



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together

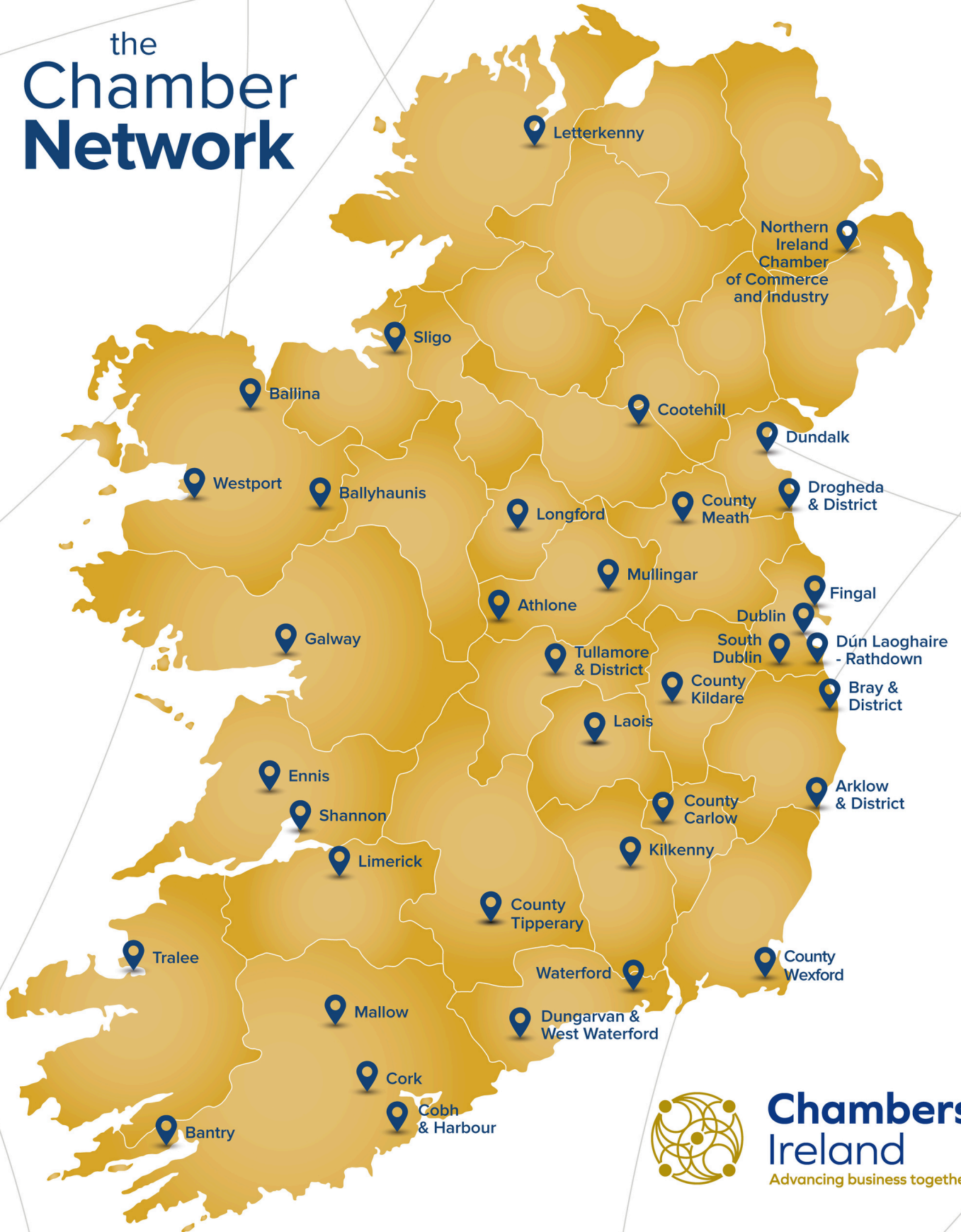
SECURING TODAY BUILDING FOR TOMORROW

Chambers Ireland's 2024 General Election Manifesto

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the Chamber Network



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together

36 Affiliated Chambers

8500+ Businesses Represented across the Country

937 Total Lobbying Returns in 2023

INTRODUCTION

When we wrote our Manifesto for the 2020 election in 2019, the threat of Brexit was the greatest geopolitical risk on the horizon. Who could have predicted that the Covid crisis was only weeks away, that war would break out in Ukraine and the Middle East causing global discord and severely disrupting supply chains and yet, in spite of all those challenges, GDP would grow by over 30% and our employment levels would be at a historic high of over 2.7 million people?

However, in that Manifesto we wrote “Underinvestment in infrastructure, particularly housing, has become a threat to our competitiveness and to the overall sustainability of our economic recovery.” The current Government has made significant progress in housing from where we were in 2019 but our collective ambition for the delivery of all the other infrastructure we require to support a growing population and workforce, sustain our competitiveness and make progress towards our Sustainable Development Goals continues to lag precariously. Now is not the time for complacency. The country is in danger of overtrading, with our infrastructure becoming less able to meet the demands placed on it. The new Government must be

relentless in identifying the problems causing this delivery abyss and establishing solutions that address those problems with alacrity. Our booming tax revenues put us in an enviable situation where financing growth and development is not a challenge. A comprehensive review of Departmental structures should also be undertaken to ensure that the structures in place are appropriate for the challenges Ireland faces in 2025, not those of our crises driven years of 2008 – 2012.

Ireland’s economic success since the 1960s was kick-started by tax policies to attract foreign direct investment. Global trends in corporate taxation now mean that Ireland must look to lead in other areas to ensure our continued competitiveness on the international stage and to improve the conditions that enable growth of indigenous businesses. Infrastructure is not the only factor driving such competitiveness and productivity. Our continued investment in education and training remains critical across a broad spectrum of third level institutions and qualifications, apprenticeships and most importantly lifelong learning. Businesses need support to upskill and reskill employees as the drive for talent and competition in recruitment has created skills shortages that are hindering business growth and development. Opportunities abound in existing sectors and in growing areas such as AI and the green economy but unless we increase our

investment in education and training we won't be able to take advantage. Business regulation must also be reduced and consolidation of our Tax and Employment Laws is now essential.

Government must be prepared to take more risk in domestic tax policy to encourage investment. The sluggish take-up of schemes such as KEEP and EIS point to overly restrictive terms. Irish Private Household deposits of €140 billion at the end of June 2024 earn little for the State in terms of DIRT or income tax and appropriately taxed investment vehicles must offer an opportunity to put some of this national asset to alternative productive use.

In an increasingly digital and interconnected world, the importance of robust defence capabilities to address cybersecurity and interconnectivity risks in Ireland cannot be overstated. As threats evolve in complexity and frequency, safeguarding our critical infrastructure, economic stability and national security demands a proactive and comprehensive approach and significantly greater investment to underpin our competitive advantage.

Since the introduction of *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government* in 2012, Local Government has

demonstrated increased capacity, capability and flexibility. This was demonstrated to great effect during the Covid crisis. We urge the incoming Government to proactively seek to devolve increased powers to Local Government to improve our national delivery capability and further engage local communities.

The next Government has a potentially unique opportunity to change the entire landscape of the economy and society. The extraordinary success of the economy and our budget surpluses provide the necessary safety net to facilitate bold decision making and enable investment to build on our success and deliver a sustainable thriving economy for our growing population. We may never have as good an opportunity again.

IAN TALBOT

Chief Executive



I. PROTECTING IRELAND'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

Protecting and preserving Ireland's existing competitive advantages should be a priority for the incoming Government to ensure continued economic, social and sustainable success. Economically, this means not only attracting and sustaining foreign direct investment (FDI) but also supporting and promoting successful indigenous Irish businesses that drive local innovation and job creation. Socially, Ireland must remain an attractive destination for businesses, talent and tourism, while also retaining its skilled workforce by investing in higher education and fostering a vibrant, inclusive society. In terms of sustainability, the government must implement a robust industrial green strategy, capitalising on Ireland's renewable energy potential, particularly in onshore and offshore wind, to secure its future as a leader in the green economy. By safeguarding these key areas, the government can ensure Ireland's long-term competitiveness and resilience on the global stage.

A. ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Fostering indigenous business growth.

Need to champion successful indigenous businesses and support more SMEs to scale and grow. Improving access to finance, offering enhanced tax incentives, supporting research and development, and offering targeted skills programmes should ensure more Irish businesses flourish and the diversification of our tax receipts into the future.

Stimulating sustained FDI investment.

Develop a strategy for long-term, sustainable growth in key target areas for future development. There should be strong fiscal incentives and a framework of supports to foster innovation, drive skills development and promote investment.

I. PROTECTING IRELAND'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

B. SOCIAL SUCCESS

Country of Céad Míle Fáilte.

A competitiveness plan of action should be implemented to showcase Ireland on a global stage to key target demographics, including businesses, investors, PhD candidates and tourists.

Talent as a key differentiator.

We need sustainable and secure funding for Irish universities to increase their global competitiveness. Introduce a comprehensive lifelong learning strategy to enable targeted skills development at all stages of someone's career journey, ensuring we upskill the population with the knowledge and skills needed for the future world of work. Unlocking the National Training Fund (NTF) to ensure adequate funding of lifelong learning should be a key priority if we want to maintain our competitive edge derived through education and training.

C. SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Capitalising on our renewable energy potential.

Introduce a holistic and more ambitious Smart Green Industrial Strategy to amalgamate and expand on the ambition of Powering Prosperity, which is Ireland's offshore wind industrial strategy; the National Hydrogen Strategy; and the White Paper on Enterprise. A Smart Green Industrial Strategy should encompass all forms of renewable energy, the development of low-carbon technologies, enhanced research and innovation, green subsidies, fiscal incentives, green public procurement, skills development and should focus extensively on energy security.

II. SECURING IRELAND'S FUTURE SUCCESS

A. ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Chambers Ireland is calling for the next Government to take a long-term view on our future growth and potential development opportunities, and to invest accordingly in essential infrastructure that will drive competitiveness.

The previous stultification of housing development and, correspondingly, insufficient investment in our electricity grid, water and wastewater treatment facilities, and transport infrastructure has resulted in unsustainable and uncoordinated growth. Our cities and towns are straining to meet demand and urban sprawl is leading to disproportionate growth and overstretched public services in certain pockets of the country, while other areas remain underdeveloped and are struggling to grow. Balanced regional development requires infrastructure investment across the country that can benefit all. Investing in our ports, grid, transport and air infrastructure will ensure greater connectivity and the opportunity to realise our potential as a global leader in renewable energy generation. The next government must be committed to taking strategic, future-proofed decisions that will see these opportunities realised in the medium to long-term. A fit-for-purpose planning system and secure and sustainable funding is critical in delivering this infrastructure. The incoming government must prioritise immediate action to identify and tackle planning inefficiencies and ensure that key infrastructure projects are deployed swiftly and effectively.

1

Ambitious housing planning.

Scale up our ambition for housing in Ireland with a new plan of action, revised targets and better accountability from all actors. We should be aiming for at least 50,000 houses annually with this serving as a minimum target, as opposed to an optimum threshold. Improving affordability of homes both to buy and rent should be a key priority.

3

Safeguarding sustainable water supplies.

To ensure sustainable supplies of clean water into the future and adequate wastewater treatment, we must increase investment in water infrastructure with the commitment of a multi-annual funding structure. Additionally, we need to support the accelerated delivery of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Water Supply Project and the Greater Dublin Drainage Project.

5

Connecting all corners of Ireland.

Focus on delivering reliable and sustainable public transport to ensure greater connectivity to all regions across the island. This will support regional economic growth, tourism, trade, worker and learner mobility and decarbonisation. Additionally, accelerate the delivery of keystone urban infrastructure transport programmes that have already been committed to.

7

Secure funding for future growth.

State bodies that are responsible for delivering infrastructure of national importance should have multi-year funding allocations to streamline delivery and mitigate delays on essential projects.

2

Ensuring a future-proofed grid.

We need a state-of-the-art electricity grid that can transport energy from where it is made to where it is needed. Front-loading investment and development now will mean that grid reinforcements and upgrades can scale to meet anticipated demand in future years based on expected population growth and increasing demands from industry.

4

Bolstering a national ports' network.

Implement a robust and ambitious strategy for Irish ports, with a specific focus on delivery of offshore wind farm construction.

6

A renewed focus on aviation.

Review and implement a new National Aviation Policy. The current policy was created in 2015 and is now not fit for purpose. We need an aviation policy that is future-proofed to ensure our global connectivity, supports the growth of the aviation sector and enhances our economic development.

8

Supporting sustainable planning.

The planning process needs urgent reform to ensure that essential infrastructure and other critical projects can progress without uncertainty and delays.

II. SECURING IRELAND'S FUTURE SUCCESS

B. TACKLING THE COST OF DOING BUSINESS

Addressing the rising costs facing businesses will be essential in ensuring the continued success and competitiveness of Irish enterprises. The growth and development of businesses depends upon a supportive regulatory environment, pro-business policies, and accessible financial incentives and supports. In recent years, businesses have faced increased financial pressure due to Brexit, COVID-19, geopolitical instability, inflation and evolving employment legislation. To alleviate these burdens, the government should prioritise business taxation reform, ensuring the tax system remains fair and supportive of growth, particularly for SMEs. A review of employment legislation is also essential to balance worker protections with the need for flexibility in a challenging economic environment. Additionally, the rigorous application of the SME test and the "think small first" principle in policymaking is critical to ensuring that the needs of smaller businesses are considered and supported, allowing them to thrive amid complex challenges. By tackling these issues, the government can create a more favourable business environment and drive innovation, investment and job creation.

1

Reforming the business taxation landscape.

Complete a thorough review of business taxation and introduce key reforms that will stimulate business growth. This should include reform of the Employment Investment Incentive Scheme (EIS), the Research and Development (R&D) tax credit, Capital Gains Tax, Accelerated Capital Allowances and the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP). The legislation underpinning our tax system has now become excessively complicated and should be consolidated into a new single Act as last undertaken in 1997.

3

Rigorous SME Test application.

Incorporate the 'Think Small First' principle across all Government departments by introducing the SME test on a legislative basis to ensure its rigorous application across government when rolling out new legislation that may have an impact on SMEs. While positive action has been taken to roll out an enhanced SME test, ensuring it is widely applied and reporting on its impact will enable greater transparency and accountability of all departments, as well as increasing business confidence.

2

Employment legislation review.

Carry out a comprehensive review of all employment legislation that has been introduced over the past three years and measure the cumulative impact on businesses before implementing a programme of supports and remedial action to assist those businesses and sectors most impacted. This should include statutory sick leave, increases to the minimum wage, the phase-in of the living wage, pension auto-enrolment, increased parental leave and work-life balance rights. Consolidating employment legislation would also ensure greater clarity for all employers in understanding their obligations.

4

Increasing access to finance.

Government policy in relation to use of the tax system to incentivise investment in indigenous business is too risk averse, resulting in over €140 billion in low or non-interest-bearing deposits in our banking system. The Funds Review Report should be implemented particularly to incentivise Retail Investment to support investment in Irish businesses. Greater opportunities in this area will improve access to finance for indigenous businesses and increase taxes paid as a result of consequent growth.

II. SECURING IRELAND'S FUTURE SUCCESS

C. A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE RESILIENCE

Building a sustainable future will require the next Irish government to safeguard and enhance key sectors if we want to realise a safe, innovative and supportive future for all. Ensuring a skilled workforce is essential for maintaining competitiveness, particularly in emerging fields like technology and artificial intelligence, which will drive economic growth and innovation. Equally critical is taking decisive climate action to meet environmental targets and protect against the long-term risks of climate change, ensuring a sustainable future for both the economy and society. Investment in childcare is necessary to support working families, promote gender equality and ensure the country's labour force remains robust and adaptable. Additionally, strengthening national defence is vital for safeguarding Ireland's security, particularly in the face of evolving global threats, including cyber-attacks. By addressing these challenges holistically, the government can build a resilient foundation that supports economic, social, and environmental stability for generations to come.

1

Fostering skills for the future.

Align jobs and skills strategies with national industrial policy and labour market needs, informed by skills intelligence and strategic foresight and underpinned by sound funding opportunities, with specific measures targeted towards SMEs.

3

Defending our critical national infrastructure.

Develop a national defence strategy and increase investment in defence to protect against the risks posed by external forces to our energy, communications and technology infrastructure. Additionally, allocate enhanced funding and resourcing to strengthen our national cybersecurity competencies. This should include specific resources to support smaller businesses in adopting cybersecurity technology to protect against risks faced by their business.

5

Promoting business innovation.

Introduce targeted supports for SMEs to adapt to the development and advancement of AI technologies that can streamline processes and improve productivity. This should include upskilling programmes, incentives for adopting new technologies and centralised support for researching and disseminating information on the latest advancements.

7

Future-focused climate action.

Develop ambitious post-2030 decarbonisation targets and map out a plan for accelerating our ambition over the next five years.

2

Global talent attraction.

With Ireland at full employment, we need to increase our attractiveness to international talent by rolling-out the single permit system for living and working in Ireland without delay, reevaluating the salary thresholds for non-EU workers, and introducing targeted tax credits and other measures to attract Irish professionals working abroad back to Ireland.

4

Securing sustainable childcare funding.

Commit to a 5-year programme of continued investment in Early Years and School Age Childcare. Programmes like the ECCE, NCS and AIM have all enabled children and families to benefit from quality early years and school age childcare provision. These initiatives require sustainable funding and a commitment to ongoing improvement.

6

Diversifying the energy mix

Ensuring energy security should be a key priority for the next Government. Allocate funding and resources to support research and development of innovative energy technologies like green hydrogen and biomethane. Additionally, accelerate the pace of development and implementation of wind energy generation projects by streamlining the planning and consenting process.

II. SECURING IRELAND'S FUTURE SUCCESS

D. FOSTERING THRIVING TOWNS AND CITIES

The revitalisation of towns and cities to create vibrant, thriving communities where people feel safe and connected demands a holistic and strategic multi-agency approach over the next five years. Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour is crucial to fostering a sense of security and wellbeing, encouraging both residents and businesses to invest in urban spaces. Bringing more people back to high streets requires targeted support for local businesses, along with initiatives to enhance footfall and retail diversity. Investing in social infrastructure, such as parks, cultural amenities and community spaces, will improve the quality of life and foster social cohesion. Addressing vacancy and dereliction is also essential to restoring the vitality of town centres, turning unused spaces into hubs for housing, commerce and community engagement. A focus on these priorities will help rejuvenate Ireland's urban environments, making them attractive places to live, work, visit and do business.

1

Safeguarding towns and cities.

Undertake a review of Garda resourcing to realign needs with population growth and densification. Allocate additional funding to meet community needs and increase Garda presence in our towns and cities across the country. Recruitment drives for additional Gardaí should be innovative in order to attract more people to the profession.

3

Improving quality of life.

Carry out a detailed review of social infrastructure investment across the country and realign investment with population growth. Provisions for health, childcare, education, leisure and recreation, the postal sector, culture and community infrastructure must be adequately funded and aligned with demand.

5

Streamlining Town Centre First.

Increase the ambition of the Town Centre First policy by rolling it out to more towns across the country and offer greater supports to the established Town Teams to learn from one another and implement best practice solutions for common issues.

7

Enhancing the role of Local Government.

The restructuring of Local Government, as set out in *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*, has been largely successfully delivered. However, the challenges faced by the economy in 2012 when this was launched were fundamentally different to the challenges presented now and there is an opportunity to further expand local democracy. The incoming Government should proactively seek to devolve increased powers to Local Government to improve our national delivery capability and further engage local communities.

2

Revitalising the high street.

Provide additional funding to revitalize our town and city centres. Tackling vacancy and dereliction, investment in the public realm, supports for retail and hospitality, fostering greater social cohesion, financial support for local post offices and improving safety will increase foot traffic and bring visitors back to urban centres.

4

Support for parents of children with a disability or additional needs.

Allocate funding to provide free professional training for parents who are caring for their children with a disability or additional needs in disciplines that support their children, such as Occupational Therapy, Speech & Language Therapy, Psychology, Special Needs Assistant.

6

Reforming the Living Cities Initiative.

To support the sustainable development of cities and communities, the Living City Initiative (LCI) should be extended and established on a long-term basis until 2035. This extension provides stability and encourages long-term planning for construction projects. Additionally, it should be extended to all high-growth cities and towns.

II. SECURING IRELAND'S FUTURE SUCCESS

E. STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Ireland's place in the global economy is dependent upon strong working relationships being forged with the EU, UK and international partners to secure our economic stability and geopolitical interests. As an open and trade-dependent economy, Ireland relies heavily on the EU single market and fostering positive relations with the EU is essential for continued access to key markets and influence on regulatory policy. Maintaining a constructive partnership with the UK is equally critical, particularly post-Brexit, as trade, tourism and shared security concerns are deeply intertwined. On a broader scale, active engagement with international neighbours strengthens Ireland's global standing, facilitates foreign investment and enhances collaboration on global challenges such as climate change, technology regulation and security. By nurturing these relationships, the Irish government can safeguard its strategic interests, enhance its influence, and ensure long-term prosperity.

1

Strengthening engagement and leveraging our EU Opportunities.

Prioritise trade growth and make Free Trade Agreements more accessible for SMEs. Support the delivery of a Capital Markets Union and Banking Union, to secure greater access to finance for businesses.

2

Cross-Border Collaboration.

The creation of an all-island skills, innovation, and energy market requires greater cooperation between stakeholders on both sides of the border in order to realise the potential opportunities. Cross-border income tax issues should be resolved. Additionally, addressing obstacles to trade, particularly in the services sector, should be a key priority.

3

Enhanced International Cooperation.

Support strategic trade missions by facilitating financial incentives and export promotion initiatives between Chambers of Commerce, the DFA and DETE. Increase funding for international trade research and analysis to better identify emerging opportunities and risks in global markets, allowing for more informed and strategic decision-making. Enhance trade infrastructure by modernising customs processes and reducing administrative burdens to facilitate faster and more efficient trade with international partners.

CHAMBERS IRELAND

AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

The Sustainable Development Goals are an urgent call for action which acknowledge the importance of partnership between all developed and developing countries.

Chambers Ireland and ICC Ireland, together with our nationwide network of affiliated Chambers, have unanimously pledged to support the Goals. This support was acknowledged by the Irish Government in 2023 when Chambers Ireland were appointed to be a national Sustainable Development Goals' Champion for 2023 – 2024, and in 2024 when we were appointed as SDG Ambassador. Our aim is to help businesses realise the opportunities the Sustainable Development Goals create and provide companies with the confidence that meaningful results can be readily achieved, positively impacting businesses, communities and livelihoods.

We have worked with our Chamber Network and our Sustainable Business Council to help to educate the 10,000+ businesses we represent about the Sustainable Development Goals.

All of our policy outputs, including this Manifesto, are aligned with our selected Sustainable Development Goals. In the accompanying table, we have aligned each of our Calls to Action with the relevant Goals that we promote.



5 GENDER EQUALITY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES




















13 CLIMATE ACTION



| | 5 GENDER EQUALITY  | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH  | 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES  | 13 CLIMATE ACTION  |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Fostering indigenous business growth. |  |  |  | | |
| Stimulating sustained FDI investment. | |  |  | | |
| Country of Céad Míle Fáilte. |  |  |  |  | |
| Talent as a key differentiator. | |  |  |  | |
| Capitalising on our renewable energy potential. | | |  | |  |
| Ambitious housing planning. | |  |  |  | |
| Ensuring a future-proofed grid. | | |  |  |  |
| Safeguarding sustainable water supplies | | |  |  |  |
| Bolstering a national ports' network. | | |  | |  |
| Connecting all corners of Ireland. | |  |  |  |  |
| A renewed focus on aviation. | |  |  | | |
| Secure funding for future growth. | | |  | | |
| Supporting sustainable planning. | | |  | | |
| Reforming the business taxation landscape. | |  | | | |

| | 5 GENDER EQUALITY  | 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH  | 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  | 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES  | 13 CLIMATE ACTION  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Employment legislation review. | |  | | | |
| Rigorous SME Test application. | |  | | | |
| Increasing access to finance. | |  | | | |
| Fostering skills for the future. | |  |  | |  |
| Global talent attraction. | |  |  |  | |
| Securing sustainable childcare funding. |  |  | |  | |
| Defending our critical national infrastructure. | |  |  | | |
| Promoting business innovation. | |  |  | | |
| Diversifying the energy mix | |  |  |  |  |
| Future-focused climate action. | | | |  |  |
| Safeguarding towns and cities. | | | |  | |
| Revitalising the high street. | |  | |  | |
| Improving quality of life. |  |  |  |  | |
| Support for parents of children with a disability or additional needs. |  |  | |  | |

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| Reforming the Living Cities Initiative. | | |  |  | |
| Streamlining Town Centre First. | | |  |  | |
| Enhancing the role of Local Government. | | |  |  | |
| Strengthening engagement and leveraging our EU Opportunities. | |  |  | | |
| Cross-Border Collaboration. | |  |  | | |
| Enhanced International Cooperation. | |  |  | | |

ABOUT CHAMBERS IRELAND



**Chambers
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Advancing business together

Chambers Ireland is Ireland's largest business network, with a geographic reach and membership base that spans cities, towns, and communities nationwide.

Our member chambers are at the heart of their local business communities. They work closely with all of their stakeholders to help the local business environment to thrive for everyone doing business in it.

Businesses of all types are members of chambers – from the very largest to the smallest, and across all sectors. Our chambers are focused on the needs of their city, town or county and engage with everyone who is open to business. A thriving business environment needs to have a diversity of industries and businesses at different stages of development if it is to be robust and adaptable in our increasingly 'shock-prone' world.

Our network comes together to lobby government on their shared challenges. This ensures that the challenges which businesses face are heard throughout the country and that every politician, Oireachtas member, and official understands how they are affecting businesses in their region.

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**AFFILIATED
CHAMBERS**

+8500

**BUSINESSES
REPRESENTED**

937

**LOBBYING
RETURNS IN 2023**



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