

## **€1.54m Sustainability Step-Up Fund launched to back grassroots climate initiatives**

**21 April, Dublin:** Rethink Ireland has today (21.04.26) launched the Sustainability Step-Up Fund, a €1.5 million, two-year fund supported by Zurich in Ireland and the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaelteacht via the Dormant Accounts fund.

The new fund will support five innovative, community-led initiatives that will have a social and environmental impact on both urban and rural communities. Organisations including social innovations working in the space of the circular economy, climate stewardship, action and education, biodiversity restoration, community development or sustainable practices can apply to the fund.

The Sustainability Step-Up Fund comes at a particularly important time as communities across Ireland face increasing environmental pressures alongside rising inequality. Aligning with the Climate Action Plan and the Wellbeing Framework for Ireland, the fund supports communities to address local issues, promoting inclusion and boosting resilience.

Awardees will receive financial support, alongside tailored business and capacity-building supports as part of Rethink Ireland's Accelerator Programme to help them scale their impact and strengthen their long-term sustainability.

On the launch of the fund, **Deirdre Mortell, CEO, Rethink Ireland**, said "Innovative, community-led solutions are essential to addressing the climate challenges facing Ireland today. Climate change is intensifying existing inequalities, with the greatest impacts felt by those least able to withstand them – children and older people. We know that environmental causes receive only 3–4% of charitable funds raised in Ireland each year. This is why this fund is so important. It will support both people and the planet, shaping a sustainable future for Ireland where everyone is included."

Commenting on the partnership with Rethink Ireland, **Anthony Brennan, CEO, Zurich Ireland**, said: "We are committed to advancing sustainability and supporting local communities to respond to the climate crisis. Our longstanding partnership with Rethink Ireland reflects our belief in the power of social innovation to deliver meaningful, long-term impact. This fund is an important and innovative step in supporting communities across Ireland to build a brighter, more resilient and sustainable future."

The Sustainability Step-Up Fund is now open for applications, closing 28 May 2026.

--ENDS--

**For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:**

Sorcha Mac Mahon, Springboard Communications

[Sorcha@springboardcommunications.ie](mailto:Sorcha@springboardcommunications.ie) | M – 087 7585337

Marc Woodard, Springboard Communications

[Marc@springboardcommunications.ie](mailto:Marc@springboardcommunications.ie) | M – 086 829 1121

#### **Notes to the Editor:**

- Spokespersons from Rethink Ireland will be available for interview.
- Previous awardees are available for interviews – see case studies below

#### **About Rethink Ireland:**

Rethink Ireland provides cash grants and business support to charities and social enterprises working in Irish communities across the country. They work with companies, families, individuals, foundations and the Irish government who understand that new thinking in Ireland is needed. Since their first year of operations in 2016, they have created a €129 million social innovation fund.

Through these public-private partnerships, they create funds to tackle issues such as inequality and educational disadvantage. The €129 million fund has reached over one million people, launched 69 funds, backed 494 innovative projects, supported over 160,000 learners, created 1,354 jobs in the non-profit sector and supported over 4,000 people into employment. For more about Rethink Ireland, please visit [www.rethinkireland.ie](http://www.rethinkireland.ie).

Rethink Ireland follows a rigorous process for the selection of awardees of all funds. The final selection is decided by the Grant Making Committee and Board of Rethink Ireland.

#### **About Zurich in Ireland:**

Employing over 1,000 people in Ireland, across its locations in Dublin and Wexford, Zurich operates as Zurich Life Assurance plc (Zurich Life) and Zurich Insurance Europe AG, Ireland Branch (Zurich Insurance).

**Zurich Insurance** is one of Ireland's leading general insurance companies offering a wide range of products including private motor and home insurance, commercial property, business, farm and professional indemnity insurance.

**Zurich Life** is one of Ireland's most successful life insurance companies, offering a full range of Pension, Investment and Protection products. It has been meeting its customers' needs in Ireland for over 40 years.

**Zurich Insurance Group (Zurich)** is a leading global multi-line insurer founded more than 150 years ago, which has grown into a business serving more than 82 million customers in more than 200 countries and territories.

Reflecting its purpose to ‘create a brighter future together,’ the Group offers protection services that go beyond traditional insurance, to support its customers in building resilience. Since 2020, the Zurich Forest project supports reforestation and biodiversity restoration in Brazil’s Atlantic Forest.

The Group has more than 65,000 employees and is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland. Further information is available at [www.zurich.com](http://www.zurich.com).

**About The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht:**

The expanded Department is now known as the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht. The Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD leads the Department and is supported by the Minister of State with Responsibility for Community Development and Charities, Jerry Buttimer TD.

*The Dormant Accounts Fund*

The Dormant Accounts Acts 2001-2012, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003, provide a framework for the administration of unclaimed accounts in credit institutions (i.e. banks, building societies and An Post) and unclaimed life assurance policies in insurance undertakings.

The main purpose of the legislation is to reunite account or policy holders with their funds in credit institutions or insurance undertakings and in this regard, these bodies are required to take steps to identify and contact the owners of dormant accounts and unclaimed life assurance policies.

However, in order to utilise the unused funds the legislation also introduced a scheme for the disbursement of funds that are unlikely to be reclaimed from dormant accounts and unclaimed policies for the purposes of measures to assist:

1. the personal and social development of persons who are economically or socially disadvantaged;
2. the educational development of persons who are educationally disadvantaged or persons with a disability.