Community Education: A Human Rights and Well-being Investment with High Social Return

Education as a legal right and budget obligation

- The **right to education** is enshrined in international human rights law (UDHR, ICESCR, CRC, CEDAW) and embedded in Ireland's commitments under the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4: Quality Education).**
- **A human rights-based approach to budgeting** requires governments to prioritise investment in groups experiencing the greatest disadvantage, ensuring resources are allocated equitably - not only efficiently.
- This means **investment must start where the need is greatest:** with those furthest behind, facing intersecting barriers of poverty, gender, migration status, disability, or lone parenthood.

Why community education delivers more ROI than later inverventions

- Research and practice show that **early and lower-level interventions yield the greatest long-term return**, both economically and socially.
- Supporting adults with low educational attainment to re-engage in learning generates benefits that ripple across generations - improving family well-being, children's school readiness, and community resilience.
- Later interventions (e.g., upskilling already highly educated groups) may improve productivity but do not address **structural inequalities** or deliver comparable societal savings in welfare, health, and justice.

ONE GENERATION SOLUTION

An Cosán's "One Generation Solution" demonstrates this impact: when mothers access education, children's educational outcomes improve, creating long-term savings across State systems.

Intersectional Disadvantage in Local Communities

- In South Dublin, **lone-parent households make up 53% of families**, compared to a national average of 10%*.
- Over 90% of An Cosán learners are women, many from low-income, migrant, or marginalised backgrounds. These learners face **multiple, overlapping disadvantages** that perpetuate exclusion without targeted interventions.
- Community education addresses these root inequalities by providing **wraparound supports** (childcare, counselling, digital access, mentoring) that enable learners to participate and succeed.

* The Echo 4th June 2024 https://www.echo.ie/deprivation-levels-have-increased-by-50-per-cent-in-some-local-areas/

2024 IMPACT: Education as Empowerment

An Cosán Results In 2024

1,417
Adult Learner Places

50
BA Graduates

267
QQI Awards

These are not just outputs - they represent **rights realised**, families stabilised, and communities strengthened

90%+
Learner Boost
reported improved confidence, resilience, and well-being

1,400+
Digital Literacy Learners
supported, bridging the digital divide

26
Employer Partnerships
supporting pathways into work

Human Rights ROI: Funding Where It Matters Most

Community education is **high impact, low cost:**

- Delivered locally with minimal overheads
- Reduces long-term welfare dependency, health costs, and justice system pressures
- Enhances employability, civic participation, and social cohesion
- Builds resilience in communities most affected by inequality

From a **human rights budget perspective**, investment at the **lowest levels of educational attainment** delivers **higher proportional returns** than funding interventions at higher education levels.

OUR SHARED ASK: A Human Rights Budget Commitment

Aligned with the **AONTAS national campaign**, we call on government to:

1. **Increase community education funding by 12% in Budget 2026**, rising to a **ringfenced 4% of the FET budget by 2027.**
2. Guarantee **multi-annual, stable funding** to enable planning and delivery.
3. Expand **REACH funding to €10 million**, targeting those with the highest unmet educational needs.
4. Recognise community education as both a **human rights obligation** and a **policy tool for equity, well-being, and inclusion.**

CALL TO ACTION FOR LOCAL LEADERS

By embedding **human rights analysis into budget decisions**, local government can:

- Ensure **those most excluded are prioritised.**
- Deliver **transformational, intergenerational outcomes** at relatively low cost.
- Align with Ireland's human rights commitments and SDG obligations.
- Achieve better **ROI for taxpayers** than interventions targeted later in the education pipeline.

Fund what works, where it works. Invest in community education. Uphold human rights. Build stronger communities.