Pobal 2018–2021
Strategic Plan
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Welcome to Pobal’s Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021. Pobal works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies toward achieving social inclusion outcomes. Pobal does this by managing funding and providing supports for relevant Government funded programmes.

Since its establishment 25 years ago, Pobal has evolved and grown significantly in response to government priorities, adapting its skill sets and competencies to respond to the changes and challenges that have emerged.

Pobal’s lead Department is the Department of Rural and Community Development. Jointly we welcome the adoption of Pobal’s Strategic Plan which will support the Department’s mission “to promote rural and community development and to support vibrant inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland.”

This Strategic Plan outlines the environment within which Pobal now operates, the vision and mission of the organisation for the years ahead, the principles by which it works and the strategic goals and objectives it aims to achieve to ensure that Pobal is lean, fit for purpose and responsive to the future needs of communities and stakeholders.

While there have been improvements in Ireland’s social and economic landscape, there are still a number of areas that require targeting of funding supports and collaborative solutions to enable inclusive communities. For example key findings from the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index identify continued significant areas of deprivation in Irish cities, towns and rural areas. While there is an ongoing issue of intergenerational disadvantage in many areas, there is also continuing evidence of the impact of the recent recession. Small towns (1,000 – 5,000 people) have been the worst effected over the past ten years, being disproportionately hit by the recession and benefitting less from the recovery than most urban and rural areas. Pobal is dedicated to working alongside Government to achieve positive change for communities, families, individuals and children.

Pobal and the Department will use partnership approaches and will innovate to enhance quality supports for social inclusion initiatives. We will ensure that stakeholder voices are reflected in the design and operation of initiatives that we jointly manage, and we will continue to review and improve approaches to Governance in the joint work that we undertake.

Finally, thank you to all who have contributed to the development of this Strategic Plan, your input has been invaluable in defining Pobal’s strategic vision and mission for the next four years.

Minister for Rural and Community Development
Michael Ring T.D.

Seamus Boland,
Chairman,
Pobal
Our Work & Operating Environment

Established in 1992 as Area Development Management Ltd (ADM), Pobal works on behalf of Government – and in conjunction with communities and local agencies – to support social inclusion and local and community development. We provide management and support services across a range of programmes under the themes of,

- Social Inclusion and Equality
- Inclusive Employment and Enterprise
- Early Years and Young People

We administer\(^1\) related programmes on behalf of the Department of Rural and Community Development, Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, as well as the Department of Health/HSE and a number of EU bodies.

Pobal works in the areas of social inclusion, early childhood care and education, local and community development, peace and reconciliation, equality, labour market supports, and education and training.

Our work supports the delivery of valuable services to, for example, the long term unemployed, young people, farmers / fishermen, families, Travellers, older people and ex-prisoners. We have formed alliances nationally and internationally to advance our service delivery model, including close working relationships with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

Pobal is responsible for assessing proposals to a range of national programmes and in 2017 managed the allocation of over €615 million of Government funding to beneficiaries across 23 different programmes.

We assist Government by engaging with individuals, groups and communities to provide supports in areas which have the potential for greatest positive impact. Our focus reflects national policy as outlined in the Programme for Government and related initiatives.

Our work ranges from programme design to implementation support to financial administration.

\(^1\) Programmes administered as of April 2018
and governance of funding allocations. We promote quality enhancement amongst local and national organisations, develop programme and system management tools and work to ensure funded projects work within agreed guidelines.

We also provide good practice case studies, evaluations, and demographic information that support Government Departments in making policy decisions. Tools such as Pobal Maps and the Pobal HP Deprivation Index are made freely available to allow policy makers and communities respond to needs identified by these sets of tools.

We operate on an all-Ireland basis, employing over 400 staff with offices in Dublin, Monaghan, Sligo, Clifden, Letterkenny, Cork, Galway city, Limerick and Kilkenny.

Operating Environment

Our activities and priorities are shaped in context and policy by Government initiatives including, but not limited to,

- The Programme for Government
- The Action Plan for Jobs
- Pathways to Work
- The Action Plan for Rural Development
- The Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland
- Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024
- Better Outcomes Bright Futures 2014–2020
- Putting People First and EU 2020
- Project Ireland 2040

Our work and focus will also be guided by relevant sections of the National Planning Framework.

The economic changes Ireland has experienced have impacted directly on our work. The recession created a need to increasingly focus our work on the issue of joblessness. As the recovery has gathered pace, there has been an increased ability to widen some programmes' work to encompass a broader range of social inclusion issues.
Recent years have seen a recognition of the crucial importance of both ensuring that programme targeting and design are evidence based, and demonstrating programme achievements and value for money. Pobal has invested in its systems and tools to meet this need and to support the supply of this evidence.

The growth in early years services and the Government’s early years investment has been particularly important in recent years. Pobal has worked to support this growth. The further development of these services and especially the development of the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be of major significance to Pobal in the coming years.

Pobal’s work has grown significantly in recent years, with the amount of funds disbursed moving from €257 million in 2011 to €615 million in 2017. Our total administration spend for 2017 was €26.4m, 4.10% of programme costs. Down from 5.68% in 2008, 4.60% in 2015 and 4.44 % in 2016. Significant amounts of that growth have taken place within the Early Years sector, as support to parents and early years service providers has grown.

Over the course of our 25 years, Pobal has evolved in response to Government priorities. We are dedicated to supporting communities and civic society in responding to local needs. Our Board and staff are committed to supporting Government in its work to make Ireland a fairer place to live for all of our communities. We are also aware of the need to ensure that our procedures are fair, not overly burdensome and are appropriate to the size of the funds being allocated. This is not easy in a world where there is a need and expectation for increased governance, oversight and financial prudence.

It is company policy to identify the minimum data requirements needed for the effective administration of a given scheme; however issues such as European level data requirements must be factored into this design process. We are increasingly using online platforms as a measure for reducing red tape while at the same time ensuring sufficient checks and balances and audit trails are in place to protect taxpayers’ money.

A commitment to social inclusion is at the heart of Pobal. While there have been improvements in Ireland’s social and economic landscape, there are still a number of issues requiring attention, funding and collaborative solutions. For example, key findings from the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index identify continued significant areas of deprivation in Irish cities, towns and rural areas. While there is an ongoing issue of intergenerational disadvantage in many areas, there is also continuing evidence of the impact of the recent recession. Small towns (1,000 – 5,000 people) have been the worst affected over the past ten years, being disproportionately hit by the recession and benefitting less from the recovery than the most urban and rural areas.
Vision

Our vision is one in which Pobal, Government and communities work effectively together to create a cohesive and inclusive society. We work to ensure that resources and supports are targeted to meet community needs. Our core role in delivering this vision is through providing an effective programme and grant management service for the Irish Government.

Mission

Our mission is to work with Government and local and national community organisations to combat social exclusion and to improve outcomes for communities, families, individuals and children. We work to provide an efficient and robust programme and grant management service for the Irish Government. This work is underpinned by high standards in accountability of allocations and financial management, and ongoing support to all those we serve.
Operating Principles

Pobal’s programme management on behalf of Government is based on nine operating principles:

1. We provide additional supports to enhance social inclusion and equality for those individuals, groups and communities that are most marginalised.

2. We support Government to implement policy and enhance service delivery by making data and evidence-informed lessons from our programmes available as a resource.

3. We target supports and resources to contribute to positive social change.

4. We encourage and welcome hearing the views of local and national community organisations and availing of their local knowledge and expertise.

5. Our programme delivery and service models reflect the ethos and values of our Vision and Mission.

6. Our financial, legal and governance activities are robust, accountable and transparent.

7. Our administrative costs are kept to a minimum while maintaining quality and prioritising spending on service delivery.

8. We manage new programmes / business consistent with our Mission, the changing needs of all of our stakeholders and our organisational capacity.

9. We are a learning organisation supporting, valuing and capacity-building our Board and staff as key resources in the successful delivery of our service and the sustainability of our organisation.
### €615m

In 2017 €615 million was distributed by Pobal to local and national community organisations.

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<th><strong>60,700</strong></th>
<th><strong>31,016</strong></th>
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<td>approx 60,700 disadvantaged families availed of reduced childcare fees through the Community Childcare Subvention Programme</td>
<td>people received employment supports under the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)</td>
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<th><strong>3,339</strong></th>
<th><strong>10,168</strong></th>
<th><strong>191,984</strong></th>
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<td>children were supported under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)</td>
<td>alarms were installed in the homes of older people under the Seniors Alert Scheme</td>
<td>children were registered in child-centered programmes</td>
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<th><strong>400</strong></th>
<th><strong>4795</strong></th>
<th><strong>9,980</strong></th>
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<td>circa 400 community businesses, that deliver services and create employment for people from disadvantaged groups, were supported through the Community Services Programme</td>
<td>early years services were supported</td>
<td>average number of participants supported under the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection employment activation initiatives (Tús, RSS and Gateway)</td>
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Strategic Goals & Objectives

Pobal is committed to providing a highly effective service for managing Irish Government grants and payments to communities and for ensuring that these funds are used effectively. We have invested in governance, financial management, programme design, monitoring, ICT and audit systems to provide assurance to ensure high standards in accountability and use of taxpayers’ money.

Pobal will continue, over the next three years, to improve the quality of these systems and to assist Government and local and national community organisations in the provision of a high quality of project management and service delivery.

We are committed to improving social inclusion and equality through practical work with local and national community organisations, agencies and early years service providers. Pobal’s strategic goals define the specific role we will play, within the wider set of stakeholders, to support social inclusion in communities across Ireland.

In delivering its grant management services, Pobal has developed expertise and networks to become the appropriate base for the management of key quality improvement and access initiatives. This has been recognised through our appointment as the host of the Better Start and Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). We intend to continue to strengthen these abilities and to provide an appropriate vehicle to host the delivery of these services.
Goal 1

To provide high quality financial and operational management of grants.

Pobal is committed to ensuring that its processes deliver verifiable and accountable management of taxpayers’ money, while offering user-friendly, efficient and streamlined support to all stakeholders. In delivering this goal, we will:

1. Ensure that all fund allocation processes managed by Pobal are transparent, all funding recommendations made are evidence-based and all processes used are proportionate to the sums involved.

2. Ensure that all programmes managed and administered by Pobal have appropriate financial management and accountability frameworks to provide accurate accounting for all expenditure and compliance with programme, Government and EU rules.

3. Implement appropriate monitoring frameworks and systems to evaluate outputs and outcomes achieved by funding programmes and by local and national community organisations.

4. Work to reduce and minimise the cost to Government of all grant management services, through streamlining, automation and use of outsourcing.

5. Work to control service costs and maximise the benefit to regional development by locating staff teams, where possible, outside of Dublin.
Goal 2

To support local and national community organisations in their delivery of Government-funded services.

Consistent with our commitment to offer user-friendly and proactive supports, we will:

1. Provide clear, concise and high quality guidance materials on all programmes which we manage.

2. Ensure that the delivery of quality improvement services (such as the Better Start programme) operate to the highest standards and that Pobal infrastructure provides appropriate support and resources.

3. Make appropriate use of Information Technology to reduce the burden within application, assessment and reporting processes.

4. Significantly reduce bureaucratic burdens for community organisations and early years service providers to allow them to dedicate their time to the delivery of core services.

5. Offer targeted supports to local and national community organisations to help ensure that they are equipped to meet legislative, governance and financial management requirements.
Goal 3

To support Government in its decision-making and in its setting of programme priorities.

Pobal will be recognised as a strategic partner based on the organisation’s experience, expertise and delivery track record. To this end, we will:

1. Provide a high quality design service to Government which ensures that, programmes are targeted, objectives are agreed and progress measures are clearly defined.

2. Define, collect and analyse programme data to ensure clarity regarding programme achievements, on patterns of results and to offer vehicles to assist in the definition of future programme directions.

3. Support departments in the technical development of programme systems, including ICT systems, as required.

4. Develop strategic relationships with local, national and international bodies to ensure that learning is identified, rigorously assessed and properly disseminated to maximise programme benefits.
Goal 4
To develop our company as a high quality, accountable and skilled vehicle for meeting Government and community needs.

In positioning Pobal to meet Government and community needs, we will:

1. Ensure that all our governance arrangements are of high quality, meet all legislative requirements and are regularly reviewed and strengthened.

2. Ensure that our internal control, risk management and reporting processes are of the highest standard and meet relevant statutory and regulatory requirements.

3. Implement a management and staffing structure for effective oversight of all work, while maintaining an ability to offer cost-effective services.

4. Support our staff in the acquisition and development of skills which match the needs of the company and the programmes we manage.

5. Establish suitable internal management and staffing arrangements for the benefit of all staff, with suitable approaches to support gender equality, equality of access and progression for all.
In 2017, Pobal supported 23 separate programmes of varying size, scale and complexity. This number is likely to increase over the course of the forthcoming strategic planning period. Significant energies will, in particular, be invested in support of Early Years. Resource requirements will reflect activity and programme priorities, as well as the need for probity and efficiency.

Pobal has delivered consistent reductions in its administration expenditure over recent years\(^2\) and we are committed to optimising value-for-money and return-on-investment for Government.

Consistent with Pobal’s commitment to the promotion of equality and human rights in all aspects of our work as employer and service provider, we have established a dedicated team to determine how further enhancements may be made across programmes, projects, activities, strategies, policies and funding allocation.

\(^2\) From 4.60% to 4.44% to 4.10% (respectively) in 2014, 2015 and 2016.
Strategic Implementation & Performance Monitoring

Our strategic goals and objectives will inform the annual Pobal business plan which will detail specific priorities for each Directorate within Pobal. The aggregation of these priorities across the organisation’s Directorates will ensure that Pobal’s strategic objectives are delivered annually and over the life-span of the Strategic Plan.

The implementation of this Strategic Plan will be monitored and reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and the Board of Pobal. Our business planning model will be designed to link the work of each Directorate, Unit and individual, to the high level goals and objectives of the organisation.

Specific actions outlined in the annual business plans will be assigned to individual staff members and evaluated as part of the annual Performance Management Process. This integrated approach will bring cohesion, accountability and purposeful direction to the work of Pobal so that we can realise our Mission and work towards fulfilling our Vision.