

# **Green Party Irish Language Policy**

## **1. INTRODUCTION: The Irish Language and the principles of the Green Party**

The protection of Irish is in keeping with the founding principles of the Green Party. We believe that the conservation of resources is vital for a sustainable society. The Irish language is an important cultural resource for the people of Ireland, but it is a vulnerable and damaged resource which needs to be protected. As the caretakers of the Earth, we have the responsibility to pass on its resources, including its cultural and linguistic resources, in a fit and healthy state to future generations.

Linguists argue that of the 6,000 - 7,000 languages on Earth, ninety percent of them are in danger of becoming extinct within the next century. Fifty percent of the world's languages are moribund, which means that they are no longer spoken naturally by children. Although there are about 200 indigenous languages in North America, most of them are in danger of extinction. This is a disaster of culture and identity which is occurring unknown to most of the public. It is thought that on average one language each fortnight becomes extinct. It is not known whether or not Irish will be among these casualties in the future. Although 1.77 million people in the Republic, or 41.4 percent of the population, claim to be speakers, and although 12.2 percent say they use Irish daily within the education system, only 77,185 people, or 1.8 percent, use Irish daily outside the education system and only one out of three of those live in the Gaeltacht (Census 2011). Irish is declining as the community language of the Gaeltacht and is often discussed by international scholars investigating language decline and death.

Greens cannot ignore this assault on the Earth's cultural resources. Since its foundation, the Green Party has paid particular attention to the importance of Irish as one of Ireland's cultural resources. Based on the principles of ecology and of language policy, this policy paper aims to address this problem. The following is a detailed description of the measures proposed by the party to engage with the question of the Irish language.

## **2. Irish and the State**

As the Green Party is an all-Ireland party, it is necessary to consider the official language policies of two states. Due to historical reasons, there is a significant difference between the Irish language policy pursued by the Irish state and the British state to date and, despite recent political developments in Northern Ireland, it is likely that the differences will remain for some time. Historically, the southern state extended official support for the promotion of Irish (although there was a gap between the official view and action) but the northern state was hostile until very recently.

- *National and local strategy for Irish:*
- The Green Party supports the integrated and coordinated implementation of the National 20 Year Strategy for Irish, a process which is very much lacking at the moment. This Strategy is based on international good practice in language planning and policy and the Green Party contributed to its development. We believe that it is a crucial plan that will contribute greatly to the position of the language if it is applied properly.
- In order to ensure that future national and local strategies for Irish will be renewed regularly, the Green Party requests that the process be given a statutory basis in the future (as is the case in Scotland and Wales) and that the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht be given the task of preparing and of implementing national, Gaeltacht and local (outside Gaeltacht) strategies in the future.

*b. Language legislation:*

- The Green Party calls for a comprehensive increase in the amount and standard of Irish language services offered by the state to people who wish to conduct their business in Irish. Therefore, the Green Party strongly supports the full implementation of the Official Languages Act in the Republic and the campaign for the Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland, something which was promised in the St. Andrew's Agreement in 2006. We believe that any review of the Official Languages Act should strengthen rather than weaken and reduce Irish language rights and services and ensure that they are provided without question or condition. We also believe that the Office of the Language Commissioner should remain independent in order to ensure its effectiveness.
- The Green Party supports the Canadian approach to bilingual service provision, 'active offer'. According to this approach, public bodies actively and continuously publicise their bilingual services, so that the minority language community will understand that they are available without difficulty. This approach is not used at present, and undermines the effectiveness of the Official Languages Act.
- In order to show strong political leadership regarding the legislation, the Green Party calls for the establishment of an Irish Language Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach, in order to ensure that the Official Languages Act is implemented in every part of government in the Republic.

- Given the high number of errors in the Irish text on official signage (particularly road signage) throughout the country, the Green Party calls for additional powers to be given to the Language Commissioner in order to ensure that all public signage in Irish is spelled correctly.
- Irish language public services can be provided in two primary ways: (a) by the translation of official documents etc. and (b) by the recruitment of Irish speakers in public bodies. The Green Party acknowledges that (b) is the most efficient way, in terms of expense and of language, to provide Irish language services but that (a) will be necessary until enough bilingual public workers are employed. In order to ensure a high standard of Irish in any translated material, the Green Party requests that government departments do not use translators who do not have the official seal of Foras na Gaeilge (further information available at [www.gaeilge.ie](http://www.gaeilge.ie)).

*c. The State and the Irish language sector*

- In the light of research on the Irish language voluntary sector, the Green Party urges that the sector's structure be reviewed comprehensively and that the relationship (both funding and responsibilities) between Foras na Gaeilge, Údarás na Gaeltachta and the various voluntary Irish language bodies around the country be examined in order to ensure that the Exchequer money spent on the promotion of Irish is spent in a more effective, more coordinated and more focussed manner.

### **3. The Irish Language in Education**

*a. The Irish language at school:*

- The Green Party calls for a comprehensive review of the teaching and learning of Irish at primary and post-primary level, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland (see also Part K(9) of the Education Policy). The cross-border body, Foras na Gaeilge (which has statutory responsibility for Irish language education) should commission this review, in co-operation with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in the Republic and the CCEA in Northern Ireland (NI Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment), together with other shareholders.
- Until the above review reveals that another path of action should be pursued, the Green Party supports Conradh na Gaeilge's demands for the improvement of the teaching of Irish (Republic only), provided that the measures have the support of teachers and parents:

- That one subject in addition to Irish be taught through Irish to every child at primary school. This would be piloted in schools which are not Gaelscoileanna and extended gradually throughout the country.
- That two Irish language syllabi be developed at post-primary level: 'Irish Language' and 'Irish Language Literature'. In the examinations of the course 'Irish Language', the pupils' spoken, written, understanding and writing skills would be examined, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning. The course 'Irish Language Literature' would be made available to pupils who show particular ability in Irish.
- Although the Green Party recognises the importance of oral skills, it urges that the education system in both parts of Ireland pay equal attention to the other language skills: reading, writing and understanding, particularly given concerns over poor levels of literacy in Irish.
- Based on international research on language acquisition, the Green Party strongly supports Irish language immersion education at every level of education in Ireland, north and south, including early immersion education. The party requests that additional research be carried out into immersion education in Ireland, as requested by Gaelscoileanna, Foras na Gaeilge and An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (council for Irish-medium and Gaeltacht education).

*b. Teacher training*

- The Green Party calls for a plan for Irish language in-service courses for primary and post-primary teachers. Included in this plan would be Irish language renewal courses and methodology for Irish in Gaelscoileanna, Gaeltacht and other schools.

*c. Other educational services*

- The Green Party calls on the government to ensure that the National Centre for Irish Language Education is established as soon as possible in Baile Bhuirne in the Cork Gaeltacht, as promised for several years (see 5 below).
- The Green Party calls for the provision of Irish language services for children with learning difficulties and that their particular linguistic requirements be catered for, particularly in the Gaeltacht (see 5 below).

- Homework clubs for Irish-speaking teenagers or for teenagers learning Irish should be established in Irish Language Centres in urban areas throughout the country (see 6 below)
- The Green Party requests that a national system of scholarships be established to allow young people to attend Irish language summer colleges. This would be administered by the Department of Education and Science.
- The Green Party recognises that a large number of adults in Ireland wish to renew their Irish. Based on the model of the translators' seal, the Green Party calls on Foras na Gaeilge, in co-operation with stakeholders such as the Languages Centre in Maynooth University, to accredit a national adult education system for Irish in order to ensure the provision of top quality Irish language courses for adults throughout the country.
- The Green Party calls on the Department of Finance to introduce tax incentives for adults who learn Irish in the adult education system or who wish to spend time in the Gaeltacht for this purpose.

## **4. Media**

### *a. Television:*

- The Green Party supports the increase in the grant for TG4 and calls on government to ensure that it is index-linked.
- The Green Party calls on TG4 to broadcast more programmes aimed at learners of Irish. Programmes already broadcast could be rebroadcast as part of this.
- The Green Party recognises that TG4's budget is inadequate to provide a full Irish language television service and therefore, that it must broadcast programmes in English too. However, in order to protect the station's Irish language ethos, the Green Party calls on TG4 to use its additional resources to provide Irish language subtitles as a choice on as many of its programmes as possible, as is the policy of S4C in Wales.
- The Green Party calls on BBC Northern Ireland to increase its provision of Irish language television programmes.

*b. Other services:*

- The Green Party recognises the importance of RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta to the Irish language community in Ireland and abroad. It calls on government to ensure that RnaG's financial base is index-linked.
- The Green Party supports a broadcasting policy which ensures that every public and private broadcaster in the Republic broadcasts a reasonable amount of Irish, and that BBC Northern Ireland will increase its Irish language broadcasts. The Green Party calls for the re-establishment of the Irish Language Unit within the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland in order to review the amount, type and standard of Irish language radio and television programmes.

## **5. Irish in the Community: Gaeltacht**

- Of the total Gaeltacht population (96,628), 66,238 people or 68.5 percent are Irish speakers. Only 23,175 people, or 24.0 percent of the population of the Gaeltacht, use Irish daily outside the education system (Census 2011). Irish is still a community language in places and the following are the strong Gaeltacht areas: Northwest Donegal (around Gaoth Dobhair); South Conamara (from An Spidéal to Carna); West Kerry (west of An Daingean) and the Aran Islands. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 people live in areas in which Irish is the dominant community language in nearly all social domains within the community. There are between 5,000 and 10,000 Irish speakers in areas where the language is used by a significant proportion of the population in a limited number of social domains.
- The extinction of Irish as a living community language, passed on from generation to generation, is staring us in the face in the same way as the threat of severe climate change from CO2 emissions is threatening the physical environment in which we live. An emergency action plan for the Gaeltacht must be drawn up and implemented, in order to combat the further erosion of Irish in the Gaeltacht areas in which it is still used. The Green Party reiterates that this is a 'green' argument and that the protection of the Irish language and culture cannot be separated from environmental protection.
- The Green Party welcomes the many recommendations of the major study *Staideár Cuimsitheach Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht* and requests that they be implemented. The Party asks the government to pay particular attention to the recommendations regarding Family Support Centres and Youth Services, in light of the importance of young people for language maintenance.

- The Green Party calls on the government to implement the legislative amendments required to create three Gaeltacht categories: A, B and C, according to the level of daily Irish speakers in each area. Those areas in which Irish is used regularly by most of the community should be prioritised. No area which does not satisfy certain linguistic criteria should be given Gaeltacht status: it should be a requirement that Irish is used as a common language of communication within the community: in households, schools, social networks and other community institutions.
- The Green Party supports the demand that an Education Board for the Gaeltacht be established with responsibility for all levels of education from pre-school to post-primary. The Board would be granted the same statutory functions and powers as an Education and Training Board, with regard to hiring of teachers, in-service training and the organisation and management of schools. It is recommended that responsibility for Gaeltacht and all-Irish education be given to a Minister of State in the Department of Education.
- Gaeltacht schools should ensure that Gaeltacht students are given a deeper understanding of their own dialect, as well as appropriate knowledge of the standard language (An Caighdeán Oifigiúil). The Education Board for the Gaeltacht would have a role in that regard.
- The Green Party calls on the government to advance the establishment of the National Centre for Gaeltacht Education in Baile Bhuirne in the Cork Gaeltacht, as has been promised for several years (see 3 above).
- The Green Party recommends that a special division of Údarás na Gaeltachta be established whose function would be the management of housing issues in the Gaeltacht in order to protect Irish.
- The Green Party calls for the speedy introduction of a legislative amendment so that the functions of Údarás na Gaeltachta are broadened from industrialisation to social, cultural and linguistic matters. This demand is in keeping with the wishes of the Gaeltacht community for many years and that amendment/reform must be based on consultation with the Gaeltacht/Irish language community and their wishes. The Green Party does not believe that this was achieved with the 2012 Gaeltacht Act and the party agrees with the unhappiness of the Irish-speaking community and language planners with this particular piece of legislation.

- The Green Party calls for the establishment of a teacher training college in the Gaeltacht, for fluent Irish speakers, which would be run through the medium of Irish and would in the main train primary teachers to teach in Gaeltacht schools as well as Gaelscoileanna.
- The Green Party calls for resources to be made available to encourage the development of youth culture through the medium of Irish in Gaeltacht areas and in third level colleges throughout the country.

## **6. Irish in the Community: outside the Gaeltacht**

- The Green Party recognises the pioneering work of the Irish language voluntary sector on the promotion of Irish outside the Gaeltacht.
- In order to ensure that those people who wish to increase their knowledge of Irish, or those who require services in Irish may better be served, the Green Party recommends the establishment of a national network of Irish Language Centres in every urban centre in Ireland which contains a substantial number of Irish speakers (according to the Census – both Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland). A wide range of Irish language services would be provided in each Centre: babysitting; translation; advice on use of Irish in business; Irish language classes; homework clubs; advice on raising children in Irish etc. Such a similar system already exists in Wales.

## **7. Irish and Immigrants**

- The Green Party believes that the Irish language should be available to everyone, regardless of race, ethnic background or nationality. The Green Party does not want Irish to be used as a racist tool against immigrants and therefore the party calls for the positive promotion of Irish amongst those communities.
- The Green Party calls on the Irish language organisations to appoint an Officer with responsibility for promoting Irish among the immigrant communities.
- The Green Party calls on the government to provide Irish language classes, free of charge, to all immigrants who request them, as is the case with English language classes at present.

- The Green Party supports the production of multilingual booklets, in Irish and in immigrant languages, so that immigrant communities can access basic Irish language phrases.
- The Green Party asks the Department of Justice to ensure that anyone wishing to apply for Irish citizenship can do a proficiency examination in either Irish or English and that those choosing the Irish examination will be fully facilitated in their choice.

## **8. Irish and Information Technology**

- The Green Party recognises the central role of information technology in Irish language learning among the current generation.
- The Green Party recognises that the Internet is as important a medium as television for language learning and that it is a very important tool for the future development of the Irish language.
- The Green Party supports the work of Foras na Gaeilge in the development of information technology for the Irish language.

## **9. Irish in the European Union**

- The Green Party supports the enhanced status of Irish as an official working language of the European Union, and will work to ensure that the status is implemented in full and that the derogation of that full status which is currently in place be lifted. It will support any educational or training initiatives aimed at increasing the supply of trained translators and interpreters. The Party welcomes the fact that official status has increased funding opportunities for educational and cultural projects in Irish at European level, and has enhanced job opportunities for Irish citizens seeking work in EU institutions.

## **10. Irish within the Green Party itself**

- The Green Party have implemented a Language Charter within our own party in order to show our sincerity about encouraging the use of Irish and bilingualism. This Charter is a document describing measures that will be taken to strengthen the use of Irish within the party. This Charter is on display on the party's website and we continually accept feedback from the public in order to develop and improve it.