

Where We Work

Africa

Africa will remain the principal geographic focus for Irish Aid.

The main reason for this focus is need: 34 of the world's 50 Least Developed Countries are in Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa the number of poor continues to rise and the average income of the poorest is declining. More than one-third of children have not enrolled in primary school. Overall, progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals is slowest in Africa. Approximately 80% of Ireland's Overseas Development Aid goes to Africa.

Ireland's relations with Africa consist of more than the provision of aid. Ireland's trade with the continent is worth hundreds of millions of euro every year. Increasing numbers of African-born people are living and working in Ireland and we have a network of diplomatic missions in Africa. We have been involved in UN-approved peacekeeping and crisis management operations across the continent and Africa will continue to be a focus for our peace support efforts. However, the Irish Aid programme remains the Government's main engagement with Africa.

Six of Ireland's programme countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa: **Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia**. In addition, we have significant programmes in Liberia, Sierra Leone and South Africa. A limited expansion in the number of programme countries is being considered. This expansion will focus on Africa.

Within the EU there is an increased focus on Africa. In December 2005, the Heads of State and Government of all EU member states, including the Taoiseach, adopted a strategy for the Union's relations with Africa. The EU-Africa Strategy represents a

step forward in relations with Africa. It deals with development, security, human rights, governance and economic growth.

The Strategy emphasises African ownership, and partnership, and working through African institutions. It sets clear priorities and measurable targets and represents engagement at the highest political level in Europe with the challenges Africa faces.

Support for African Institutions

Recent years have seen a growth in regional and continent-wide initiatives to tackle the challenges facing Africa. New institutions have come into being and existing ones are being revitalised. Working with these institutions offers an opportunity to address political, development and security issues on a regional basis.

The African Union (AU), established in 2002, represents the paramount regional organisation addressing the security and developmental challenges confronting the African continent. The AU has taken the lead role in responding to the current conflict in Darfur, Sudan. The AU has also mounted successful peace-support operations in Burundi and the Central African Republic. The EU has served as a model for the AU in its aim of accelerating political and socio-economic integration on the continent. The AU has adopted as its socio-economic programme the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative which is intended to provide a framework for the continent's development, emphasising African ownership and leadership.

The AU's development has given rise to a number of important pan-African institutions, such as the AU Peace and Security Council, the Pan-African Parliament and the African Commission on People's and Human Rights.

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The AU is also collaborating closely with sub-regional organisations in Africa, particularly those, such as the Economic Community of West African States, which are making an important contribution to regional peacekeeping efforts.

These institutions and initiatives represent a strong political commitment by African leaders to take the lead in tackling the continent's problems – and they deserve support. How successful they will be in the long term remains to be seen. A key test of their credibility will be their handling of intractable governance problems in some African countries. Continent-wide progress will take time. It will require external support and Ireland will play its part.

We will provide assistance to the African Union and to other regional organisations in Africa to support efforts to tackle the challenges facing the continent.

Regional Development Programmes

Action at a regional level is necessary to address problems which do not respect national borders.

With the extra financial resources now available to the programme, it is timely to explore the possibility of supporting regional approaches to development, to complement what we are doing at the country level.

Four of Ireland's programme countries are members of one of these regional organisations, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and we provide significant assistance to a fifth member, South Africa. This provides us with the knowledge and experience as well as the political and administrative grounding necessary to begin to build a regional programme in Southern Africa.

Regional integration is relatively well advanced in West Africa and may offer further opportunities.

We will explore the possibilities for the development of regional programmes in Southern Africa and in West Africa to bring added value to our ongoing work within individual countries.

Africa in Ireland

The image and understanding of Africa in Ireland continue to be dominated by the nature and scale of the problems of underdevelopment. This is beginning to change, not least because of increased immigration from Africa, and we are beginning to see a more comprehensive and complex picture.

It is important that the commonplace, negative images of Africa are balanced with an understanding of the positives that the continent has to offer; including in terms of history, culture and art, as well as economic and political success stories. The diversity between and even within countries should be highlighted. African leadership of efforts to address African problems should be highlighted.

The Department of Foreign Affairs will provide financial support for events to mark Africa Day, 25 May, in order to promote a more positive and comprehensive understanding of Africa in Ireland.

Other Global Engagements

While Africa remains the main focus of our efforts, we will also respond to need in other parts of the world. The increased resources available in recent years have allowed us to expand our cooperation, in particular in Asia, where two of our programme countries are located.

Asia

The pace of development in Asia over the last 50 years has been spectacular, but it has been uneven. Some of the world's largest and fastest growing economies are side by side with some of the world's poorest people.



Rice cultivator in Vietnam.

Irish Aid's support in Vietnam is focussed on governance, health and developing the private sector, with the overall aim of assisting Vietnam to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

The range of Ireland's relations with Asia reflects that diversity, including growing trade links and political dialogue bilaterally and as part of the EU, including through the ASEM and ASEAN process. Given the great need which exists in much of Asia, development cooperation is an essential part of the relationship.

Two of Ireland's programme countries are in Asia: **Timor-Leste (East Timor) and Vietnam.**

Timor-Leste is the least developed country in Asia. Ireland has been engaged in Timor-Leste since before the country achieved independence in 2002. This engagement has moved from the provision of emergency and humanitarian assistance to long-term development cooperation. Ireland also provided troops and members of the Garda Síochána, operating under a UN mandate, to help stabilise the country after independence. The main focus of our assistance will continue to be capacity-building for the government, aimed towards more effective, efficient and accountable service delivery.

The increasing instability in Timor-Leste will not diminish our commitment to helping its people. In Vietnam, we are combining a clear focus on poverty reduction with support for the growth of the private sector. Given Vietnam's economic growth, the role of the development cooperation programme there will be time-bound. Some of Vietnam's neighbours are at a much lower stage of economic development. Vietnam will provide a base from which we can develop a **regional programme covering Laos and Cambodia.**

Recent years have seen enormous and immediate humanitarian need in Asia, following the conflict in Afghanistan, the earthquake in Pakistan and the South Asian tsunami. We have responded to these emergencies and we will engage further in supporting recovery operations in the affected countries.

Latin America

Development cooperation with Latin America should follow a differentiated approach based on that region's own needs. While Central America will remain the focus of our bilateral assistance, we will continue to fund projects across Latin America and to support appropriate EU assistance to the countries of the region.

Central America is the poorest region in Latin America. While none of the countries of Central America is characterised as Least Developed, there are very high rates of relative and absolute poverty, particularly in rural areas. The impact of Tropical Storm Stan in 2005 and of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 highlighted the vulnerability of the poorest people to the effects of natural disasters.

The Irish Aid programme of cooperation in Central America is currently concentrated mainly in three countries: **El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.**

While our assistance is delivered primarily through civil society organisations, our activities are planned in close cooperation with the governments of these countries. Our assistance to Central America will be targeted on:

- > Supporting citizen participation in public policy engagement for poverty reduction, including through continued support for civil society capacity-building
- > Assisting people build their own livelihoods, including through support for fair trade, and promoting market access for women and other small producers

Civil society organisations will continue to be the main channel of our assistance. We are building links with Irish organisations, including NGOs and universities. We will ensure that the activities we support in these areas continue to be in line with the national poverty reduction and development plans of these countries.

The volume of assistance allocated for Central America will grow as the overall programme grows.



Harvesting organic coffee in Guatemala.

Through Irish Aid's support for capacity-building for small coffee producers in Central America, there has been a significant increase in the number of producers, workers and families benefiting from fair trade and ethically certified sales.

Palestine

Ireland has been a long-standing supporter of efforts to assist the Palestinian people. Palestine is not inherently a very poor country but it is exceptionally aid-dependent because of the continuing territorial conflict. The operating environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has become increasingly difficult because of restrictions on access and movement and, without a political resolution, aid can be seen as a palliative rather than a solution.

Ireland's programme in Palestine has been responding to the changing needs of the Palestinian people.

Irish Aid provides support to programmes in education and local rural development as well as supporting human rights and democratisation through our funding to civil society organisations. We strive to alleviate suffering through our partnership with UN agencies which provide humanitarian services on the ground.

We will continue to work to ensure that Ireland's assistance is delivered to those who are most in need and to ensure that our humanitarian response is effective within the context of longer term development.



Children arrive at Asharka school, Qalqilya, West Bank.
Irish Aid has provided funds to assist the education sector in Palestine, including fellowships in Bethlehem University, as well as humanitarian support.

Europe and Central Asia

The transition to democracy in the Balkans and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) proved difficult and gave rise to significant increases in poverty in many countries. There were also major humanitarian consequences of conflicts within the Balkans, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, resulting in increased flows of refugees and economic migrants, people trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

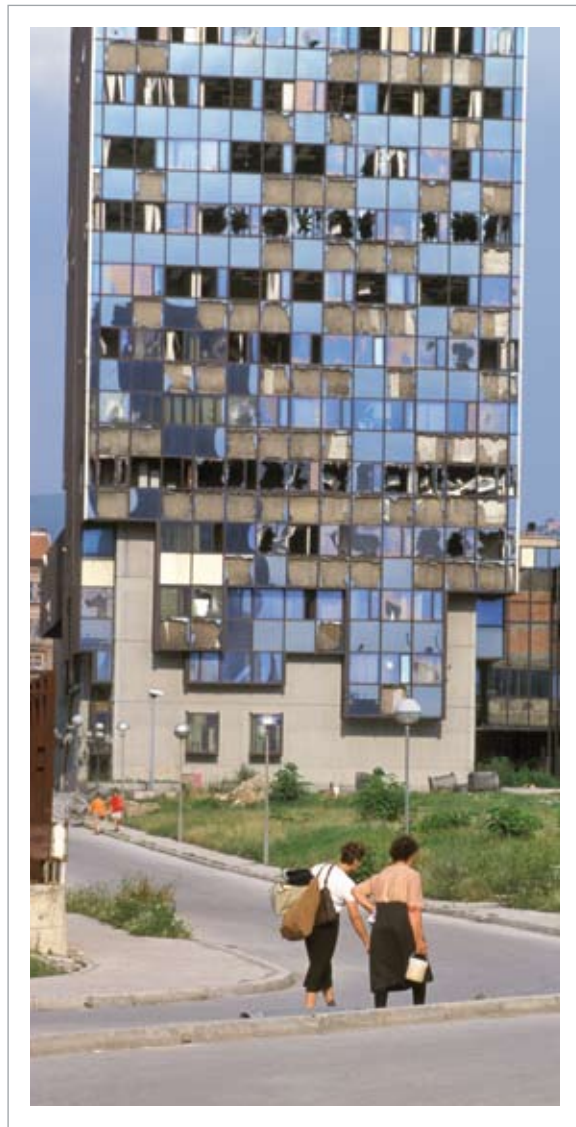
Even though the political situation in the West Balkans has stabilised, it is still one of Europe's most crisis-vulnerable areas and there is a concentration of Irish Aid funding in that region. Outside of the Balkans, the Partnership Programme also seeks to contribute to stability, security and democratic transition in countries bordering the expanding EU.

Much of Ireland's aid to countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia consists of its share of multilateral programme funding, especially through the EU, UN and World Bank.

In addition, Irish Aid provides bilateral funding for a Partnership Programme for Europe and Central Asia (PPECA). The programme seeks to address poverty reduction and support democratic transition in the region.

We work in partnership with a number of international organisations and agencies with proven track records on the ground. Ireland also has specific funding obligations in the region arising from the Stability Pact for Eastern Europe and expectations linked to our Council of Europe and OSCE membership and support for the European Neighbourhood policy. In addition, the Partnership Programme seeks to support the fundraising and advocacy work of Irish NGOs in the region.

Our priorities will include civil society capacity-building, human rights and democratisation and support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.



War-damaged building in Sarajevo city centre, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Irish Aid has supported efforts to formally identify casualties of civil war in the Balkans and is involved in the construction of court houses in Bosnia to serve a new justice system in that country.

