



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

SEANAD ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—*Neamhcheartaithe*
(OFFICIAL REPORT—*Unrevised*)

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SEANAD ÉIREANN

Déardaoin, 3 Iúil 2025

Thursday, 3 July 2025

Chuaigh an Leas-Chathaoirleach i gceannas ar 9.30 a.m.

Machnamh agus Paidir.
Reflection and Prayer.

Teachtaireachtaí ón Dáil - Messages from Dáil

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Dáil Éireann passed the Defamation (Amendment) Bill 2024 on 2 July 2025, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired.

Dáil Éireann passed the Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension and Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025, changed from the Social Welfare (Bereaved Partner's Pension) Bill 2025, on 2 July 2025, to which the agreement of Seanad Éireann is desired.

Gnó an tSeanaid - Business of Seanad

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: The Cathaoirleach has received notice from the following Senators that they propose to raise the following matters:

Senator Maria Byrne - The need for the Minister for Health to make a statement on her plans to review the eligibility criteria for the long-term illness scheme to include inflammatory bowel conditions, such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray - The need for the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to apply the SME test to the proposal for an increase in the personal injury guidelines.

Senator Tom Clonan - The need for the Minister for Education and Youth to ensure the training experiences of graduates of the new professional doctorate in educational psychology commencing in NUI Maynooth in September 2025 will qualify graduates to work flexibly across the services and settings where they are so acutely needed.

Senator Chris Andrews - The need for the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to make a statement on the implementation of the recent XL bully legislation.

Senator Mark Duffy - The need for the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to expand the Croí Cónaithe cities scheme to include towns with populations greater than

10,000 to enhance the viability of apartment buildings in these towns.

Senator Gareth Scahill - The need for the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht to make a statement on his Department's remote working strategy and the targets for his term.

The matters raised by the Senators are suitable for discussion and the Cathaoirleach has selected Senators Maria Byrne, Linda Nelson Murray, Tom Clonan and Chris Andrews and they will be taken now. The other Senators may give notice on another day of the matters they wish to raise.

Nithe i dtosach suíonna - Commencement Matters

Health Services

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank the Minister of State, Deputy Butler, for coming to the House to discuss this important issue. In recent weeks I have met an adult and a 18-year-old girl who suffer from Crohn's disease. The 18-year-old girl has been very debilitated over recent years. She spends an awful lot of time in hospital. She has had to drop out of school because of the level of her illness. Crohn's disease and colitis are very debilitating. It is very difficult to get a proper diagnosis because they are hidden diseases in that people do not know what the symptoms are or what is happening. The diseases are a breakdown in the immune system and people can suffer very badly with them. Some people have a lesser degree of it but many people suffer for quite a while. When they have energy, they are great, and suddenly the immune system goes down and they can be very sick with it.

When I met this 18-year-old recently, which was not my first meeting her, I saw how sick she has been, especially in recent years. She should be enjoying her life, going to school and playing sport, yet she could be in hospital for six or eight weeks at a time.

These conditions should be included on the long-term illness scheme because inflammatory bowel disease is not of the person's doing. It is something that, unfortunately, people end up being diagnosed with. I will not use the phrase "no future" but people spend a lot of time in bed and sick and it should be included in the scheme because of the cost of the medicines. Even in the short term, perhaps it could be included in the drug payment scheme and these people could qualify automatically for a medical card. Our long-term objective should be to have it in the long-term illness scheme.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Mary Butler): I thank Senator Byrne for raising this very important issue. The long-term illness scheme was established under section 59(3) of the Health Act 1970, as amended. Regulations were made in 1971, 1973 and 1975 prescribing 16 conditions covered by the scheme. These include acute leukaemia, mental handicap - which is not wording we use any more, I have to say, when I think about it - cerebral palsy, mental illness in a person under 16, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, diabetes insipidus, muscular dystrophies, diabetes mellitus, Parkinsonism, epilepsy, haemophilia, spina bifida, hydrocephalus and conditions arising from the use of Thalidomide. There is no mention of Crohn's disease or any form of inflammatory bowel disease. I take on board what Senator

Byrne said about that young person. When people have bowel conditions, it is very debilitating. That person will probably spend a lot of time in the comfort of her own house because of the condition.

As we know, under the scheme, patients receive drugs, medicines and medical and surgical appliances directly related to the treatment of their illness free of charge. While there are no plans to extend the scope of the scheme at present, it is important to reflect that it exists in a wider eligibility framework. The Government has put a significant focus on improving access to, and the affordability of, healthcare services, advancing substantial policy, legislation and investment to deliver expanded eligibility and services in line with Sláintecare.

As we are all aware, public inpatient charges in public hospitals have been removed, first for children under 16 years of age in 2022 and then for adult public patients in 2023. We have also focused on reducing costs in primary care, delivering the largest expansion of GP visit cards in 2023 to include children aged six and seven and those earning no more than the median income. We have also focused on reducing costs in primary care, delivering one of the largest expansions of GP visit cards in 2023 to include children aged six and seven and those earning no more than the median income. This enabled these patients to visit their GP free of charge. These two GP access measures provide eligibility to approximately 500,000 additional people.

People who cannot, without undue hardship, arrange for the provision of medical services for themselves and their dependants may be eligible for a medical card. Eligibility for a medical card, as we all know, is determined by the HSE, primarily based on an assessment of means. The HSE may exercise discretion and grant a medical card, even though an applicant exceeds the income guidelines, where he or she faces difficult financial circumstances, such as extra costs arising from illness. There are about 80,000 discretionary medical cards in the mix now. The issue of providing a patient with eligibility on the basis of illness or a disability was previously examined in 2014 by the HSE expert panel on medical need and medical card eligibility. The group concluded it was not feasible, desirable or ethically justifiable to list medical conditions in priority order for medical card eligibility. In following the expert group's advice, a person's means remains the main qualifier for a medical card.

In respect of medications, there has also been a focus on reducing costs for families. As we know, the drug payment scheme threshold was €124 per month in 2020. It now stands at €80 per month - a reduction of over 33%. I am not sure if the response addresses the issue the Senator raised in relation to a young person with a disease such as Crohn's disease or other difficult bowel conditions. I will certainly raise this aspect with the Minister to see if there is any consideration that can be given. The regulations were made more than 40 years ago, so maybe it is time for them to be looked at again.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank the Minister of State for her positive response. I agree with what she said about these rules having been made more than 40 years ago. I know one or two people who have Crohn's disease would certainly love to make a submission to the Department in relation to their condition and maybe even a case study concerning how debilitated and ill they are. Perhaps this might be something the Department might be open to receiving and perhaps the Minister of State might be able to check this out for me. To see how ill that young girl was really was the cornerstone in this regard for me. The other lady I met was pregnant, but has had a diagnosis of the disease since she was 11. She said it never leaves you, you just learn to manage it. That young girl, though, certainly spends most of her time in hospital - this is the key thing here. She also spends a lot of time at home and this means her mother has to take time

off work to stay with her. I would appreciate any support the Minister of State can give or any information she can bring back to me.

Deputy Mary Butler: Any disease or condition a person, especially a young person, is living with is very difficult. It is difficult for the parents and siblings too because when somebody is ill in the house, everybody is involved. This is the right way. At the same time, though, Crohn's disease is very debilitating and very difficult for a young person to manage. They do not want to have to battle for things such as a medical card. The Department will always welcome any submissions it gets. All the correspondence that comes into the Department is looked at. If the Senator would like to see if the people she mentioned would like to write in, we can 100% facilitate that. I will speak to the Minister about this issue, because, as I said, even the wording I was quoting in my first contribution - regarding the 1975 Act - is no longer appropriate.

Senator Maria Byrne: Absolutely.

Deputy Mary Butler: This is especially the case when we are talking about the new mental health Bill I will be bringing to Report Stage on Wednesday. It is a huge Bill and I am looking forward to bringing it into the Seanad shortly. I will bring this matter back to the Minister and revert to the Senator.

Senator Maria Byrne: I thank the Minister of State.

Personal Injury Claims

Senator Linda Nelson Murray: I thank the Minister of State for coming in. I am here to ask about the SME test being applied to the legislation on the personal injury guidelines, as there is a recommendation that they be increased. The SME test was introduced by the Government as a part of measures in May 2024. This is a no-brainer because any major new measure from the Government will be assessed for its impact on small business through an enhanced SME test. In all cases, a completed SME test must be included or an explanation provided as to why it is considered an SME test is not required.

The SME test is all about "think small first" and considers how measures will impact businesses. Some enterprises can be disproportionately impacted by regulatory or administrative burdens if not given due consideration during the formation of policy. Ireland's SME test is a four-step process for policymakers to consider: consultation, identification, impact and mitigation. If ever this test were needed, it is now, when the personal injury guidelines look likely to come before us for an increase of 16.7%. On 5 March 2024, the personal injuries guidelines committee of the Judicial Council submitted the outcome of its review of the personal injury guidelines to the board of the Judicial Council, pursuant to section 18(2)(b) of the Judicial Council Act 2019. This means businesses, community groups, sports clubs, motorists and charities will all pay the price as this increase will be passed on to policyholders.

I have brought this issue up many times here in the Upper House. My colleagues and I brought a motion to this House only two weeks ago on insurance whereby all of us stated the increase in the personal injury guidelines was excessive. We cannot allow this to go ahead without performing the SME test. We have brought in the SME test for businesses to allow us to consider impacts on them when policy and legislation is before us. When the personal injury

guidelines go ahead, all our premiums will increase and, in particular, those of business, the backbone of our economy, so we keep getting told. The recommendations from the Judicial Council state:

The Committee has not found it possible to carry out any meaningful analysis of the quantum of court awards given under the Guidelines to date that might inform this review. This is because the inevitable delay between the commencement of proceedings to which the then new Guidelines applied and their trial has meant that there are very few decisions and certainly not enough to be statistically significant.

How can we apply these guidelines when we have not even properly analysed the data? The committee just recommended an increase of 16.7% instead. The Judicial Council Act 2019 made clear that rigorous analysis should take place, including consulting with the Personal Injuries Assessment Board. No such consultation took place despite the thousands of cases the board has processed since the guidelines were introduced in 2021.

Without the increase, a minor back injury in Ireland sees people get between €12,000 and €20,000. In England, it is a maximum of £8,300. A minor shoulder soft tissue injury in Ireland has a maximum of up to €12,000, while in England it is £5,200. A minor ankle sprain injury in Ireland has a maximum of €12,000, but it is £6,300 in England. In Ireland, a minor foot fracture has a maximum amount of €20,000, while it is £12,700 in England. These are the numbers before we apply the 16.7% increase. I call on the Minister for enterprise to enact the SME test on the personal injury guidelines before any decision is made to implement them.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Neale Richmond): I thank the Senator sincerely for raising this timely and pertinent matter. Before I deliver the reply on behalf of the Minister, Deputy Burke, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the Senator's long-standing personal, professional and political commitment in this area. It is an area to which she brings a great level of familiarity, and one that I would imagine is the rival of any Member of either House of this Oireachtas. It is something I have seen firsthand in my previous roles in the Department of Finance, where I looked after insurance, and in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, as it was, where I looked after SMEs and small business.

Turning to the specific matter, for the interest of the House and in direct reply to the Senator I will lay out a little about the personal injuries guidelines in the Act and the role of the Judicial Council, what the process is and where the SME test may be applicable. There is no point in me repeating to the Senator the efforts the Government has made in relation to insurance or the importance given to it in the programme for Government. For clarity, the introduction of the personal injuries guidelines came in April 2021 and was a key outcome of the action plan on insurance reform of 2020. It has brought about much reform in the claims settlement framework in Ireland. The NCID has consistently provided evidence to demonstrate the positive impact the personal injury guidelines have had on lowering costs across all settlement channels. The Injuries Resolution Board alone has seen the volume and value of personal injuries awards reduced by 25% and 39%, respectively, over the period from 2019 to 2024, which included the introduction of the personal injury guidelines. Furthermore, the volume of claims in this period dropped by 33%.

However, the Judicial Council, which is entirely independent in its function, reviewed the personal injury guidelines as set out in the Judicial Council Act 2019 and now proposes to

increase the personal injuries guidelines by 16.7%. In accordance with section 7(2)(B) of the Judicial Council Act 2019, the next step is for the Minister for justice to lay a draft of the amendments to the personal injuries guidelines before each House of the Oireachtas. That is a process by which we can either accept or reject the recommendations. We have no ability to differentiate or to set a different level. That is a matter for an independent body.

The application of the SME test is a little more complicated than perhaps I would like it to be. It has been used over 20 times in legislation since it was introduced last year under the Minister, Deputy Burke, but the test is a matter for all Departments to consider in respect of policy and legislation under their remits. It is not simply a matter for the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment. It would also have to take in the Departments of Finance and justice as well feedback from all other affected Departments, which, on something such as this, is all of them. As I said, whether to accept the personal injury guidelines is a matter for the Oireachtas.

Speaking personally, although I am probably breaking the rules here, I would be very concerned about the introduction of the test. I have heard the very real concerns laid out by people who do not usually agree with each other on this area. We heard it this morning on the radio and have seen it over recent days and weeks. It needs very serious reflection by all parts of government and the Oireachtas. I have no objection in principle to the application of the SME test but I am not sure that is the exact tool that is necessary in this regard due to the nature of the system by which these recommendations are brought to the Houses.

Senator Linda Nelson Murray: I thank the Minister of State. I really appreciate it and the acknowledgement of my work and his own on everything to do with insurance. It is the reason I got into politics seven years ago when I nearly lost my business over it all. That is why I am passionate about it. It can be hard when you know something is wrong and you feel it is going to happen. I just know it will be wrong if these rates increase because it will have a catastrophic impact. One lady told me yesterday that if her insurance goes up by anything, she will have to close her business. The cost will be passed on.

We need to give it more thought. We should not rush into it. I hope there will be time to reflect on it and debate it more. Maybe the SME test is not the thing for it. We will see the decision about that. I am just looking out for everyone's business, as well as sports clubs, festivals and everything else. I am glad to hear the Minister of State say he is concerned about it too. I really appreciate that. Many others have spoken about it here, so I thank them.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I will ensure the relevant Departments look to see if the SME test should be applied. I am not ruling that out. I just wanted to be frank and direct to make sure I was not misleading the Chamber about what can be achieved by the SME test on this compared with other areas of policy or legislation where it may be applied. However, the case the Senator has laid out, not only here this morning but over the last number of years along with colleagues, is very coherent and needs to be borne in mind. I appreciate the role of the Judicial Council. I acknowledge and respect its independence and it is important that it is independent, but we have a decision as legislators to make and we have to make that mindful of all the impacts it may have.

Further and Higher Education

Senator Tom Clonan: I thank the Minister of State for attending this morning to hear this

Commencement matter. A new professional doctorate in educational psychology will commence in September and the Government has very generously made available a bursary of €40,000 per student at taxpayers' expense. I do not know if it is generally understood in Cabinet that this course will only qualify its graduates to work with the National Educational Psychology Service, NEPS. It is an excellent service. It is very well managed and has no wait lists. However, the course will not qualify its graduates to work with the 400 HSE primary care teams throughout the State or with our 91 children's disability network teams. None of the graduates of this course will be able to work with the 90 child and adolescent mental health services teams in the country, to work with the section 38 or section 39 care providers or to work with Tusla. That is an extraordinary waste of taxpayers' money. Similar doctoral programmes in educational psychology, such as the ones run in the University of Limerick, UCD and Queen's University Belfast, qualify their graduates to work in all those settings and NEPS. The course in Maynooth is an outlier in its course design. It is very narrow in its scope. Having spent 22 years in the academic setting designing courses and supervising students to PhD and at postdoctoral level, I know it would take the course design team maybe one or two meetings to change the design ever so slightly so that its graduates could address the very pressing needs in all those other care settings.

The Minister of State will be aware that in our primary care teams there are children waiting up to nine years for a psychological intervention. Throughout the country, there will be 25,000 children waiting on an assessment of need that can be carried out by an educational psychologist were they to be properly qualified. This is countrywide. For example, in Dublin north city and west, there are 2,816 children waiting to see an educational psychologist, while Cavan-Monaghan has 3,550 and Louth-Meath 1,447. For each one of those children, there is also a family. In many cases they are waiting two, three or four years to see an educational psychologist. We know we face a very significant recruitment and retention challenge for psychologists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists. I welcome this development – it is a great initiative – but for the want of a little change in the course design, graduates will only be able to work with NEPS. It is an excellent service but it is already well resourced. It does not have waiting lists. In the areas of most acute need in our communities, in CAMHS and in the primary healthcare areas, none of its graduates will be able to work. It is an anomaly in that the similar courses run in UCD, Queens and UL qualify their graduates to work everywhere. I hope someone can speak to the president of Maynooth University and get that little change put in place to benefit us all.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I am grateful to Senator Clonan for raising this issue. The importance of the National Educational Psychological Service, which he raised, is not lost on this Government. It provides a critical service to almost 1 million children and young people and almost 100,000 staff who work in our primary, post-primary and special schools daily.

The Government has set its commitment to double the number of educational psychologists in schools. There are 240 educational psychologists in NEPS but, as with any service, there are ongoing vacancies due to statutory leave, retirements and promotion so to really deliver for children we need so many more in our system as a matter of urgency. To give some idea of the scale of the need, there is one NEPS psychologist for every 4,600 children in schools in Ireland. In other countries there is an educational psychologist for approximately every 1,900 children, so there is a very significant gap which we need to address. Bridging that gap will require approximately 550 educational psychologists, which means an additional 330 psychologists working in the system.

The Department of Education and Youth has progressed a number of initiatives over the last few years in order to increase the supply of educational psychologists including running annual recruitment campaigns and providing bursaries to students in the two existing programmes.

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The House may also be aware that there are only two courses in Ireland providing professional training programmes for educational psychologists and, as Senator Clonan laid out, graduates are shared across the education and health sectors. NEPS is committed to employing the graduates of the courses supported by the education bursaries but unfortunately these existing courses provide fewer than 15 graduates annually to NEPS. If our ambition is to grow the statutory National Educational Psychological Service in the way I have described, we need a complete change in mindset and a willingness to work in new ways to make this happen.

The Minister was delighted, last March, to welcome the announcement by Maynooth University of its intention to commence a new professional training programme for educational psychology, which will start, as the Senator set out, in September. This course is much needed. After a competitive interview process, 20 candidates of the highest calibre have now signed up to start their professional training on this programme. The Department is extending its bursary scheme to support these students and the programme will support a substantial increase in the number of qualified educational psychologists available to NEPS. This new programme is a significant step forward in the Government's commitment to significantly increase the number of college places for educational psychologists as outlined. I can absolutely reassure the Senator that this programme will adhere to the very highest standards of education and training that are in line with international accreditation standards for educational psychologists.

The NEPS service is committed to supporting this programme, as it does the other professional training programmes, through the provision of practice placements, supervisory support and input to the training itself. Over the three-year programme, trainees will develop expertise in the core skills of assessment, intervention, consultation, training and research within a variety of educational and service settings. They will gain hands-on experience working with children, young people, families and professionals, ensuring they are well prepared to support the learning, development and emotional well-being of children and young people. They will also gain expertise working with multidisciplinary teams with continually evolving opportunities for such work within the education sector, including as part of the multidisciplinary team in the north-east inner city, working with other multidisciplinary teams in education, including the education therapy support service and the new national therapy service which will be introduced from this year into special schools.

I fully understand the points made and the career-wide bona fides of the Senator in this regard. However, a deliberate decision has been taken to focus on NEPS. It is not to exclude other services. Other areas will be provided for. I am more than happy to make the Senator's points to the Minister directly and to the president of the university. However, there is method in the process here.

Senator Tom Clonan: NEPS is a great service and it absolutely needs to recruit educational psychologists, but this method is tailoring a doctoral training course to be specific to the needs of NEPS to the exclusion of all the other areas where the need is more acute while children are going into psychological distress for want of a brief intervention. Some of those children go on to develop serious issues and problems that become life-altering and life-limiting. If we were

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to look at the area of most pressing need, the logical conclusion would be to accredit a course that qualifies graduates not only to work in NEPS, where they are absolutely needed, but also to work elsewhere. I appreciate the Minister of State's assurance that he will speak to the Minister, Deputy Lawless, about this. It is a mistake. I understand the reasoning behind it, but it is a lost opportunity when all the other areas could benefit.

However, I thank the Minister of State for his engagement and I appreciate his assurances.

Deputy Neale Richmond: It is important to say that I am replying on behalf of the Minister for Education and Youth, as opposed to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The Senator will understand the need for the Department of Education and Youth to make sure there are qualified psychologists coming into NEPS in particular. That goes to the heart of the issue at play. I have been assured by the relevant Ministers that this course will be of the highest standard and will be fully integrated and aligned with the wider governmental need in the education sector, but it will not be either-or. Other supports for training in the wider scheme will be made available. I will be more than happy to take that forward for the Senator.

Control of Dogs

Senator Chris Andrews: I thank the Minister of State for coming to the House to discuss the matter of XL bullies.

Despite recent changes, XL bully legislation continues to fall short in several key areas, particularly in fairness, due process and clarity. The introduction of a review process for private owners of dogs to seek a certificate of exemption is welcome and important, but the legislation still lacks several important amendments causing concern for rescue organisations, dog owners and advocates. Currently, a private owner of an XL bully can appeal for an exemption, if necessary. That is welcome. The difficulty is that the same does not apply to rescue organisations and pounds and if it does not, many dogs will be killed. The language in the legislation and regulations is vague. There is currently no legal provision that allows dogs held in rescue centres or local authority pounds to receive an interim certificate of exemption. This omission creates an inconsistency whereby dogs cannot be re-homed without a permanent certificate of exemption, but a permanent certificate of exemption can only be applied for after a dog is placed in a home. Therefore, those dogs are left in limbo, unable to move to homes where they would legally be allowed to receive the exemption. There should be a temporary or interim certificate process for rescues and pounds to facilitate lawful re-homing and prevent the unnecessary killing of dogs, which, if they were reviewed, would be spared.

There is also a clear inconsistency in breed identification. There is no published training standard or certification process for vets to ensure accurate and consistent breed identification. This is a glaring issue, given the widespread misclassification of XL bully dogs. Dog wardens have been arbitrarily misidentifying XL bully dogs. At the very least, a mandatory, uniform training with a written examination is needed for all dog wardens. The absence of such training will continue to lead to misclassification, the suffering of dogs and an unnecessary waste of taxpayers' money. As recently as this week, a presa canario was euthanised as an XL bully in a Limerick pound. Such mistakes will be made because of the lack of clarity. The confirmation standards used to define XL bully-type remain vague, unamended and open to interpretation. How it is decided that a dog is an XL bully is vague and unclear. There is still no maximum

height despite height being a critical trait in breed classification. The continued use of the term “type” fosters subjectivity and inconsistency, enabling the misclassification of dogs that do not possess core XL bully characteristics. This vagueness perpetuates the risk of over-reach, penalising responsible owners and wrongly targeting dogs which are not XL bullies. It throws the net so wide that it covers all bully breeds and that is a dangerous precedent to set.

The lack of legal protection for dogs in rescue centres and dog pounds has contributed to high stress, burnout and morale injury among staff and volunteers. The psychological trauma caused by these preventable outcomes is immediate and long-lasting, not to mention the cruel and unnecessary suffering inflicted on the dogs themselves. Until these issues are resolved, the legislation will continue to result in unnecessary animal deaths, undermine public confidence and cause serious distress to those working to protect these animals. The Government must urgently consider these issues and commit to meaningful revisions of the regulations.

Furthermore, I understand ongoing legislative work is being done in this area. It is important that the issues affecting XL bullies are not ignored and that the relevant advocacy and rescue groups are included in the consultation process.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I thank Senator Andrews for raising this matter. I ask him to bear with me. I have a slightly lengthy answer which I will deliver on behalf of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Heydon, who has asked me to take this Commencement matter.

The Control of Dogs (XL Bully) Regulations 2024, SI 491 of 2024, that banned XL bully dogs came into force in two stages beginning on 1 October 2024, with a full ownership ban coming into force on 1 February 2025. The ban was brought in by the then Minister for Rural and Community Development, who was responsible for dog control at that time. The XL bully-type dog is a variant of the wider American bully breed. It is typically larger in height and body shape and more muscular than other American bully-type breeds such as the micro, pocket, standard and classic breeds. It is acknowledged that XL bully is not a recognised breed and that XL bullies are a cross of restricted breeds. Therefore, it was unanimously decided by the implementation team that was established to develop the regulations that the term used with regard to describing the dogs should be XL bully-type. The only legally recognised method of identification of a dog as an XL bully-type in Ireland is by use of the physical conformation standard contained in the regulations.

The ban was brought in over two stages to give XL bully-type dog owners who wished to keep their XL bully-type dog the time to obtain a certificate of exemption. There was a four-month period between 1 October 2024 and before 1 February 2025 where owners were able to apply for a certificate of exemption. Charitable organisations were also able to apply for certificate of exemptions for XL bully-type dogs in their care during this period if they wished. As part of the regulations, any registered charitable organisation that had an XL bully-type dog in its care before 1 October 2024 had until before 1 February 2025 to rehome the dog to a new owner.

Since 1 February 2025, if an owner is found to have an XL bully type-dog in his or her possession, as determined by the dog warden in accordance with the XL bully-type dog physical conformation standard, without a certificate of exemption or proof of application for a certificate of exemption, the dog warden may seize the dog and have the dog euthanised in a humane manner. In addition, such owners may be charged with an offence under the Control of Dogs

Act 1986.

A small number of animal welfare organisations sought a judicial review of the regulations. As part of this process, the organisations concerned had sought an injunction to extend the 1 February deadline for rehoming XL bully-type dogs in their care until the judicial review process was completed. This injunction was denied by the High Court. Therefore, it remains illegal for these organisations to rehome an XL bully-type dog after 1 February. As outlined in the regulation, the only dogs that were permitted to be rehomed up to 1 February were those that were in the care of the relevant bodies before 1 October 2024. It is illegal for any person or organisation to rehome an XL bully-type dog after 1 February of this year. I am informed that the case has been settled and the matter is due for mention in the High Court on 15 July.

An amendment to the initial XL bully regulations came into force on 9 June 2025. The amended regulations define a review process in circumstances where a dog owner may disagree with the determination of a dog warden that a dog not in possession of a certificate of exemption meets the physical conformation standard. If, following review, a dog is determined to be an XL bully-type dog, the review process allows for the relevant owner, including a charitable organisation, to obtain a certificate of exemption which will allow them to keep the dog until the end of its natural life, provided that the dog was born before 10 December 2024. If a person or organisation does not wish to keep an XL bully-type dog, they can surrender the dog to their local authority dog warden service where the dog will be euthanised in a humane manner.

The dog control stakeholder group, established in 2024 by the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, has been tasked with considering the policy and legislative matters with regard to the control of dogs. The stakeholder group meets regularly, and the work of the group is wide-ranging and complex in nature. The group's remit includes considering the need for legislative change. This requires in-depth analysis and consultation to ensure amendments are robust, fit for purpose, implementable and deliver the best outcomes for communities and for dogs themselves. This work will take some time. However, the Minister, Deputy Heydon, has no objection in principle to any measure that may improve the overall regulation of the dog breeding sector and support public safety and the welfare of dogs, and he is more than happy to engage with the Senator directly to achieve that.

Senator Chris Andrews: I do not believe for a second that dog bans work for a variety of reasons. I do not have the time to go into it now. The key point is that the appeal process afforded to private dog owners should be afforded to rescues and pounds. However, because of the vague language in the legislation proposed, such as the use of the word “type”, it encompasses all bully breeds and that is going to have a really negative impact because many of the dog wardens do not have the training that is required to identify a dog. They have not had the training in the past and there are no plans to have dog wardens trained in the future for identifying dogs. That language then leaves it open to interpretation. I honestly feel that the Minister is on the right track but we need to refine the language to ensure that dogs in pounds and rescues also have the ability to get an exemption.

Deputy Neale Richmond: I will make three points in very brief reply to the Senator. First, with regard to the use of the word “type” and how it came to be and the need to separate, there is an XL breed but then, within the breed, there are types of dogs. That is the differentiation that was sought because there is a very specific thing at play here. In terms of the training in respect of identification and those processes, I fully take the Senator's points on board, but I have been reassured that those processes are in place as best as is possible.

It does come to the issue with regard to the ideological and ethical issue of whether one believe bans work or not. The Government has made a decision to ban this type of breed of dog for very particular high-profile reasons, and we are not alone in doing that. At some stage in politics, we all have to live with agreeing to disagree. However, improvements can always be made to legislation and that requires the full engagement of all aspects of the House. I am sure the Minister, Deputy Heydon, will be more than happy to go along that path with the Senator as quickly as possible.

Acting Chairperson (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Sin deireadh an chláir. The House stands suspended until 10.30 a.m.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 10.16 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 10.33 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 10.16 a.m. and resumed at 10.33 a.m.

An tOrd Gnó - Order of Business

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: The Order of Business is No. 1, motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending EU Regulation 2024/1348 as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level; No. 2, motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending EU Regulation 2024/1348 as regards the application of the “safe third country” concept; and No. 3, motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a Council recommendation on a co-ordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine, to be taken at 11.45 a.m. and to be completed at 1.15 p.m., if not previously concluded, with the three motions to be discussed together, the time allocated to the opening remarks of the Minister not to exceed ten minutes, those of group spokespersons not to exceed ten minutes, those of all other Senators not to exceed five minutes, time may be shared, and the Minister is to be given not less than eight minutes to reply to the debate.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: The compulsory purchase order, CPO, system is there to support development. I wish to raise a road that was developed in Galway, the N63. When a local authority serves a notice to treat, that is when it has entered into an arrangement, on behalf of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, or the National Transport Authority, NTA, to purchase land to develop it. In this instance, the notice to treat was served in 2014 but, to date, the landowners have not got paid. They have made numerous representations regarding what they perceive to be the value of the land and the loss of sites but, regrettably, the local authority has not made an offer to date. The landowners have made a freedom of information request, which, unfortunately, was initially refused. It is hard to believe it was refused. That landowner has incurred serious stress and upset over ten years.

I raise this today because we have just completed submissions for a national development plan. We all talk about wanting to invest in, develop and improve our infrastructure but there has to be an element of trust in the process. All those in the process have to be good actors. That is how you bring people to the table and ensure development can happen at pace. Is the case I am raising an outlier? I have not mentioned the local authority or any individuals. I would love the Minister for local government to tell me how many notices to treat are in excess of the 12-month period where the landowner is waiting for payment. That is important informa-

tion. We want to go forward and there is a lot of development happening but where landowners have been waiting more than ten years for a payment, there is something radically wrong.

Senator Manus Boyle: It was brought to my attention by Councillors Martin Harley, Jimmy Kavanagh and Michael Boyle that the funding for the apprenticeship programme for education and training boards, ETBs, nationally will be cut by €40 million this year. This means a large number of apprentices will not be in a position to go from phase 4 to phase 6. This is ridiculous at a time when the country has a massive shortage of skilled people. We need to address it quickly, even before the summer recess, because it means apprenticeships will not be fit to go forward in September. Will the Deputy Leader try to find out where this sits? This is crucial. Our apprenticeships and our ETBs are working very well. This is something we need to get behind and back. There is a massive shortage of trained personnel out there. We are taking people in from other countries. Our own people want to do it. Will the Deputy Leader please find out where this stands?

Senator Aubrey McCarthy: I voice concern on behalf of Irish businesses facing complete uncertainty regarding the US Administration revisiting tariffs and potentially imposing tariffs as high as 10%. They are to be imposed on all EU imports within days. From dairy farmers to distillers, vital sectors of the Irish community are bracing themselves for impact without any clarity as to what is coming. The recent Government trade forum regrettably yielded more heat than light. It shows we need actionable diplomacy rather than reactive dialogue. We must ensure that seasoned negotiators, not just diplomats, represent Ireland in these trade agreements. It has been said in this House before that we should focus on what we can control. That is diversifying our export markets, investing in supply chains and supporting the affected industries. The Minister, Deputy Donohoe, has noted that economic growth is still expected but we feel it is not at the pace the Irish people deserve. Ireland cannot afford to be passive in this. We have to act swiftly and with a sense of togetherness. Tariff uncertainty must not paralyse the policies we already have or were planned.

Yesterday, I received a briefing from the Banking and Payments Federation Ireland. It painted a stark and deeply concerning picture of our housing structure. In 2008, we built 78,000 units of housing, backed by €41 billion in capital. However, today we are managing to build just 38,000 units, backed by €13 billion in capital. Investment in apartment construction has collapsed. I listened to the Minister, Deputy Donohoe, on the news on the way in and he admitted that apartments are an area of consideration. It seems private capital flow has more or less stopped. The implications are stark. We are not only questioning our housing targets; we are missing them. At the root of this problem, as I have brought up at the housing committee, is a planning system that is riddled with uncertainties and infrastructure that fails to adapt to the urgent reality. We really need to start treating this as an emergency, with local authorities receiving the allocations that were promised on 16 May.

We also need immediate intervention in the housing supply pipeline, which should support builders that build 50 units or fewer with not only mentoring but also improved access to capital. The approved housing bodies need to make sure their limited supply of capital is enhanced. That will empower housing delivery. Words and targets are not enough. We need decisive action and long-term commitment. Our people deserve better.

Senator Chris Andrews: Last week, it was announced that Penneys was making 100 of its Dublin staff redundant as part of a plan to outsource many of its roles to India. This decision was taken not out of necessity but out of a desire to maximise profits for the bosses and share-

holders. Penneys is not a company that is struggling and it has been expanding rapidly across Europe, North America and Asia. Penneys made record profits last year as a result of the hard work of the underpaid staff and now many of these workers will find themselves unemployed and on the streets. It is very disappointing that an Irish company would do this to its own workers and be so callous about their careers and lives. Unfortunately, this is not a new development in Ireland. The reality of a globalised economy is that corporations can pick up and move operations to wherever has the lowest labour costs and the State offers very few protections to workers who are out of employment due to overseas outsourcing.

There are no protections for workers made redundant due to foreign outsourcing. Currently, only workers affected by domestic outsourcing are protected and that needs to be examined. It is very important that these workers who are made redundant are supported by the State and are not abandoned like the Debenhams workers who bravely fought for their rights for more than 400 days. I hope the Minister for enterprise is treating the issue very seriously and is actively looking for a way to assist these unemployed workers. Likewise, I believe it is very important for us in this House to have a debate on workers' rights and employment protections.

Senator Teresa Costello: This week, I attended the Irish Cancer Society pre-budget launch. As always, I had the privilege of speaking to cancer survivors and listening to their lived experiences. One issue that was raised with me, not for the first time, was the lack of adequate supports for women who have had breast cancer and are now facing menopause. For many of these women, menopause is not just a natural transition; it is a really difficult side effect of a life-saving treatment. Hormone replacement therapy, HRT, is often not an option due to the hormone-sensitive nature of their cancer. Ireland has made real progress in recent years with the roll-out of menopause clinics and the availability of free HRT, but for women who cannot use HRT the options remain far too limited. This gap in care must be addressed.

That is why I want to highlight Veoza, a non-hormonal medication that targets neurokinin 3 receptors in the brain to manage moderate to severe menopause symptoms. It became available in Ireland in late 2023 and is under review for inclusion in the drugs payment scheme. That was confirmed in a reply to a parliamentary question in March 2025. As of July 2025, it is only available privately at a cost of approximately €70 per month. For women who have survived breast cancer and cannot take HRT, Veoza would be life-changing but right now, cost is a real barrier for people. It is vital that we make Veoza accessible and affordable. We need to make sure no one is left behind when it comes to menopause care.

Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn: I ask for an opportunity to have a debate in this House about the sportsperson's tax rebate. On retirement, Irish athletes who have lived and trained in Ireland are entitled to claim tax back on 40% of their earnings from their sport. The then Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, first introduced sportsperson's tax relief in 2002 and, at the time, said the measures were being introduced as a reward for the contribution our sports stars make, as an acknowledgement for their relatively short careers and as an encouragement for them to stay in Ireland. It was and continues to be a welcome addition to the suite of supports available to Irish athletes.

However, I want to highlight an anomaly. If a 100 m sprinter, for example, who has been chasing the Olympic dream probably from the age of 17 or 18 is talented and lucky enough to be awarded Sport Ireland funding and remains on that funding until retirement at the age of about 30, he or she will be on a grant and will not be an employee or PAYE or PRSI worker, so tax credits do not accrue. The maximum annual grant available to our highest achieving

athletes is €40,000 per annum.

By contrast, a rugby player might play at an academy, which is a different model. It is a contract model through the province or the IRFU. The sprinter gets a grant from Sport Ireland, while the rugby player, soccer player or jockey is on a wage. Golfers also benefit because prize money is included in the rebate, but what is not included in the rebate is sponsorship money. Sponsorship, unfortunately, is often the only way for our Olympic or Paralympic athletes to make a good living from their sport and they have to pay tax on sponsorship earnings during their careers, which also incurs bookkeeping costs. What has happened, by accident rather than by design, is that in the male-dominated sports such as rugby, soccer, golf, motorsports and horseracing, retired athletes fare significantly better than our swimmers and sailors, who have been sustaining themselves on Sport Ireland funding and sponsorship. This has also inadvertently affected female athletes negatively. Think of national treasures such as Rhasidat Adeleke, Ciara Mageean, Mona McSharry, Kellie Harrington, Ellen Keane or Annalise Murphy. None of those global superstars can claim the tax rebate on sponsorship earnings even though they can claim the rebate on prize money, but the prize money in those sports is far less than the prize money in racing or golf. I would love to have a debate on this. It is an anomaly and it could be discussed at greater length.

Senator Imelda Goldsboro: I ask that the Minister for education, Deputy McEntee, come before the Seanad to address the issues of class sizes and the capitation grant. We have heard from Irish National Teachers Organisation, INTO, and principals are frustrated in numerous schools in my constituency with regard to having an update on this. They need proper investment. They are underfunded and operational costs have increased significantly over the past number of years. It is causing great frustration for so many principals, staff and management in schools and must also be for the parents of the students. It is a priority. I know there has been an increase that will come into effect but it is not enough, unfortunately. We need to make this sustainable for all primary schools and our principals need to know this is a priority of the Government and the Minister.

Senator Maria McCormack: There is a lack of GPs in Laois. We have had a large population growth but do not have services, especially GPs, to match this. The national average GP ratio is 1:1,000 but in Laois at the moment the ratio is about 1:1,600. There are large areas in Laois that have no GP. To use the town of Ballickmoyler as an example, it has a population of approximately 1,100 people and hundreds of new houses have been built there. Surrounding areas also feed into it, but there is no GP there. There is no GP in Doonane, Crettyard or The Swan. Large areas of the county are without a GP. Where there are GPs, there are large wait times and extra pressure on our hospitals and out-of-hours services. I call on this House to have a debate about more GPs for County Laois, especially public GPs and not just private GPs.

Senator Gareth Scahill: I wish to bring up an issue that I am sure is relevant for every Member of this House. It is also a timely intervention at the moment as it is with regard to school transport. I call for a debate in this House on school transport. Like many of the Members of this House, I have regularly used the representatives at Bus Éireann's email address to try to raise issues about routes school buses are taking and capacity. The timely manner of responses is totally inadequate. At this time of year, it is important that we are seen to ask for these things.

An example I wish to raise is Glenamaddy Community School in Galway. Since March, I have been contacting Bus Éireann with regard to this issue. We are not looking for increased

funding for a bus route there, but for a more efficient route that would take in a much wider proportion of the population and the additional village of Ballymoe. It is timely that we have a conversation such as this. The very fact that we are not looking for money and are talking about efficiencies, which is what we are here to do, is important. I hope the House can facilitate a conversation on this in the near future.

Senator Ollie Crowe: This morning I raise the issue of vaping, especially the growth in vaping we have seen among young people in recent years. The proportion of young people in Ireland using vapes and other tobacco products has increased significantly, rising from under 20% in 2015 to 30% in less than ten years, according to research from the Irish National Cancer Registry. Many of us have sort of believed vaping to be more or less safe, but as Paul Kavanagh, chair of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland clinical advisory group on smoking and e-cigarettes, pointed out, when commenting on this research, that the reality is it will be another ten or 20 years before we know the full health effects of e-cigarettes. Dr. Kavanagh also emphasised that nicotine is a toxic and addictive substance and that e-cigarettes can deliver it in unpredictable and inconsistent doses.

There is also significant concern about e-cigarettes being a gateway to cigarettes. The steady decline in traditional smoking has slowed considerably, which lends credibility to that suggestion. Basically, people are starting out on e-cigarettes and then moving on to cigarettes. According to the experts, three in ten of all teenagers are using these products, we still do not know the health effects and we will not know them for years to come. I do not think I am on the only one in this House reflecting that we do not know the health effects of e-cigarettes and hoping this does not end with a similar story to cigarettes. These statistics are very alarming. We need to have more discussion on it in this House. I ask that the matter be raised with the Minister for Health and request that she joins us in the coming weeks.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Retailers are the lifeblood of all our communities, sponsoring virtually everything and creating local jobs, particularly for students during the summer holidays, etc. We should support our small retailers in every way possible. One of the biggest threats to them is smuggling of illicit goods and selling them outside the normal retail chain. The biggest example of this is in the tobacco sector.

Separate to the retailers and their losses, approximately €540 million is lost to the Exchequer every year from contraband cigarettes being sold. In 2024, the total seizure of related goods was worth €128 million, which is to be welcomed. This was double the value of the total value of illegal cigarettes seized in 2023. The Revenue officers and the cross-Border agency task force work on this constantly, but there is a need for more staffing here. There is a shortage and they would pay for themselves, if you like. There could be possible redeployment.

The increase in the number of illicit products seized is not due to increased resources as there was minimal allocation of resources here. There has been a 25% increase in passenger arrivals into Irish airports and a 14.6% decrease in Revenue's staff from 630 people to 540 people. That is not to be welcomed. I want the Deputy Leader to bring to the Government the fact we need to have more people policing this and finding the contraband. A total of 37% of all cigarettes coming into the country are illegal cigarettes. That is how bad it is. We need to up the staffing. We are possibly at a level where we do not need to increase the price of cigarettes any more from a health perspective. It has reached a very high pinnacle. Whatever about pricing, we certainly need to increase staffing and stop the contraband cigarettes from every perspective. We should be supporting our retailers. The whole community depends on them.

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Senator Pauline Tully: I raise the issue of home care hours for older and disabled people. I am regularly contacted by families of older and disabled people regarding home care hours. Where hours are sanctioned, carers are possibly not turning up for their shifts, or when two carers are required, only one turns up. This happens regularly at weekends. Where needs have changed and a person requires more care, the HSE will say the hours are sanctioned but that it cannot identify carers to provide the slot.

On the other hand, I hear from carers whose client may possibly be in hospital and whose hours are banked by the HSE. Therefore, the carers have been paid but are not filling those hours and they are not being allocated to others. Even as a temporary measure, it would make such a difference to the family carers looking after older or disabled people. Another carer told me one of her clients had passed away. She worked for a HSE-contracted agency, but waited weeks to be assigned to new people and was down money as a result. She was there, willing, able and trained up to provide care, people require it, yet she was not assigned to provide that care. There seems to be an issue that those with the most need are often not prioritised over those with less need. That is something that needs to be looked at as well.

I would love to see a debate on this issue looking at the whole system because something in it seems to be broken where hours are available but are not being assigned. We also need to look at ways of trying to employ more carers and making sure that we can hold on to them for long time. Pay and conditions are key issues in this regard.

Senator Pat Casey: For the information of the House, while Wicklow can be considered the youngest county or the last county to be created in 1606, when it comes to the investment in public transport infrastructure, we are definitely the last county to be considered. I look on with a bit of jealousy as the Deputy Leader sits there, because when it comes to the national rail review, I hear discussions about four-track services, increases to treble-track or double-track services and new stations in counties around Dublin, while in Wicklow, nothing is done to the single-track service it has today. We were promised that the DART service to Wicklow town would be in place by 2023-24, which then became 2028 and has lately become 2030.

In the meantime, we are looking at M11 congestion that happens every evening and morning, and while a major plan had been put in place for the upgrade from junction 4 to junction 14, which had gone to the preferred route stage, that was then pulled by the Minister in previous Government and replaced by the N11-M11 bus priority corridor, which is causing untold concerns, specifically in Bray with regard to the closure of the Herbert Road junction, but which will serve no purpose for the long-term future of transportation to Wicklow. For the information of the House, Wicklow has the last single carriageway coming into Dublin city centre, which is the N81.

11 o'clock

Proposals to improve that have been shelved. When it comes to the bus service, we will not even go there. There is no capacity on some buses. We have a completely unreliable service. Wicklow has been forgotten when it comes to investment in transport. We need to address that deficit if we are going to grow in a sustainable manner.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I want to raise the ongoing debacle and farcical situation regarding the placement of a surgical hub in the north west. I live in Sligo. We were assured that a surgical hub would be provided in Sligo University Hospital. We were assured by the Minister

of State, Deputy Marian Harkin, that part of the deal of going in with the Lowry group was that the surgical hub would be based in Sligo.

At a HSE regional health forum meeting in April, it was stated that plans were progressing and Sligo would be the base for the hub. I will in no way try to pit Donegal against Sligo. We need a surgical hub in both areas. I know Senator Manus Boyle has raised this significant issue, as have GPs, consultants and patients in Letterkenny. There has been a really good lobbying campaign for a surgical hub in Sligo.

We were assured that a business case was made for the surgical hub to be based in Sligo. My colleague, Deputy Alan Kelly, asked a parliamentary question in the Dáil on 24 June about what was part of the Lowry deal. He was assured that no deals were done with the Lowry Independents regarding HSE infrastructure. The Minister for Health, Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, said she has not received any business case for the surgical hub to be based in Sligo. Can we find out who is telling the truth and where the surgical hub will be based? We should not have a Dublin-centric model. It seems that we are cut off, from Galway up to the north west.

We need two surgical hubs. I hope it is not a case of divide and conquer. We need clarity. We need to find out who is telling the truth and when the information will be released. Patients and families are waiting. We are all getting fed up of the divide and conquer attitude towards the north west.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I welcome Deputy Connolly, his brother Dave and another guest, William. You are very welcome. I hope you enjoy your visit to Leinster House today.

Senator Dee Ryan: I request that the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage come before the House to outline the policies and procedures that govern how local authorities receive gifts such as buildings or other assets from philanthropists. Too often, generous offers to give back to a town, village or county are met with red tape and a lack of clarity. We need a clear and supportive framework to ensure that where someone wishes to gift something of value to their home community that gesture can be accepted and put to meaningful use.

Right up and down the country, our main streets are challenged - ask any retailer or Tidy Towns activist. When a gift which could be used as a community, arts or recreational space is offered, it can be transformative. It can provide opportunities for children to learn or play, young people to gather safely and creatively and entire communities to thrive and connect, thereby combating loneliness. In an era where we have multiple competing demands on the public purse, we should enable and encourage such acts of generosity and not create obstacles. Let us ensure that communities across the country can fully benefit when someone steps forward with a gift intended to give back.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: Before I move to the next speaker, I welcome H.E. Georgios Stilianopoulos, ambassador of Greece to Ireland. He is a guest of Senator Keogan. You are very welcome, ambassador. I hope you enjoy your visit to Leinster House today.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: On 30 June, the *Irish Independent* published the result of its investigation into the regulation of how sick certs are issued. There are serious limitations to telemedicine and areas where it can be exploited. The newspaper revealed that in some cases sick certs were issued without having any phone or video consultation with the patient. It has correctly been described as a bit of a wild west.

There are serious issues with the practice of telemedicine as it relates to Irish abortion policy. Since its introduction in 2020, it has been possible to acquire abortion pills which are then self-administered without a patient needing to be physically examined by a doctor. What struck me in the investigation carried out by the *Irish Independent* is that the Department of Social Protection will not accept online sick certs for social welfare schemes. The telemedicine system is not robust enough for the Department when it pertains to finances, but when it comes to the healthcare and treatment of women it sees no issue.

This is particularly concerning in cases of potential coercion and abuse. Meeting the women in person increases the likelihood of a provider identifying any coercion or domestic abuse. Aontú submitted a parliamentary question to the Minister for Health, Deputy Carol MacNeill, to ask whether independent research had been undertaken into the impact and effect of telemedicine abortion since its introduction in 2020. The Minister cited the 2021 review and stated that no serious adverse events had been reported to the HSE related to remote consultations for the termination of pregnancy.

I ask the Minister to conduct new independent research, given that in October 2022 the *Irish Examiner* revealed how an underage girl had been locked in a room and forced to ingest abortion pills. While telemedicine can provide convenience, it also risks being exploited. This is particularly alarming in the case of telemedicine abortion which poses a distinct risk to vulnerable women who may face the danger of domestic abuse and coercion.

Senator Fiona O'Loughlin: Senator Rabbitte raised the issue of CPOs, in particular those relating to the N63 road. I was quite shocked to hear the details that an arrangement was apparently made in 2014, but a landlord has not been paid since. That raises a lot of questions because the individual has suffered a loss of income. As the Senator said, that has caused a lot of stress. We need clarity on CPOs. They are, of course, not just used for roads, bypasses, etc. but also for derelict buildings in our towns. I am conscious of an ongoing issue in Newbridge. CPOs are used in order to put buildings to good use. It is important that there is absolute clarity for the owners, trustees or whatever the case may be. There should be very clear guidelines on timelines and compensation which is generally agreed to be fair. There is a process in place to carry out valuations. As the Senator said, there has to be an element of trust. She asked if the House was aware of any similar situations going on for more than 12 months. I am not, but I will leave that open to the House and anybody outside the House. It is a fair point. We should ask the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to come before the House and speak about CPOs. There will probably be more of them in the future, in particular given the housing situation. I am happy to agree to look for that.

Senator Manus Boyle spoke about apprenticeship programmes and a decrease in funding. I am not aware of that. I had reason to speak to the Minister, Deputy Lawless, the week before last regarding a craft apprenticeship in Ballyfermot school of music. He assured me at that point that absolutely no apprenticeship programme would end. We are at a time when we need to invest in our apprenticeship programmes and show parity of esteem to young people who are leaving school. They can earn as they learn and apprenticeships are the way forward. We will certainly ask about that possibility. I am not aware of it but we will look for clarity and for the Minister, Deputy James Lawless, to come to the House to talk about the apprenticeship programme, in general.

Senator McCarthy spoke about Irish business concerns regarding proposed tariffs. There has been an intensification of EU trade negotiations in recent weeks. The Tánaiste was in

Brussels for one such meeting on 26 June. The Tánaiste is in close contact with the EU trade Commissioner, Maroš Šefčovič, whose name I always pronounce incorrectly, so excuse me for that. The trade forum is ongoing. We cannot afford to be passive and we need to show business owners, particularly those in the SME sector, that we are supporting them. We are also looking for new markets. The Taoiseach has been in Japan this week. The development of new trade links is hugely important. We have an action plan on market diversification. The Senator also mentioned the banking industry and concerns about the housing situation. We are all concerned about the housing situation but I know that many developers are finding it hard to get access to credit from the banks. Maybe banks could improve their lending rules.

Senator Andrews spoke about the 150 redundancies at Penneys. It is a very difficult time for the workers and their families. I recall that there was a statement from the Minister for Social Protection, Deputy Dara Calleary, in relation to this. He said that it was a Government priority to support the workers. He has deployed a team to deal with the 150 people. They have been offered supports and income. Under the new rules, they can have income of up to €450 per week. The team is also looking at education and training supports. The Senator also called for a debate on workers' rights. We will look for this, as it is an important issue.

Senator Teresa Costello spoke about a briefing she received on adequate supports for cancer survivors facing menopause. For these women, HRT is not an option. We are all thankful to the former Minister, Stephen Donnelly, for leading a revolution in women's health, particularly in the context of menopause supports. The Senator spoke about a new drug which is under review and, as she rightly said, no one should be left behind. We hope that this new drug will be considered and the women who need it will get access to it.

Senator Ní Chuilinn spoke about the sportsperson's tax rebate. There was no one like Charlie McCreevy to find ways to support niche industries. He really did the State incredible service. At the time, I am sure it was just something that came out of the blue, but I know the man and I know the way his mind works. He is quite an incredible person. It was an important thing to do. Senator Ní Chuilinn spoke about the anomaly for different sports. She made the very fair point that sponsorships were not included. We need to bring this to the attention to the Minister for sport and the Minister for Finance.

Senator Goldsboro spoke about class sizes and the need for proper capitation grants. The Senator is right, the schools we represent in our areas are to the pin of their collar at this time, with rising prices. I acknowledge that the capitation grants will increase in September, from €200 to €224 per student for primary schools and from €345 to €386 per student for post-primary schools. I agree that this is still not enough. There is an anomaly with regard to what primary schools and secondary schools get. This should be equalised. If anything, younger children need more supports. There is a special unit in the Department of Education, the financial support services unit, that deals with financial supports for schools that find themselves in a very difficult situation. School principals need certainty. Regarding investment in schools, there has been a 20% increase in capitation over the past three years, but we are still not back to where we were in 2011. Considering how costs have risen, to think that we are back at pre-2011 levels is wrong. Principals need certainty and they need more middle-management administrative supports. There needs to be more deputy principals. In a primary school I know with more than 1,000 pupils, there is only one deputy principal. They are finding it difficult to manage. We will look for the Minister for education to come to the Seanad. We will try to get her before the recess and if not, immediately once we resume.

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Senator McCormack spoke about GP services in Laois. He mentioned that the national average is one GP per 1,000 people but in Laois the figure is one GP per 1,600 people. This is an issue in counties such as Laois where the population is growing. The Senator is correct to say that it puts extra pressure on hospitals and out-of-hours GP clinics. This issue did not begin overnight, it has been ongoing for some time and it has been highlighted by many GPs. There are some issues in the system. We will look for the Minister for Health to come here to address this particular issue. If we are focusing on primary care, as we are doing as part of Sláintecare, we need to ensure that we have a good GP service.

Senator Scahill spoke about school transport. As the Senator knows, the Minister of State at the Department of education, Deputy Michael Moynihan, had a briefing in the audiovisual room. It was great that he was able to bring in Oireachtas Members and representatives of Bus Éireann and the NTA to answer questions. I know there is a big review going on but the Senator mentioned the timely responses that every one of us should get. It is completely wrong that the Senator is not getting answers within an adequate time. No matter their party, everyone should be able to use the service that is there to get responses through the Oireachtas line. The Senator spoke about Glenamaddy Community School and the need to have a more efficient route put in place there. The Senator could possibly put in a Commencement matter next week. She is right to raise the general issue of getting responses.

Senator Ollie Crowe spoke about vaping and the number of young people who are vaping all the time. The Senator is correct, it has increased very significantly. The fact that three out of ten teenagers are vaping is an alarming statistic. Earlier this week, I happened to hear on the radio a young person talking about the impact vaping had on them and that it provoked a psychotic episode. There is a lot of evidence on this and we should have a session on vaping and get all the information and research.

Senator Joe O'Reilly spoke about retailers being the lifeblood of our communities - which we all agree on - and the effect on retailers of illicit goods. Apart from what is being lost to shops, particularly those close to the Border, €540 million is lost to the Exchequer. This could be very significant funding going into communities. I did not know that 37% of all cigarettes consumed here are smuggled. We need more people policing this issue, between Customs and Excise and An Garda Síochána. It would be worthwhile getting a briefing on how the matter is policed.

Senator Tully spoke about home care hours, particularly for older and disabled people. It is a quagmire and it is complex. In certain areas it is hard to be identify carers and that is why we need to have more courses on social care and we need to show school leavers that social care is such a worthy thing to do. We should provide the appropriate PLCs and apprenticeships. Senator Tully spoke specifically about the possibility of carers not turning up. That is most regrettable. In situations like that, I assume the agency must deal with those issues. Most of the carers I have come across have been excellent in terms of their care, attention and love they provide to those for whom they care. The Senator also said that some carers are available but are not being allocated work. Again, this is an administrative error that needs to be cut down on. It is certainly something we will raise with the Minister.

Senator Casey comes from the youngest county. I am sorry it is the last county to be thought of in terms of public transport. I am glad that one of its train stations got the fair fares, which is something we all fought for. The Senator is right in what he said about the services the county was promised such as the DART. So many people have moved to the county because of the

cost of housing in Dublin, so it is a commuter belt area and Wicklow should have a far better service. We have looked for a debate on the NDP before recess so that might be a place to raise it. We will look to the Minister for Transport to come to the House to talk about that as well.

Senator Cosgrove spoke about surgical hubs and where one would be based in the north west. She spoke very eloquently about it and the fact it is not a Donegal versus Sligo debate. We just need clarity on it. I know Councillor Edel McSharry has been in touch with a number of us about the issue. The Senator also mentioned the deal that the Minister of State, Deputy Harkin, made. I have no idea about the deal. I would love to know the details so the Senator can pass them on. I hope that clarity is provided very soon and that work can start. It would be ideal if both counties got it but we just need a decision so that people would know. It is probably worth putting down a Commencement matter to get the specific details about it.

In response to Senator Dee Ryan, reading the newspapers, I can appreciate what has happened in Limerick over the past few weeks and why this is a really important issue. I wish we had that problem in Kildare. We all wish we had that problem of benefactors who want to be able to give supports. It is not about giving it to the local authority; it is about giving it to the people so communities can be transformed and they can be enabled to thrive. The issue here concerns what happens when a philanthropist wants to gift land or a building to a local authority. A case involved Magee Barracks in Kildare many years ago. It was to be gifted to the local authority, which did not want to take it. A developer bought it and the Department of education had to buy that piece of land for a school, so we need clarity. We also need a system that is not tied up in red tape. If a generous benefactor wants to give a gift with no strings attached and it is decided that this should be done through the local authority, which is generally the best way in terms of transparency, we should enable it. Again, we will look for the Minister for local government to come to the House, so we are looking for him to come to the House to discuss two different issues.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly spoke about a shocking situation of which she was aware. We all feel huge compassion for that individual. She spoke about sick certificates being issued without any consultation. A tele-consultation is still a consultation and I know it has worked if someone cannot get to a GP physically. I have not used it but I did see one in operation and it seemed to work well and is a consultation. The important thing is that it is a consultation. The article in the newspaper showed that there was no consultation and people could buy a medical certificate. This is completely wrong. I understand that it is down to the Medical Council to regulate that. There does not seem to be a specific regulation but I think one should be brought in. Perhaps that is something we can ask the Government to do.

An Leas-Chathaoirleach: I would like to acknowledge that we had a tour group here, the North Wexford Historical Society, who were the guests of Deputy Malcolm Byrne. I welcome Bríd and Gráinne Shaughnessy and Thomas and Samuel Reilly, who are guests of Senator Brady. I am sure they are enjoying their visit to Leinster House today.

Order of Business agreed to.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar fionraí ar 11.25 a.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 11.46 a.m.

Sitting suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.46 a.m.

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An Cathaoirleach: I thank the Minister for coming to the House. No. 1 is the motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending EU Regulation 2024/1348 as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level; No. 2 is the motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending EU Regulation 2024/1348 as regards the application of the “safe third country” concept; and No. 3 is the motion regarding the proposed approval by Seanad Éireann of a Council recommendation on a co-ordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine. All three motions will be debated together and decided separately.

Before I call the Acting Leader to move No. 1, I welcome to our Gallery friends of Deputy Ivana Bacik, who served here for many years and we miss her greatly, and a group from Rathmines University of the Third Age. They are most welcome to Seanad Éireann today. I also welcome the group from the North Wexford Historical Society, who are guests of another former Member of the Seanad, Malcolm Byrne, now a TD.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 16th May, 2025.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O’Callaghan): I too welcome the group from the Rathmines University of the Third Age. Coincidentally, they are from my constituency. I was here yesterday and the Terenure men’s club and the Ringsend active retirement group, also from my constituency, were in. I do not know what is going on here.

An Cathaoirleach: We arrange that specially.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: Every time I come in here, there seems to be a local constituency group, so I thank the Cathaoirleach for that.

I stand here to ask the Seanad to approve these motions to opt in to these three proposals in the field of international and temporary protection. As the Cathaoirleach knows, Ireland is committed to supporting and advancing the development of a common European system of asylum so that we have a consistent, fair and efficient asylum procedure in ordinary times and times when there can be crisis situations, as was the case in Ireland last year.

In 2024, Ireland opted in under Article 4 of Protocol No. 21 to seven, what I refer to as non-Schengen, measures of the migration pact. On 29 April 2025, the Government approved my proposal that we draft a new international protection Bill, which would, in effect, transpose into Irish law the measures contained within those European Union regulations and directives. The reason I am here is that on 16 April 2025 the European Commission published a proposal for

a regulation amending the asylum procedures regulation as regards the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level. This regulation provides for the first time in EU law for the possibility and conditions to designate safe countries of origin at Union level. As the Cathaoirleach will be aware, we already do that at national level pursuant to section 72 of the International Protection Act. The possibility for member states to designate countries as safe countries of origin at national level is retained and will be retained into the future. It is proposed to designate all EU candidate countries, which are currently Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine, as well as Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo, Morocco and Tunisia as safe countries of origin at Union level. As I mentioned a moment ago, under section 72 of the International Protection Act 2015, I as Minister for Justice can make an order designating a country as a safe country of origin. To date, that has been done by me and my predecessors in respect of 15 countries. The 15 countries we have designated as safe overlap to a certain extent with the countries proposed at EU-wide level. The countries we designate safe are Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Egypt, Georgia, India, Kosovo, Malawi, Montenegro, Morocco, North Macedonia, Serbia and South Africa. When one compares the countries identified in our national legislation as safe countries with the countries proposed to be designated safe at EU-wide level, one will note the EU list contains three countries that are not on the Irish list, namely, Colombia, Türkiye and Tunisia. The agreement of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level would contribute to the objective of enhancing co-operation on return and readmission as part of the comprehensive approach to migration set out in the migration pact. That is the proposal in respect of the safe countries of origin at EU level. I am seeking permission from the Seanad to avail of our opt-in procedure under Article 3 of Protocol No. 21 which will allow us, as Senators will know, to get actively involved before the procedure is finalised and put in place as a regulation.

The second motion concerns a different proposal concerned not with safe countries but “a safe third country”. At present, under section 72A of our legislation we can designate another country as “a safe third country”. To date, we have only done it in respect of one country, namely, the United Kingdom, which includes the Isle of Man. However, on 20 May 2025, the Commission published a proposal for a regulation amending the asylum procedure regulation as regards the application of the safe third country concept. This allows member states to determine an international protection application is inadmissible when the applicant could receive effective protection in a third country considered safe for the applicant. Currently, I may, by virtue of section 72A of the International Protection Act, designate by order a country as a safe third country. As I said, the only country so designated under our legislation is the UK, which includes the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

The asylum procedure regulation will govern the safe third country concept at an EU level when pact measures come into effect and when the international protection Bill is enacted by these Houses in June 2026 or beforehand. Under the proposed amendments, the connection criterion will remain, but there will be two further alternatives. One is that the concept can be applied based on transit through a safe third country before reaching the EU. The other is on the basis of an arrangement or agreement with a safe third country ensuring the examination of requests for effective protection in that country. As the EU intensifies efforts to establish an effective and safe migration policy, it is important Ireland is strategically aligned with fellow member states on a multilateral basis to benefit from opportunities and address challenges. Ireland’s strategic role in relation to migration decisions will be strengthened through its participation in migration measures at EU level. A decision to opt in to these proposals would

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demonstrate Ireland's commitment to a common EU-wide solution to migration as evidenced by our opting in to the EU migration pact. Opting in under Article 3 of Protocol No. 21 would, as I said, allow Ireland to influence the proposals during the legislative process, giving potential to mitigate any aspects of the proposals may cause difficulties for us.

On 11 March 2025, the European Commission published a proposal for a regulation establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union. Opting in to this proposal would demonstrate Ireland's commitment to a common EU-wide solution to migration, which is already evidenced by our opting in to the pact. The returns proposal has been constructed by the Commission as a hybrid measure with both a Schengen and non-Schengen legal basis to facilitate the participation of Ireland and Schengen member states and Schengen-associated countries. The particular manner of Ireland's participation is still under discussion with our EU counterparts, given the complexity of the hybrid legal basis issue. The issue will be formally discussed by all member states in the relevant working group next Monday, 8 July. I am going to reflect on that discussion and if the emerging consensus is that an opt-in under Article 4, instead of Article 3, of Protocol No. 21 would be preferable, I will instead ask officials to pursue that path and will subsequently be back before this House seeking approval at a later date for an Article 4 opt-in.

In respect of the other proposal before the House, on 4 June 2025, the Commission published a proposal for a Council recommendation on a co-ordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine. Given the inherent temporary nature of the temporary protection directive it is accepted that even if the war in Ukraine remains protracted, temporary protection must come to an end; otherwise it is no longer temporary protection. The Commission has published a proposal for a Council recommendation on a co-ordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine.

The four sets of measures I have outlined promote the transition into other legal statuses before the end of temporary protection, ensure smooth and sustainable reintegration in Ukraine, ensure the provision of information to displaced persons and enhance co-ordination, monitoring and exchange of information among member states and Ukrainian authorities to monitor and support reintegration efforts. The proposed Council recommendation will not be binding in nature; rather, it is an important tool to support a co-ordinated EU-wide exit from temporary protection. Providing a roadmap for an orderly exit from temporary protection, this recommendation is essential to meeting one of the key objectives of activating the temporary protection directive, which is to protect the member state's international protection system, while acknowledging that many persons enjoying temporary protection have been in the Union for several years. We need to take into account that if we decided to just end temporary protection, the strong likelihood is every Ukrainian person here would simply decide to apply for international protection. Given there are approximately 87,000 Ukrainian people in the country it would put extraordinary pressure on our system, specifically the IPO and IPAT, if that were to occur.

It is important for Ireland to opt in to all these proposals to ensure Ireland's immigration system is robust, but also effective and efficient. Opting in to the three measures I am seeking approval for would also underline Ireland's commitment to EU values and its support for the EU's migration system and would demonstrate Ireland's continued solidarity with our EU partners. I thank the Cathaoirleach and will briefly state again I am seeking the approval of Seanad Éireann to permit Ireland to opt in to the three measures before the House under Article 3 of

Protocol No. 21. That will enable us to participate before the legislative measure is finalised. In respect of the fourth measure, which is the returns measure, I need to consider more what is going to happen in the European Commission and if it looks like Article 4 of Protocol No. 21 is the most preferable way to get into it, I will be back here at some date in the future looking for approval to opt in under Article 4 should Ireland be permitted to get into the returns regulation.

12 o'clock

An Cathaoirleach: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank him for his contribution. I welcome to our Distinguished Visitors Gallery, born in Memphis and now a state Senator in Mississippi from district 15, which is halfway between Memphis and Jackson, I believe, two great cities, Bart Williams, his wife, Cynthia, and daughter Emily. They are welcome to Seanad Éireann. Bart is a great friend of lieutenant governor Delbert Hosemann who is a great friend of Ireland and a big supporter of Notre Dame as well. Bart, Cynthia and Emily are most welcome. Thank you for being here.

Senator Robbie Gallagher: Fearaim fáilte mhór roimh an Aire ar ais go dtí an Teach seo inniu. The Minister is very welcome back to the House this afternoon. I compliment him again on his attendance in this House. He is a regular visitor here and it is very much appreciated. I know he has a lot on his desk at the moment but the respect he clearly shows towards this House is noted and appreciated by us all so gabhaim buíochas leis as sin.

I am happy on behalf of the Fianna Fáil group here to take on board the recommendations that the Minister has outlined in great detail this afternoon. It is vitally important when it comes to migration that we have a European response to the problem. Not doing so, if we were left to our own devices, would very much isolate us. The EU migration pact is an important step forward in our having a proper, co-ordinated EU response to this particular issue. On the three proposals the Minister outlined, I am happy to go on his recommendation. Having further time to look at the other issue makes perfect sense. In due course, when he has had time to reflect on that, he will be back to us with his thoughts and recommendations on that.

It is interesting that the list we have of safe countries and the list the EU is operating off are quite similar. There are only three countries which the Minister mentioned, Colombia, Tunisia and Türkiye, which we do not have on our list. It is notable that the lists are very similar. What the Minister outlined on the Ukrainian situation and temporary protection makes good common sense. I am happy to do that.

When it comes to migration, we are all looking for a system, whatever shape or form that takes, that is firm but fair. Since the Minister took office, he has had a lot on his desk. This is one issue which he has taken great control of. I would be glad if he could share up-to-date numbers of those coming to our country seeking international protection and how that compares with the previous 12 months. I would also be grateful if he could outline his ambitions for the turnaround time, if I might put it that way, for dealing with applications. What is the target? What is the current timeframe for to turn around the applications and how that compares with the previous 12 months or 24 months? That would be useful to see where we are.

The issue of migration is not going to go away. I would be interested to know what the figures are for those seeking international protection here and to reflect on those. We can be very proud of our record in this country. We have been very fair. We have opened up our doors to the Ukrainian community who fled the horrible situation in their country. We have opened our

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arms and houses to them. The generosity of the Irish people is to be noted in that regard. We can be very proud of how we reached out and helped the Ukrainian community. It is amazing how many of them have integrated into our society and how many are working here in this country. From speaking to many of them, I know their desire is to go home whenever it is safe to do so. They are contributing to our society and I very much welcome that. We can be very proud of all we have achieved in that regard.

I am happy to proceed as the Minister outlined. I would be grateful if, when he has the opportunity, he would come back to me on the questions I have raised in my contribution.

Senator Joe Conway: Is aoibhinn liom an Aire a fheiceáil ar ais arís. Tá sé de nós aige a bheith anseo go rialta agus, mar a dúirt an Seanadóir ansin, bainimid go léir sásamh as é a bheith anseo.

I was somewhat of the hope that my colleague, Senator McDowell, would be here to ply his considerable wiles and perspectives on this question. I take it he is unavoidably held up so I will bat on as best I can.

I understand there is significant and broad support for these measures among our group. Earlier this week, I spoke of the phenomenon in the seanfhocal i nGaeilge of being a “Taidhgín an dá thaobh”. Well, we are over 50 years a member of the European Union and we cannot be Taidhgín an dá thaobh. Either we are in it or we are out of it and I think this significant measure is very inclusive and very protective for the European Union. As such, it merits great support and being looked at as an antidote to the existential threats that are coming at Europe from many directions, from over as far as the Urals and many of the movements in our political partners in the European Union.

It is remarkably sensible, inclusive and in line with what the European Union has put forward. As a sovereign nation we should be in there working with our partners to devolve the best system of immigration, third-country status and enlightened immigration policies that are needed at the moment. They are so needed but we have to tread very cautiously because we have to maintain the status of our European and democratic way of life. These things are singly important to all democracy-loving people on this island and across the Continent.

Tugaim mo fhíorthacaíocht don Aire agus don Rialtas. Go n-éirí go geal leis an rún seo.

Senator Garret Kelleher: I am sharing time with Senator Cathal Byrne. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht teacht isteach arís chun an t-ábhar seo a phlé linn. Again, I thank the Minister for coming to the Chamber to articulate the importance of the common European asylum system and in particular the EU migration and asylum pact. In an enlarged European Union and at a time of volatility on the international stage with conflicts in different countries, it has become even more important that we work together with our European partners. I thank the Minister for attending the meeting of the Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, where he articulated the importance of opting in and influencing the legislative process. On behalf of the Fine Gael group, I again thank him for his attendance and assure the House we are fully supportive of the proposals before us today.

Senator Cathal Byrne: I acknowledge our guests in the Distinguished Visitors Gallery. About six years ago, I spent a week in Mr. Williams’s district, believe it or not. I had a very enjoyable and pleasant time and the people there were very welcoming and accommodating. He and his family are most welcome here today.

I thank the Minister very much for coming into the Chamber. As my good colleague beside me said, the Fine Gael group is supporting these motions. I will contribute in general terms about immigration. It is important that these issues be discussed in the Houses of the Oireachtas and that conversations happening among the public be reflected in this Chamber and down the hall. In a general sense, I am supportive of immigration and recognise the benefits of it. I think immediately of our hospitals, healthcare system, educational institutions and hospitality sector, and the many people who have come here through the work permit programme or sought asylum, been accepted and been granted asylum and leave to remain in this country and the contribution they have all made. I recognise also the contribution of the new Irish, those individuals who have applied through our mechanisms to become Irish citizens and have been granted citizenship and the contribution they have gone on to make to the country.

The other side of the coin is that it is important we have a migration system that allows for firmness and fairness, as was mentioned. It should also be fast. It is so important that measures like these will allow for faster processing of applications and the designation of a country as a “safe country”, which will allow officials in the immigration system to process those applications more swiftly. That is very important. I recognise the work the Minister has done and the work done by his predecessor, my party colleague the Minister, Deputy Helen McEntee, in the area of deportations. As a country, it is important that there be a mechanism that grants the State the ability to deport people who have applied for asylum and been refused and have then gone through the appeals process and, ultimately, had that application refused, and have then been asked to leave the country but have not done so. It is so important that the work done in this area proceed and progress, including in regard to the call for greater resources to ensure our migration system complies with the three principles of being fair, fast and firm.

I acknowledge the right of many people who have concerns about the immigration system in the country. It is a conversation being had in bars, in the street, at GAA matches, in the workforce and in so many communities across the country. We should move from the emergency system we have seen in recent years, where individuals with the ability to make private accommodation available have received massive sums from the State. We should move away from that model and towards one that is State-owned, whereby the State is resourcing the accommodation. I recognise the work done in securing some of these facilities across the country and the work that is continuing to be done to ensure there is resourcing and accommodation available for individuals who come to the country to seek assistance in the most difficult situations. Once those applications have been processed and have gone through the system, it is important that firm action be taken. If it is the case that somebody receives permission to remain in the country, they should be swiftly issued with a PPS number and the ability to apply for and take up employment and to make a contribution to the economy. I recognise the work done in this area to date. As my colleague outlined, the Fine Gael group supports the Minister’s proposals and will be voting accordingly.

Senator Nicole Ryan: I welcome the Minister back to the House. It is good to have him back with us today. We are being asked to debate three significant motions concerning regulations the Government is proposing we opt in to under Article 3 of Protocol No. 21 to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This is not a debate about whether we need a fully functioning, fair and efficient migration system. We do, of course, and we all acknowledge that. This debate is actually about sovereignty, scrutiny and whether the Government should be handing Brussels a blank cheque to set policy in areas where we still have the right to decide for ourselves. Until yesterday, four motions were due to be debated. That number changed

when the motion on the EU returns regulation was suddenly withdrawn. Quite frankly, that withdrawal tells us everything we need to know about why this Government's approach is flawed and reckless. It is extraordinary and deeply worrying that the Government is preparing to opt in to regulations where the nature of Ireland's participation is still being discussed with EU partners. It was only at the eleventh hour, citing the complexity of the hybrid legal basis, that the motion was pulled. If anything, this proves our point that the Government should not be opting in early under Article 3 when it has the option to wait until Article 4 and to make an informed decision.

Sinn Féin has been consistent. Where someone is not entitled to remain in the State, the State must act. Deportation orders should be enforced and tracked, but the Government cannot continue to pretend that surrendering more and more decision-making powers to the EU is somehow the answer. Let us remind ourselves that Article 4 of Protocol No. 21 allows Ireland to opt in to EU regulations after they have been adopted, once we know exactly what we are signing up for. This is a prudent and responsible approach. What the Government is instead doing is rushing to opt in early under Article 3 and, in doing so, binding the State to whatever comes out of the EU-level negotiations, even if it does not serve our best interests. Once we opt in under Article 3, we are bound. We have no veto and there is no going back. That is just bad governance.

The three motions before us deal with the establishment of a list of safe countries of origin at Union level, the application of the safe third country concept and the transition out of temporary protection for those displaced by the war in Ukraine. Each of these is important and deserves proper scrutiny and decisions that should be made here in the Chamber and not imposed by a majority vote in Brussels. I will deal with each motion in turn. Starting with that relating to safe countries of origin, Ireland already has the power to designate countries as safe for the purposes of international protection. That is provided to us under the International Protection Act 2015. We currently have 15 such countries, as the Minister outlined, including Albania, Georgia and Brazil. Sinn Féin supports the use of accelerated procedures in these cases to ensure efficiency and integrity in our system. There is no added value, though, in surrendering this power to the EU. In fact, doing so could hinder our ability to make decisions based on the realities here on the ground, which may differ significantly from those of the larger Schengen states. If we already have the tools, and we do, why would we give the power away? Why allow a Brussels-wide list to override decisions made here by a Government accountable to the Irish people?

The second motion deals with safe third countries. This concept is already in Irish law. In fact, as the Minister mentioned, the UK is currently the only area designated as a safe third country. Recent legislative changes were made to facilitate this following legal challenges. Again, however, the EU regulation would take things further, removing the requirement for there to be a clear connection between the applicant and the third country. That regulation seeks to make transit through a country proof of connection and, therefore, the safe third country concept could be invoked. Again, if we want to adopt our laws in a way that reflects Irish values and serves our system, we can do that ourselves. What we should not do is lock ourselves into a one-size-fits-all EU measure under Article 3 before the final text is even clear.

The third motion concerns the transition from temporary protection. Sinn Féin has opposed the extension of the temporary protection directive to 2027. We said it was not sustainable and we were criticised for that. Now, ironically, the EU is proposing that this plan end, which is exactly what we had called for. This transition should be led by the Government based on what

is right for Ireland and not by following a co-ordinated EU plan that may not reflect the unique pressures we face from housing to integration. We also cannot forget that temporary protection created a two-tier system here in Ireland and that schemes like the ARP exacerbated rental markets, offering supports not available to other people in housing distress. We need a transition but we also need control over how that transition happens. Signing up to an EU-wide approach under Article 3 would remove that control. We can do better for people.

This debate is not about opposing the principles behind these regulations. It is about process, sovereignty and democratic accountability. The Irish people elected us to make decisions in this Chamber, not to outsource those decisions to Brussels behind closed doors. Sinn Féin calls on the Government to withdraw these opt-ins under Article 3 and to reserve our right to make decisions under Article 4 with full information and proper scrutiny. Once we sign up under Article 3, that is it. There is no room for change and no room to opt out. That is not how migration policy should be made; it should be made in sovereignty in a democratic state. For that reason, Sinn Féin will vote against all three motions. I urge others in the House to do the same.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: No one is disputing that we need a fair and efficient emigration and migration policy but the motions under discussion are serious in nature and will have a significant impact on the rights of people who have sought protection here. There is an inherent danger in rushing through any legislation and when legislation pertains to the rights of people who could subsequently be removed from this jurisdiction and therefore be unable to avail of any appeal process or rectification of errors, the legislation deserves proper scrutiny. The proposals were only recently published and were brought to our attention a week ago. They need to be examined properly through the committee system, whether in the justice committee or the European affairs committee. We cannot possibly determine this afternoon the impact the regulations will have.

Senator Ryan referred to the fact that the regulations establishing a common system of return of third country nationals legally in the EU have been withdrawn. That is surely an admission that more scrutiny is required. The proposals relating to third countries considered safe is extremely reminiscent of the UK's Rwanda policy. This proposal seems to allow for member states to decide an application is inadmissible and yet the individual or individuals cannot be returned to their country of origin. Surely if it is not safe for a person to return to their country of origin, they should be granted asylum here or at least leave to remain here until it is safe to be returned to that country. The law currently requires any safe country a person may be deported to must be a country to which they have a connection. The new regulation appears to remove this requirement and is likely to result in a third country setting itself up as a safe country to receive people we have decided we do not want, and to charge accordingly. The Rwanda policy in the UK was ridiculed at the time it was introduced as one of Boris Johnson's most bonkers policies and was withdrawn by the Labour Government. It is estimated to have cost the UK taxpayer £700 million and resulted in a total of four voluntary deportations. Surely we have made enough bad policy decisions in this country that we do not need to go back to neocolonial policy.

There have to be serious questions surrounding what the regulations consider to be a safe country. The first proposal would designate all EU candidate countries as safe countries of origin. These include Albania, Bosnia, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine. Europe is telling us we need to spend 5% of our gross domestic product on defence against the Russians and then it is declaring Georgia and Ukraine safe. Outside of

that, the EU will also designate Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, India, Kosovo, Morocco and Tunisia as safe countries of origin. I do not know how many of us would fancy going on holidays to Ukraine or Colombia.

I appreciate Pride Month is over but we have to bear in mind the International Protection Act requires protection to be given where there is a risk of persecution on the grounds of sexual orientation. Is it not relevant to a safe country designation that in Egypt, for example, same-sex activity is punishable by up to 17 years in prison, with hard labour, fines and deportation. Where would a gay person deported from Ireland to Egypt be deported to? Would it be back to Ireland? What if that gay person seeking protection was originally from Egypt? Does Egypt then cease to be a safe country? Do we end up with a game of human ping-pong between Ireland and Egypt as an individual is deported back and forth? It is not a joke. It is very serious and I know everyone is taking this very seriously. ILGA-Europe publishes an annual Rainbow Europe review of the human rights situation in every European country. According to it, Türkiye comes in with a score of 5%, ahead of only Russia and Azerbaijan. Georgia is sixth last on 12%. So-called safe countries clearly are not safe for everyone.

We are voting against all the motions. If these proposals are passed by the Houses, as Senator Ryan said, they are in effect in Irish law and cannot be challenged in courts. I urge my fellow Senators to please reject these motions.

Senator Aidan Davitt: I join colleagues in welcoming the Minister to the House. He has shown in his short time in the ministry that he is an extremely hard-working Minister and has taken decisive action in that time. I commend him on the hard decisions he has made. It is not easy to make such decisions and I am sure he will face lots of ire due to them.

The recommendations from the EU seem to be quite reasonable. I do not think this is anything knee-jerk. It seems most of our compatriots in Europe agree and are of like minds. Many have a much stronger line on immigration than we do. Of course, many of them feel the brunt of it more heavily than we do. Through the pact, there is a certain sense of equalisation. It is quite a reasonable measure and the Minister has my full co-operation and support.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I share the concern many have expressed about the proposals before us. I echo what we have heard across the House about recognising migration as something that has happened for centuries and millennia and something that is often a net positive for countries. Ireland, with its history of migration in different economic and political circumstances, circumstances of conflict and so on, as well as its record of contribution globally, should have a particular understanding of migration.

Part of the context around migration is that right now we have the highest levels ever recorded of displaced and internally displaced people worldwide. The drivers for much of this increased migration are conflicts, our increasingly militarised world and our increasing focus on conflict. That is something Europe needs to reflect on, as one of the great arms-producing areas of the world and a part of the world that is, it seems, deeply committed to escalating militarisation internationally. That is alongside our greater contribution to climate change, which is one of the greatest and most desperate drivers of people moving. We need only look to the micro context of Gaza to see that people move for hunger. The extreme famine conditions we saw recently in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere have been exacerbated by climate and by the failure of western countries, including European countries, to step up to their responsibilities. We have to consider that context, rather than employing tunnel-vision language around the bur-

den of migration within Europe and how to deal with it. Let us talk about the burden of poverty, conflict and environmental devastation that is being placed on people around the world.

I turn to my specific concerns on the proposals before us. Asylum processes need to be fair and functioning, but that cannot come at the expense of human rights. At the heart of every application is a human being, a person or sometimes a family, whose rights must be respected as they make a claim for asylum in Ireland. The motions raise concerns about the human rights of those individuals and families.

The first proposal regards opting in to the asylum procedures regulation, which provides that the EU can designate safe countries. It states a country can only be designated safe if it is shown there is no persecution, as defined by EU regulation. However, several of the countries that will be deemed safe by the EU regulations have well-documented human rights violations, including violent repression of political opposition, imprisonment of journalists, widespread gender-based violence and, as has been highlighted, violence and penalties against those who are LGBT simply for their existence. These are also incredibly dangerous place for human rights defenders. Italian courts, for example, have ruled that some of the countries the EU designates as safe are not, in fact, safe. There is a serious concern around how these EU regulations will work in practice. For example, one criterion for a county to be deemed safe is that the EU-wide recognition rate is below 20%. This is a blunt tool. It is a standardised mechanism or an algorithm for making a decision rather than being a safety assessment, which is what should be required, with regard to the individual asylum applicants and their potential safety. Again, it can lead to blanket discrimination by country of origin rather than individuals accessing their rights and having their rights vindicated.

In terms of the well-documented human rights violations in some of the EU-designated safe countries, applications from these countries will be fast-tracked. The fast-tracking of these in these circumstances will undermine the human rights of the applicant. Speeding up these processes without adequate resources can lead to mistakes. We had situations in the past of extraordinarily poor decisions being made in the first round that needed to be reversed on appeal. I recall situations where cut-and-paste decisions were being made where the gender of the person was wrong. There were so clearly cut-and-paste decisions historically in Ireland where people had to have that corrected on appeal, for example. These mistakes often have life and death consequences for individuals.

The legal supports are inadequate and many may go through the system without even meeting a lawyer. We need a properly resourced asylum system that gives safe and legal routes for asylum seekers and refugees. There is only one organisation in Ireland that can assess torture victims, and it has a six- to 12-month waiting list. That is the kind of area where considerable focus and resources should be placed on ensuring the dignity of the applicants and their personal safety assessment. Human dignity is a fundamental European value. The Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU states, "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." The proposal before us do not guarantee that.

There has been some spectacle around the issue of deportation flights. Many people were disturbed to see five children deported from the country last month. A principal at the school two of the children attended outlined how their mother was waiting on a scheduled immigration appointment at the time of the deportation. The children were on the football team and had participated in the GAA for two years. They had friends. They were well integrated in the community. The school advocated for them to be able to stay. These are questions regarding

protections. How does this serve the public interest? Is it simply that we are talking of our capacity for housing and these kinds of issues are being put in? These are failures in the provision for persons in terms of conditions of living well in Ireland. It is very hard to see how the balance of risk to an individual is balanced here with the public interest. Within the proposal before us, the construct of non-entry could allow for indefinite detention at borders. UN experts have stated that detaining migrant children is never in the best interests of the child, is always in violation of children's rights, and, I would say again, is not in the public interest.

The second proposal relates to the application of the safe third country. The third proposal has been removed. My time is running out, so I am actually going to focus on the proposal that has been removed because it is key. As has been said, the fact that it has been removed reflects the concerns that are there because the same logics are underpinning the withdrawn third proposal, which I think the Minister said we will consider if we join it under Article 3 or Article 4.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Article 4.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: Let us be clear, however; I do not believe we should join it at all. Let us look at what was in that proposal that has been withdrawn, which comes from the same kind of logic in terms of safe countries. It comes from the same kind of perspective, which is a neocolonial perspective and a colonial perspective in terms of determining or arbitrating the lives of others. The change would mean that rather than having to have a connection to the country a person might be deported to, it would say the concept of a country of return would include, among other things, habitual residence, first country of asylum, third country where the individual has a right to enter and reside and, crucially, third countries where there is an agreement or arrangement concluded bilaterally or at EU level. Therefore, it is a country that the EU strikes a deal with. Let us look at the record of those in terms of the immigration control deals Europe has put in place in the past to keep people from even reaching European borders. Consider the immigration control deal we had with Libya, where the most horrendous human rights abuses have been documented, or the immigration control deal we struck with Sudan that contributed to the arming of what became actors in the war that is ongoing there currently. Those are some of the ways the EU has struck deals in its 11 immigration control deals. There was the insertion of borders between countries that did not have borders between them previously because they are to serve EU interests. That is the record of the kinds of deals Europe has struck with regard to European immigration control. I would call it nonsense, but it is too severe and serious in its consequence. This is the El Salvador piece or the Rwanda piece whereby Europe can designate a country and state that, even if these people have nothing to do with or no connection to this country, because Europe has a deal with that country, we will send them there. It is an outsourcing, not of the vindication of human rights, but it is a derogation and an abdication of our duty around human rights and international law, and it is a displacement and outsourcing that will, in effect, effectively sending people to situations where their rights cannot be vindicated. That is what was in the third proposal, which has been pulled back, and that is a deeply colonial logic. Let us have a deeper consideration of all the proposals, given that this was part of the picture. Let us pull back and consider them all with regard to an Article 4 accession or non-agreement or non-opt in. Clearly, these are logics that need interrogation in Ireland, which, as one of the only countries in Europe with a colonial history of being colonised, should have a particular attention to these consequences.

Senator Sarah O'Reilly: I welcome the Minister. Reading through the proposed motions, the first thing that struck me was that we could have been doing this all along ourselves and, indeed, we have been doing it to an extent. Ireland should not have opted into the EU migra-

tion pact when we have the full capability to govern and legislate on migration ourselves. Now, we find ourselves in the scenario where we will have to adhere to an annual specific number of relocations and financial contributions at an EU level. We have ceded power to the EU on this.

To lock ourselves into an agreement when we have no idea what the financial state of the country will be in the future is incredibly shortsighted. We are now bound by this agreement rather than the Irish State and Irish people having the option to choose for ourselves our own policy on immigration. However, this is not about the responsibility of the Government or the capabilities of the Irish people. This is about our Taoiseach and our Tánaiste trying to be the best boys in Europe. Given the Government's subservience to the EU on all matters, whether it is immigration, neutrality or agriculture, we cannot trust that it will advocate for our best interests when it comes to the migration pact. It is only because of Aontú that the level of Government incompetence regarding immigration has come to light.

Most of the information and statistics in the public domain about immigration were uncovered by Aontú through parliamentary questions. We have long proposed the need for an Irish sea border to monitor the movement of people entering the country. Our Government needs to work with the British Government to see this implemented. Aontú is part of the North-South Inter-Parliamentary Association, and we will raise this issue on these forums to ensure cohesive and direct action happens. We have also highlighted the need for data collection and comprehensive record-keeping. In fact, one of the selling points of the EU migration pact was the ability of member states to share information regarding screening. What has not been published is that we cannot opt in to these screening regulations because we are not a member of the Schengen area. We still have no idea of the cost of this pact to the Irish taxpayer, but it is estimated that the additional staff alone are set to cost €32 million per year. The Government's decision to opt in to the EU migration pact is not because of a commitment to reforming and strengthening our immigration system, but about ceding power to Europe. If the Government is happy to relinquish any difficult policy decisions to the EU, then perhaps its members are in the wrong profession.

From the start, we have advocated for a strong immigration policy that distinguished between those who need help and those who do not. Ireland is capable of accomplishing this without allowing the EU to happily legislate for us at an astronomical cost. What happens if we say "No" to the EU? If we had said "No" to the pact, would the EU have fined us or taken us to court? That is not how democracy should work.

Senator Sharon Keogan: I was probably one of the strongest opponents of Ireland opting in to this migration pact in this House along with a small number of Independent Senators. People are entering this country illegally and when people enter illegally, they have to be dealt with and returned. People are sick of people entering this country illegally and not facing the consequences of it. The Minister stated that the proposals were being accepted to ensure Ireland's immigration system is robust. I do not believe it is robust, I do not believe it is effective and I do not believe it is sufficient. I do believe the Minister is making progress, but he needs to do more. He definitely needs to do more. They are still coming in through Belfast. It seems very little has been done to increase Border patrols with the PSNI and An Garda Síochána. Will the Minister address that today? I wish him well because if any Minister is going to tackle illegal immigration, it will be him. We want a firm message to go out that if people are here illegally, they will be deported. The message must go out that they must get out or be put out. I wish the Minister luck and continued success in his role.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O’Callaghan): I listened to the Senators very carefully and I thank them for their contributions. I will try to respond to the points they raised but if I miss a point, I apologise. Senator Gallagher asked a couple of succinct questions. He asked how many people have sought international protection in Ireland to date this year. The answer is 6,000 in the first six months of the year. It was considerably lower than last year. In 2024, 18,500 people sought international protection in Ireland, while in 2022 and 2023, the figure was 13,500. Looking at the figures, I believe that this year’s figure will be lower than in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The Senator also asked how many applications had been processed this year. The answer is 9,475. Of those applications, 81% were refused or ruled inadmissible. The Senator asked what the turnaround time was. I want to see a turnaround time of three months between the hearing of the application at the IPO and the determination on appeal in the second instance. The IPO has become considerably faster. It is very efficient. I need to introduce the same efficiencies into the appeals board. In the past couple of weeks, I have appointed 36 new members to the International Protection Appeals Tribunal, which will have the effect of speeding it up.

Bhí mé ag éisteacht leis an Seanadóir Conway. Dúirt sé go bhfuil Éire in áit cosúil le “Tadhg an dá thaobh”. That is a bit unfair. We have an option in terms of Protocol No. 21, which was agreed many years ago, whereby we could opt in to justice and home affairs matters if we decided to. Some Members have asked what we are doing about sovereignty. This is us exercising Irish sovereignty. The elected Members of this House and the Lower House are making a determination as to whether we opt in to these measures, and I am asking them to permit opting in under Article 3.

Senators Kelleher and Byrne made contributions in respect of the immigration and asylum processes. There is no doubt that immigration has served this country well but when it comes to immigration, we also need to recognise that we have to have rules. No country in the world has an immigration system that does not have rules. All I am trying to do is achieve a controlled immigration system. Asylum is a small part of the immigration system. Tens of thousands of people come to Ireland every year on work permits, thousands come to Ireland each year on student visas, thousands come for holidays and individuals come seeking international protection. No matter what element it comes under, we have to have rules to respond to it.

Senator Nicole Ryan’s main criticism was that we should be opting in to all these measures under Article 4 as opposed to Article 3. It is traditionally the case that we do opt in under Article 4 but the advantage of opting in under Article 3 of Protocol No. 21 is that we are then able to become part of the discussions and negotiations that lead to the finalisation of the legislative measure. If we opt in under Article 4, as the Senator advocated, the measure is made and we either opt in to it or not. We would not participate in the making of it. She asked why we are handing over this power to designate safe countries to the EU. We are not. We would still retain the power under section 72 and in the new Bill, which will also provide for it, to designate countries as safe countries. I as Minister can designate whatever countries I believe it is appropriate to designate as safe. Parallel to that will be an EU system where the EU will designate countries. There will be many overlaps, as we have seen, but the real benefit of it is that if the EU has designated a country as a safe country, it will be much easier for Ireland to designate that country as a safe country because there will be widespread recognition within the EU that it is accepted. I also think that since we have a harmonised asylum system within the EU, it would be unusual, as exists at present, that some countries are designated by some countries as safe while other countries are not designated as safe by another country. There is a benefit to

having a harmonised response. The same point applies to safe third countries.

Senator Ryan also spoke about temporary protection. I know what the Sinn Féin policy is. Everyone in the EU, including Ireland, recognises that temporary protection must come to an end. Had the Sinn Féin policy been implemented, Ireland would just have pulled out of temporary protection, which would have had extraordinary consequences for Ireland. First, as I said in my opening remarks, the 87,000 Ukrainians who are here would immediately apply for international protection so, as opposed to having 6,000 people applying for international protection this year, we would be up to over 90,000. Any termination of temporary protection, which will happen, has to be done on a harmonised basis with the EU, which is why this is being proposed.

I listened to what Senator Cosgrove said about a Rwanda-style policy. That is not the intention of the Government but it is the case that there are countries that are safe. Georgia is a safe country. I am being careful about how I say this, but just because parts of a country may be unsafe does not mean that people from that country have an entitlement to come here and claim international protection. The benefit of a safe designation is that it speeds up the process. It expedites it. Everyone's application is still considered but it is done on an expedited basis. The Senator mentioned the persecution of gay people in Türkiye. Assessments have been done of Türkiye in terms of democracy, but it is not feasible for Ireland to say it has a responsibility to accept every gay person in Türkiye. That is just not feasible.

I noted what Senator Davitt said. Senator Higgins spoke about the benefits of migration. I agree with her about the benefits of migration but, again, I insist that we must have a controlled system. She was correct in identifying that conflict has caused migration, but look at the reason there has been the greatest level of migration to Ireland in recent years on the basis of asylum. It is Russian aggression in Ukraine. As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, 116,000 people have arrived from Ukraine. I think the number is now below 90,000. That is what triggered that. The Senator also mentioned climate change and was critical of the safe countries concept. I recognise the responsibility that I and the Irish State have when it comes to considering asylum applications. We are very liberal and fair when we are looked at in a European context and we do take into account the rights of the applicant, but there is a balance to this. As well as taking into account the rights of the applicant, we have to take into account the rights of the State and its right to be entitled to have a controlled migration system.

Senator Higgins also spoke about deportation flights. The reason we have deportation flights is because it is in the public interest to have them. It reveals that we have a controlled migration and immigration system. If we have a system where no matter who comes in, whether they succeed or fail in their application to stay, we say that it does not matter and they can all stay, why are we spending billions on a system for the IPO, IPAS and accommodation? We might as well just say that everyone can stay. It is about the public interest and having a controlled migration system. I am trying to do it in as humane a way as possible but I am not going to abandon my responsibilities simply because there are parts of the job that are probably unpleasant.

With regard to the removal of the return measure, the reason that is being done is because there are further discussions in respect of it. We will have ultimate control on whether we decide to opt into it. As I said, we will be back in respect of an Article 4 opt-in.

Senator Ryan talked about how we are ceding power to the EU. That is not correct. One thing that is apparent from recent history is that when you look at the UK, they left the European Union on the basis that they thought that, by leaving the EU, they would be able to resolve what

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was predominantly an immigration issue they faced. They have not. Their issues in respect of immigration have become considerably worse since they left. That is why it is important there is a broad and harmonised European response.

I note what Senator Keogan said as well with regard to what is needed in terms of border control. It is correct to say that very many people claiming international protection are coming in across the Border with Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, the policy advanced by Aontú is not achievable. I cannot, nor can any Minister, Tánaiste, Taoiseach or anyone in this Government, achieve an Irish Sea border when it comes to this issue. It may be something for the future but we cannot achieve it now.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 31; Níl, 15.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Andrews, Chris.
Boyle, Manus.	Black, Frances.
Brady, Paraic.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Cathal.	Collins, Joanne.
Byrne, Maria.	Cosgrove, Nessa.
Casey, Pat.	Harmon, Laura.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Higgins, Alice-Mary.
Comyn, Alison.	Keogan, Sharon.
Conway, Joe.	McCormack, Maria.
Costello, Teresa.	Murphy, Conor.
Craughwell, Gerard P.	Noonan, Malcolm.
Crowe, Ollie.	O'Reilly, Sarah.
Daly, Paul.	Ryan, Nicole.
Davitt, Aidan.	Stephenson, Patricia.
Duffy, Mark.	Tully, Pauline.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Goldsboro, Imelda.	
Kelleher, Garret.	
Kyne, Seán.	
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	
Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	
Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	

Wilson, Diarmuid.	
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Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, Senators Nicole Ryan and Joanne Collins.

Question declared carried.

I o'clock

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 as regards the application of the 'safe third country' concept,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 13th June, 2025.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 30; Níl, 17.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Andrews, Chris.
Boyle, Manus.	Black, Frances.
Brady, Paraic.	Boyhan, Victor.
Byrne, Cathal.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Maria.	Collins, Joanne.
Casey, Pat.	Cosgrove, Nessa.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Comyn, Alison.	Harmon, Laura.
Conway, Joe.	Higgins, Alice-Mary.
Costello, Teresa.	Keogan, Sharon.
Crowe, Ollie.	McCormack, Maria.
Daly, Paul.	Murphy, Conor.
Davitt, Aidan.	Noonan, Malcolm.
Duffy, Mark.	O'Reilly, Sarah.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	Ryan, Nicole.
Gallagher, Robbie.	Stephenson, Patricia.
Goldsboro, Imelda.	Tully, Pauline.
Kelleher, Garret.	
Kyne, Seán.	
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	

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Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	
Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, Senators Nicole Ryan and Joanne Collins.

Question declared carried.

Senator Seán Kyne: I move:

That Seanad Éireann approves the exercise by the State of the option or discretion under Protocol No. 21 on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the area of freedom, security and justice annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to take part in the adoption and application of the following proposed measure:

Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine,

a copy of which was laid before Seanad Éireann on 26th June, 2025.

An Cathaoirleach: Before I put the question, I welcome guests of Deputy Eoghan Kenny from the Mallow Women for Women group of Mallow, County Cork. They are most welcome to Seanad Éireann. I thank them for saying hello.

Question put:

The Seanad divided: Tá, 30; Níl, 14.	
Tá	Níl
Blaney, Niall.	Andrews, Chris.
Boyle, Manus.	Boyhan, Victor.
Brady, Paraic.	Clonan, Tom.
Byrne, Cathal.	Collins, Joanne.
Byrne, Maria.	Cosgrove, Nessa.
Casey, Pat.	Craughwell, Gerard P.
Clifford-Lee, Lorraine.	Harmon, Laura.
Comyn, Alison.	Keogan, Sharon.
Conway, Joe.	Murphy, Conor.
Costello, Teresa.	Noonan, Malcolm.
Crowe, Ollie.	O'Reilly, Sarah.

Seanad Éireann

Daly, Paul.	Ryan, Nicole.
Davitt, Aidan.	Stephenson, Patricia.
Duffy, Mark.	Tully, Pauline.
Fitzpatrick, Mary.	
Gallagher, Robbie.	
Goldsboro, Imelda.	
Kelleher, Garret.	
Kyne, Seán.	
Lynch, Eileen.	
Murphy, P. J.	
Nelson Murray, Linda.	
Ní Chuilinn, Evanne.	
O'Donovan, Noel.	
O'Loughlin, Fiona.	
O'Reilly, Joe.	
Rabbitte, Anne.	
Ryan, Dee.	
Scahill, Gareth.	
Wilson, Diarmuid.	

Tellers: Tá, Senators Cathal Byrne and Paul Daly; Níl, Senators Nicole Ryan and Joanne Collins.

Question declared carried.

An Cathaoirleach: When is it proposed to sit again?

Senator Seán Kyne: Next Tuesday at 2.30 p.m.

An Cathaoirleach: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Cuireadh an Seanad ar athló ar 1.23 p.m. go dtí 2.30 p.m., Dé Máirt, an 8 Iúil 2025.

The Seanad adjourned at 1.23 p.m. until 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 8 July 2025.