



The DAC's main findings and recommendations

**Extract from: OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews
Ireland 2020**

The DAC's main findings and recommendations

Ireland is a strong development partner

A new ambition

Irish development co-operation has pulled through a tough decade. Following the global financial crisis and recession in Ireland, Irish development co-operation had to weather cuts in staffing, pay and spending. Ireland's economy is now back on track and official development assistance (ODA) started growing again in 2015. Today, Irish development co-operation is strong, and with many areas of excellence.

Driven by a new ambition, Ireland has decided to do more and do better. In the 2018 policy document *Global Ireland*, the government calls for doubling Ireland's global footprint by 2025. Ireland is opening new diplomatic missions, competing for a seat on the United Nations Security Council, exploring new trade partnerships, deepening and expanding engagement with Africa, and building up relations with Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and small island developing states. Development co-operation is integral to this new ambition.

Ireland's prime ambition is reaching the furthest behind first. This is the overarching goal of *A Better World*, Ireland's 2019 policy for international development. For Ireland, development co-operation is about both values and self-interest: it helps alleviate poverty, vulnerability and inequality, brings shared prosperity, sustains friendships, enhances global influence and opens markets. *A Better World* focuses on Irish strengths such as reducing humanitarian need, strengthening governance, and promoting gender equality. Climate action is also a top priority. To reach its objectives, Ireland foresees a significant increase in its ODA budget in line with its international commitments. Broad consultations on *A Better World* have shown that Ireland's population, development community and politicians all strongly support the new vision and ambition for Irish development co-operation.

Sustaining Ireland's strengths will help to deliver the new ambition

Ireland is a strong voice for sustainable development, leading and supporting policy dialogue at both international and local levels. It has facilitated the adoption of key global frameworks, notably the 2030 Agenda and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and is successfully influencing global debates on its priorities such as women, peace and security. In partner countries, Ireland takes lead roles in political dialogue and donor co-ordination, including on challenging topics.

Walking the talk, Ireland allocates its ODA to least developed countries (75% of its country allocable aid in 2017) and fragile states, priority partners and sectors. Ireland provides only grants, which are almost 100% untied. This clear focus enables Ireland, as a relatively small donor, to exercise leadership and make a

visible difference. Ireland is now adding regional approaches to its portfolio and aims to expand its engagement in both volume and scope.

Ireland is a leading advocate for multilateralism and civic space, and is engaging in close dialogue with its partner organisations, including at country level. As a result, civil society partnerships are characterised by mutual trust and flexible and reliable funding. Ireland is appreciated for its constructive engagement on the boards and governance bodies of multilateral organisations, where it advocates for poverty reduction and responses to partner countries' needs. Ireland provides significant core funding and extends multi-annual allocations to a number of its multilateral partners. Ireland considers its membership of the European Union (EU) essential to its relations with the rest of the world, and it intends to contribute even more actively to shaping European external engagement.

Ireland is an excellent humanitarian partner and has a unique approach to fragility. A good range of tools – diplomatic, development and humanitarian – ensure that Ireland can design an appropriate response to individual fragile contexts, based on its own history. Ireland's flexible funding models, especially for humanitarian assistance, could provide useful inspiration for other DAC donors. There are good efforts to align internal funding streams to support the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Ireland has a strong approach to development education which focuses on achieving greater knowledge and changed attitudes. Its approach encompasses both formal and non-formal education and relies on strong partnerships among the government, non-governmental organisations, education actors and local communities. Outreach to schools is already very substantial, and Ireland is aiming to reach wider audiences to sustain and deepen the considerable support within the Irish population.

Ireland can build on its achievements

Working across government, in particular to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

Ireland is stepping up collaboration on development programming across government departments. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the clear lead for Ireland's international co-operation. There are already numerous good examples of collaboration between DFAT and other line departments including joint initiatives and staff exchanges. A revamped inter-departmental committee will provide opportunities for strategic exchange. It will also allow departments to share technical expertise and to benefit from DFAT's advice on quality co-operation.

Ireland is making progress on policy coherence for sustainable development in developing countries, but more work is required. It has undertaken a spillover analysis and has improved tax policies, engages on health worker migration and consistently sends troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Ireland has a strong focus on climate change adaptation in its development co-operation. However, in line with the ambition set forth in *A Better World* to be a "good citizen of the world", it also needs to progress in its domestic response to climate change. With the 2019 Climate Action Plan, the government has taken an important step in this direction. As pointed out in the last peer review, Ireland also needs to improve the mechanisms it uses to identify potential areas of incoherence between its domestic policies and development objectives and to systematically assess and monitor progress in addressing these.

Recommendation

1. Ireland should further develop mechanisms for analysing the impact of its domestic policies on developing countries, identify potential inconsistencies, discuss action to address these with all stakeholders, and ensure that progress is monitored.

Building on a strong foundation to enhance the effectiveness of partnerships

Ireland's partnership approach is one of its trademarks, but it has scope to make its partnerships even more effective. When updating the strategies for multilateral, civil society and research partnerships and finalising its private sector strategy, Ireland could focus on articulating how each contributes to Ireland's objectives, in particular in the more challenging environments where Ireland operates. Clarifying the added value of different types of partners would help Ireland to decide how to best scale up its ODA budget so as to ensure sustainable results and not overstretch its capacities and systems. Ireland could also explore how to facilitate collaboration among its partners, building on existing dialogue platforms that bring together various Irish stakeholders.

Ireland is an active, respected player in its partner countries, and aims to work with and through partner country governments where possible, despite often challenging contexts. It continues to take a proactive role in joint approaches, donor co-ordination and political dialogue, and takes country context as the starting point for its strategic planning and programming. Building on its close relationships with partner country governments and other actors in-country, Ireland should further strengthen country ownership and leadership by making greater use of country results frameworks and fully aligning its mission strategies to country priorities, as highlighted by 2018 data on development effectiveness. It should also publish data on its projects and performance-related information more regularly and make available forward-looking expenditure plans.

Ireland still lacks a clearly articulated approach to private sector engagement, although it has stepped up its activities since the last peer review, including engaging with the EU on responsible private sector investment for sustainable development. A private sector strategy, currently being prepared, will help Ireland to sharpen its niche in a competitive donor environment by building on its experiences to date, especially in the agri-food sector. The strategy should have a clear focus on the development impact of Ireland's private sector engagement on marginalised populations, which falls squarely within Ireland's overall priorities. Such a focus would also require articulating the government's risk appetite for investing in private sector partnerships.

Recommendations

2. Ireland should further improve the alignment to and use of country-owned results frameworks as well as its medium-term predictability and transparency in government-to-government partnerships.
3. Ireland should finalise a private sector engagement strategy that builds on its niche and focuses on development impact, in particular for the benefit of marginalised populations.

Readying systems and knowledge management to support the more ambitious development programme

Most Irish development co-operation systems function well, but Ireland needs to build them up to deliver a larger and more complex ODA portfolio. Ireland has invested in greater standardisation of its grant management and significantly improved its risk management. It is developing a specific policy on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in line with the 2019 DAC recommendation. Building on its solid risk management, Ireland could complete its guidance on safeguarding issues and continue to build on anti-corruption efforts beyond the management of its grants. DFAT has also recognised the need for more e-based processes and investment in information technology infrastructure. In a growing system, these would help to maintain efficiency and also facilitate co-ordination, which relies in many ways on informal contacts. Moving forward, Ireland should also clarify where it sees the right balance on quality assurance to avoid overreliance on either grant managers or technical experts. The planned management review will help Ireland to assess the need for adjustments in its systems.

Ireland has a strong focus on learning. Self-reflection, broad consultation and evaluations inform strategic decision making. Operating mostly in challenging contexts, Ireland is willing to take risks, and it gives space for innovation, monitors results and takes adaptive action. Recent, much-needed investments in the capacity of the DFAT Evaluation and Audit Unit will help it to disseminate findings and enhance its support to other units in their conduct of evaluations. However, knowledge management on development co-operation is not systematic, despite a recommendation in Ireland's 2014 peer review. At present, sharing lessons beyond the team in question often relies on informal contacts between staff, with a high risk of losing knowledge. Nevertheless, Ireland has good practices to build on such as regional thematic workshops and communities of practice.

Recommendations

4. Ireland should assess its quality assurance mechanisms to ensure priorities, evidence, and cross-cutting and safeguarding issues are adequately reflected across all grant management phases.
5. Ireland should invest in knowledge management and, in particular:
 - a. systematically capture and disseminate lessons from programming and findings of all evaluations
 - b. expand knowledge sharing mechanisms to strengthen thematic expertise.

To deliver on its vision, Ireland will need to address some challenges

Translating the ambition of A Better World into operations

With *A Better World*, Ireland has created an ambitious – and still relatively new – vision that inspires staff, partners and the public. Ireland is already planning operational guidance to translate into practice the new policy priorities and ways of working outlined in *A Better World*. Staff and partners need clear and accessible guidelines to adapt targeting, intervention logic, ambition and risk appetite to reach the furthest behind first, the overarching goal of the new development policy. Moreover, Ireland aims to develop or update guidance on its top policy priorities. This should articulate the interlinkages between priorities and with intervention areas. To ensure guidance is applied in practice, staff and partners will also require training, support and systemic incentives.

Building on its strong commitment to results, Ireland also needs to define its new approach to managing for the sustainable development results that it aims to achieve. Ireland is setting up an Accountability Framework to track the implementation of top-level commitments and has plans to establish a more comprehensive results management approach in order to inform strategic decision-making, learning and adaptation. Aligning with the SDGs and partner countries can help to make a future results framework more useful and manageable for both Ireland and partners. Moreover, although monitoring at programme level has significantly improved, capacity and skills vary across the system.

Recommendations

6. Ireland should develop operational guidance on both reaching the furthest behind first and its top priorities, and it should implement a plan to roll out this guidance to staff and partners.
7. Ireland should advance its approach to results-based management by:
 - a. promoting a results and learning culture, and strengthening capacities to manage for results across the system
 - b. adopting results frameworks that spell out the expected results chain, using SDG targets and indicators, and enable a clear focus on those furthest behind.

Mobilising and managing a significantly higher ODA budget

Over the years, Ireland has maintained a strong commitment to providing 0.7% of its gross national income (GNI) as ODA and, as was noted in the 2014 peer review, both the public and political parties support a rise in the budget. Following the severe economic contraction in Ireland (2009-2014), this ambition has not been realised. Since 2015, while the ODA budget has grown, the ODA-to-GNI ratio has remained at around 0.31%. This contrasts with Ireland's undertaking to move towards the 0.7% target when its economy improves.

Significantly increasing the ODA budget requires a solid plan. Ireland benefits from strong economic growth that is projected to continue at 3% over the coming years. Based on these projections, meeting the 0.7% commitment would require Ireland to triple its current ODA budget by 2030. Managing such an increase would also require identifying the best-suited delivery channels, scaling up capacity for grant management, reflecting economic uncertainty and continuously making the case to the public.

Recommendation

8. To increase its ODA budget and meet its international commitment of 0.7% of GNI by 2030, Ireland should develop and implement a comprehensive plan that identifies how to grow spending, and communicate the value of international development to the parliament and public.

Investing in necessary human resources

Human resources are essential for Ireland to get the most out of its global profile and expanded development portfolio, as noted in Ireland's 2014 peer review. Ireland's development co-operation model strongly relies on its dedicated staff, in that they ensure close and regular engagement with partners and fill leadership roles at global and local level that give Ireland its influencing power. Ireland is taking action to reverse significant staffing cuts, but it will need to ensure it has sufficient capabilities to deliver on its priorities and notably assess how a growing budget will affect staffing needs. Moreover, Ireland will need

to assess and address high turnover rates within DFAT that affect the level and quality of engagement with partners and to monitor and continue investing in well-being. Finally, DFAT needs to clarify which skills and competencies it requires in-house, and if and how these relate to different staff categories. The model of diplomats, specialists and generalists needs to be kept under management review to ensure the appropriate blend of skills, expertise and capabilities. Implementation of DFAT's human resources strategic action plan and the planned management review are critical opportunities to address these challenges.

Recommendation

9. Ireland should undertake strategic workforce planning to ensure it has the appropriate skills, expertise and capabilities to deliver on its expanding development co-operation objectives.

Access the full report

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