



Submission to Review of Ireland's Foreign Policy and External Relations

Introduction

Age Action Ireland (AAI) welcomes the public consultation and call for submissions by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) on its review of Ireland's foreign policy and external relations. AAI is the leading Irish non-governmental organisation working on older people's issues. While AAI's main focus is on advocacy and service provision for older people in Ireland we have been working since 2009 on ageing and development, focussing on global ageing and issues older people face in developing countries.

Our main aim is to raise awareness about these issues with the general public, older people and other development organisations in Ireland. We do this through development education, producing materials, engaging in campaigns and building support among relevant stakeholders on ageing and development issues and the rights of older people, including for a new international Convention on the Rights of Older People.

Many of the issues listed for consultation are not relevant to AAI's work so this submission will focus on promoting our values and interests and international development. First a paragraph on the context to this submission.

The Ageing Context

Population ageing is one of the most significant trends of the twenty first century and has important and far reaching implications for all aspects of society. By 2050, there will be more over-60s worldwide than children under 15.¹ Population ageing is occurring faster in developing countries, which have less time to adjust to the consequences of this demographic transition. Currently, 8% of the population in developing countries are over 60, compared to 20% in developed countries.² Globally, the population of older people (defined as over 60) will increase by 29 million each year on average between 2010 and 2050, and

¹ UNDESA Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*. Available from <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

² *World Population Ageing 2009*, available here http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WPA2009/WPA2009_WorkingPaper.pdf

80% of this increase will be in developing countries.³ It is in this context that AAI is making this submission.

Promoting our Values and Interests

Ireland's foreign policy and external relations has among other things traditionally focussed on the promotion of human rights. Ireland thus has a strong international reputation in the area of rights, as reflected by its current membership of the UN Human Rights Council. AAI recommends the prioritisation of human rights and using a rights based approach in Ireland's foreign policy. As a small State with limited resources and influence the continuation and increased priority of human rights would mean Ireland can continue to take a leadership role on this issue internationally.

In this regard AAI endorses Dochas' submission to this review process and the Galway Platform on Human Rights in Foreign Policy submission. Notably AAI would like to recommend that the protection of human rights in foreign policy is also reflected in Ireland enforcing its domestic human rights obligations. This will mean taking a whole of government approach.

AAI would also like to recommend that DFAT apply the core principles of using a human rights based approach; namely the express use of the human rights legal framework, equality and prioritisation of vulnerable groups, empowerment & participation of those affected and accountability, to all its policies and actions. This approach guards against unintended discrimination and potential vulnerability of older people as well as other groups such as women, children and people with disabilities. The inclusivity of using the human rights legal framework and taking a human rights based approach is vital.

AAI also urges the DFAT to support the drafting of a Convention on the Rights of Older People at the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing. As well as improving the situation of the rights of older people in Ireland perhaps more significantly, given the demographic projections on ageing populations, a new Convention would improve the situation of the rights of older people in developing countries. AAI were delighted to welcome Ireland's recent co-sponsorship of resolution 24/20 at the UN Human Rights Council in September 2013 to appoint an independent expert on the rights of older people, a good example of Ireland's leadership in the area of human rights.

International development

There was a strong human rights focus in *One World One Future* which was very much welcomed, as well as the whole of government approach. In this regard AAI would like to endorse Dochas comments on policy coherence in development in its submission.

³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Current Status of the Social Situation, Well-Being, Participation in Development and Rights of Older Persons Worldwide*, August 2010, available here <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/publications/current-status-older-persons.pdf>

Given the huge projected increase in the population of older people in developing countries, as outlined above, AAI urges DFAT to prioritise ageing and older people in its development policies and programmes now and into the future to adequately plan and prepare for this demographic change. This includes ensuring data disaggregated by age (among other things, e.g. disability, gender) is gathered in all its programmes.

AAI also urges DFAT to promote the collection of this data in the negotiations on the post 2015 framework. Ageing and older people were not included in the millennium development goals, with the result that data was only collected on people up until age 49. Our partners HelpAge International published the first ever Global AgeWatch Index in October 2013, which revealed a serious lack of data in key geographical regions including Africa, the Middle East and the Caribbean.⁴

In addition to this AAI also recommends that DFAT push for the 2015 framework to be human rights based with equality and non-discrimination as priority themes. All goals and targets must take account of the rights of people at all stages of their lives. The global call to “leave no one behind” in the Report of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda⁵ should be made meaningful by tackling inequality and exclusion including removing barriers to the full participation of all people in society regardless of age, disability and gender.

As mentioned above AAI provides development education in our work to raise awareness about the issues older people face in developing countries. In this regard we would like to endorse the Irish Development Education Association’s submission under this review. Notably we would like to recommend the continued prioritisation of development education and public awareness in Ireland’s foreign policy and policy on international development. This work is a crucial way to provide support for Ireland’s development and human rights policies as well as public engagement with international development and human rights issues.

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⁴ The GlobalAgeWatch Index is available here <http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/>

⁵ The Report of the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda is available here <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>