

The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR), Belfast, is pleased to respond to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's open invitation to submit responses to the Public Consultation Paper for Ireland's third national Action Plan Women, Peace and Security.

The ICR is an independent not-for-profit registered charity based in Belfast whose staff team comprises post-doctoral researchers, qualified mediators and trainers. We address policy and community development matters in relation to Conflict Transformation working daily with women impacted by the legacy of conflict.

We have a nuanced understanding of the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls working on a daily basis with women who have been affected by conflict and war including refugees and asylum seekers. We place at the heart of the design, delivery and evaluation of our work women in communities as beneficiaries and contributors. We work locally and internationally on programmes connected to transgenerational impact of conflict, loss and trauma and we privilege methodologies which use engagement with the arts and heritage as opportunities to develop confidence, capacity and reflection on issues which otherwise are challenging to begin to articulate.

We have worked previously with the DFA&T through its Reconciliation Fund with the programme "Loyal Voices" addressing the routes to radicalisation of young people at risk of paramilitary activity. Our publication "Peacebuilding and the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland: An overview of reports and programmes", was discussed and disseminated in Colombia by ICR at the DFA&T sponsored event "Opportunities for promoting women's right to a life free from violence and gender equality in transitional contexts." We draw on these and our experience on the programmes outlined below and conducted this year alone to provide the rationale for our perspectives.

We are currently undertaking several small-scale and time-bound interventions for groups each comprising 30 women in each council area Counties Down, Armagh, Antrim engaged on our conflict-legacy programmes "Back to the Future". We have designed and had accredited "Gender based Violence" an interactive training programme for groups of professionals and service users addressing FGM and the use of gendered violence including psychological violence as a weapon of conflict and war.

We have several hundred beneficiaries engaged on larger-scaled pieces of work each involving multiple interventions over a 12 month+ period which include (but not exclusively):

- "Tackling Paramilitarism" Member of Consortium overseeing research and work with communities in transition to address the Executive Office Action Plan (B4) Programme in 8 areas based on the strategy "A Fresh Start" which emerged from The Good Friday Agreement.
- "Peace Training EU" Creative Partners in the development of a Pan-European Peace Training Platform based on the provision, development and dissemination of training

- materials for pre deployment and the relief and recovery after military intervention [office@peacetraining.eu](mailto:office@peacetraining.eu)
- “*Growing Understanding*” An anti-hate sectarian and racist hate-crime programme being delivered to those at risk of engagement with criminal justice agencies including former combatants and ex-prisoners.

ICR have recently completed for UNHCR and OSCE the design of resources and the delivery of a mediation training for trainers programme in relation to Albanian and Serbian IDPs and Returnees to Kosovo.

ICR’s “Peacebuilding and the Women’s Sector in Northern Ireland: An overview of reports and programmes”, report acknowledges the significant and under researched role that women play as preventative agents in peace building in Northern Ireland and the limited and tokenistic inclusion of women in peace building and conflict transformation and decision making. ICR recognise the specific contextual implications for the social, economic, psychological and physical resilience of women and families in a society emerging from conflict where there is increased likelihood of recurring conflict.

We recognise the challenges faced by women when control from within both elected and unelected political parties and paramilitary groupings undermines their good intention and/or capacity to engage cleanly in community development work for those who are not affiliated.

In light of Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and work ICR has been engaged with for Department for the Economy study on *‘Barriers to Participation and Progression in Education and Employment for those at risk of becoming involved with Paramilitary Organisations in Northern Ireland’* as well as the British Council’s *Next Generation Ireland-Northern Ireland* study, the NAP should be cognisant of the lasting impact of the conflict on young people in those communities particularly affected by its legacy, with a greater understanding needed of the gendered dynamics of this, having in mind the limiting effects on the economic and social independence and prosperity of young women particularly.

The new NAP provides an opportunity to recognise the additional challenges faced by women who are migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers from conflict-affected states coming to live in the post-conflict and divided nature of Northern Ireland society. Three recent piece of work by ICR in relation to Migrant workers, Refugees and Asylum-seeking women are: the Belfast City Council-funded piece on *‘A Different Difference: hate crime and discrimination towards individuals of Muslim background in Belfast’*; work on Brexit through the CFNI and Big Lottery-funded *Brexit and eYou* project and; the *“Flowers of Sudan”* Education and Empowerment integration programme for women from the Sub-Saharan Africa who are asylum seeking, refugees or experiencing family reunification,

There is much to draw on and much that is being underutilised from the experiences of women in Northern Ireland that can intersect with Ireland’s Policy for the role of women as

peace builders, and peacemakers, peace keepers and peace advocates within International Development. Consequently, and based on an evidence base drawn from our work above, we ask that the following be taken into consideration.

**How should the National Action Plan apply to the Ireland-Northern Ireland context as well as migrants, asylum seekers, and others living in Ireland who come from conflict and post-conflict affected areas?**

ICR's have produced a short publication "Daily Lives" to accompany an exhibition providing a photographic comparison of the experiences of women who are asylum seekers and refugees in direct provision in the South as well as those living in the North and in Italy. We use it as a training resource to encourage dialogue by with and between those whose lives are impacted by living in diaspora as a result of conflict and post conflict areas. The experiences of those relocating to Northern Ireland fleeing from the ravages and images of conflict often find themselves in Northern Ireland, more so than in other jurisdictions in Ireland, in the midst of communities who remain impacted by sectarian division and the legacy of the inter-generational impact of traumatic loss and are themselves at risk of retraumatisation. Additional support, including the resourcing and commissioning of arts-based initiatives for women who are new to communities as well as their host communities to enable the breaking down of segregation, myths, and mistrust is a necessary process of any integration. It also provides the opportunity to ensure the participants are able to feed into any decision making, monitoring of. and responses to the implementation of the NAP by engaging in cumulative evaluation and feedback sessions.

**How can the existing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms of the previous National Action Plans be improved?**

ICR endorse any acknowledgement of the need for more rigorous accountability and monitoring/evaluation of government policy and associated interventions require a rigorous tracking of attitudinal and behavioural change. This is particularly pertinent for those repeat stakeholders and beneficiaries to programmes This is a challenge for programme designers and delivers, not least in a sector where engagement can draw on the networks of a limited and overlapping number stakeholders bringing multiple and sometimes competing agendas to a process. However we recognise the absolute need for this to be undertaken and done in a way which allows for rigorous reflection and self-reflection by all stakeholders to the process. The metrics and qualitative materials used as any measure of success require long short, mid and long term review. Consequently consideration of reframing the importance placed on monitoring and evaluation may require additional resources to ensure this is an integral and valued part of a process rather than what can be perceived to be a wash-up exercise by some contributors.

**How can the plan better engage those who have a role to play in Women, Peace and Security, but may not feel directly impacted? (eg men and boys, faith leaders, victims of human trafficking)**

It is a well-rehearsed adage that those who have been part of any conflict situation are well placed to provide solutions to building a better future. It is also widely accepted that in Northern Ireland, the community and voluntary sector is sectionalised with gatekeepers sometimes working with a legacy of trauma which can impact the engagement of and who speaks for the most marginalised in society. Irrespective of endeavours by a range of political representatives, churches and those transitioning from male dominated armed groups, women in Northern Ireland live in a patriarchal society and remain in relationships and communities where there is a culture of coercive control being exercised by a range of organisations and gatekeepers attached to former paramilitary activists. Engaging with those who may not feel directly impacted by WPS needs to be managed in a way that provides safety, security and the role of women not connected through personal or family ties to armed groups, not to be dominated and/or silenced because of an in-built culture of fear, servitude and where power dynamics are balanced in the favour of some women against others.

**How should Ireland better promote knowledge of Women, Peace and Security locally, nationally, regionally and internationally?** ICR urge the undertaking of a scoping research exercise. The aim would be advising on the benefits/challenges of establishing and resourcing a Departmental accredited network of individuals and organisations throughout the island comprising those engaged in mediation and peace training/building individuals and organisations working locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.