

# Aviation, Climate and Children's Rights

Children need climate action now. The State is obliged to protect them from climate harms. This means every sector playing its part to urgently cut the pollution causing the worsening climate crisis, **including the aviation sector.**



Aviation has a huge effect on the crisis due to the vast quantity of emissions involved in every flight, and the fact that they are emitted high in the atmosphere, making them even more damaging.<sup>1</sup> The world needs to reduce aviation pollution, to protect ourselves and particularly our children from worsening the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

A 2025 International Court of Justice ruling made clear that governments must do more to address the climate crisis under human rights law and that States must regulate businesses in this regard. It emphasised the rights of children and future generations. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child also makes clear that States "should refrain from taking retrogressive actions that are less protective of children". Increasing aviation pollution at this point in history is patently less protective of children.

Some perspective on aviation pollution: While average annual greenhouse gas emissions per capita in Ireland are around 11 metric tonnes (mt)<sup>3</sup>, per-passenger emissions from a return Dublin-New York flight are equivalent to about a sixth of that - at 1.8 mt<sup>4</sup>. Since 1990, Ireland's population has grown by 44% but emissions from aviation increased by 500%.<sup>5</sup> By one estimate, the Irish aviation sector now accounts for 10% of Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions<sup>6</sup>.

Despite all this, the sector is being encouraged to increase flights through:

- Lavish State subsidies (unlike other transport fuels, jet kerosene is exempted from carbon tax and excise tax<sup>7</sup>)
- Flights to/from other countries are excluded from the scope of Ireland's Climate Act
- The Irish State pours money into supporting aviation, including €36m in regional airport funding in Budget 2023.
- Airline tickets are VAT-exempt throughout the EU, as is aircraft leasing<sup>8</sup>
- Government support for the lifting of the Dublin airport passenger cap
- Government support for re-introduction of internal flights to Derry

## Justice Implications of Aviation

Our children's right to a safe future is being sacrificed to allow a minority of people to fly, an even smaller minority to fly frequently, an even smaller minority to live a private jet lifestyle, and an even smaller minority to maximise profits and wealth through the aviation industry. For perspective:

- Approximately only 6% of people in the world fly in a single year<sup>9</sup>
- It's estimated that only 11% of the global population flew in 2018<sup>10</sup>
- Approximately 80% of the global population has never flown<sup>11</sup>
- While a return Dublin-Alicante flight accounts for a climate impact equivalent to 0.74 mt of CO2 per passenger<sup>12</sup>, an average person in Uganda emits just 1.1 mt in a whole year<sup>13</sup>
- The livelihoods and safe future of people who do not fly at all are being destroyed by the relentless efforts to expand fossil-fueled industries, such as aviation.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.opportunitygreen.org/publication-controlling-contrails-lowering-climate-impact-of-aviation>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/reports/threat-to-progress>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/maps-and-charts/greenhouse-gases-viewer-data-viewers>

<sup>4</sup> <https://co2.myclimate.org/en>

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Daly, Carbon emissions from aviation can't be swept under the carpet, 2024, accessed at <https://hannahdaly.ie/2024-06-03-aviation>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.opportunitygreen.org/publication-closing-irelands-aviation-climate-gap>

<sup>7</sup> 'Excise Duties on Energy - EU Legislation on Excise Duties for Energy Products', European Commission

<sup>8</sup> 'VAT treatment of Services Relating to Vessels and Aircraft', [Revenue.ie](https://www.revenue.ie), October 2024.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/air-space-magazine/how-much-worlds-population-has-flown-airplane-180957719/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378020307779>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ecowatch.com/frequent-flyer-emissions-2651292287.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://co2.myclimate.org/en>

<sup>13</sup> <https://x.com/StayGroundedNet/status/1280167668981604352>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ecowatch.com/frequent-flyer-emissions-2651292287.html>

# Responsible Climate Policy for Aviation

Ireland urgently needs public policy on aviation that is consistent with a stable climate to ensure a safe future for our children, future generations and people in Ireland and around the world who are already being affected by the fallout from global warming. To ensure a just transition, any such policy must provide support for any aviation sector workers who may need to be retrained for employment in other sectors.

A responsible policy could include many options which have *not* been implemented or considered to date:

- limits on emissions associated with flights to/from Ireland
- limits on private jet travel
- air-freight limits
- fair taxation of aviation fuel
- frequent flyer levies
- bans on fossil fuel advertising and sponsorship
- environmental labelling schemes for aviation
- addressing demand via some form of rationing of flights<sup>14</sup>

Absent a comprehensive aviation policy, it is reckless to consider abolishing or raising the Dublin Airport passenger cap of 32 million annual passengers. Although the passenger cap is a crude tool (disregarding aviation emissions from freight, for instance), as it stands, it is the primary protection against increased pollution from Ireland's aviation sector.

## False and Inadequate Solutions

The aviation industry regularly claims that it is implementing solutions to its emissions problem, but many of these solutions are inadequate or are problematic in other ways. For instance, while aircraft have become significantly more fuel-efficient in the last three decades, any emissions savings have been leapfrogged by the rapid growth of aviation. Other oft-touted solutions that fail to deliver include:

- Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF); It takes massive amounts of land and resources to produce small amounts of SAF, much of which is, directly or indirectly, palm oil from tropical deforestation.
- Carbon Offsets - The CO2 emissions of a specific flight cannot be neutralised, offset, or directly reduced by financial contributions from consumers.<sup>15</sup>
- Offsetting schemes such as CORSIA, based on dubious "plant trees" type projects.<sup>16</sup>
- Sustainability initiatives to limit emissions from airport ground operations, while worthwhile, often serve as a distraction because the emissions saved pale in comparison with climate impacts from actual flying.

## Aviation and the Economy

The government cherry-picks data to back their claims that aviation is good for the economy, but such claims are dubious.<sup>17</sup> It is very likely that more money flows out of the country by people in Ireland flying abroad, than flows into the country through inward tourism. In 2023, according to the Central Statistics Office, the total estimated expenditure of visitors to Ireland was €7.3 billion<sup>18</sup>. In the same year, total expenditure on outbound overnight trips amounted to \$12.9 billion<sup>19</sup>.

### ***About Children's Rights Over Flights***

*We are a grassroots group of parents, grandparents and others who want children's rights prioritised above polluting flights. We campaign to defend the rights of children in the context of the climate emergency by ensuring that the aviation industry does its fair share to protect them from climate harms; We increase awareness of the climate harms of aviation and expose misinformation; We highlight real and false solutions to pollution from aviation. Find us at <https://childrensrightsoverflights.ie/>*

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2023-02-17/any-way-you-slice-it/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.beuc.eu/press-release/21-airlines-commit-stop-greenwashing-following-beuc-complaint>

<sup>16</sup> <https://carbonmarketwatch.org/2024/03/27/corsia-hot-air-carbon-credits-cannot-offset-polluting-planes>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.transportenvironment.org/articles/economics-of-air-transport-in-europe>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-lbta/inboundtourismannual2023/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-hts/householdtravelsurveyquarter4andyear2023/>