

**Submission to  
Ireland's Second National Action Plan  
UNSCR 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS)  
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In response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122 which expresses the intention to 'focus attention on women's leadership and participation in conflict resolution and peace building' the overall aim of the second Irish National Action Plan on WPS/1325 should be to transform systems and structures that limit women's participation in public life/decision making at all levels in society, such as, through socio-economic disadvantage and cultural and religious beliefs that stereotype women and position them as 'other' or less valuable than men as leaders and decision makers within the post-conflict context.

**1. What strategic objectives should be priorities for the second national action plan?**

**Strategic Objective 1: Promote and support north-south dialogue on the legacy of the conflict on this island and its impact on women's lives, health, access to formal decision making structures and roles in Irish/Northern Irish society.**

**Strategic Objective 2: Promote and support women's participation in peacekeeping and in formal politics by challenging cultural norms (such as men are peacekeepers/leaders/decision-makers) and by developing innovative mechanisms to support women's advancement.**

**Strategic Objective 3: Advocate on behalf of the inclusion of Northern Ireland in both the British and Irish NAPs and promote the development of a regional NAP for Northern Ireland.**

**Strategic Objective 4: Educate to raise awareness of how women experience violence differently to men in conflict/post-conflict societies and adopt strategies to shift cultural acceptance of gender based violence (GBV) to one of 'no violence' and prevention of violence.**

**2. How can Ireland help empower women affected by conflict?**

Within Ireland itself, asylum seeking/refugee women & girls need to be robustly championed by the second NAP in relation to the following:

- Information needs to be provided to asylum seeking/refugee women on their human rights and how to report incidents and crimes and that the reporting of incidents/crimes will not affect their asylum process. For example, women should be informed about the role of the Garda and how they can help them; and that they can apply for asylum separately from their husbands.
- Provide cultural and sensitivity training for Garda and other government representatives who come into contact with refugee/asylum seeking women, as many women have reported insensitive questioning about gender based violence, trauma and abuse.

- Gender based violence experienced within their country of origin to be taken into account as grounds for asylum as many women are fleeing countries to protect girl children from FGM, child marriages, and other cultural practices that harm and dis-empower women and girls.
- Improvement of the quality of direct provision centres for asylum seekers, and faster asylum processing.
- Women-only direct provision centres to be made available for single and vulnerable women.
- Mechanisms in place to ensure consistent supports, such as counselling and health screening, are available to refugee/asylum seeking women.
- Create ways for refugee/asylum seeking women to become part of the local community by supporting the contribution of their knowledge and skills through access to: paid work, voluntary work, education, development of their English language skills.

### **3. How should the National Action Plan approach actions relating to Ireland-Northern Ireland (NI)?**

#### **Strategic Objectives 1 & 3 outlined above respond to this question.**

- The resolution is still little known or understood across Ireland, north and south, by politicians and other stakeholders, and this prevents it from being actively supported and championed. Therefore a communications/advocacy campaign aimed at all interested stakeholders should be one of the areas for strategic focus in the second NAP.
- The NAP should acknowledge that NI is a shared space on WPS/1325 for both the Irish and British Governments.
- Bring 1325 into the institutions of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (such as the NI Assembly, North-South Ministerial Council, British-Irish Assembly, etc). Ministerial councils to adopt a 1325 approach to their business by considering the practical implications of 1325 on a north-south basis.
- Britain, Ireland and NI Assembly to develop NAPs on WPS/1325 that relate to each other.
- Issues for tri-partite engagement could include: health: such as mental health issues, and inter-generational trauma; and education: integrated schooling in the North and education in the South about 'the troubles', the gendered impacts of conflict, and 1325 and its implementation at home and abroad.

#### **Strategic Objective 2: Promote and support women's participation in formal politics and in peacekeeping by challenging cultural norms (such as men are peacekeepers/leaders/decision-makers) and developing innovative mechanisms to support women's advancement.**

- Create space for innovation within politics, e.g. support campaigns to get more women into electoral politics such as the adoption of gender quotas in NI.
- Support programmes to develop women's leadership capacities and promote alternative forms of leadership such as 'power with others' via relationship building rather than 'power over others' or hierarchical power as used in patriarchal systems.
- Women's inclusion in political life should not be about fitting in to a masculinised system but about creating a new fairer system that reflects greater women's way of contributing to society.
- Affirm the diversity of experience, creativity, wisdom and knowledge women bring to politics rather than focusing on their physical appearance or their roles as mothers or carers.
- Pursue policies and practices likely to increase the numbers and level of participation of women peacekeepers in multi-dimensional missions in a diversity of roles, ranks and jobs.

**In relation to Ireland's first Nap, Action P2.01 'Increase the participation of women in Ireland's peacekeeping, international development and peace building activities', the following needs to be undertaken as part of the process to inform Ireland's second NAP:**

- To publish and widely circulate the findings of the Irish Defence Forces 'Working Group Convened to Examine the Full Participation of Primary Family Carers in the Army' on obstacles to women's recruitment and retention, especially in relation to overseas deployment. To be presented and discussed within the relevant Oireachtas Committee.
- The Defence Forces to outline revised policies on how personnel who are primary carers in the home, can access senior command and staff courses, which are a necessary progression route to senior ranks. Most primary carers are women, and will not be able to leave their families for up to 10 months to complete a course as they do not usually have a 'wife' equivalent at home (that most men have), to take on caring roles and relieve them to undertake the training course. This is evidenced by looking at the numbers of women who have so far completed a senior command and staff course – by early 2013 only three women had completed this course – a very low percentage after more than 30 years of women's integration into the Defence Forces.
- Publish the plan and timetable to operationalise recommendations of the Working Group.
- Publish names of individuals responsible for implementing plans, budgets allocated, and communications links to relevant department/individual.

To send out a message of equality women peacekeepers need to be visible within the Defence Forces and within peacekeeping missions in a variety of roles, ranks, and jobs, interacting with all members of a society. They need to be given opportunities to utilise their full set of capacities, skills and knowledge whilst on a mission. While it is extremely beneficial to civilian women to have women peacekeepers as part of any mission it is also necessary to not only position women peacekeepers in roles/jobs where they are interacting with civilian women. Because if women are positioned only in 'women-facing' jobs this will entrench gender stereotypes both within the military and within the host nations and position many women peacekeepers in jobs they simply are not best suited to doing.

Many peacekeeping missions today are multi-dimensional thereby expanding the peacekeeping mandate into areas of humanitarian relief, refugee return, de-mining, civilian policing, demobilization, human rights monitoring, election monitoring and nation building, such as the reconstruction of vital political and security institutions. Women peacekeepers are necessary to engage with civilians as part of these processes, in particular, in conflict regions where religion or culture prohibit local women from communicating with men (i.e. male peacekeepers) outside their tribe or family. A recent study supported by the Irish government, on gender perspectives in the Lebanon states that:

*The presence of female peacekeepers was mentioned to have had a lasting impact with the local population and was hailed as an opportunity to empower young women. The participants suggested that the use of female peacekeepers is important because women often relate better to other women. [...] It was suggested that if female peacekeepers were present in municipality meetings more women would come to meetings. [...] Another common perception of 'Safety' for women in South Lebanon is the lack of full citizenship and equal access in their community. The participants reported that they are not consulted in the planning or needs assessment in their communities, including by international organisations, based on the assumption that women's needs would reflect those of men. Women highlighted that their concerns varied to men's in many areas and expressed that their insecurity is related to the lack of participation in identifying the*

*hazards and risks facing their communities. Access to resources was also a recurring issue with women expressing their frustration that in times of disaster or conflict, despite being the most affected during and post disaster or conflict, they are systematically left out of consultations related to disaster relief or distribution of aid. The women highlighted that they have a better understanding of what is needed post disaster in their communities than men, but this did not alter international assumptions about who should be consulted. Women also requested that their views and concerns be recognised on an equal basis to men's by the international community. (UNIFIL Pilot Final Report, 2014)*

The quote above explicitly outlines why women as well as men need to be consulted with as part of the data gathering process of a peacekeeping mission. If the gathering of gender perspectives from civilians is to include both women and men then it is important that the Irish Defence Forces develop an agenda-setting approach to gender mainstreaming its policies and practices; this will support the aim to transform gender relations both within its own ranks and between itself and civilians in host nations. The agenda setting approach involves a fundamental re-think not only of procedures but also of the end goals of policymaking. Most institutions adopt the integrationist approach which introduces a gender perspective into existing policies. This approach does not challenge gender stereotypes but simply adds to patriarchal and state-centred structures already in existence.

As it is important to increase the numbers of women in peacekeeping it is necessary to consider what inhibits women from joining militaries in the first place. Therefore, as part of the process to develop Ireland's second NAP the Defence Forces could use the content of a study it commissioned in 2007 on the root causes for why few women are joining its ranks, as baseline data for this undertaking. The report by TNS MRBI outlined the reasons for low recruitment of women as due to: a perception that the Defence Forces is aggressive, macho and regimented, with women having to work harder than men to be accepted; women positioned as tomboys or sex objects; and with issues of isolation, bullying, few promotion opportunities, and poor work/life balance.

To ensure equality of power sharing amongst women and men within the Defence Forces it is vital to build trust and confidence in its systems to guard against gender stereotyping. This can only be created by ensuring that women have as much influence as their male peers, on organizational systems and procedures. Therefore, it is recommended that the Defence Forces develop systems and procedures that not only gather gender perspectives from civilians in peacekeeping missions but also gather the gender perspectives of Irish peacekeeping soldiers amongst their own ranks.

The Defence Forces prides itself in being open to new knowledge and encouraging learning amongst its personnel on matters relating to international security. To enable the inclusion of a diversity of perspectives and experiences the Defence Forces could encourage more of its personnel to undertake research on gender. If the Defence Forces were to actively encourage gender research; and to learn from it; and include its findings into policy and practice it would be positioned globally as a leader amongst peacekeeping nations and as a reflective and flexible organisation capable of responding dynamically to a diversity of peacekeeping situations whilst implementing a gender sensitive approach to conflict resolution.

Training programmes on gender and culture within the Defence Forces need to ensure that they do not conflate gender to mean 'women' only. For example, if training programmes on gender are 'women focused' by excluding men's experiences they will not fully explain the power dynamics in a post-conflict situation and this will create a lack of understanding and analysis of how inequalities are created and recreated; how systems and attitudes can encourage sexism; and how they can be transformed to

egalitarian and respectful relationships. If training programmes on gender only highlight the different experiences and roles women have during and after a conflict, they can further isolate women by drawing attention to their differences and by positioning them as a minority group both within and without the military.

**An update to Action P2.A1.2 in the first NAP which commits to: ‘Continue monitoring the overall number, rank, grade and role of women and men in the Irish Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána and civilian support personnel, including those who are deployed overseas. This includes specifying organisational focal points tasked with data collection’, needs the following information to inform the second NAP which should be published and widely circulated on a dedicated WPS/1325 website:**

- Publish numbers of women/men deployed on overseas missions at all levels/ranks/jobs in Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána and civilian grades.
- Timeline to implement plan to ensure women are deployed to overseas missions in a variety of ranks, jobs, tasks, and roles on a mission, especially within decision-making and leadership roles.
- Commitment by Defence Forces and AGS to a certain percentage of women achieving senior ranking roles by 2017.
- Research on gender perspectives carried out by Defence Forces and AGS and communicated to wider Irish society.
- Transparency of policies and actions on how Irish personnel accountable for their actions while on a mission and how ‘robust accountability mechanisms’ deal with discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying against women.
- Additional actions to include strengthening institutional capacity through gender mainstreaming policies and to be responsive to the different security needs and priorities of civilian women.
- Support action-based research on the experiences and perspectives of civilians who interact directly with Irish peacekeepers as well as military personnel of ‘other ranks’, who often have more day-to-day contact with civilians.
- In relation to the gender perspectives of civilians the Defence Forces should engage with asylum seeking and refugee women currently living in Ireland who have come from war-torn countries. By seeking their insights and experiences of interacting with peacekeepers the Defence Forces would demonstrate a genuine commitment to understanding the needs of civilian women in a conflict/post conflict situation.

**In relation to Action P1.A1.3 in the first NAP which calls for ‘in consultation with CSOs and consultants with expertise in WPS, develop and pilot a set of questions on gender issues for inclusion in post-deployment debriefing of all personnel deployed by Ireland [...]’ the following needs to be available as part of the process to develop the second NAP:**

- Publication of the pilot set of questions on gender issues for inclusion in post-deployment debriefing of all personnel deployed/lessons learnt on gender issues/concrete applications of training on gender in the field.

**Strategic Objective 4: Educate to raise awareness of how women experience violence in post-conflict societies and adopt strategies to shift cultural acceptance of gender based violence towards women to one of ‘no violence’ and to support women’s role in the prevention of further violence/conflict.**

Fear is an on-going issue amongst communities in conflict/post-conflict and it is used by some groups, such as paramilitaries, to have control over other groups. Therefore, mechanisms need to be adopted that transform systems to counter bullying by people in positions of power.

- As part of this process ongoing communication is necessary to continuously transmit the message that violence against women will not be tolerated and that perpetrators will be punished.
- Women-centred justice processes to be developed and resources allocated to prosecutions against perpetrators of violence to provide justice for women and children.
- Resources made available to outreach to men and men's groups to raise awareness on the issue of violence and to develop peer education programmes.
- A re-education process for children in post-conflict needs to be included as part of peace building. To break the cycle of children acting out behaviours from the conflict, learned by growing up in a violent society. Therefore, more research to be conducted on young people and their attitudes and beliefs about violent behaviour.
- Education in schools on non-violent forms of conflict resolution to include confidence building through skills development and capacity building in the following areas: universal human rights, respect, dignity, equality, mediation, peace building, and negotiation skills, conflict resolution.
- Girls need to be encouraged and empowered to speak out and actively participate in society at decision-making and leadership levels.
- There needs to be acceptance of women's sexuality and safety for women to talk about their sexuality, e.g. take steps to improve sex and relationship education in schools with gender equality as the goal.
- Educate on the need for women to be involved at all levels of peace negotiations from grassroots to national formal politics & mechanisms needed to monitor gender equality in those processes.
- Finances need to be provided to women at grassroots level to support their capacity building to move into formal politics.
- UNSCR 1325 to be incorporated into the policies and working practices of county councils and local authorities to inform local development plans.

#### **4. How can the existing monitoring mechanisms of the first National Action Plan be improved?**

- Transparency of monitoring and evaluation through a dedicated website on WPS/1325.
- Names and contact details of senior personnel responsible for implementing each of the actions to be made available on the website.
- Publication of budget and timeline for each action.
- Provide financial support to CSOs involved in M&E processes so that they can allocate appropriate time and resources to monitoring the NAP.
- Parliamentarian/member from each Oireachtas Committee to be invited onto Monitoring Group.
- Separate regular meetings for CSOs, government representatives and parliamentarians who then present their reports to Monitoring Group meetings.
- Create monitoring and evaluation forms and provide regular meetings between women's groups, CSOs and government departments.

#### **5. (b) How can the Oireachtas play a greater role?**

As public representatives Oireachtas committees need to be held responsible for advocating on behalf of implementation of the WPS/ 1325 NAP. There needs to be a shift in power from CSOs/government representatives reporting to the relevant Oireachtas Committee, to the committees reporting back to CSOs/Interest Groups. For example, each Oireachtas Committee should report to civil society on its responsibilities within the NAP e.g. Justice & Equality on asylum seeking women; Defence on women

peacekeepers/gender perspectives from peacekeeping missions. These responses should be made publicly available on a dedicated website on WPS the website should include the following:

- Members of each Oireachtas committee listed along with chair and key responsibilities and forthcoming meetings on WPS to enable members of civil society to plan to attend briefings either in the gallery or as a presenting group.
- Actions agreed at the end of each committee briefing along with deadline for actions to be implemented.
- Response from Oireachtas Committee to Interest Groups/CSOs through a written report.
- Oireachtas Committee members invited onto monitoring group.

**6. How should Ireland promote Women, Peace and Security in multilateral organisations?**

**In relation to action P2.02 in current NAP the following needs to be developed in NAP 2**

- Take a lead on advocating on behalf of UNSCR 2122 which expresses the intention to ‘focus attention on women’s leadership and participation in conflict resolution and peace building’ to address the ‘participation pillar’ in WPS/1325 which got lost into the ‘women as victims’ perpetuating the stereotype of women as vulnerable rather than as powerful in their own right.
- Advocate on behalf of the UN assessing all troops pre-deployment to ensure they meet the requirements and standards of a UN Peacekeeping mission.
- Advocate on behalf of peacekeepers given robust mandates that allow them to actively protect women and girls. Mandates to be clearly communicated to and understood by all the people they are there to protect.
- To build trust between civilians and peacekeepers it is necessary to ensure that local populations are made aware of the peacekeepers code of conduct; that peacekeepers will be prosecuted for breaches of these codes of conduct; and that local populations are informed of the prosecution outcomes and actions taken against any peacekeepers who have breached these codes.

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