



The Irish Association
of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE

Tuesday 8 February 2022

Jane Ann McKenna, CEO, Dóchas

Chairman Flanagan, Deputies and Senators, I am delighted to have the opportunity to meet with you in person, and on behalf of Dóchas and our members we warmly welcome your engagement with us today on the issue of education in international development.

I would also like to thank all members of this committee for their engagement with my colleagues last October when they gathered virtually to speak to you about COP26, and the need to shift from commitments to action. In this regard, we welcome the fact that the Oireachtas has moved to approve the Climate Budget Framework which will allow for greater monitoring of Ireland's actions in reducing harmful emissions and contributing to a more sustainable world for current and future generations.

Today, Dóchas members would like to speak to you about their role in supporting the provision of quality education for children and young people living in marginalized communities around the world.

We know that for many of these children, conflict, poverty, and the real impact of climate change on their livelihoods has been compounded by the devastating impact of Covid-19.

This pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education in history. Since April 2020, global school closures impacted over 90% of the world's student population in more than 200 countries. It is the most marginalised - girls, children with disabilities, those in conflict-affected regions and those living in poverty, who are bearing the brunt of school closures.

For example, according to research from the Brookings Institute published last September, when schools reopened after six months of closure in [Uganda](#) and Kenya, a far lower percentage of girls returned to schools than boys, in some cases up to 20% of those girls failed to return¹.

Shockingly [a study](#) of nearly 400 of the hardest-to-reach rural adolescent girls in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda found that 34 percent had lost a parent or guardian to COVID-19, 70 percent had to pursue income-generating activities, and 86 percent could not afford to return to school.

This unprecedented disruption to education has rolled back substantial gains made as part of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education in recent decades. In fact, in early 2020, it was predicated that eliminating preventable deaths among new-borns and children under five, and getting children into

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2021/09/22/what-do-we-know-about-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-girls-return-to-school/>

primary schools were the only two goals likely to be achieved.² It goes without saying that this is now not the case.

It is imperative that we act now to prevent the exit from education for millions of children, especially girls, from being a permanent one.

Building back stronger, more gender responsive and resilient education systems that are prepared for future shocks, stresses and school closures requires a multi-pronged approach. Underlying causes, including vaccine equity, conflict resolution and equality, must be addressed to ensure that children can fulfil their right to education, health and protection.

I would now like to introduce my colleagues who will speak to you virtually today. First to speak will be, Fr Frank Bird who is the Director for the Marist Asia Foundation who have been supported by Misesan Cara to carry out a Burmese Migrant Secondary Education Programme in Ranong, on the Thailand Burma Border in Southern Thailand. We will then cross continents to speak to Laban Onisimus, Education Lead and Acting Head of Social Development Programmes with Plan International in Nigeria. Finally then we will cross to the Horn of Africa to speak to Ahmed Ali Dirshe working with Concern Worldwide in Somalia.

Here in Ireland, we recognise the importance of investing in education and see the real societal and economic impact this investment brings.

Today you will hear how against many odds, communities across the globe, supported by Dóchas members are doing all they can to ensure thousands of children receive a quality education.

We ask that you as members of this committee support our aims in ensuring that all children can access quality education no matter where they live.

- **Support the right to a free education for all children whether that education be provided through the support of NGOs in marginalized and forgotten communities or through the provision of support to governments to implement quality education systems.**
- **Ireland has committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 both here in Ireland and globally through its development and humanitarian support. As this committee monitors the implementation of the SDGs, we ask you interrogate Ireland's approach to how we Reach the Furthest Behind First and in particular SDG 4 which focuses on Quality Education.**
- **Ensure that importance, support and dedicated funding is given to education in emergency and conflict settings, as well as specifically for refugee and displaced children.**

² <https://www.europeanscientist.com/en/research/most-of-the-sustainable-development-goals-will-not-be-met-by-2030/>

