



Children clapping and playing in the Kisongo Makuyuni Area Programme, Tanzania. Photo: © World Vision/Ben Adams

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST IN A WORLD OF RISING HUNGER AND DECLINING AID

WORLD VISION IRELAND PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2027

Introduction

"There is a shortage of food and money. Children have to take responsibility. This means we cannot go to school."

— Claude*, Burundi

This testimony reflects a growing global reality. When families lack food and income, children are the first to be affected through hunger, loss of education and increased exposure to harm.

According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)¹, global need is at record levels, with 239 million people requiring humanitarian assistance. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)² estimates that more than 117 million people are forcibly displaced worldwide. Hunger is also deepening. The Global Report on Food Crises finds that 266 million people are facing acute food insecurity, most in protracted crises. At the same time, global support is declining, leaving the majority of humanitarian needs unmet and reinforcing the need for increased and sustained investment from donors, including Ireland. For

children, this combination of rising need and shrinking support is devastating. Ireland has long stood in solidarity with the most vulnerable.

Budget 2027 presents an opportunity to reaffirm that leadership by investing in children whose futures are being shaped now.

A World Where Children Are Being Left Behind

The scale of the global crisis is unprecedented, but its impacts are not evenly distributed. Children are at the centre of today's crises. UNICEF estimates that more than 200 million children require humanitarian assistance, while one in five children globally lives in or is fleeing conflict.

Hunger is one of the most immediate and visible impacts. As highlighted in the Global Report on Food Crises, 266 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, with children the most vulnerable. In many contexts, hunger is no longer temporary but chronic and deepening.

*Name changed to protect identity

1 UN OCHA Global Humanitarian Overview 2026 <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2026-enesfr>

2 UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2025 Report <https://www.unhcr.org/media/mid-year-trends-2025>

Climate change is compounding these challenges, disrupting livelihoods and increasing pressure on already vulnerable households.

Without sustained action, an entire generation risks being left behind. These pressures are further intensified by declining global support. At the same time as global needs continue to rise, the resources available to respond are declining sharply. UN humanitarian financing data shows that in 2025 appeals were funded at only around 35% of requirements, leaving nearly two thirds of needs unmet. Earlier in the year, some appeals received as little as 20–25% of required financing, highlighting the depth of the crisis. This shortfall is compounded by a broader contraction in official development assistance (ODA). OECD³ data shows that Official Development Assistance fell by 23.1% in 2025, the largest decline ever recorded.

In this context, increasing development and humanitarian funding is critical to closing the gap between needs and response.

Cuts in assistance are already reducing food support, limiting education opportunities and weakening child protection systems. When support declines, families are forced to make difficult decisions, including cutting meals, withdrawing children from school, or pushing them into labour.

This represents not a lack of solutions, but a failure to invest at the scale required to meet growing needs.

Hunger is Driving a Child Protection Crisis

Hunger is not only a humanitarian issue, but also a key driver of risks for children.

Recent World Vision research, *In the Shadows of Hunger*, highlights the scale and severity of the crisis. Across multiple fragile contexts, 55% of households are experiencing severe food insecurity, with many families surviving on just one meal a day or less. In over half of households surveyed, at least one family member had gone to sleep hungry in the previous month.

Hunger is driving a cascade of harms for children. It is directly linked to increased child labour,

school dropout, family separation and early marriage, as families struggle to cope with shrinking resources.

Where assistance is reduced, these risks intensify further. Households experiencing cuts in support are significantly more likely to adopt negative coping strategies that directly affect children, including withdrawing them from education or exposing them to exploitation.

Beyond immediate risks, hunger has profound long-term impacts. Malnutrition undermines physical and cognitive development, reduces educational attainment and increases the likelihood of lifelong poverty. At the same time, the psychological distress associated with persistent food insecurity affects children's mental health and wellbeing.

Without sustained investment in food security, nutrition and resilience, these risks will continue to increase, with children bearing the greatest long-term consequences.

Addressing hunger is therefore essential not only to saving lives, but also to protecting childhood itself.



What Works: Investing in Children and Building Resilience

Despite the scale of the crisis, there is clear and consistent evidence that investment in children delivers significant results.

³ OECD (2026), Preliminary Official Development Assistance Data 2025
<https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2026/04/a-historic-decline-in-foreign-aid-preliminary-2025-oda-data.html>

World Vision research, Putting Children First for Sustainable Development, shows that every \$1 invested in child-focused development assistance can generate up to \$10 in long-term social and economic returns, through improved health, education and productivity outcomes. This reflects the high impact of early and targeted investment. However, children remain significantly underfunded.

Our analysis also shows that while children represent around 46% of populations in aid-receiving countries, only 12% of global Official Development Assistance is directed towards programmes that benefit them. In some cases, as little as 5% is specifically targeted at children's needs. Ireland is a leading performer on child-focused aid, allocating 32.6% of its ODA to children, more than double the global average - placing it 4th among donor countries, with a strong balance between direct (17.5%) and indirect (15.1%) investments. However, projections suggest that declining aid could result in up to \$163 billion in lost social and economic returns linked to reduced investment in children.

At the same time, evidence from World Vision's research highlights the importance of building self-reliance. Supporting families to access livelihoods and stable incomes significantly reduces risks for children and helps communities move from crisis to recovery.

These outcomes depend on sustained development investment, including through Official Development Assistance. These findings underline a clear conclusion. Investing in children is not only a moral imperative, it is also one of the most effective, high impact uses of development funding.

Irish Aid Works: Delivering for Children

Irish Aid's Civil Society Partnership is demonstrating clear and measurable impact at scale, including in some of the world's most fragile and climate-vulnerable contexts.

In 2025 alone, World Vision Ireland's ICSP-supported programmes reached over 203,600

people directly across Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific, with women and children comprising 84% of beneficiaries.

These investments are translating into tangible outcomes:

- Over 90% of targeted households adopted climate-smart agricultural practices, strengthening food security and resilience
- 75% of households diversified income sources
- More than half reported improved disaster preparedness and coping strategies.

Protection and empowerment programmes supported approximately 85,000 vulnerable women, girls and children, increasing confidence and agency among nearly 69% of participants, while expanding access to education, psychosocial support and legal services.



Huguette drinking water at a school water point built by World Vision in Eastern DRC. Photo: © World Vision/Jean Baptiste Mirindi

Humanitarian responses reached a further 39,000 people directly and over one million people indirectly, demonstrating the flexibility and effectiveness of Irish Aid's long-term, locally led approach.

Maintaining and increasing Ireland's Official Development Assistance is essential to sustaining and scaling these results.

These results demonstrate a clear principle. Well-targeted, sustained investment works.

Recommendations for Budget 2027

At a time of rising global need and declining support, Budget 2027 must respond decisively.

World Vision Ireland urges the Government to take the following actions:

- Increase Ireland's overseas development assistance in Budget 2027 to respond to rising global hunger, climate and humanitarian needs.
- Set out a credible pathway towards reaching 0.7% of GNI for Official Development Assistance by 2030.
- Strengthen child-focused funding, working towards allocating at least 25% of ODA to programmes supporting children, supported by annual increases.

- Prioritise investment in hunger, nutrition, climate resilience and humanitarian response
- Improve tracking and accountability mechanisms, including age-disaggregated data, to ensure impact for children.

Conclusion

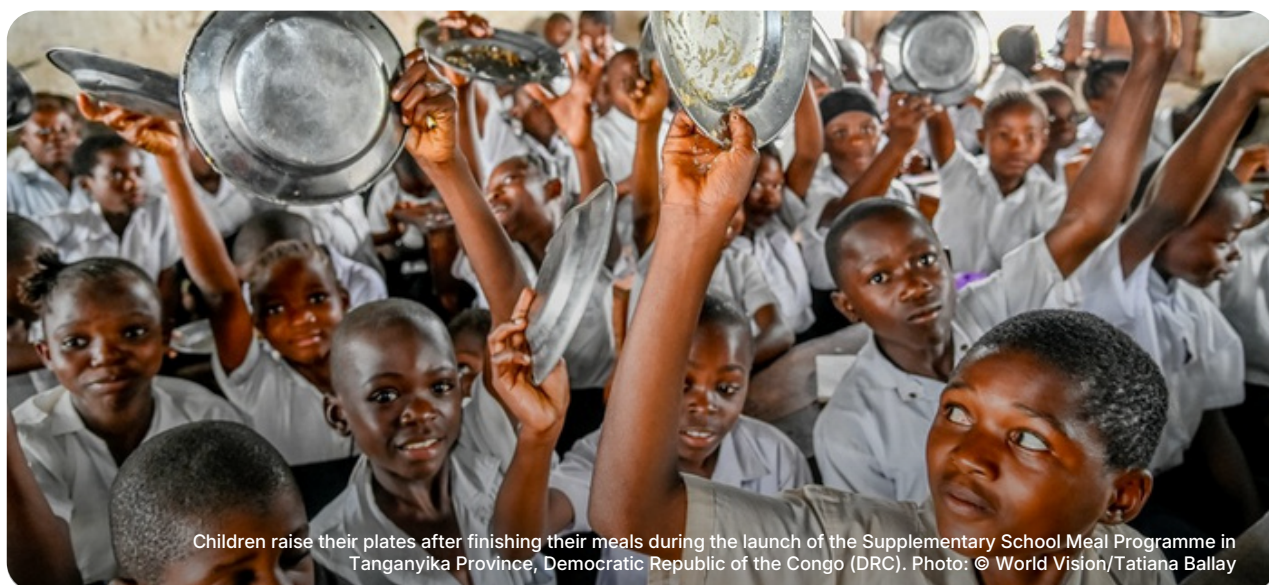
Children are at the centre of today's global crises.

Rising hunger, increasing displacement and declining global funding are shaping their lives in ways that will have lasting consequences. Yet the evidence is clear. We know what works and targeted investment delivers results.

Ireland has demonstrated leadership through its development programme, delivering real impact for vulnerable communities. At a time when many donors are stepping back, that leadership matters more than ever.

Budget 2027 presents a clear moment of choice. The decisions made will determine whether children facing hunger and crisis are supported or left further behind.

Investing in children today is not only the right thing to do, but also one of the most effective ways to build a more stable, secure and just world tomorrow.



Children raise their plates after finishing their meals during the launch of the Supplementary School Meal Programme in Tanganyika Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Photo: © World Vision/Tatiana Ballay

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Charity Number: CHY6434/20011796

