

Our Budget 2026 asks

- **Increase investment in GCE, taking a cross-departmental approach, accounting for inflation and moving towards a widely recognised target of 3% of Official Development Assistance**
- **An increase in funding allocated for GCE/ESD projects under ESD to 2030**
- **A dedicated funding stream for GCE/ESD projects under the SDG National Implementation Plan**
- **Dedicated funding streams for GCE/ESD projects under the Climate Action Plan and the National Action Plan Against Racism**
- **Increase Official Development Assistance towards target of 0.7% GNI**
- **Adopt Coalition 2030 budget recommendations to reach Furthest Behind First**

Introduction

Ireland has been a beacon of light on the world stage for many years, and increasingly so in the past 21 months. Many nations look to Ireland in terms of our development cooperation policy. We are known for our role in co-developing and promoting the Sustainable Development Goals, in protecting humanitarian principles at the UN Security Council and being “a strong independent voice that promotes the values and principles of a rules-based, multilateral system.”¹

It is our values of justice, solidarity, human rights and equality that shape our foreign policy, but which also underpin our investment in educating the people on this island to uphold and practice those values, and to understand the roots and drivers of global injustice and global inequalities.

Ireland, led by Irish Aid, has been investing in this type of education - Development Education/Global Citizenship Education (GCE) - for 50 years, and through this investment, it has contributed to growing a collective of global citizens. It has been instrumental in moulding generations of critical thinkers across Ireland. “Graduates” of GCE have pushed the frontiers of global solidarity and contributed significantly to Ireland’s international development cooperation programme, which has contributed richly across the world for decades.

Between 2021 and 2024, Ireland invested €33.6 million in programmes and projects aiming at educating over 1.2 million people on this island to become informed and active global citizens.

¹ [Lives on the Line, Dóchas Pre-Budget 2026 Submission](#)

This investment has achieved solid foundations in embedding GCE across formal, non-formal and informal education settings and within policy, structures, curricula and teacher education, and it has made us a leader and role model for other European countries.

However, now at a time of immense turbulence and intensified global and local challenges, those foundations must be protected, built upon and expanded. GCE builds civic trust, participation, and resilience in a time of political disinformation and polarisation. Therefore, the need for Ireland to continue and increase investment in GCE has never been greater.

It is imperative that Ireland continue to show leadership and maintain its steadfast commitment to Global Citizenship Education, as signalled by Minister of State for International Development and the Diaspora, Neale Richmond, at the IDEA Annual Conference in May 2025. Minister Richmond spoke of *“the critical importance of supporting critical thinking and public awareness in this rapidly changing and interdependent world”*, urging IDEA and its members to focus *“on the hard issues - including the drivers and impacts of climate change, efforts to undermine the multilateral system, disregard for international law and international humanitarian law, and, indeed, disinformation. These are among the greatest challenges of our time.”*

In this context, Budget 2026 is a key moment for several reasons: not only are we facing intensifying global risks and running out of time to reach our SDG targets by 2030, but Ireland is also on the cusp of developing a new national GCE Strategy for the coming five years.

Who are we and what do we do

IDEA is the Irish Development Education Association, the national network for Development Education, also known as **Global Citizenship Education (GCE)**, on the island of Ireland, and a leading voice for the sector. We represent 100 members involved in GCE in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Together we work to strengthen GCE and Education for Sustainable Education (ESD) in Ireland and to raise awareness of the crucial role it plays in fostering global citizenship and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We work in strategic partnership with Irish Aid to help deliver its Global Citizenship Education Strategy. We also contribute to the delivery of the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development, the SDG National Implementation Plan, Climate Action Plan and the National Volunteering Strategy.

The scope of our work is guided by SDG Target 4.7:

*By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through **education for sustainable development** and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, **global citizenship**, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.*

Target 4.7 is considered a key enabler and an accelerating force to achieve all SDGs.

Global Citizenship Education enables people to explore key issues such as equality, climate justice and human rights, through creative, innovative and interactive approaches.

It gives them the opportunity to examine the impact of these issues globally and locally, including how their own lives are affected. It also supports them in considering how their values, choices and actions can contribute to or mitigate an issue and in exploring what action they can take to create positive change. As GCE focuses on the interconnectedness of the world, it empowers people to create a more just and sustainable future for everyone.

Global Citizenship Education is delivered by a range of actors in Ireland, including international development NGOs, community and voluntary organisations, educational institutions and networks, trade unions, educators, researchers, and activists. It engages hundreds of thousands of people of all ages and communities throughout the island of Ireland each year.

Thanks to the investment of Irish Aid and others, Ireland has a high impact GCE sector, informed by values of equality, diversity, sustainability and human rights. We are recognised at European and international level as a leader in GCE due to the support structures in place and the quality of the organisations and programmes.

However, in its most recent Development Assistance Committee report², the **OECD** noted that “Ireland has received international recognition for its development education strategies” but **called for more resources to be devoted to Development Education/GCE:**

“Mobilising more funds for development education would allow Ireland to reap the benefits of its strong approach to promoting global citizenship. Ireland has received international recognition for its development education strategies...However, without additional investment, Ireland cannot seize the opportunity to help turn development-aware children into development-aware adults who could then contribute in their communities, as consumers, or in politics...While Ireland remains an average DAC funder of development awareness, it commits in A Better World to mobilising more resources. This responds as well to strong calls by Irish civil society for greater resources for this.”³

This call by the OECD is a reminder that current investment levels could mean Ireland will fall short in delivering on its SDG 4.7 commitment, despite strong foundations, and therefore increased investment is essential.

Working closely with Irish Aid and across relevant departments, our sector has the potential to bring about large-scale positive societal change to create a just, equal and sustainable society and help fulfil Ireland’s commitments to delivering on the SDGs. Achieving these goals is of utmost importance for our society to maintain support for multilateralism and Ireland’s important role on the world stage as a voice for justice, solidarity and human rights. In addition, GCE helps combat the escalating threats to democracy, the rise of racism and anti-immigrant sentiments, and to swiftly transition towards a sustainable way of living. IDEA has identified several priorities for the GCE sector in Ireland to 2030 to address these escalating threats in its updated vision and roadmap for GCE to 2030 which will be launched ahead of Budget Day, and which is a successor to [Vision 2025- Towards a society of Global Citizens](#).

² [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Review of Ireland, 2020](#)

³ Ibid. p. 30

Recent Policy Developments

In recent years, there have been significant advancements in policy regarding GCE. Notably, the [Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy \(2021–25\)](#) has laid a robust foundation for the sector's growth until 2025. Its [Mid-Term Review](#) and the preliminary findings of the 2025 GENE Peer Review of Ireland both emphasised the relevance and effectiveness of the strategy, to which IDEA and its members, as strategic partners, Irish Civil Society Programme partners and grantees greatly contribute. Additionally, the [Dublin Declaration on Global Education to 2050](#), endorsed by 25 EU Member States, at Dublin Castle in 2022, is a substantial milestone in shaping the future trajectory of GCE throughout Europe. At global level, the [UNESCO 2023 Recommendation \(revised 1974 recommendation\) on Education for Peace and Human Rights, International Understanding, Cooperation, Fundamental Freedoms, Global Citizenship Education and Sustainable Development](#) is considered the global GCE standard.

Other important policy advances regarding GCE include:

- [SDG National Implementation Plan 2022-24](#)
- [2nd National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development 2022-2030](#)
- [Climate Action Plan 2025](#)
- [EU Council Recommendation on Education and Training contributing to strengthening of European Values and Democratic Citizenship](#)
- EU Council Conclusions on [The Transformative role of education for sustainable development and global citizenship as an instrumental tool for the achievement of the sustainable development goals \(SDGs\)](#)
- EU Council Recommendation on Learning for the [Green Transition and Sustainable Development](#)
- [UN Transforming Education Summit commitments \(2022\)](#)

Despite significant progress, Ireland's ambitious plans have not been matched with sufficient levels of funding to fulfil their objectives. Insufficient funding to meet the scale of the challenges hampers our ability to equip citizens with the necessary information, tools, and choices to navigate an ever-turbulent interconnected world that demands transversal skills and a comprehensive understanding of key global challenges. The GCE learners of today are the tax-paying citizens, policymakers and development cooperation workers of tomorrow. Therefore, reaching SDG Target 4.7 is critical to meeting the other SDGs. Commensurate investment is required to ensure Ireland can build on strong GCE foundations, ensure policy aspirations aren't just aspirational, and realise the vast opportunity by harnessing GCE to create a better future.

Budget 2026 Recommendations

Increase investment in GCE, taking a cross-departmental approach, accounting for inflation and moving towards the widely recognised target of 3% of Official Development Assistance

Under the Irish Aid **Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021-2025**, the Government significantly increased its funding for GCE from 6.7 million per annum in 2021 to 9.8 million per annum in 2023 and has maintained this level of funding for GCE since then. This is very welcome

and valued. However, since 2023, it has not taken inflation⁴ and a rise in living costs into account. In addition, the current spend represents just 1.2% of the current Irish Aid Official Development Assistance (ODA) Budget (€810 million) and falls far short of the **projected €26 million per annum** that should be allocated to GCE if Ireland were to meet the widely recognised target⁵ for GCE funding, which is **3% of the ODA Budget**.

Global Citizenship Education suffered considerable cutbacks during the years of the financial crisis (2008 – 2016). While acknowledging that funding has been restored, it is also true that the sector is still grappling with the aftermath of those significant funding cuts endured over the years. Now the sector faces the **additional challenge of coping with rising operational and living costs**. This is compounded by the growing demand for our work amid a backdrop of rising racism, extremism and social division.

Increasing investment in GCE by taking a cross-departmental approach would enable the sector to maintain the gains and intensify efforts to educate children and adults on the global challenges we face and Ireland’s important role on the world stage as a voice for justice, solidarity and human rights at a particularly critical time. It would also enable the sector to absorb the rising costs of providing GCE in formal, non-formal and informal educational settings.

The **Dóchas** Pre-Budget 2026 Submission echoes this request in its recommendation:

*“Increase investment in Global Citizenship Education, adopting a cross departmental approach. This is critical, among other reasons, to enhance the public’s understanding of Ireland’s contribution to the world, which is rooted in its history of solidarity and compassion.”*⁶

An increase in funding allocated for ESD/GCE projects under ESD to 2030

IDEA members are key actors in the implementation of the **Second National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2022-2030 – ESD to 2030**, and it is crucial that adequate funding is allocated to ensure the strategy’s successful implementation. We welcome the May 2025 allocation of €450,000 for ESD projects by organisations and the September 2024 allocation of €600,000 for ESD projects by schools by the Department of Education and Youth and we acknowledge and value the increase in this funding compared to 2024. We would welcome a dedicated funding stream from the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science for ESD/GCE projects by organisations and higher education and further education partners. This would allow more higher education and further education students to be reached in non-formal and informal learning spaces, to complement institutional efforts to embed ESD/GCE in Further and Higher Education.

A dedicated funding stream for GCE/ESD projects under the next Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan

⁴ [Rates of inflation in Ireland from 2023 – 2025, Eurostat, European Central Bank](#)

⁵ [European Conference on Awareness-Raising and Development Education for North-South Solidarity](#), held in Brussels 19-20 May 2005, building on previous suggestions by UNDP, and restated in Bridge 47’s [Envision 4.7: Roadmap in support of SDG Target 4.7](#) (2019)

⁶ [Lives on the Line, Dóchas Pre-Budget 2026 Submission, p.5](#)

The next iteration of the **National Implementation Plan (NIP) for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** will also require a specific budget line for GCE/ESD. GCE/ESD should be a core element of Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals NIP, contributing to reaching SDG Target 4.7. A broad public education and outreach plan is essential if the ambitious objectives of the NIP are to be achieved. This needs to be delivered through formal, non-formal and informal education.

Dedicated GCE funding streams for GCE/ESD projects allocated to the Climate Action Plan and the National Action Plan Against Racism

Projects on GCE/ESD are key to implementation of the Climate Action Plan, as well as the National Action Plan Against Racism, as the success of key parts of both action plans hinges largely on effective education initiatives. Climate justice and anti-racism are core components of GCE/ESD. This will require dedicated funding streams from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality, respectively.

Increase Official Development Assistance budget towards target of 0.7% GNI

IDEA supports the call by **Dóchas** for Ireland to increase Official Development Assistance (ODA) by €300 million in Budget 2026 to make real progress towards fulfilling its promise in the Programme for Government to reach the UN target of spending 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on ODA by 2030.

Adopt Coalition 2030 budget recommendations to reach Furthest Behind First

IDEA signed up to the [Coalition 2030 “Furthest Behind First” campaign](#) and we endorse its [Budget for the SDGs recommendations](#). One of the key recommendations is to categorise and align all national budget lines and reports to specific SDG targets, using both UN indicators and nationally relevant indicators. This would enable more effective monitoring of SDG progress and comprehensive budgeting for long-term sustainable development.

Related Policy Recommendations

Strategic cross-government prioritisation and policy coherence for GCE

IDEA members work across a broad spectrum of Irish society and in many different institutions and settings. Global Citizenship Education requires a supportive and coherent policy context. Stronger coordination and collaboration are needed between relevant government departments, along with integration of GCE into their policies and programmes. These include, but are not limited to, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Education and Youth, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Stronger coordination and coherence are also needed between key policies, including the Irish Aid Strategy on Global Citizenship Education, National Strategy on Education for Sustainable

Development, National Youth Strategy, Further Education and Training Strategy, The Climate Action Plan, The National Action Plan Against Racism, and the National Volunteering Strategy.

Integration and prioritisation of GCE in relevant institutions and networks is also necessary. These include Education and Training Boards, schools' networks, youth sector bodies and third level institutions.

Make GCE a strategic priority in the Government's policy agenda with clear leadership, oversight, and resourcing mechanisms to provide a coherent, integrated approach that reaches across relevant departments.

Consolidate coordination mechanisms to enhance cross-departmental coordination of GCE-related policies, and for integration into key institutions and networks.

Address precarious working conditions of GCE practitioners

IDEA members have highlighted concerns about the working conditions of GCE practitioners, noting that many experienced practitioners are being lost to more secure positions outside the GCE sector. The principle of **Decent Work** in SDG 8 should apply to all GCE practitioners. Precarious conditions disproportionately affect staff in smaller and specialist GCE organisations. When funding projects from public money we believe that the relevant Government Department should ensure that GCE grantees are adequately resourced so that their employees have, in line with SDG 8, decent and secure work.

Conclusion

We value the enhanced policy framework at both national and international levels that further embeds the importance of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Ireland. We acknowledge and are proud of the progress achieved to date. At the same time, in today's turbulent global context and era of rising disinformation, now is not the time for complacency. As Minister Neale Richmond stated at the IDEA Annual Conference in May 2025, "now is the time to reinforce messages of global solidarity."

Ireland has shown clear global leadership in GCE policy. Budget 2026 presents a vital opportunity to match that leadership with meaningful investment that corresponds to the scale of the challenge and the opportunity. At a time of intensifying uncertainty and interdependence, our education system, public discourse, and social cohesion will be stronger if our citizens are equipped to understand and respond to the complex global challenges of our time.

IDEA and its members stand ready to advance this shared mission - in partnership with Irish Aid and across government - to ensure Ireland continues to lead with integrity, foresight, and global solidarity.