

Unclassified

English text only

5 March 2024

**DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE  
DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE**

**Peer Review**

**Mid-term Review of Ireland**

The mid-term review of Ireland was conducted in 2023 following the 2020 peer review.

**JT03538702**

**Director**  
DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE

DCD/PG(2023)027

03 October 2023

To: DAC Delegates and Observers

### **Ireland's Mid-term Review, 6-7 July 2023, Dublin**

On 6-7 July 2023, I conducted the mid-term review of Ireland, together with Santhosh Persaud and Néstor Pelechà Aigües of the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD). I wish to thank Secretary General Joseph Hackett, Director General Michael Gaffey, and officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), as well as civil society representatives. I would like to thank all stakeholders for taking the time to discuss with us, and Director Eamonn MacAodha, Ms Edel Cribbin and Ms Wendy Jacobs for the excellent co-operation in the lead-up to the review.

The mid-term review focused on Ireland's progress towards the nine recommendations identified in the [2020 OECD-DAC Peer Review](#) and the developments that have occurred since. We were encouraged to see that Ireland has made progress on all recommendations, if to varying degrees. Since the peer review, Ireland has continued its leadership as an advocate for sustainable development, a staunch multilateralist, a good partner for civil society and a promoter of development education. Fully implementing the peer review recommendations, notably on ODA, human resources, guidance on its priorities and policy coherence would help Ireland further capitalise on its strengths.

Global crises and Ireland's mandate on the UN Security Council have heightened cross-government engagement in, and attention to, development co-operation. Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Ireland concluded that the priorities set out in its 2019 policy *A Better World* remain highly relevant. As an example, it substantially stepped up its food security assistance in the Horn of Africa. It is mobilising cross-government efforts to host a large number of refugees from Ukraine.

#### **Ireland can seize opportunities to increase ODA/GNI while continuing to invest in capacity**

Ireland's ODA/GNI ratio spiked to 0.64% in 2022 when in-donor-refugee costs constituted half of the reported ODA. Excluding additional costs for Ukrainian refugees, Ireland estimates ODA/GNI to have reached 0.4% in 2022, while the ratio had remained at around 0.3% from 2015-2021. Against this background, we discussed opportunities for Ireland to achieve and maintain a substantially higher ODA/GNI ratio. These include the very strong public and cross-party political support, a budget surplus, the growing cross-government engagement, mobilisation of resources for the hosting of Ukrainian refugees, and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Irish development co-operation in 2024. We highlighted that a stronger ODA profile would substantially enhance Ireland's international leadership roles and advocacy for development finance for least developed countries and climate change adaptation.

Ireland's development co-operation continues to be firmly set within its foreign policy and the objective to increase the country's global footprint. Ireland has opened new embassies and offices in Africa, the Americas and Asia, is resuming development co-operation in Central America and Colombia, and increasing its engagement in West Africa. It recently adopted its second SIDS strategy. The peer review had highlighted that expanding geographic focus will require adequate financial and human resources to avoid diluting Ireland's efforts. Despite valuable investments in human resources, challenges from shortages and turnover remain. DFA can build on the conclusions of the forthcoming management review to address those challenges, particularly in updating its human resources strategy and stepping up knowledge management efforts.

#### **Stronger cross-government engagement and policy coherence can support Ireland's international voice**

We commended Ireland for its continued leadership as an advocate for global sustainable development in support of least developed countries, food security, gender equality and climate change. Underpinned by a new framework for multilateral co-operation, it takes leading roles, such as co-facilitator of the forthcoming SDG Summit. Ongoing evaluations of Ireland's soft power and UN Security Council Mandate will provide important lessons to further build on this strength. As a provider of quality multilateral finance but often at smaller volumes than its peers, we also discussed how Ireland could bolster its role as a strong multilateralist through increases in multilateral ODA.

The engagement between DFA and other government departments has become closer, thanks to more substantive exchange in the Inter-Departmental Committee on Development Co-operation and regular collaboration on issues such as food security, climate finance and multilateral partnerships. Enhanced collaboration with the Department of Finance provides an opportunity to link up Ireland's efforts on sustainable finance and sustainable development. We underlined the importance of using the National Implementation Plan for the SDGs to integrate global sustainable development in the work of all government departments. This would improve the coherence between Ireland's domestic policies and development objectives and strengthen Ireland's international advocacy.

### **Continued investments in learning and guidance, in particular on reaching the furthest behind first will enhance Ireland's co-operation**

Since Ireland set its overarching priority to reach the furthest behind first in 2019, it has been progressing on a common understanding of the concept among staff. To steer Ireland's efforts, a planned toolkit will be an important next step. Staff and partners would also benefit from a systematic articulation and guidance of how Ireland will support the furthest behind first throughout its efforts and manage interlinkages such as with climate vulnerability, gender equality, locally led development and humanitarian, development and peace approaches. Integrating these approaches in Ireland's development co-operation and investing in learning could provide valuable insights for other DAC members but also bolster Ireland's international advocacy on leaving no one behind.

Ireland is a strong partner to civil society and recently introduced a five-year flexible funding scheme for Irish international NGOs, Ireland's Civil Society Partnership for a Better World. In addition to regular exchange with CSOs around programme partnerships, there has been close collaboration on Ireland's Security Council membership and the new Global Citizenship Education Strategy. To draw on civil society expertise, share information and guide its partners, DFA and other departments could explore if such structured processes could also benefit work on furthest behind first, climate, policy coherence and locally led development. This could also allow discussing the role of Irish and local CSOs in advocating for and implementing larger ODA budgets.

### **Conclusion**

The mid-term review found valuable progress against recommendations. The next peer review in 2027 will be an opportunity to assess Ireland's actions to further capitalise on its strengths, in particular by mobilising greater resources, intensifying cross-government efforts on sustainable development, and investing in guidance and learning on its priorities. I encourage Ireland to continue its close collaboration with the DAC and the DCD team, to update on new developments, share lessons and seek guidance from other members and the Secretariat.



María del Pilar Garrido Gonzalo

CC: Ambassador Carsten Staur, DAC Chair  
Rahul Malhotra, DCD  
Renwick Irvine, DCD  
Santhosh Persaud, DCD  
Néstor Pelechà Aigües, DCD

Annex: Table on progress against the 2020 peer review's recommendations

**Annex - Progress against the 2020 peer review's recommendations**

| <b>Keywords</b>                              | <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Progress</b>  |
|--|---|--|
| Policy coherence for sustainable development | 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. | <i>Some progress.</i> While there are no dedicated mechanisms yet, the <a href="#">2022 National Implementation Plan for the SDGs</a> has a specific objective to integrate the SDGs into the work of all government departments through regulatory impact assessments, SDG budgeting, capacity building and dedicated work on policy coherence for sustainable development. Ireland is adjusting relevant policies. It participates in the OECD Global Tax Agreement, and a new tax treaty policy requires spillover analyses for LDCs. Ireland's <a href="#">Food Vision 2030</a> includes a goal to strengthen policy coherence. It has updated its <a href="#">Climate Action Plan 2023</a> , although latest <a href="#">national reporting</a> highlights that measures will be insufficient to meet targets. In 2021, the government issued guidance on business and human rights, and a CSO coalition report pointed out room for improvement. In the UN Security Council, Ireland has promoted links between climate and security and a humanitarian carve-out for sanctions. |
| Partnerships; use of country systems         | 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.   | <i>Limited progress.</i> Ireland engages constructively with partner country governments, as recent country strategies and evaluations underline. It is also promoting learning on engagement in politically constrained contexts. New country strategy guidance will make consultation of governments compulsory unless not feasible. Spending information is shared for the next year but not the medium term. Ireland plans a consultancy to strengthen the alignment with partner results systems as current country strategies are only aligned at a general level. The forthcoming GPEDC monitoring round provides an opportunity for Ireland to discuss with partners how it can further enhance its co-operation.  |
| Private sector engagement                    | 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.  | <i>Some progress.</i> Ireland is expanding both its financial and non-financial private sector engagement (PSE) and created an internal PSE network. Moreover, under its <a href="#">climate finance roadmap</a> , Ireland aims to explore private climate finance over the coming years. Ireland has not developed a PSE strategy to steer these efforts but considers developing internal guidance. This would be helpful to determine how Ireland's PSE at limited scale can best add value in line with its priorities. Ireland is testing new approaches and drawing lessons, such as from an Enterprise Fund for International Climate Action and the Tech Challenge South Africa. The <a href="#">Africa Agriculture Development Programme</a> (AADP) has been revised to strengthen the development relevance of applications. However, Ireland continues to tie the AADP to submissions from Irish companies.   |
| Quality assurance and safeguarding           | 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.  | <i>Good progress.</i> Ireland has undertaken a review of its quality assurance mechanisms. It has significantly stepped up its capacity for gender equality, including through guidance, training, a learning series and the creation of a gender adviser network. A safeguarding policy (related to the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment) was adopted in 2021, while the development and roll-out of guidance is ongoing. A new climate change unit at HQ supports embassies in integrating climate change into the portfolio. Development of a climate-proofing methodology is ongoing, including with a gender equality lens. New country strategies undergo internal and external quality assurance at inception, drawing on findings from a compulsory final review.   |
| Knowledge management                         | 5. Ireland should invest in knowledge management and, in particular:<br>a) systematically capture and disseminate lessons from programming and findings of all  | <i>Some progress.</i> Ireland continues knowledge management and learning practices. Staff networks like a group of gender advisers enable knowledge sharing. DFA teams engage with think tanks and research partners to develop understanding and evidence in Irish Aid's priority areas but could also enhance their own knowledge capacity. Multi-stakeholder platforms and processes, for instance on global citizenship education and rural development in Africa, bring  |

|                                  |  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
|                                  | <p>evaluations; and</p> <p>b) expand knowledge sharing mechanisms to strengthen thematic expertise.</p>  | <p>together insights from the wider Irish system and could be explored in other areas. To make more decisive progress, DFA's Business Support Unit has established a work plan for developing a learning and knowledge management agenda and started consultations to establish an internal network for results, evaluation, knowledge and learning. The planned introduction of a new digital grant management system will enhance access to project information and lessons. The new mission strategy guidance prompts missions to conduct learning workshops to integrate learning and research agendas into the mission strategies, including on local innovation to enhance adaptation to context.</p>  |
| Policy framework; implementation | <p>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.</p>   | <p><i>Some progress.</i> Ireland champions the leave no one behind agenda in multilateral fora, such as the DAC and the United Nations system. DFA has worked on building a common understanding of its overarching priority of reaching the furthest behind first based on a concept paper and is currently developing a toolkit. DFA has also enhanced Irish Aid efforts on disability across its teams. Yet, systematic articulation of plans for reaching the furthest behind first and guidance is pending. Significant efforts are ongoing to strengthen work on Ireland's priorities of gender equality and climate change (see recommendation 4). DFA has created a new unit covering peace and stability in the Development Co-operation and Africa Division and the Political Division, providing an opportunity to advance Ireland's operational commitment towards integrating humanitarian work in a genuine nexus endeavour.</p> |
| Results management               | <p>7. Ireland should advance its approach to results-based management by:</p> <p>a) promoting a results and learning culture, and strengthening capacities to manage for results across the system; and</p> <p>b) results frameworks that spell out the expected results chain, using SDG targets and indicators, and enable a clear focus on those furthest behind.</p> | <p><i>Limited progress.</i> Ireland could further advance its approach to results-based management based on the positive steps taken since the 2020 Peer Review, such as the digitalisation of the programme management system and the recently approved embassy strategy guidance. With the support of a consultant, Ireland plans to develop results frameworks that capture the whole of mission efforts, enabling adaptation of the strategies to the SDGs and the objective to reach the furthest behind first. Subsequently, Ireland also plans to develop guidance on accountability. Ireland has engaged with the OECD on using the SDGs as a common roadmap at the country level. Greater attention to learning at the mission level (see recommendation 5) provides opportunities to promote a culture of results and learning by setting wider learning agendas supported by management.</p>  |
| ODA levels                       | <p>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.</p>  | <p><i>Limited progress.</i> Ireland has not developed a plan to reach its commitment of 0.7% ODA/GNI by 2030, while opportunities for achieving and maintaining a substantially higher ratio exist. A cross-government <a href="#">climate finance roadmap</a> usefully identifies avenues for increasing climate finance to reach EUR 225 million by 2025, notably by increasing the share of ODA that addresses climate change.. DFA's communication unit has increased capacity for communication on development co-operation, which could help communicate the rationale for ODA increases.</p>  |
| Staff capacity                   | <p>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.</p>   | <p><i>Good progress.</i> Ireland has increased the pool of development specialists by 20% since 2017 and created new entry-level positions for development specialist officers. Yet, recent evaluations and reviews continue to highlight the consequences of limited capacity and high turnover, causing delays and affecting partner engagement. DFA is finalising a management review of Ireland's International Development Assistance Programme, which will identify workforce measures to address those challenges, e.g. on knowledge transmission and training for ensuring adequate expertise in high rotation positions. DFA plans to update the current 2019-22 Human Resources Strategy by the end of 2023.</p>   |