



DEFENCE, SECURITY AND NEUTRALITY

**Our plan to rebuild our
Defence Forces and strengthen
our national security.**

Labour 



DEFENCE, SECURITY AND NEUTRALITY

Our mission is to restore our Defence Forces, strengthen our national security, address historic under-resourcing, and protect our position of military neutrality.

After years of neglect our Defence Forces are in crisis, and the greatest threat to our national security is the falling strength of our army, navy and air corps. Labour will reverse this and rebuild our Defence Forces so that Ireland is prepared for current and future threats and ready to continue our proud role in UN peacekeeping missions.

REBUILD OUR DEFENCE FORCES

The report of the Commission on the Defence Forces provided a blueprint for rebuilding our Defence Forces, and Labour will invest to meet the Level of Ambition 2 to enhance our military capabilities and continue our strong record of peacekeeping missions.

The establishment strength of the Permanent Defence Forces is 9,600 but at the end of August was 23% below that, with 7,426 personnel across the three services. Our immediate first goal will be to implement a workforce strategy to meet the current agreed strength of 9,600, and a medium-term plan to grow that by a further 2,000.

The housing crisis permeates all aspects of Irish life and providing affordable homes for Defence Forces personnel is a key way to boost recruitment. Vacant properties in the Curragh and on other sites should be brought back into use to house serving members and their families. Labour will also establish a partnership between the Department of Defence and AHBs to develop non-essential sites in the Defence Forces land bank to house service members and their families.

Our Defence Forces must be prepared for the impact of climate change in responding to emergencies and natural disasters, not just at home but also while operating overseas. Future investment in equipment and facilities must also be focused on achieving carbon neutrality.

To rebuild our Defence Forces, Labour will:

- » Develop a workforce recruitment and retention strategy to reach the current establishment strength of 9,500 and then progress plans to recruit an additional 2,000 Defence Forces personnel within the lifetime of the next government.
- » Reform the command-and-control structures of the Defence Forces to empower the Chief of Staff, and provide appointments for the representative associations to the External Oversight Body and make it fully inclusive.
- » Increase investment in our Defence Forces to meet the Level of Ambition 2 as outlined in the Commission on the Defence Forces report, with an accelerated upgrade of the naval fleet and investment in primary radar capability.

- » Ensure barracks and associated facilities are upgraded and maintained to the highest standards, bring vacant residential properties back into use, and work with AHBs to develop new housing on Defence Forces land for service members and their families.
- » Provide suitable facilities in Dublin before the location of the new inshore patrol vessels there.
- » Deploy unmanned aerial and sea drone technologies to improve monitoring and security in our territorial waters.
- » Carry out an evaluation of the Air Corps requirements to protect Irish airspace and provide intercept capability, including the projected cost and infrastructure requirements.
- » Establish expert led reviews on whether to transfer responsibility for the Irish Coast Guard and National Cyber Security Centre to the Department of Defence.
- » Develop and implement plans for carbon neutrality and prepare for the impact of climate change on the operating environment at home and abroad.
- » Undertake a strategy to encourage more women into the Defence Forces, aiming for a target of 35% women participation.
- » Address issues of sexual assault, discrimination, harassment and bullying in the Defence Forces, as brought forward by the Women of Honor group, and work towards implementing outstanding IRG recommendations.

IMPROVE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Labour will strengthen the roles of the representative associations as key stakeholders with an entitlement to proper engagement, consultation and meaningful dialogue with the military authorities, Department, and Minister of Defence in advance of decisions being made. The long overdue affiliation of Defence Forces representative associations to ICTU is welcome but overly onerous restrictions have been placed on members, and Labour will review these to ensure full affiliate membership for Defence Force representative associations.

A significant barrier to recruitment and retention in the Defence Forces, particularly for women, is the absence of a sufficient work-life balance. The Defence Forces are still excluded from the provisions of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997. Labour will address this while acknowledging that some activities may require exemptions. These exemptions will be mitigated by appropriate protections in agreement with the representative associations, such as Time Off in Lieu (TOIL), additional annual leave in certain streams, and family reunion flights for personnel deployed overseas.



Labour will remove the current policy of not paying Defence Force personnel overtime for working outside of normal working hours. This will enhance recruitment to the service, reestablish the Defence Forces as a competitive employer of choice, and ensure retention is prioritised for those personnel who have made the choice to remain in the Defence Forces and in the service of the State.

To improve terms and conditions, Labour will:

- » Establish an independent review, in consultation with the representative associations of pay and allowances including duty rates and pension coverage to determine barriers to recruitment and retention, benchmark to international comparators, and implement recommended pay rises and pension changes.
- » The review will include the need for an occupational supplementary pension as a key retention measure for post-2013 Defence Force members, and applicable to other frontline uniformed services such as An Garda Síochána, the Prison Service and Fire Service, to bridge the gap for those forced to retire early.
- » Improve the work-life balance of Defence Forces personnel by implementing the working time directive and pay overtime for working outside normal hours.
- » In consultation with the representative organisations, update the Defence Force Regulations (Administrative Instructions) C.S.4, revise on an annual basis to ensure more flexibility and review technical pay to improve retention.
- » As recommended by the Commission of the Defence Forces, introduce Long Service Increments to the pay scales of all ranks of enlisted personnel.
- » Fast track the introduction of Lance Corporal Rank following acceptance by the Commission of the Defence Forces.
- » Establish workable family friendly policies to include the provision of childcare facilities for those serving both at home and overseas.

RECOGNISE NATIONAL SERVICE

Ireland must do more to recognise and reward the contributions of veteran Defence Force members. We will develop a National Veterans Policy that will clearly and respectfully establish the State's obligations to those who have served in our armed forces. We will work with veterans, the Defence Forces representative associations and other stakeholder groups such as ONE to ensure that our ex-servicemen and women are supported in post-military life. The strength of the Reserve Defence Force needs to be swiftly rebuilt and skills in areas such as cyber defence and security will be fully incorporated.

To recognise national service, Labour will:

- » Introduce an automatic medical card for any member of the Defence Forces who must leave the service due to medical reasons.
- » Work with the different veterans' groups and other stakeholders to create a National Veterans Policy that clearly and respectfully establishes the State's obligations to those who have served in our armed forces.
- » Establish an Office for Veterans Affairs, support and enhance Veteran Homes and Support Centres, and deliver dedicated mental health supports.
- » Initiate a review of the policy for the awarding of medals to all ranks of the Defence Forces, removing administrative barriers to recognition of distinguished and meritorious service, both current and posthumous.
- » Reinvigorate the Reserve Defence Forces through improved benefits for volunteers and establish a Cyber Defence Reserve within the RDF.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Ireland needs to overhaul our national security structures and underpin the National Security Analysis Centre in the Department of An Taoiseach with legislation. There is a growing lack of democratic scrutiny and oversight despite recent alarming developments such as the HSE cyber-attack, the impact of the pandemic and rising global tensions. The veil of secrecy should be partially lifted with national security briefings provided to Opposition Leaders as is routine in many neighbouring countries.

To strengthen our national security, Labour will:

- » Publish a National Security Strategy, place the National Security Analysis Centre (NSAC) on a statutory footing as an accountable agency, and review the progress of relevant recommendations from the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, and the Commission on the Defence Forces.
- » Develop an Oireachtas accountability mechanism to oversee the National Security strategy, NSAC and the security roles of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána.
- » Establish an independent Examiner of Terrorist and Serious Crime legislation.
- » Review the vulnerabilities from the use of CCTV and other technologies in the Houses of the Oireachtas, other State properties and high security locations.



NEUTRALITY

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, war in the Middle East and the increased prevalence of hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors has brought security considerations to the fore. Ireland should not compromise on our long-established position of military neutrality but equally, we should not compromise on our values and their promotion – we cannot be politically neutral in the face of imperial aggression or genocide.

Labour is committed to retaining and protecting Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality by amending our Constitution. Our proposed wording published in 2002 if adopted would confirm Ireland may accept any obligation arising from membership of the UN or from action taken under its aegis but shall not be a member of any organisation or party to any international agreement or arrangement whereby it becomes bound to commit its military aid to the defence of another state.

Labour recognises the incredible work done by the Irish Defence Forces over many decades in cultivating and maintaining an excellent reputation abroad on UN peacekeeping missions and we want to ensure that that reputation endures. Our position of neutrality and support of the Triple Lock protects our Defence Forces, whereby they would only serve as representatives of the global community approved through the UN rather than acting as just for a part of the world.

To protect our neutrality, Labour will:

- » Maintain and protect Ireland's long-standing position of military neutrality and support a referendum to enshrine it in our Constitution.
- » Retain the Triple Lock for approval of peacekeeping missions under the UN with changes to allow for larger, short-term deployments of personnel for emergency evacuations and protection missions, up from the current limit of twelve.
- » Ensure Irish air space and airports are not used for the transport of munitions and weapons of war.



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