



OXFAM

Ireland

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

2019

MANIFESTO



1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, the European Union has been a major political force in the promotion of peace, democracy and shared prosperity. However, in today's fragile and fractured political climate the very value of the EU is being questioned. Trust in international alliances is eroding, and countries within and beyond Europe are adopting regressive and isolationist policies. In response, the EU is turning inwards and allowing its policies to be shaped by the short-term political agendas of a small number of member states, rather than by long-term sustainable development objectives which benefit all people.

In the next parliamentary term, Ireland's MEPs have an opportunity to stand against this tide and provide visionary political leadership which goes beyond short-sighted and self-interested policies. The global challenges we face – including climate change, tackling rising inequality and responding to complex and protracted humanitarian crises – can only be solved on a multilateral basis.

The 2019 EU parliamentary election is a pivotal opportunity to restore trust in the EU and the benefits of global multilateralism.

Candidates should unite behind a vision of Europe that is fair, equitable and compassionate, and remains true to the EU's founding values of human dignity, freedom and equality. To fulfil these values and achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Oxfam Ireland is asking Ireland's MEPs to address four priority issues in the next parliamentary term:

1. Asylum and Migration
2. Inequality
3. Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
4. Climate Change

“IRELAND'S MEPs HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE VISIONARY POLITICAL LEADERSHIP WHICH GOES BEYOND SHORT-SIGHTED AND SELF-INTERESTED POLICIES.”

Cover Image: Spread the word! Oxfam committee members spread vital messages to young women in Jamam refugee camp. Photo: John Ferguson.

Next page: Five-year-old Shadi* (name changed) lost his leg and needed a prosthetic one. He lives in Yemen amid the disastrous humanitarian conditions of Jabal Zaid Camp, Al Turbah, Taiz, where people live in threadbare tents and lack the basic needs. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen has left almost ten million people one step away from famine. Since the escalation in conflict in 2015, food prices have soared while household incomes have plummeted, pushing the costs of basic foods beyond the reach of many. Photo: VFX Aden/Oxfam.



a. Within Europe

At the EU level, Ireland has been complicit in a failed system of migration management which prioritises border security over the needs of vulnerable people. While the number of people arriving in Europe irregularly through the Mediterranean has dropped significantly from the peak in 2015, the situation for many refugees and migrants in Europe has become worse. Reception systems in countries of arrival – in Greece and Italy – are over capacity. Asylum seekers are often pushed out of the official system by poor and unsafe conditions. They often lack information about legal ways to claim asylum or reunite with family members in other European countries.

Oxfam responds to the needs of refugees and migrants in Italy, Greece, Spain and Serbia. We have seen first-hand the devastation that Europe's flawed migration policies are causing, and we want to challenge this response by presenting positive, alternative solutions.

Pictured are Ayman (42), his wife Susan (38) with their three children – Ahmad (16), Aya (14) and Suleiman (8) – who decided to flee to Lebanon from Syria when violence broke out in their hometown. Ahmad has severe muscular dystrophy and needs special medical care, so staying in a war-torn country was impossible for the family. Because of Ahmad's disability and the limited care he is able to receive in Lebanon, the family was selected to go to Italy through Oxfam's 'Humanitarian Corridors' programme. Oxfam helps refugees find refuge in Europe through safe and legal routes, without having to risk their lives to get there. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam



Ireland's MEPs should stand up for the rights of migrants and asylum seekers within the EU by:

- **Supporting shared responsibility for hosting refugees equally** under a proposed new Dublin system.
- **Supporting the implementation of EU asylum system that is safe, fair and effective and that provides access to basic services to all asylum seekers.** This includes healthy food, water, medical assistance, and legal information and assistance.
- **Ensuring refugee family members can reunite** across countries, including in Ireland.
- **Supporting EU search and rescue operations with the sole objective of saving lives and supporting search and rescue by NGOs.** People saved in international waters should not be returned to Libya, which the UN has warned is not a safe country for disembarkation, and where it has been documented that migrants suffer torture and rape.

b. Beyond Europe

Cooperation with third countries on migration issues must be based on respect for human rights and international law; promote inclusive, accountable and transparent processes; and work for the benefit of displaced people, migrants, and communities in host and destination countries. This means identifying opportunities to support regional migration initiatives which foster cross border trade and access to markets and refraining from agreeing policies on migration management with states that have questionable human rights regimes.

Ireland's MEPs should stand up for the rights of migrants and asylum seekers beyond Europe by:

- **Maintaining the integrity of aid.** Aid should be distributed in accordance with need, and its effectiveness should only be measured in achieving development goals, not by tackling migration.
- **Cooperating with countries globally to address the situation of refugees and migrants and reduce the dangers and discrimination that they suffer.** This includes investing in regional mobility schemes that make travel cheaper and safer, as well as developing safe and regular pathways to Europe for refugees and for migrants, regardless of the level of their professional skills.
- **Only supporting partner countries' security systems when it contributes to achieving peace and stability, inclusive and sustainable development, state-building and democracy, rule of law and protection of human rights.**
- **Addressing the specific needs of refugee and migrant women and girls** within aid programmes and promoting their role as leaders for positive and inclusive change.

3. ADDRESSING INEQUALITY

Tax Justice

The world is facing a global inequality crisis. An increasing gap between rich and poor is creating divided societies and stoking populist sentiment. Part of this rising inequality stems from harmful practices like tax avoidance, which makes the rich richer while trapping the most vulnerable in poverty. Right now, developing countries lose over \$100 billion a year to tax dodging by multinational companies – money that could fund vital public services like health and education. Investing in these public services give people the means to lift themselves out of poverty. This is especially the case for women and girls, who make up the majority of people living in poverty and who are more likely to rely on public services.

When public services are inadequate or unavailable, it places an inordinate burden on women as care-givers, often compromising their health and their opportunities for education and employment. Conversely, quality public systems increase women's economic opportunities and their decision-making power within the household and can make a key difference in spreading care responsibilities more equitably. Besides draining money from social services, tax dodging also negatively impacts poor people because it requires governments to raise a greater proportion of their revenue from other sources. Most developing countries raise two thirds or more of their tax revenue through consumption taxes, which eat up a larger proportion of income the poorer you are.

“WELL-DESIGNED TAX SYSTEMS THAT REDISTRIBUTE WEALTH AND ENABLE SPENDING ON PUBLIC GOODS ARE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS FOR GOVERNMENTS TO REDUCE INEQUALITY AND POVERTY, WHILE SUSTAINING GROWTH.”

The Oxfam confederation has worked on issues related to the international financial system for over a decade. We believe that a fair tax system is essential to eradicating poverty and inequality by 2030. Well-designed tax systems that redistribute wealth and enable spending on public goods are one of the most effective ways for governments to reduce inequality and poverty, while sustaining growth. Taxing companies' profits, particularly those of large, successful corporations, is one of the most progressive forms of taxation. It raises more income for national budgets, and when this revenue is invested in public services, it reduces inequality.

Ireland's MEPs should help design fairer tax systems that address inequality and reduce poverty by:

- **Promoting progressive tax systems** to counter rising inequality in the framework of the European Semester. This includes making sure that tax policies in the EU **promote gender equality** and are fully in line with policy coherence for development commitments. The EU must **stop the race to the bottom on corporate taxation**, facilitated by the lowering of corporate tax rates and the use of harmful tax practices.
- **Passing legislation on Public Country-by-Country Reporting** to ensure that multinational corporations pay their fair share of tax and are accountable for publishing what they pay where, to allow states to develop public services such as health and education, which address inequality.
- **Supporting the establishment of an intergovernmental tax body** under the auspices of the UN, with the aim of ensuring that developing countries can participate equally in the global reform of international tax rules.
- **Passing legislation on common corporate tax rules known as the Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB)** while promoting alternatives to the current corporate tax system at international level, such as unitary taxation, with special attention to the likely impact of these alternatives on developing countries.

The Paraisópolis Favela (Paradise City Shantytown) borders the affluent district of Morumbi in São Paulo, Brazil. Photo: Tuca Vieira.



4. DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Oxfam's work with people enduring poverty and injustice around the world gives us a unique understanding of the significance and impact of EU development cooperation. Conflict and natural disasters have resulted in an estimated 201 million people being left in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance. Oxfam responds to the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar and South Sudan which have caused untold suffering and displacement, particularly of women and girls. Meanwhile, drought and food insecurity in the east and horn of Africa have jeopardised livelihoods and protracted crises in countries like Somalia trap people in food insecurity and poverty, creating a new cycle of devastation.

The EU's commitment to eradicating poverty and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals - in particular the commitment to leaving no-one behind - is undermined by its preoccupation with 'tackling migration', increasing security, and promoting privatization and one-sized trade partnerships. To maintain its global leadership on poverty eradication and international development, the EU must prioritise sustainable development in its external action agenda.

Poakurugu holds her youngest child Amin* as she explains how she has benefitted from Oxfam's work in Ghana, where we have provided basic farm equipment and training to communities - helping them to take on challenges such as unpredictable weather. Photo: Nana Kofi Acquah/Oxfam



Ireland's MEPs must prioritise and advocate for sustainable development in the EU's external action agenda by:

- **Ensuring EU development aid's primary purpose is to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.** Development cooperation must follow the strong policy framework based on the Treaty of Lisbon, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement.
- **Strengthening the role of civil society by fostering a supportive environment for citizen and civil society participation to advance human rights, good governance and democratic accountability.** This should include dedicated funding and increased involvement in decision-making for civil society organisations, particularly women's rights and feminist organisations, and human rights defenders.
- **Maintaining a focus on countries and populations most in need.** This includes Sub-Saharan Africa and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), without forgetting the challenges related to human rights, poverty and inequalities in Middle Income Countries (MICs).
- **Using caution when increasing the role of the private sector in development cooperation.** EU development aid should only be used to support private investment for projects with a proven sustainable development impact, which contribute to the core objective of Agenda 2030, not as a subsidy for European companies.
- **Promoting humanitarian principles and the EU Consensus on humanitarian aid to prevent interferences from external agendas and to prevent the securitisation of aid.** Irish MEPs should support a further increase in the humanitarian aid budget to 2 billion euros per year in order to meet global humanitarian needs.
- **Promoting and funding an environment where women's rights organizations and women-led organisations play a leading role in identifying needs before, during and after crises.** Support these organisations to become leaders for change and to deliver assistance that is gender sensitive.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is affecting many of the communities with which Oxfam works; undermining their livelihoods through gradual, insidious changes in temperature and rainfall patterns, and increasing the frequency and/or intensity of hazards such as floods and droughts. On a global scale, disasters are increasing in both frequency and impact. The number of people affected by disaster doubled during the 1990s, and every year since 2000 over a quarter of a billion people lost their home, livelihood or health as a result. Vulnerability to disaster and climate change matters because it perpetuates and deepens the poverty and suffering. It stands in the way of people - particularly women - being able to enjoy their basic rights and reduces their chances of ever being able to attain them.

Ireland's MEPs should take action on climate change in the next EU parliament by:

- **Introducing and encouraging policies consistent with the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement.** The EU should aim at entirely decarbonising all sectors of its economy before 2050. This will require a swift upwards revision of the EU's current 2030 climate targets.
- **Excluding large scale unsustainable use of bioenergy from the EU's long-term strategy because of its impacts on land use, food security and the environment.** The EU's priority should be reducing emissions through a reduction in energy demand, an increase in energy efficiency and the promotion of sustainable renewable energy such as wind and solar power. The EU should improve the sustainability framework of the 2030 climate and energy package.
- **Supporting the delivery of the shared commitment made by developed countries to jointly give \$100bn per year to support climate action in developing countries by 2020.** This aid should be grant based and prioritised for adaptation in the poorest and most vulnerable countries. Importantly, any increase in climate funding should not come at the expense of funding for development.
- **Actively promote the adoption of a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) across all member states, and actively support countries that are willing to move faster than others through the Enhanced Cooperation mechanism.** This tax would help finance the fight against climate change, and would contribute to reducing inequality.

6. CONCLUSION

In an address to the Irish Association of Contemporary European Studies, President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, stated that:

"We have arrived...at a critical juncture in the history of the European project. We are at a moment when a new departure is required – when a new departure is possible. We can, together, breathe new life in the European vision, and in doing so, we will also be saving a model on which the peoples of other continents have placed their gaze and considered exemplary for their own future cooperation."

In the next parliamentary term, Europe's achievements must focus on improving the lot of our shared humanity, forging a solidarity that extends to those beyond Europe's shores. To do this, EU institutions must address the global challenges of economic inequality – including gender inequality – climate change and migration. The EU must maintain its strong global leadership in development cooperation and humanitarian aid to ensure that people affected by poverty, conflict or crisis receive the support and protection they need. Oxfam stands ready to assist.

Aaron, 41, stands in front of his home, surrounded by the devastation caused by Cyclone Idai, in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. Oxfam is responding with water, sanitation services, food and other non-food items to people affected by Cyclone Idai that hit Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March 2019. Photo: Philip Hatcher-Moore/Oxfam



OXFAM IRELAND

Oxfam is a world-wide development and humanitarian organisation that mobilises the power of people against poverty. Around the globe, Oxfam works to find practical, innovative ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty. We save lives and help rebuild livelihoods when crisis strikes, and we campaign so that voices of the poor influence the local and global decisions that affect them.

Last year, Oxfam Ireland, in partnership with Irish Aid, worked in over 14 countries and reached 952,000 people through our development and humanitarian programmes.

In Ireland, we advocate nationally and globally on a variety of issues, including financing for development, inequality, tax justice, women's rights and human rights in humanitarian crises. At EU level, Oxfam challenges EU policies to make them work for people in poverty. In Brussels, we work to influence key decision-makers in the EU institutions to ensure that EU policies affecting poor countries have a far reaching, positive impact on the lives of those most in need.

For more details contact:

Policy and Advocacy team

Oxfam Ireland

info@oxfam.org

2nd Floor Portview House

Thorncastle Street

Ringsend

Dublin 4

t: +353 1 635 0461

w: www.oxfamireland.org

f: www.facebook.com/oxfamireland

t: www.twitter.com/OxfamIreland