



Submission

The National Policy on Social Enterprise in Ireland 2019 - 2022

May 2019

INTRODUCTION

Conradh na Gaeilge welcomes this opportunity to submit a submission in relation to the National Policy on Social Enterprise in Ireland 2019 – 2022.

Conradh na Gaeilge is the democratic forum of the Irish-speaking community and the organisation advocates for the language throughout the whole of Ireland and around the world.

The primary aim of the organisation is to progress the Irish language as the ordinary language of Ireland.

Since its foundation on 31st July 1983 members of Conradh na Gaeilge are actively promoting the Irish language in every aspect of life in Ireland, from legal affairs and education to the development of media and Irish language services.

Conradh na Gaeilge has been selected by Foras na Gaeilge, the all-island body which operates north and south on behalf of both Governments to promote the Irish language, as one of the six lead organisations funded by them to develop the Irish language on the island of Ireland. Primarily, Conradh na Gaeilge has been selected to protect the language, to represent and raise awareness of the Irish language.

There are 180 branches and many individual members of Conradh na Gaeilge, and every member of Conradh na Gaeilge works hard to promote the use of the Irish language in their own area. More information on the work of Conradh na Gaeilge can be found at www.cnag.ie.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN THE GAELTACHT AND THE IRISH LANGUAGE

There are both native speakers and new Irish-speakers throughout the country and that Irish-speaking community is diverse. Even though they are a diverse community, Irish-speakers have the same basic demands and linguistic requirements within the Gaeltacht and outside it. But many of those demands are not being met by the State, so that creates social enterprise to fulfil those demands. For example, Irish classes are run

throughout the country to provide opportunities to the community to learn Irish. There are also youth clubs to normalise the Irish language amongst young people. The Pop-Up Gaeltachtaí satisfy two requirements, socialisation through Irish and providing an opportunity for learners to speak it. The popularity of Pop-Up Gaeltachtaí all over the world shows that there is a demand. For those who wish to exercise through Irish, Na Gaeil Óga were founded, a GAA club (Gaeil na Gaillimhe and Laochra Loch Lao followed the same structure) and Na Cnocadóirí, a walking club. In the Gaeltacht there are clubs that provide singing and dancing classes in the sean-nós style, which keeps the Irish heritage alive. This shows that there are talented, energetic, creative people in the Irish-language scene doing this work for their own community. In the Gaeltacht, it is the social enterprises which are at the heart of language planning to bolster the language through efforts to increase the number of Irish-speakers in the future. An excellent example of this is the foundation of Tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta who provide support for parents raising their children through Irish. A good example of social enterprise in the Gaeltacht is the Gaeltacht Co-operatives who are at the centre of the Gaeltacht community who provide many services to the Gaeltacht community. Another example is the Gaeltacht theatres who promote traditional and contemporary arts through Irish.

This social enterprise exists because the State is not providing certain services and the private sector is not providing the services either. There is a need for much more social enterprise in the Irish language sector. For example, efforts have been made for years to establish a cultural centre in Dublin. There is also a chart radio station for young people, Raidió Rí-Rá, but it is not available on FM frequency and therefore it is not easily available to young people. There is no nursery operating through Irish in Dublin either. There is a lack of Irish-language organisations around the country who could promote the Irish language in their local area. Much could be written about the demands, these are only a few examples. The ecosystem must be built for the Irish-speaking community so that there is a more positive environment for them to speak the language, that is that more opportunities are provided to speak Irish.

MINORITY LANGUAGE ENTERPRISE

In the Gaeltacht there are business enterprises that operate through Irish who receive support from the State through Údarás na Gaeltachta. Outside the Gaeltacht the likes of Enterprise Ireland support business enterprises. But there is no support available for small businesses outside the Gaeltacht who cater for the Irish-speaking community. There is a need to equalise the market and to provide more supports for businesses founded through Irish. Supports such as grants, training, resources, tax relief etc. There are examples around the world of the State supporting minority language enterprises. An example of this is that the Welsh Language Commissioner engages with companies in Wales to weave the Welsh language into their businesses. This State must look to create a positive environment for businesses who wish to operate through Irish. Language entrepreneurs must be recognised.

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN A MINORITY LANGUAGE

Very small grants are available from the State for business companies looking for things like signage, websites, or information sheets in Irish or bilingually. There is also funding available for the Irish-language organisations. But there is no support available at all when those Irish-language organisations want to develop a new social enterprise. So those social enterprises fall between the cracks. When an Irish-language organisation requests support from the State to create a new social enterprise, it is refused because it is considered double funding. It is an example of inaction by the State that it is mentioned in the 20-year Strategy to 'develop at least one physical space in Dublin dedicated to Irish only, comprising a book shop / CD's / DVD's, where a programme of literary events could be held, where facilities such as coffee shops could be located so that families and individuals could come together.' We are more than 9 years into the strategy and this goal has not been reached yet. The Irish-language community does not have the funding to undertake this – but the State has the ability to realise this, they only need to look north to Belfast where there are [three times as many cultural centres](#) as there are in the capital. Social enterprise and capacity is being curbed. Every county needs to create a language plan as part of the 20 Year Strategy and of course, the central goal of these plans is to increase the number of Irish-speakers. Social enterprise has a central role in ensuring that.

COMPETITION FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH IRISH

It is well worth holding a competition in schools which operates through Irish so that the best social enterprise through Irish can be found. It is worth doing this at second level and at third level to encourage social enterprise through Irish, like the BT Young Scientists Exhibition. Investment would be needed from the State to run this competition and also to create a prize fund. Mentoring support can be provided to the winners. This will add to the 'image of the school community', the hinterland of the area of the school, and strengthen the link between the school and the area in which it is located. Conradh na Gaeilge would be happy to be part of such a competition with our wealth of experience dealing with the schools over the years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL POLICY

- The Irish language must be included in any action in relation to this policy to ensure language equality.
- A specific range should be specified for Irish-language Social Enterprise.
- Investigate any assistance available from the EU for social enterprise in minority languages.
- There is a need to research the effect of social enterprise on the position of the Irish language.
- There is a need for advice to be available in Irish and an understanding of the Irish-speaking and Gaeltacht communities to ensure the effectiveness of the social enterprises.
- Ensure that the funding system will not effect the coherence of the various enterprises. The social enterprises must be encouraged and assisted to grow.
- If buildings are being provided for social enterprise, it must be ensured that some of these buildings are provided for social enterprise through Irish only. If Irish-language enterprises are sharing space in buildings with English-language enterprises the English language will get the upper hand as the language of this building. Any signage in the building should be available in both official languages of the State using bilingual best practice (same size font and a different colour for each language).
- There is a need for continuous monitoring to evaluate how the Irish language sector is performing, i.e. are there more social enterprises being created year after year, are there more people using those services, what technology and facilities can be used to ensure that the enterprises are being run effectively, etc.
- There is a need to bring the social enterprises together to see how they can learn from each other and which resources can be shared.
- There is a need for a complaints mechanism if the State is interfering with the functions of the social enterprises through Irish.

- It is worth mentioning the Irish language as a condition/as a possible field of work for social enterprise if it is decided to amend the Companies Act to specifically mention social enterprise and language enterprise.
- There is a need to look at how social enterprises operate in minority languages in Europe to ensure that we are using the most effective methods to promote the language.
- The cultural, social and economic impact of these social enterprises must be measured.
- A funding scheme should be provided to support language enterprises or extend a language enterprise structure throughout the country/the world, as is available for English language enterprises “angel investment.”
- A competition for social entrepreneurs through Irish should be established as recommended previously in this document.

CONCLUSION

This submission highlighted the fact that there is a lot of social enterprise through Irish being provided by voluntary groups. It also highlighted that there is not enough State support being given to this social enterprise. Even though there is State evaluation for business enterprise in the Gaeltacht, it highlighted that there is very little support for enterprise outside the Gaeltacht. It was recommended in this submission that it would benefit social enterprise to run a schools competition which would recognise good ideas among young people and would encourage them to engage in social enterprise through Irish. It was recommended that appropriate recognition be given to the Irish language in the Policy and to do that in an integrated and coherent manner. The existing social enterprise through Irish fulfils some of the basic demands and requirements in the Irish-speaking community and the Gaeltacht but that is certainly not adequate.