keep landlords in the system. This will cost €20m.
- ✓ Strengthen the complaints system and penalties for rogue tenants including giving the RTB eviction powers for anti-social behaviour.

Ending Homelessness

1. Ensure new social housing units form part of the Home First Policy

The on-going failure of the Fine Gael government to resolve the homelessness crisis is an affront to the basic decency of our country. Their record of missed targets and the continued plight of families in hotel rooms is a damning indictment of government policy. Achieving some 50,000 new social housing units by 2025 will address the long-term issue of supply of affordable units for households.

It is vital that local authorities co-ordinate to ensure that these homes are made available for vulnerable households who have slipped through the administrative cracks and under severe pressure ended up homeless. The “Home First” strategy remains vital to underpinning a long-term solution to the complex factors behind many families and individuals becoming homeless. We will:

- ✓ Ensure that the required number of the 50,000 new social housing units are made available as part of the “Home First” strategy.
- ✓ Allocate adequate funding to address rough sleeping on our streets as a matter of priority by increasing homeless funding to €250m per annum.
- ✓ Launch a Housing First for Families pilot project within Homeless funding.
- ✓ Ensure young people at 18 leaving State and Foster care have fully resourced AfterCare and Transition plans so they don't end up experiencing homelessness.
- ✓ Develop and launch a National Youth Homelessness strategy to tackle the specific problems with increase in young people becoming homeless. Especially for young people leaving foster or state care.
- ✓ Set up a Homelessness Prevention Unit with the Department of Housing to develop and support effective prevention actions.

The costs of these measures is €84.5m in additional spending.

2. Increase Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment supports

Combined with the range of measures around supply, a Home First focus and rent certainty additional short-term measures are required to stem the growth the homelessness. Rent and Housing Assistance Payments must be regularly reviewed to ensure they reflect the rental market reality. Rolling reviews of these vital rental supports, particularly in high pressure urban areas, will help keep households on the edge from falling into homelessness. We will:

- ✓ Increase rent supplement levels nationally by 10% to support vulnerable households. This increase will be targeted in Dublin and other high cost rental areas. This will cost €59.1m.
- ✓ Establish a new regular review structure will be implemented to ensure the payment system is adapted to market reality.

3. End Rough sleeping

Ending the rough sleeping of homeless people on our streets is a moral and social imperative. Unfortunately, this group of people has not been a priority under Fine Gael governments. Many rough sleepers do not want to go into emergency accommodation, such as hostels, due to security and substance abuse concerns. These issues must be addressed, and the quality of hostel accommodation improved dramatically, in order to encourage people off our streets and into emergency accommodation. These are only a short-term measures and must be combined with a well-resourced Home First policy to ending homelessness. We will:

- ✓ Give HIQA a mandate to inspect standards in hostels and other emergency accommodation and implement quality improvements.
- ✓ Increase funding for Drug Free Hostels.
- ✓ Increase funding to hostels to reduce shared accommodation and ensure every guest can be given the dignity and security of their own space with a locked door.
- ✓ Work with stakeholders, case workers and homeless people on a suite of measures to encourage rough sleepers off the streets and into emergency accommodation.

4. Establish a Preventing Homelessness Fund

The best way to tackle homelessness is to prevent it. Renters in repossessed Buy to Let units are acutely vulnerable to eviction and homelessness. We need a rolling fund to purchase units, transfer them to Approved Housing Bodies and prevent evictions to ensure it does not exacerbate the homelessness crisis.

- ✓ **We will set up a rolling acquisition fund in the Housing Agency to purchase repossessed units and keep those tenants in place. At current repossession numbers we will allocate €168m to purchase all repossessed Buy to Let units.**