

Sustainability

Ireland's emissions profile is dominated by emissions from the energy supply, transport and agriculture sectors¹. The immediate challenge for Irish climate policy is to meet the EU 2020 targets for the domestic sector², which is a reduction of at least 20 per cent on the 2005 emission levels by 2020. If achieved, the projected strong growth in the agriculture sector set out in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food vision *Food Harvest 2020* will likely result in agricultural emissions increasing by 7 per cent by 2020. There is a significant challenge for Government in achieving the binding EU 2020 targets whilst also pursuing its *Food Harvest* agenda.

Agriculture accounts for the largest proportion of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions, 31.9 per cent of the total. Pursuing Food Harvest 2020 and increasing milk production in 2015³ means that emissions from agriculture are likely to continue to increase over the coming years.

Agricultural emissions increased between 2012 and 2013 and are driven by higher animal numbers reflecting plans to expand milk production (EPA, 2014). A recognition of the 'limited' mitigation potential of the sector must not reduce efforts to reduce agricultural emissions and meet international targets and obligations.

Climate change

Climate change is one of the most significant and challenging issues currently facing humanity. Ireland produces an estimated 160,359 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every day (EPA, 2014). Increased levels of greenhouse gases, such as CO₂, increase the amount of energy trapped in the atmosphere which leads to global effects such as increased temperatures, melting of snow and ice and raised global average sea-level.

If these issues are not addressed with urgency the projected effects of climate change present a serious risk of dangerous and irreversible climate impacts at national and global levels. Food production and ecosystems are particularly vulnerable.

The latest research from the World Meteorological Organisation has ranked 2014 as the hottest year on record, and finds that fourteen of the fifteen hottest years ever recorded have been in this century. In Ireland, six of the ten warmest years on record have occurred since 1990⁴.

Among the predicted adverse impacts of climate change are sea level rise, more intense storms, increased likelihood and magnitude of river and coastal flooding, adverse impacts on water quality, and changes in distribution of plant and animal species⁵.

Policy Priorities

- A common understanding of sustainability should underpin all public policy decisions.
- The economic value of biodiversity must be accounted for in all environmental policy decisions.
- Shadow national accounts should be developed to move towards a more sustainable, resource efficient model of growth.
- A progressive and equitable environmental taxation system should be developed in a structured way that does not impose a disproportionate burden on certain groups.

¹ EPA (2014) Ireland Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector.

² Agriculture, transport, residential and waste sectors.

³ Milk Quotas in the European Union were abolished in 2015.

⁴ <http://www.epa.ie/climate/>

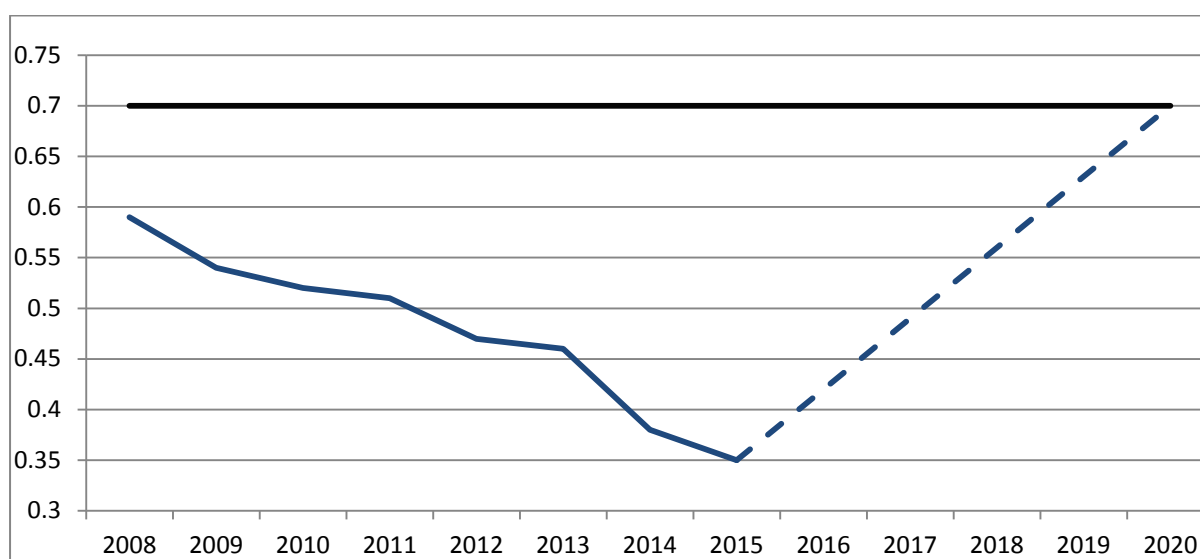
⁵ *ibid*

Global South

Table 10: Ireland's net overseas development assistance, 2005-2020*

Year	€m's	% of GNP
2008	920.7	0.59
2009	722.2	0.55
2010	675.8	0.53
2011	657.0	0.50
2012	628.9	0.47
2013	637.1	0.46
2014	601.6	0.43
2015	602	0.38*
2016	742	0.42*
2017	893	0.49*
2018	1053	0.56*
2019	1221	0.63*
2020	1398	0.7*

Source: Irish Aid (2012:73) and various Budget Documents.* Projected figures based on adjusted figure of GDP and GNI as introduced in 2015 by Eurostat. 2016-2020 numbers set out a possible pathway to reaching 0.7% target by 2020.

Chart 10: ODA as % GNP Ireland 2008 – 2020*

*(2015-2020 projected)

Global South

Sustainable Development Goals

2015 is the European Year for Development (EYD). Within the EU, this means development issues are subject to increased awareness and publicity campaigns for 2015. In planning for the post-2015 development agenda, *Social Justice Ireland* believes that the international community needs to play an active role in developing the proposed UN Sustainable Development Goals and in assisting less developed countries achieve their potential. Rebuilding our commitment to ODA and honouring the UN target should be important policy paths for Ireland to pursue in the years to come. Not only would its achievement be a major success for government, and an important element in the delivery of promises made, but it would also be of significance internationally. Ireland's success would not only provide additional assistance to needy countries but would also provide leadership to those other European countries who do not meet the target.

Inequality in the Global South

The UN Human Development Report 2014¹ (UNHDR) notes that there are 1.2 billion people living on \$1.25 a day or less and 2.7 billion living on less than \$2.50 (HDR 2014, p.71). In a world with resources many times what is required to eliminate global poverty this situation is intolerable.

The report warns that “there is evidence that the overall rate of progress is slowing—and this is worrying.” (UN HDR 2014, p.33²) The report notes that “to tackle vulnerability, particularly among marginalized groups, and sustain recent achievements, reducing inequality in all dimensions of human development is crucial³. The key emphasis within the 2014 report rests on vulnerability and individuals ability to respond to the shocks and uncertainties of a globalised

world, in terms of climatic, economic and political upheavals. Whilst greater numbers around the world are emerging from poverty, “more than 2.2 billion people are either near or living in multidimensional poverty. That means more than 15 percent of the world's people remain vulnerable to multidimensional poverty⁴.”

Overseas Development Assistance

The Irish Government regularly cites the positive assessment international bodies give of Irish overseas aid. The OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review of Ireland noted how Ireland's “institutional structures enable it to deliver co-ordinated, quality development co-operation and to be a pragmatic and flexible partner” (*OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Ireland 2014*, p. 17).

Since 2008, Ireland's ODA expenditure has significantly decreased (see chart 10). The cumulative impact of these successive cuts to the ODA budget is to limit the resources tackling extreme poverty, hunger, human rights abuses etc. If ODA contributions continue to decline aid programmes- and poor communities in host countries- will suffer.

The Irish government needs to recognise the mutual benefits in trade and stability from ODA that translate into security and prosperity and commit to reach the UN target of 0.7% GNP by 2020. In the context of Ireland's current challenges it is important to bear in mind that many people in the world are in a far worse situation and have been in this situation for a very long time.

Policy Priorities

- Commit to reaching the UN target on ODA of 0.7% GNP by 2020.
- Take an active role in developing and promoting the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2014>

² *Ibid* p.33

³ *Ibid* p.2

⁴ *Ibid* p.3

Social Justice Ireland is an independent think-tank and justice advocacy organisation of that advances the lives of people and communities through providing independent social analysis and effective policy development to create a sustainable future for every member of society and for societies as a whole.



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