



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

Submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence

October 2017 – Review of Irish Aid programme

Dóchas Humanitarian Aid Working Group

The Humanitarian Aid Working Group (HAWG)¹ acknowledges and welcomes this opportunity to present a collective submission to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Irish Aid Programme.

Ireland's humanitarian donorship is recognised and respected globally as a principled supporter of humanitarian actors responding to the needs of communities in conflict settings or in the aftermath of natural disasters. As a Good Humanitarian Donor,² Ireland has signed up to respect the principles of humanitarian action. Ireland is a signatory to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid³ which outlines the policy framework for the EU when acting in response to humanitarian crises. The Consensus sets out why, how and when the EU acts. Ireland's commitment to humanitarian action was further reinforced in the commitments of the Irish Government to the Agenda for Humanity of the World Humanitarian Summit.

As a humanitarian donor, Ireland is constantly balancing the ever-growing needs with limited resources and vocal criticism of international assistance and multilateral institutions. Ireland's aid is of enormous value to those who receive it. Ireland's reputation globally is further strengthened by the prominence of Irish NGOs overseas and the impact of their work, the engagement of Irish Aid as a humanitarian donor in field locations and the research and advocacy investment Ireland has made over the last decade.

As Irish Aid moves to review its policies for the coming years we believe there are a number of key recommendations which if implemented could strengthen Ireland's contribution to

¹ HAWG Members Comhlámh, WorldVision, Plan International Ireland, Irish Red Cross, Goal, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Trócaire, Concern, Tearfund, Gorta Self Help Africa, CBM Ireland

² <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/home-page.html>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/european-consensus_en

humanitarian action. These recommendations are set out below and are very much in line with the current stated objectives of Ireland's Humanitarian Assistance Policy 2015.⁴

Policy Objective 1: To provide needs-based humanitarian assistance in a way that is predictable and flexible to respond to sudden onset, protracted and forgotten humanitarian crises.

The Grand Bargain

Ireland is one of 22 international donors to have signed the Grand Bargain. Of key interest to HAWG Members and in line with Irish Aid's Humanitarian Assistance Policy are the following commitments:

- **National and Local responders⁵:** Achieve by 2020, a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs .
- **Cash-based programming⁶:** Increase the routine use of cash, alongside other tools, including in-kind assistance, service delivery (such a health and nutrition) and vouchers. Employ markers to measure increase and outcomes.
- **Participation Revolution:** Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian country team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.
- **Multi-year planning and funding:** Increase multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning and multi-year funding instruments and document the impacts on programme efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring that recipients apply the same funding arrangements to their implementing partners.

Efficient and transparent funding

As referenced in the Irish Aid Annual Report 2016⁷, the scale of humanitarian need in the world today is at unprecedented levels, and continues to grow. The number of people requiring

⁴ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/Humanitarian-Assistance-Policy-2015.pdf> (accessed 11/10/2017)

⁵ Irish Aid should explore a balanced range of options in meeting this commitment: direct funding, pooled fund contributions, collaboration with INGOs and START funding contributions.

⁶ Cash is an important element of Irish Aid's Social Protection Policy (2017).

⁷ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaidpublications/Irish-Aid-Annual-Report-2016.pdf>

humanitarian assistance is an estimated 130 million. At the same time, the international humanitarian system faces significant funding shortfalls.

In 2016, Ireland's humanitarian assistance programme grew to €194 million to respond to the unprecedented level of humanitarian need. Non-governmental organisations received 12% (€23,773,000) of Irish's Aid Humanitarian budget in humanitarian funding in 2016⁸. This is an alarming reduction from 20% (€28,630,000) in 2015.⁹ While Ireland's overall humanitarian aid budget is increasing, the allocation to NGOs has been reduced. The contribution to multi-lateral funding, WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, UNOCHA, UNHCR, CERF and country-based pooled funding mechanisms on the other hand, has increased. This absolute and percentage reduction in funding to NGOs is of concern for a number of reasons.

Irish NGOs have traditionally valued the role of Irish Aid as a partner and as a donor. Ireland globally is well recognised, not just because of the nature and quantity of Ireland's funding, but the quality of response provided by Irish Aid and delivered by Irish NGOs. Irish NGOs take a global and a local approach to our work. We are international actors, but we are accountable principally to the Irish public as supporters of our individual organisations and as tax payers.

While we recognise the ambition of the Irish Government to strengthen Ireland's reputation on the global stage, the valuable relationship of mutual support and accountability should not be lost as it is part of the fabric of the Irish humanitarian sector. In setting up a response to a new crisis, NGOs' first port of call will always be our own national government. This facilitates a swift response given the prior relationship that exists.

If Irish Aid chooses instead to increasingly fund multilateral agencies (as is the case in the current crisis in East Africa where Irish Aid has chosen to increase their allocation to OCHA's Country Pooled Fund in Ethiopia rather than making funds available to Irish NGOs), Irish NGOs must look to other funding sources to support their humanitarian response.

Where humanitarian aid is highly politicised, in complex and protracted settings like Syria, Somalia, Mali or South Sudan for example, NGOs may struggle to find funding to ensure principled humanitarian action can be delivered that is neutral and impartial and cannot be perceived or interpreted as politically influenced or controlled. Traditionally, the Irish Government was a major advocate for humanitarian principles, for the protection of civilians and International Humanitarian Law. This role is invaluable to NGOs.

⁸ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaidpublications/Irish-Aid-Annual-Report-2016.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/annualreport2015/IA-Annual-Report-2015.pdf>

Recommendation: The trend of reducing funding to Irish NGOs in favour of increased support to multilateral agencies and pooled funding mechanisms should be reversed. A comparative value for money assessment should be undertaken on humanitarian funding practices.

Emergency Response Fund Scheme (ERFS)

The Emergency Response Fund Scheme is an excellent tool which strongly supports recipient agencies to respond to emergencies in a rapid and flexible manner. It provides seed capital for interventions which is essential in leveraging more prolonged donor funding. The focus on un-earmarked funding allows partners to decide on the appropriate sector and region in their response. The scheme reinforces the mutual trust between Irish Aid and NGOs. All ERFS holders have fully allocated this funding for 2017 due to the increased demands for rapid response.

Recommendation: The speed of approval is key to the value of ERFS and the timeliness of the approval process should be evaluated. Given the usefulness of this funding instrument, access to the fund should be made available to a larger number of NGOs, and the amount of funding allocated to ERFS should be doubled.

Overseas Development Aid (ODA)

Internationally, Irish Aid continues to be a voice for principled ODA in an era of political pressures on aid budgets. Domestically, Irish Aid has done an excellent job in championing the aid budget and maintaining overseas aid as a priority.

Irish Aid and the HAWG Members have shared concerns about the future of development, the need to maintain overseas aid work and publicise Ireland's contribution to development as important and impactful, and the right thing to do as a global leader. As one of the richest countries in the world, we hold a shared responsibility to contribute to equality, look outward and continue to influence for the type of world we want and that Irish people consistently tell us they want.

Recommendation: Continue advocating towards the 0.7% GNI*¹⁰ ODA target by 2025. Given the scale of humanitarian crises currently facing the world, increase the % of funding dedicated to humanitarian affairs.

¹⁰ The CSO published a measurement of national income in July 2017 called Modified GNI (GNI*) this is intended to be a more realistic measurement of size and growth within the Irish economy.

Flexible and multi-year funding

Irish Aid is one of few institutional donors offering flexible funding for humanitarian crises, with devolved decision making and rapid response, e.g. ERFS and multi-year Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP). The stability of funding is welcome and provides a good example for other institutional donors. However, the quality of funding is a consideration as NGOs are faced with increasing risks both financially and in terms of security, and there are additional costs associated with maintaining high-quality responses and in investing in human resource capacity. The HAWG members are proud of the quality of our work and see ourselves as partners of Irish Aid and not subcontractors to short-term responses but contributing to the broader strategic goals of Irish Aid.

Recommendation: Flexible funding should be maintained and the quality of funding should be considered in more detail to enable NGOs to deliver high quality responses in increasingly complex and expensive operating environments.

Rapid Response Corps and the UNHRD

Irish Aid has made significant investments in both the Irish Aid Rapid Response Corps and the UNHRD (Humanitarian Response Depots) pre-positioned humanitarian stocks.

Recommendation: HAWG Members as participants of the Irish Aid-funded UNHRD stocks request continued engagement on the cost-benefit of the pre-positioned stocks and suggest Irish Aid consider a complimentary cash response mechanism as an alternative to UNHRD where it is more appropriate.

Pooled Fund Mechanisms & CERF (Central Emergency Response Funds)

An increased emphasis is being placed by Irish Aid on providing funding to UN pooled fund mechanisms which, although they have the benefit of streamlining aid flows and reducing duplication, are often less efficient in practice¹¹.

Pooled funding is best suited to selective use in long term chronic crises and should be considered for this purpose, especially where there are strong local partners available. However, for sudden onset and acute situations, direct funding to NGOs through established funding mechanisms or specific funding calls will always be faster and more efficient. The HPP and ERFS mechanisms are superior in delivering aid flexibly and efficiently.

With an annual humanitarian budget of €193,744,000¹², Ireland is now the 5th largest donor to CERF with an annual contribution of \$23,900,000, with Sweden (\$70,074,374), Germany

¹¹ <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/GHA-Report-2017-Chapter-5.pdf> and

<http://www.unocha.org/cerf/sites/default/files/CERF/AG2017/Note%20on%20NGO%20access%20to%20CERF.pdf>

¹² Core Support to Multilateral - Humanitarian Assistance 92,503 13% of total ODA; Humanitarian Assistance - Bilateral 101,271 14% of total ODA. Total Humanitarian Assistance 193,774

(\$65,161,000), the Netherlands (\$57,717,000) and Norway (\$44,227,188) giving greater amounts of funding in 2017.

In 2016, Ireland's contribution to CERF was \$13,783,925 and funding to humanitarian NGOs totalled €23,773,000. It is important to note that Ireland's contribution to CERF in 2017 has increased by over \$10 million to \$23,900,000.

CERF funds about 500 projects each year. Only UN agencies can directly receive these grants. They, in turn, may pass along funds to partners including local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local governments and civil society, which then implement projects on the UN's behalf.¹³ In 2015, UN agencies used more than half of CERF¹⁴ funding received (\$241 million), to procure relief supplies for affected people. Many of these supplies were then distributed by NGOs and other partners to people in need. HAWG members share a concern on the pass-through nature of funding via CERF and Pooled Fund Mechanisms and the cost effectiveness of this approach.

In addition, the transfer of risk, both financial and security, from UN agencies to NGOs is a major challenge for NGOs and one which donors, including Irish Aid must be more cognisant of. Proximity to communities in need, and providing assistance in complex, highly charged and often dangerous environments is expensive and resource and personnel heavy. NGOs are increasingly expected to maintain a high quality, principled response with decreasing funding and limited costs to maintain standards and systems.

Recommendation: Irish Aid should consider the value for money aspect of pooled funding versus funding NGOs directly through instruments like the HPP. Irish Aid should evaluate the value for money from contributing to pooled funding mechanisms and continue to assess the efficacy of pooled funding mechanisms, endorsing reform of the mechanisms or re-directing funding as appropriate.

¹³ http://www.unocha.org/cerf/sites/default/files/CERF/UN_CERF_AR2016.pdf

¹⁴ In 2015, CERF disbursed funds to eleven United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. These organisations provided over a quarter of this funding (\$120 million) to their implementing partners, including 143 international NGOs, 320 national and local NGOs, 161 government entities and 24 Red Cross/Red Crescent societies. NGOs are essentially subcontracted to deliver a response with funding that has passed through a minimum of two other organisations. The bureaucratic weight of this approach and the cost of implementing a response is borne by NGOs.

Policy Objective 2: To link Ireland’s humanitarian and development approaches so as to prevent, prepare for, support recovery from, and build resilience to, man-made crises and natural disasters.

Focus on Fragile States and Situations

Humanitarian actors are increasingly working in fragile and conflict affected states, not sudden-onset crises. Building on the commitment of Irish Aid’s Humanitarian Assistance Policy to develop a coherent approach to working in chronic situations is more important than ever. The Grand Bargain work stream *Strengthening Engagement between Humanitarian and Development Actors* is key to ensuring durable solutions are found in complex and increasingly protracted settings. In practical terms, increasing amounts of development funding should be allocated to situations of protracted crises, recognising the limitations of humanitarian assistance and the needs and desires of affected populations to invest in and protect their future and remaining resources.

Recommendation: Revisit the focus on protracted or complex crisis and ring-fence funding or revise development funding criteria specifically to enable interventions in contexts which receive much less attention and resourcing.

Policy Objective 3: To demonstrate Ireland’s leadership and partnership for effective international humanitarian action with a particular emphasis on gender, protection and on targeting forgotten and underfunded humanitarian crises.

Gender and protection

Irish Aid has done an exceptional job in prioritising and championing the protection of women and girls in emergencies and in global advocacy and policy development on the prevention of and response to Sexual and Gender Based Violence, identifying and supporting specialist NGOs. In response to the growing needs, Irish NGOs have increased capacity to respond to SGBV and support local organisations across a broad range of contexts. Irish Aid should review strategic partnership investments and investigate the possibility of forming strategic partnerships or alliances with Irish NGOs who are carrying out strong SGBV programming on the ground.

Recommendation: In addition to providing increased funding directly to Irish NGOs working with women and girls, and with men and boys, Ireland should continue to invest

in protection efforts at political and diplomatic level. Inclusion of communities in the design of programming and focussing attention on the value of prevention is vital. Crisis-affected people should be at the centre of all humanitarian responses – accountability, participation, agency and input of affected communities is essential.

Policy Objective 4: To contribute to building a humanitarian evidence base and improving humanitarian response through research, good practice and a focus on effectiveness and results.

Irish Aid is increasingly investing in research¹⁵, supporting NGOs, think tanks, academia and a variety of organisations to document good practice, explore new approaches and supporting innovation. Protection and gender-based violence, resilience, humanitarian financing and conflict prevention are key themes in humanitarian action.

Recommendation: Irish Aid should increase work with NGOs, multilateral and other partners to improve the use of evidence and data for decision making on humanitarian policy and practice. Share research plans with partners; publicise and share the findings of research across the sector, via HAWG and Dóchas meetings, collaborative roundtables in Ireland and at appropriate international fora.

¹⁵<https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/allwebsitemedia/20newsandpublications/publicationpdfsenglish/Irish-Aid-Research-Strategy-2015-2019.pdf>