



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

**Submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in respect of
Irish Aid White Paper Consultation on Ireland's New International Development Policy
Dochas Education in International Development and Emergency Working Group**

- Nature of views: **Organisational**
- Organisation (if applicable): **Dochas - Education in International Development and Emergencies Working Group**

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Introduction

The Dóchas Education in International Development & Emergency Working Group is a group of members who have come together to network, learn and share their resources and expertise on education in development and emergency situations. The group is also committed to engaging with key domestic and international stakeholders, in order to promote dialogue and influence matters relating to inclusive, safe, quality education priorities.

Restricted access to education increases the likelihood of intergenerational poverty. Yet despite this, millions of children around the world are still denied their right to an education, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The most recent estimates have **approximately 264 million children out of school**¹. Every boy and girl should receive a quality education that increases their chances in life. An education creates better employment opportunities, better health, and facilitates active citizenship including participation in political processes.

Over the last few years, there has been progress in enrolling more children in school around the world. For example, in **2015, 91% of primary-school-age children were enrolled in school**, bringing the number of out-of-school primary-aged children down from 100 million in 2000 to 61 million in 2015². It is not enough however to get children into school; we also need to ensure that they learn to read, count, and acquire necessary life skills. A poor quality education is almost equivalent to no education. Vulnerable and marginalised groups including girls, children with disabilities and children living in fragile and conflict-affected countries are most likely to be impacted by limited access to education, a lack of well-trained teachers, inadequate learning materials, and unsuitable education infrastructure.

It is widely recognised that educating girls has a multiplier effect on other development outcomes. Educated girls and women tend to be healthier, have fewer children, earn more income and provide better health care for themselves and their children. These benefits are also transmitted from generation to generation and across communities at large, making girls' education one of the best investments that a country can make, however **53% of out-of-school children are girls**³.

¹ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002503/250392E.pdf>

² <https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/primary-education/>

³ https://www.unicef.org/education/bege_61667.html

Children with disabilities are often excluded from education systems. In many countries, a combination of discrimination, social attitudes, poverty, lack of political will, and poor human and material resources leave children with disabilities more vulnerable to being excluded from education. It is essential that societies adapt their education systems to ensure that these children can enjoy their basic human right to education without discrimination of any kind.

Education remains critical during times of conflict. **Currently, one in four out-of-school children live in crises-affected countries**⁴. A strong focus on education in countries affected by crisis promotes stability, good governance, and peace. It can also provide a visible sign of a return to normality for children. Education in protracted crisis breaks the cycle of hopelessness, frustration and anger.

The UN's 'Leave No One Behind' agenda emphasises the need to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised including girls, children with disabilities, and those living in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Lastly, early childhood education is recognised as vital to lifelong success with evidence to demonstrate that investment in this area supports the highest returns from individuals, societies and countries. Children who have access to quality early childhood programmes have better long-term learning outcomes and are more socially and economically productive in adulthood.

The Working Group recommends that Ireland's new international development policy:

- **Is future oriented, recognising that development is a long-term process.** Investing in children and young people today is an investment in positive development tomorrow. Education enables people to take control of their own futures; it enables innovation and new ideas; it enables social and economic growth. Prioritising investment in education in the short-term will have a cumulative impact in breaking the poverty cycle over the next 20 years.
- **Reflects Ireland's own positive experience of prioritising support for universal education.** Ireland is a clear illustration of the positive impact investing in universal education – from pre-primary to secondary – can have on a country's economic and social development.

⁴ https://www.unicef.org/education/bege_61667.html

- **Promote the building of sustainable education systems for poverty reduction and human development, in line with Irish Aid’s Education Strategy.** This means directing support towards public education systems and developing quality indicators in partnership with key stakeholders (including International and local NGOs) to ensure interventions are reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised, i.e. girls, children with disabilities and those living in fragile and conflict-afflicted countries.

1. What elements of Ireland’s international development experience should the new policy reflect?

Ireland is a clear example of the positive impact investment in universal education can have on a country’s economic and social development. Even after decades of investment, the on-going change in the level of human capital continues to have a progressive impact on Irish society and the economy.

The Working Group feels that the new Policy for International Development should reflect the positive experience of Ireland and prioritise support for universal education – from pre-primary to secondary in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 - as a proven means of development. As Irish Aid’s Education Policy & Strategy states: Ireland should promote the building of sustainable education systems for poverty reduction and human development.

After a few years in which education was not prioritised in Ireland’s overseas aid agenda, the recent commitment by the Government to double Ireland’s contribution at the Global Partnership for Education Conference in Dakar (February 2018) is a positive sign that Ireland recognises the importance of education in ensuring positive long-term development outcomes.

Ireland’s international development experience provides a rich example of the positive impact of education which can be built upon. From a tradition of volunteers and missionaries that saw educators travelling overseas, to Irish NGOs who have contributed to the development of new ways to promote education in emergency and crisis contexts and established strong relationships with local governments to support them in improving their education systems.

Building on Ireland’s current international development policy *One World, One Future* that highlighted the promotion of gender equality as a cornerstone of sustainable development, the new policy should promote gender-responsive education as key in realising progress

toward gender equality. Education empowers girls and boys with foundational skills, knowledge and skills for work, leadership capacities, increased livelihood opportunities, influence and autonomy. At the same time, gender equality is indispensable to achieving educational goals that will make sustainable development possible.

On climate change, where Ireland has established itself as a leader on the global stage, we recognise the evidence proving that people, especially women, with higher level of education appear to be more resilient in the face of crisis. If Ireland wants to remain a credible leader on climate change, then education must become a clear priority.

2. What are the implications of the changing global context for Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

The increasing fragility in the world's poorest countries, gender inequality, and the changing nature of extreme poverty are all elements of the global context that need to be recognised. Investing in education is essential if we are to reverse these trends.

Studies have proven that investing in education yields significant development benefits. Education reduces poverty, boosts economic growth and increases income. It increases a person's chances of leading a healthy life, reduces maternal deaths, and combats diseases such as HIV and AIDS. Education can promote gender equality, reduce child marriage, and promote peace. In summary, education is one of the most important and effective investments that a country can make in its people and its future.

Within the global context, education is paramount to the success of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Notably, Goal 4, which aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."

Post-*Brexit*, the UK's departure from the EU will leave a leadership gap on education that Ireland can seek to fill, promoting the importance of investing in education for global development and stability, in line with its own experience.

As the European leader on education, Ireland could join Canada in the push for education for all, especially girls. Evidence from a diversity of contexts and across generations demonstrates the enormous benefits that girls' education has; not only for girls themselves but also for their children, families, communities, and countries. Investing in education, and especially gender-responsive education, is vital to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

3. Do the proposed priorities respond to the changing context and contribute to the achievement of our vision of a more equal, peaceful, sustainable world?

Global evidence consistently shows that education is the basis for addressing the majority of the proposed priorities – it is investing in the adults and decision-makers of tomorrow. Yet in 2016, Irish Aid invested just 4% of its ODA in education, demonstrating that it is not currently an explicit priority. Establishing education as a key priority in the new international development policy would outline Ireland's support for a world in which more children receive an inclusive, quality education. Enhancing global levels of literacy and numeracy is a vital strategy to creating a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world.

While the Working Group welcomes the identification of education among the proposed interventions, we believe that to ensure a meaningful, long-term impact from investment in education, the new policy should look beyond education in protracted crises and education for skills development and employment programmes. Attention and support should focus on universal education for all (especially the most vulnerable and marginalised such as girls and children with disabilities) including early childhood care and education up to secondary level. To tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality in a sustainable manner, education needs to be approached as a 'life long process'.

Priority should be given to those countries where access to education is still a challenge, supporting government to develop quality public education systems based on respect for human rights and development. This includes supporting governments to budget appropriately to address gaps and needs, and ensure that education is gender-responsive. The Working Group believe Ireland should oppose the 'outsourcing' or privatisation of public education systems which have the potential to neglect those most in need or hardest to reach, in contrast to the '**Leave No One Behind**' agenda.

4. How can we improve delivery of Ireland's international development cooperation and humanitarian action?

The time has come for Ireland to step up and become an advocate for investment in education in both the EU and other multilateral institutions.

The Irish missionary, development and academic education sectors should be supported to work together, combining and enhancing their resources, capacities, impact and influencing power.

The Irish Government should release a roadmap for achieving its 0.7% ODA commitment by 2025 as part of its new international development policy, including education as priority sector for interventions. Part of this budget should be allocated to a fund for piloting new modalities of intervention, and research to inform Ireland's work overseas.