

Ireland's commitment to Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Social Justice Ireland welcomes the publication of [‘A Better World: Ireland’s Policy for International Development’](#), which outlines the Government’s commitment to reaching the UN target of allocating 0.7% of our GNI to official development assistance by 2030. The reiteration of the commitment to Ireland’s ODA target is welcome, and Government is to be commended for setting a date by which it will meet this target.

However, in order to maximise the impact of our Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) programme and to assist developing countries in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals we urge Government to be ambitious and frontload investment between now and 2025. This would bring our ODA commitment in line with *Global Ireland*, the strategy for doubling the scope and impact of Ireland’s global footprint and influence by 2025.

As table 1 shows, over time Ireland had achieved sizeable increases in our ODA allocation. In 2006 a total of €814m (0.53 per cent of GNP) was allocated to ODA, reaching the interim target set by the Government. Budget 2008 further increased the ODA budget to reach €920.7m (0.59 per cent of GNP). However, since then the ODA budget has been a focus of government cuts and has fallen by more than 11 per cent.

Table 1: Ireland’s net overseas development assistance, 2006-2019

Year	€m’s	% of GNP
2006	814.0	0.53
2007	870.9	0.53
2008	920.7	0.59
2009	722.2	0.55
2010	675.8	0.53
2011	657.0	0.46
2012	628.9	0.46
2013	637.1	0.46
2014	614.9	0.39
2015	647.5	0.32
2016	725.8	0.33
2017	743.4	0.32
2018	707**	0.36*
2019	817**	0.39*

Source: Irish Aid (2017:60) and various Budget Documents. * Estimate based on GNI*, which *Social Justice Ireland* considers to be a better measurement of Ireland’s national income.

** Projections from Budget documentation and Estimates.

While this fall is disappointing, *Social Justice Ireland* strongly welcomed the move in Budget 2019 to increase the ODA budget by approximately €110m – a significant increase in nominal monetary terms and firm step in the right direction. The publication of ‘A Better World: Ireland’s Policy for International Development’ is an opportune time for Government to be ambitious and frontload investment in ODA between now and 2025. Ireland’s improving economic situation should be seen as an opportunity to recover lost ground in relation to our ODA commitments.

Rebuilding our commitment to ODA and honouring the UN target should be important policy paths for Ireland to pursue in the coming years. 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.

Our [Sustainable Progress Index 2019](#), which measures Ireland’s performance on the implementation of the SDGs, found that Ireland scored poorly on SDG 17 ‘Partnership for the goals’. Goal 17 seeks to strengthen global partnerships to support and achieve the targets of the 2030 Agenda, by bringing together national governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector and other actors. Despite advances in certain areas, more needs to be done to accelerate progress. A clear indication of the amount of the ODA budget that will be administered by Irish Aid should be published as part of the annual Budget process. This would improve Ireland’s progress on Goal 17.

The % of GNI devoted to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) is part of the data used to analyse progress on this goal. The latest data suggest that Ireland’s contribution of 0.3 is well below the EU average. Ireland is ranked 11th on this indicator in 2017. Sweden, Luxembourg, and Denmark top with Portugal and Greece at the bottom. In Budget 2019 the Irish Government made a substantial move towards increasing its ODA. However, that increase will not yet register on these numbers. Clearly, much needs to be done to accelerate progress on this SDG. We welcome today’s commitment to ODA by the Government and urge Government to be ambitious and frontload investment in ODA between now and 2025. This would bring our ODA commitment in line with Global Ireland, the strategy for doubling the scope and impact of Ireland’s global footprint and influence by 2025 and improve our performance on SDG 17.

Several times over the last three decades Irish governments have made a commitment to reach the UN target of 0.7% GNI by a specified date. As yet, this target has not been reached. We hope that Government implements an ambitious action plan to reach this target. It is important that the relevant Joint Oireachtas Committee have monitoring role regarding implementation of this plan.

Social Justice Ireland supports the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence (2018) when it says;

The Committee is of the view that a firm commitment to achieving ODA expenditure of 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2030 is critical to the future of international development and calls on the Government to set out the way it proposes to reach this target. In this

regard, the Committee unanimously and unequivocally supports calls for a multiannual plan to increase the aid budget on an incremental, phased basis.

Given Ireland's current and projected economic growth, *Social Justice Ireland* believes this recommendation should be implemented with urgency, replacing this 2030 target with an earlier target of 2025.

Policy considerations

We outline a number of policy recommendations below that would improve Ireland's performance in terms of its global commitments.

- The Irish Government should use Ireland's improving economic situation as an opportunity to recover lost ground in relation to our ODA commitments and upscale it's ambition and investment in ODA;
- Increasing ODA as % of GNI would be a strong sign of our commitment on partnership for the goals;
- Take a far more proactive stance at government level on ensuring that Irish and EU policies towards countries in the Global South are just. Ensure that Irish businesses operating in developing countries- in particular Irish Aid country partners – are subject to proper scrutiny and engage in sustainable development practices;
- Ireland has an excellent opportunity to partner with developing countries towards supporting their attaining of the SDGs. In particular it should work with other governments to end the race to the bottom on corporate tax rates. This would help all countries deliver on their commitments on Sustainable Development Goals;
- There is a need to gather evidence and track progress – on policies that drive outcomes in order to implement the 2030 Agenda;
- It is critically important that Government integrate all 17 SDGs into all policy-making processes - give them the priority that they require if they are to be achieved by Ireland.