



**The Centre for
Cross Border Studies**

The Centre for Cross Border Studies

Consultation Response:

Ireland's Second National Action Plan – Women, Peace and Security¹

This response has been prepared by The Centre for Cross Border Studies as a contribution to the consultation on Ireland's Second National Action Plan, currently being developed under the leadership of the Conflict Resolution Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

About The Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns.²

The response that follows, therefore, is closely informed by the Centre's particular concerns and organisational aims. It focuses particularly on the question of how the National Action Plan (NAP) should approach actions relating to Ireland-Northern Ireland, although it also raises two overarching issues: monitoring and evaluation, and the necessity to address the concerns raised in the UN's Human Rights Committee

¹ This consultation response was authored by Dr Anthony Soares, Research and Policy Manager at the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

² For further information, please visit www.crossborder.ie.

fourth periodic report. After some introductory remarks, it is with these overarching issues that the Centre for Cross Border Studies' response begins.

Introductory Remarks

The Centre for Cross Border Studies acknowledges the potential value of the current consultation exercise being undertaken by the Conflict Resolution Unit on Ireland's NAP, and the leading role Ireland has taken in promoting the principles of UNSCR 1325, and of subsequent related resolutions, championing the importance of Women, Peace and Security (WPS). A meaningful consultation will ensure that 'Ireland's second National Action Plan, like the first one, will be considered a "living document" open to continuous improvement'.³

The Centre for Cross Border further recognises the importance of the first NAP having afforded consideration to the effects on women of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and to their vital role in forwarding peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. The Centre, therefore, also welcomes the fact that the current Consultation Paper invites views on how the NAP should 'approach actions relating to Ireland-Northern Ireland' (p.7). This is in stark contrast to the United Kingdom's *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014-2017*, which makes no specific mention to the conflict and post-conflict context in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, and as will be discussed later, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies strongly recommends that the second iteration of the NAP must promote implementation of the principles of WPS resolutions with the same vigour internally as the first NAP did externally.** Indeed, this concern was raised in the Mid-Term Progress Report, in which the authors stated: 'Overseas and in international arenas is where the NAP has been most useful in taking action to bring about concrete changes to the lives of women and girls. Less progress is evident in the implementation of actions within Ireland-Northern Ireland for women from conflict-affected countries living in Ireland and women in Northern Ireland'.⁴

However, in order for the second NAP to effectively progress this issue and WPS generally, certain internal matters must be addressed as well.

³ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Consultation Paper: Ireland's Second National Action Plan – Women, Peace and Security* (July 2014), p.7.

⁴ Bronagh Hinds and Karen McMinn, *Mid-Term Progress Report: Implementation of Ireland's National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, 2011-2014* (2013), p.6.

1. “The State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved”⁵

The development of the second NAP and its subsequent implementation must be accompanied by Ireland’s *domestic* adoption of all the principles enshrined in UNSCR 1325, and all other resolutions, covenants and treaties regarding the status of women. Any obstacle to women’s full participation in all areas of public life will not only compromise the development of Ireland’s society generally, but will also inevitably undermine the development and implementation of the NAP.

Therefore, the Centre for Cross Border Studies urges the Irish Government to comply with the recommendations contained in the UN Human Rights Committee’s “Concluding observations on the fourth periodic review of Ireland” (2014), specifically those dealing with women. These included, for example, how ‘women continue to be underrepresented in both public and private sectors, particularly in decision-making positions’ (C7), and that ‘domestic and sexual violence against women remains a serious problem in the State party’ (C8).

The second NAP should – by making it explicit that WPS resolutions are equally applicable in the domestic and international settings – enable the UN Human Rights Committee recommendations to be implemented, and to remove potential obstacles to Ireland’s external promotion of WPS principles. This means that Ireland’s second NAP should not only be a “living document”, open to change, but also one that is *lived*, including by domestic policy makers.

2. “If you don’t assess how well you are doing against targets and indicators, you may go on using resources to no useful end, without changing the situation [...] at all”⁶

To ensure that the second NAP achieves the maximum degree of required change it is imperative that a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the highest quality be designed and implemented. Moreover, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies urges that the design of such a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework be undertaken by relevant experts in this area, with the close involvement at every stage of all government departments and all the principal stakeholders, and with women represented strongly at all levels.** However, in order for this to happen **due attention must also be paid to the development of appropriate, relevant and meaningful indicators.** Such indicators should not be excessively quantitative in nature (which would result in a bureaucratic exercise with

⁵ Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 41.2.

⁶ Civicus, *Monitoring and Evaluation* (2011), p.1.

insufficient effect), but should instead represent an appropriate balance between quantitative and qualitative.

Consequently, the Centre for Cross Border Studies fully supports the recommendation made in the Mid-Term Progress Report that:

DFAT's Evaluation and Audit Unit should assist the development of a common monitoring and reporting system to assist smarter governance of the NAP. A monitoring and evaluation framework should be designed to accompany the next NAP from the outset, including a system to show whether actions are on or off track. A standardised reporting format linked to Pillar outputs, outcomes and impacts, rather than a simple description of activities, should be introduced (p.46).

For a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to succeed it is also imperative that the timely availability of appropriate quality data is ensured. The Mid-Term Progress Report noted:

Amongst the key challenges in measuring progress on the NAP's implementation was the absence of baseline data in relation to objectives, actions and indicators. There were inconsistencies in the level and nature of monitoring data, a lack of quantitative and qualitative data including information on financial expenditure and in many cases limited data in relation to specific indicators. This links to flaws in the overall monitoring framework with weaknesses in relationships across objectives, actions, indicators and indicators and actions which are unrealistic or too narrow to encompass what has to be done (p.6).

Resolution of these shortcomings must be a priority in the preparation of the second NAP and its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

3. "Northern Ireland is not yet a society at peace as the legacy of the past continues to overshadow our present"⁷

The Centre for Cross Border recognises that the first National Action Plan contained within it significant commitments in regard to women in Northern Ireland. Under Pillar 2, for example, the Irish Government committed itself to 'Provide support to cross-border, and cross-community initiatives to strengthen women's political participation in Ireland, North and South', and under Pillar 5 to 'Engage with appropriate Northern Ireland authorities to encourage development of policies and measures consistent with the aims of UNSCR 1325, in consultation with civil society organisations'.⁸

⁷ Margaret Ward, 'Excluded and silenced: Women in Northern Ireland after the peace process', *openDemocracy* (December 2013).

⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – Conflict Resolution Unit, *Ireland's National Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR 1325, 2011-2014* (2011), p.12, p.13.

However, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies also notes and endorses the Mid-Term Progress Report's suggestion that 'There is room to develop the Ireland-Northern Ireland dimensions across Pillars**, which can be done while taking account of jurisdictional constraints and without detracting from the international focus' (p.37). The need for such a development is all the more pressing given the current context in Northern Ireland in the wake, for example, of the lack of success of the Haas-O'Sullivan talks and the ongoing consequences of the flag protests. One of the results, as Lynn Carvill notes, is that 'In some communities women are withdrawing from cross-community activity due to rising tensions and fear'.⁹

Critically, the under-representation of women in the key arenas directing the development of Northern Ireland will continue to hamper progress in relation to peacebuilding and reconciliation, and to neglect the specific impacts of the conflict on women. Consequently, the second NAP must be able to address the following call by Lynn Carvill, which was informed by the views of women attending workshops as part of the *Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning* project:

It is crucial that we continue to challenge the status quo and the predominance of male voices and views in our conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. We must carve out a space for women, to ensure their voices and experiences fully inform the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Although, as has already been noted, the Irish Government made a commitment in the first NAP 'to strengthen women's political participation in Ireland, North and South', a recent Northern Ireland Assembly research paper states: 'With the exception of Dáil Éireann, the Northern Ireland Assembly has the lowest female representation of devolved and national legislatures in these islands'.¹⁰ In light of this, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies strongly recommends that the second NAP should accelerate efforts to address the lack of women at political level and in all areas of policy-making and leadership – North and South.** Here, as in other areas, the NAP should facilitate cross-border and all-island approaches (as well as East-West) to the implementation of the principles of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions.

In this respect, **the Centre for Cross Border Studies urges implementation of the recommendations made by Bronagh Hinds and Debbie Donnelly in their *Strategic Guide***

⁹ Lynn Carvill, 'Women in Northern Ireland: Sharing the learning', *openDemocracy* (May 2014).

¹⁰ Northern Ireland Assembly, Research and Information Service Research Paper 09/14, *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly* (September 2013), p.3. See also Research and Information Service Briefing Note 46/14, *Women in the Northern Ireland Assembly – Update* (March 2014), and Research and Information Service Briefing Paper 79/14, *Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power* (June 2014).

and Toolkit,¹¹ which would furnish an excellent framework for the second NAP. Among these, we would highlight the following proposals that the NAP should facilitate:

- The North South Ministerial Council should progress the commitments and spirit of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement on women's participation and gender perspectives. Where appropriate, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government should seek to develop a synergy between the respective women/ gender equality strategies so that both governments can clearly demonstrate delivery of peace benefits for women (p.32).
- The reestablishment of the Civic Forum in Northern Ireland and the **establishment of the North South Consultative Forum, both with gender balanced representation** (p.34).
- There should be greater North/South lesson-sharing and collaboration on tackling the underrepresentation of women, such as on quotas and affirmative action measures in Ireland, the Women in Local Councils initiative in Northern Ireland and strategies for the participation of women and women's organisations in community planning in both jurisdictions (p.35).
- The Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of Ireland should work with civil society organisations to ensure that the appropriate policies and resources are in place to better protect and provide for female asylum seekers, refugees, women immigrants and those with insecure visa status who are victims of domestic and sexual violence, abuse and trafficking. Greater cross-border collaboration by government representatives and officials on this issue should be made a priority (p.37).
- Incorporate a focus on women, peace and security (UNSCR 1325) into the current work of institutions and bodies set up through the Belfast/Good Friday agreement such as the North South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. Such a focus should also be incorporated into the work of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement (p.40).
- Develop a trilateral approach between the British and Irish Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive to build cooperation in implementing the spirit and principles of UNSCR 1325, addressing the impact of the conflict on women in both jurisdictions and demonstrating delivery of peace commitments and benefits for women (p.40).

Concluding Remarks

The Centre for Cross Border Studies commends the Irish Government for its continued commitment to the promotion and implementation of the principles contained within UNSCR 1325. We sincerely hope that the development and implementation of the second NAP and its accompanying Monitoring and Evaluation Framework are undertaken in a truly collaborative spirit, involving all relevant stakeholders, in Ireland, Northern Ireland and further afield. We also hope that the National Action Plan will enable the promotion and implementation of those principles equally at home and abroad.

¹¹ Bronagh Hinds and Debbie Donnelly, *Women, Peace and Security: Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Developing and Applying Women, Peace and Security Practice in Northern Ireland/Ireland. Strategic Guide and Toolkit* (Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2014).