

## **Dóchas Submission to the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications**

### **Consultation on the second SDG National Implementation Plan**

**September 2021**

#### **1. Introduction**

Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and co-operation between its members, and helps them speak with a single voice on global development and justice issues. Our vision is a world where poverty and marginalisation are unacceptable and where every person has the right to live a life of dignity. The Dóchas network is made up of over 57 incredibly dedicated, diverse and hardworking Irish organizations working on 15 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in over 100 countries who are deeply rooted in the communities where they work. Further information is available at [www.dochas.ie](http://www.dochas.ie).

This document provides a collective response on behalf of the Dóchas network to the Government consultation on the second National Implementation Plan (NIP). This submission outlines:

- progress made towards delivering the first National Implementation Plan
- issues or blockers preventing progress
- recommendations as the second NIP is developed and opportunities to accelerate progress against the SDGs

#### **2. Summary of progress against Ireland's first National Implementation Plan**

There has been **limited progress since 2018** at Government/national level in implementation of the national plan to deliver against the SDGs. This is especially true in relation to promoting policy coherence, ensuring strong partnership with civil society and other stakeholders, financing to meet the targets at home and internationally, and raising awareness of the vital role that the SDG roadmap can play in Ireland. However, it is recognised that without access to data or information sharing, it is difficult to be clear on what progress has been made at sectoral or cross sectoral level.

**NGOs are delivering a significant amount of work both domestically and internationally** which is contributing to delivering against the SDGs. Much of this work has needed to pivot or change over the last eighteen months to **adapt to the needs, pressures and impact of Covid-19** both locally and globally. Much of this work is **not captured or evidenced within**

**Government-level reporting against the NIP** – through a lack of monitoring systems and capacity to aggregate results into broad policy areas.

There is **some data on national level progress available** through Ireland's **SDG Data Hub**<sup>1</sup> and the **Central Statistics Office (CSO) SDGs page**<sup>2</sup>, and the **CSO infographics** in particular have been useful in **efforts to raise awareness and understanding of the SDGs**. However, much of this is based on data between 2016 and 2019, which is not helpful in supporting monitoring and accountability exercises. In addition, **many of the SDG target areas are not included**, which means there is no baseline against which to assess progress. It is understood that some areas have new data, but due to resourcing challenges related to Covid-19, the analytical and data visualisation work has not yet been completed.

The **Countdown to 2030 'Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health'**<sup>3</sup> financial indicators have been useful for monitoring financial commitments to sexual and reproductive health, but at present only small changes in data have been identified and cannot be considered evidence of progress.

**There has been progress in climate change legislation** and there is a recognition of climate action being taken domestically and internationally - but there are concerns about implementation, again as a result of a lack of information or monitoring data.

Progress has been noted in some strategic commitments to the SDGs - **all County Council strategic plans now include references to SDGs** and the new **Irish Aid Strategy on Global Citizenship and Development Education 2021-2024** (forthcoming) includes a focus on SDGs, and on increasing understanding of global interdependencies and inequalities.

### 3. Issues that hinder progress

#### 3.1 Clarity, Communications and Engagement

There remains a focus at Government and national level on enhancing citizen awareness of the SDGs, yet our members believe that Ireland is ready to move beyond creating awareness, to **demonstrating tangible progress against clear targets**. Civil society needs to be consulted in a meaningful way in this regard, for example through more effective use of the stakeholder forum. The Government's financial support to Coalition2030 is welcome in that regard, but we are concerned that the stakeholder forums have stopped, and that there isn't a more strategic space, particularly in areas where the Government is struggling to meet its targets, or where there is policy incoherence.

Initiatives and ideas proposed to enhance stakeholder engagement around the last NIP, e.g. the **National Stakeholder Forum and SDG Champions, have not produced expected outcomes**. Communications have been further hampered by **lack of clarity around definitions of concepts and phrases**, including **'reach the furthest behind first'** and **'leave no one behind'** and lack of clear messaging and targeted communications with media and politicians/ political parties. However, it was noted that Ireland's Policy for International Development, 'A Better World', seeks to underline the importance of these concepts<sup>4</sup>, but does not provide a framework for operationalising this approach.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://irelandsdg.geohive.ie/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/unsustainabledevelopmentgoals/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.countdown2030.org/country-profiles>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.irishaid.ie/about-us/policy-for-international-development/>

The **'leave no one behind' agenda**<sup>5</sup> is a specific concern, recognising that Ireland has made a clear commitment to this transformative agenda and as yet there are no clear plans or targets to address disparities in policy outcomes affecting the poorest and marginalised groups. **Recognition of intersectionality** is important within this agenda, and **people with disabilities** are a specific example of a group whose voices, needs and experiences are seldom heard in both domestic and international policy development. This is also linked to identification of the need for **improved data collection and disaggregation** of data that goes beyond the basics of gender, geography and age for example, to include all forms of discrimination and the root causes of inequalities are identified and addressed.

### 3.2 Policy and Financing

There is a **lack of ambition at national level** in terms of clear, measurable targets and how this is translated into collaborative, coherent policy choices. Yet Covid-19 has shown the relevance of the SDGs in promoting cross-sectoral approaches and collaboration to solve complex problems. For example, recent progress in vaccine development.

**Culture** is an opportunity to drive inclusive and equitable policy development. Work by UNESCO on promoting the role of culture in the SDGs<sup>6</sup> has set an important international precedent which emphasises the need to about **development beyond economic growth**.

The OECD Recommendation on **Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD)** 2019 responds to the growing demand by OECD Members and non-Members to deal with the "how" of coherent 2030 Agenda implementation. The Recommendation presents a set of eight principles for promoting PCSD, which are organised under three main pillars. It calls on Adherents to develop:

- A strategic vision for implementing the 2030 Agenda underpinned by a clear political commitment and leadership to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development.
- Effective and inclusive institutional and governance mechanisms to address policy interactions across sectors and align actions between levels of government.
- A set of responsive and adaptive tools to anticipate, assess and address domestic, transboundary and long-term impacts of policies.

However, as the 2020 OECD DAC peer review of Ireland's Official Development Assistance programme stated that, while Ireland is making progress on policy coherence for sustainable development in developing countries, more work is required.

Policy coherence for development across all departments of government is needed to meet the SDGs by 2030. In particular the current cross-departmental mechanism to ensure co-ordination of the SDGs has not been seen to be transparent and accountable. Ideally this structure would regularly report to the stakeholder forum and relevant Oireachtas Committees. We have consistently called for the coordination of the SDGs to sit with the Taoiseach's office to give it the importance and urgency that is needed.

The **SDGs must be integrated into all domestic and foreign policies made by government**. Currently there isn't sufficient integration of policies on climate, taxation, human rights and trade which are undermining the delivery of the SDGs.

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<sup>5</sup> ODI Report 'Leave No One Behind - Five Years In to Agenda 2030' <https://odi.org/en/publications/leave-no-one-behind-five-years-into-agenda-2030-guidelines-for-turning-the-concept-into-action/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/culture-sustainable-development>

In addition, undermining the delivery of the SDGs is lack of substantial financing to deliver on the Goals. In particular, while the new international development policy, A Better World, places the SDGs at their core, there has been no additional funding to deliver on them, with ODA flatlining over the last five years at 0.3%. We welcome the Programme for Government commitment in 'Our Shared Future' to reach the internationally recognised target **of 0.7% spend of GNI by 2030**. To make this ambition a reality the Government needs to increase the pace by committing to **reaching 0.5% over the course of its tenure to Budget 2025**.

#### 4. Recommendations

Below are a number of recommendations for the Government to consider in relation to developing the second National Implementation Plan and accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

The four areas the recommendations cover are: (1) Government commitment (2) Monitoring and Evidence (3) Definitions and Targets, and (4) Communications and Engagement.

##### 4.1 Government Commitment

- **Set out clear budget requirements to deliver on the SDGs:** and put financial indicators into monitoring and reporting processes. This includes setting out a clear pathway with annual commitments that will be implemented to reach a spend of 0.7% of GNI by 2030 on Official Development Assistance.
- **Address Government's perceived lack of commitment:** progressing actions, in particular the National Stakeholder Forum and SDG Champions, and relocate the SDG delivery team into the Department of the Taoiseach.
- **Review and develop a structure and process for policy coherence across Government:** explore the inner workings of the policy development across Departments, identify best practice for assessing policy outcomes and impacts and build on that, ensuring inconsistencies in practice are addressed.
- **Track Progress and improve accountability:** to ensure transparency around progress, report to Dail members and relevant Oireachtas committees annually on progress.

##### 4.2 Monitoring and Evidence

- **Update Ireland's SDG Policy Map** to capture new policies since last NIP.
- **Move beyond the economic lens and financial criteria:** remove the 'either-or' stance on priorities to generate policy coherence across environment, education, inclusivity, equality etc, alongside economy.
- **Increase transparency:** through better monitoring of progress and sharing of data and reporting.
- **Ensure data collection supports the 'leave no one behind' agenda:** providing disaggregated data across identity characteristics and root causes of inequality.

##### 4.3 Definitions and Targets

- **Define the 'leave no one behind' agenda and provide a framework** to ensure clarity and wide scale understanding of related approaches and targets to tackle inequalities across the SDGs, with in-depth awareness of the interconnectedness of policy impacts particularly for the poorest and most marginalised groups.

- **Broaden target areas within SDGs to be relevant to a developed country like Ireland<sup>7</sup>:** For example include culture change across SDG policy areas, such as increasing inclusivity and providing SDG information in multiple languages; include the Well-Being Framework and related targets; include a target around homelessness.
- **Prioritise known drivers and enablers to achieving the SDGs:** for example, strengthening policy and investment in education - development and global citizenship education, wider skills, knowledge and values, to support public understanding of the human-centred approach of SDGs.

#### 4.4 Communications and Engagement

- **More structured communications and clear messaging** incorporating targeted engagement with media and politicians, continue public engagement but shift from awareness to education and involvement.
- **Agree with all stakeholders the purpose and principles behind the National Stakeholder Forum:** ensure it meets regularly with a shared agenda that attracts all partners.
- **Create transparency on progress to date:** and improve opportunities for organisations to feed in their delivery and progress that may be sector-specific.
- **Re-energise the historical role Ireland played in SDGs and role model prioritising SDGs:** address the possible disconnect between Government and citizen's understanding of, and perception of, SDGs.

#### 5. Conclusion:

Now more than ever we need to apply the principles of equality, sustainability and justice at home and abroad, as well as creating a stronger social dialogue. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain a critical roadmap to allow Ireland to meet the complex global challenges of Covid-19, climate change and conflict in partnership with the EU, the UN, Irish NGOs, as well as build a fair and equitable society at home.

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<sup>7</sup> Ireland is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world for quality of life <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/IRL>