

# Ireland

Karen McMinn (University of Ulster) in consultation with civil society representatives from the Oversight Group for Ireland's NAP on UNSCR 1325 (April 2016)

## Introduction and overview

Ireland is now in the early stages of the implementation of its second national action plan (NAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2015-2018). The second NAP builds on the actions of the first (2011-2014) and, to some extent, from the findings of the mid-term and final reviews.<sup>1</sup> The second NAP maintains a focus on the prevention of conflict, prioritising actions to address gender-based violence (GBV) and gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV), whilst seeking to strengthen commitments to progress women's leadership and participation in decision-making in conflict and post-conflict situations. The second pillar of the NAP (Women's participation and representation) supports increased engagement of women in national political dialogues and in political decision-making in fragile state settings as well as the development of programmes which enable men's engagement in gender equality. The third pillar (Protection, relief and recovery) now combines support on protection from GBV and GBSV with actions on relief and recovery to support women on the island of Ireland affected by conflict, including in Northern Ireland.

The recognition of Northern Ireland as a post-conflict region within Ireland's NAP continues to provide critical acknowledgment and support for women engaged in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the region, given that the United Kingdom's (UK) NAP does not include any reciprocal actions to support women in Northern Ireland. Ireland's first NAP provided support to local and national women's civil society, including funding to support cross-learning among women's civil society organisations (CSOs) in Ireland on UNSCR 1325-related issues, and support for a public inquiry initiated by women's civil society in Northern Ireland on the need for UNSCR 1325. The current NAP has continued this approach with commitments to promote women's experience and expertise in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland/Ireland within the international arena as well as the provision of funding to support women who have been affected by the conflict on the island of Ireland. Funding from the Reconciliation Fund within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) also supports projects in Northern Ireland and cross border areas to develop the role of women in peacebuilding and civic and political life. These outward and inward dimensions<sup>2</sup> make Ireland's NAP a distinctive and unique model for NAPs globally, strengthening the coherence of actions on women, peace and security (WPS) between domestic and overseas contexts and providing opportunities for broader engagement with women in local communities and CSOs.

The fourth and final pillar of the NAP (Promotion of the WPS agenda in international, regional and national forums) provides an important tool for effective advocacy to address the persistent obstacles and challenges to the effective implementation of the WPS normative framework. This is a critical priority given the shared global concerns about the failure of UNSCR 1325 policy instruments to transform the gendered drivers of war and conflict, which were highlighted in the 2015 Global Study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.<sup>3</sup>

The implementation of Ireland's NAP is the responsibility of a range of government departments and agencies: DFAT (which includes Irish Aid, the political and Anglo-Irish divisions and the Conflict Resolution Unit (CRU)), the Department of Justice and Equality, the

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebstemedi/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/empoweringwomen-peaceandsecurity/Final-Evaluation-of-Irelands-First-National-Action-Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Outward-looking actions relate to overseas development aid, peacekeeping and diplomatic engagement. Inward-looking actions relate to migrant women affected by conflict living in Ireland, and women affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://wps.unwomen.org/~media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>

Department of Defence, the Defence Forces, *An Garda Síochána* (Police Service), the Health Services Executive, and Tusla (the Child and Family Agency).<sup>4</sup>

While the NAP does not outline specific geographical areas, it does place commitments on statutory bodies such as Irish Aid and the Defence Forces to enact a WPS agenda in countries where Ireland is already active in bilateral aid and peacekeeping. In addition, two geographical regions and one country have been identified as priority areas for the next three years: the Middle East, North Africa and Colombia.

The first NAP established a Monitoring Group which included 50:50 representation from implementing bodies, civil society and academia. The secretariat and the coordination of the Monitoring Group is provided by DFAT. The role of the group was: (1) to oversee the regular and systematic review of progress on NAP implementation; (2) to revise existing NAP objectives, actions and targets, and (3) to engage with *Oireachtas* (parliamentary) committees and coordinate dissemination of NAP information. The second NAP has continued this mechanism through an 'Oversight Group' with roles to: 'oversee the regular and systematic review of progress on achieving stated objectives, actions and targets across all pillars; and, use outreach and communications mechanisms to ensure regular dissemination of updates to wider communities of stakeholders and make sure, in particular, that the perspectives of women affected by conflict are incorporated into the ongoing work of the group.' There are currently 15 Group members, along with an independent chair and a three-member secretariat. A representative from Ireland's Permanent Representation to the EU contributes to the Oversight Group on an ad hoc basis. The NAP includes broad indicators for all actions which include commitments for the dissemination of findings on NAP themes to parliamentary committees.

Costs associated with NAP implementation commitments are the responsibility of the implementing bodies. There is currently little evidence of NAP-dedicated funds in the department budgets. The CRU, which acts as the secretariat for the NAP, has a small budget line (€25,000 per annum) which is used for a variety of activities such as the organisation of workshops to promote awareness on UNSCR 1325-related themes, participation in conferences and publication of documents relating to the NAP implementation.

Ireland's NAP has been recognised as a model of good practice at the EU level for its inclusive cross-consultation processes, integration of the perspectives of women affected by conflict in the NAP and the role of CSOs in the monitoring mechanisms. Its focus on migrant women in a domestic context and inclusion of commitments to Northern Ireland are considered to be valuable and unique elements,<sup>5</sup> as is the process for the provision of independently-produced mid-term and final reviews.<sup>5</sup>

## Design

The design of Ireland's second NAP was an inclusive process and offers some elements of good practice for CSO consultation and engagement. The process was informed by two key independently facilitated mechanisms: a stakeholder consultation and preliminary findings from the Final Review of the first NAP.

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<sup>4</sup> The Health Services Executive and Tusla, which are both responsible for domestic policy and on GBV and services for migrant women, are new additions to the implementing bodies responsible for the NAP and represent a renewed commitment to improve support to migrant women from conflict-affected areas living in Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> A mid-term review of Ireland's NAP was completed in 2013 and a final review in 2014. Independent consultants undertook the reviews which included a wide consultation with implementing bodies, CSOs in Ireland and overseas, including women from conflict-affected communities. These reviews were coordinated by DFAT's Evaluation and Audit Unit. The findings from the mid-term review were presented by the Monitoring Group to the President of Ireland. This approach to evaluation offers a model of good practice for other EU Member States in terms of transparency, commitment to learning-based independent monitoring and review, and to ensuring the promotion of findings at the highest political levels.

A public consultation process on Ireland's second NAP was opened through the publication of a consultation paper which sought the views of interested stakeholders on what should be prioritised in Ireland's second NAP. Submissions were sought from: (1) women and men affected by conflict living overseas or on the island of Ireland; (2) grass roots civil society organisations, in particular women's groups, both in Ireland and overseas, working with women who have been affected by conflict; (3) international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in conflict and post-conflict situations; and (4) independent experts, academics or practitioners with experience of or working in the fields of gender equality, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, mediation, justice and accountability and related areas. Of the 37 written submissions received from civil society, academics and individuals, over 60% were from CSOs.

Some of the key themes emerging in the consultation were: (1) the need for the promotion and implementation of WPS on the basis of a human rights-based approach to international relations; (2) the protection and promotion of women's human rights as an integral part of the agenda of all peace processes and post-conflict governance processes; (3) the need for increasing financial/technical support to local and international women's CSOs to support ongoing capacity building and engagement of women in decision-making at all levels; (4) the integration of WPS principles into Irish humanitarian interventions; (5) continued emphasis on advocacy and the participation of women; (6) meaningful consultation with local women's organisations and communities to ensure a systematic and inclusive process of dialogue with key stakeholders; (7) increased financial and technical support to Irish CSOs to underpin capacity building among women to participate in decision-making in all aspects of the implementation of a peace agreement; and, (8) the development of appropriate, relevant and meaningful indicators for effective monitoring and evaluation.

A consultation workshop organised by DFAT on the second NAP attracted over 100 participants with a good cross section of representatives from government departments, civil society and academics.<sup>6</sup> Key workshop recommendations echoed many of the themes in written submissions but the round-table discussions enabled a deeper level of debate and dialogue between civil society actors and implementing government departments. Initial findings from the final NAP review were also considered by the DFAT as part of the second NAP's development process.

In principle, these mechanisms provided a comprehensive learning process for the development of a more robust and effective NAP. However, in practice, the extent to which recommendations from the consultation process and final review influenced the current NAP is hard to assess and evidence. There are some obvious commitments such as the integration of Protection with Recovery Pillars; commitments to regular and systematic monitoring processes in the framework of the Oversight Group; the plan to incorporate the perspectives of women affected by conflict into the ongoing work of the Oversight Group; and a commitment to prioritise actions to strengthen women's empowerment and participation as part of the NAP. Whilst the task of producing a more strategic and effective second NAP was undoubtedly a challenging one, it is evident that some of the core recommendations which would have strengthened its implementation and the roles of CSOs are difficult to identify in the current document.<sup>7</sup> There is a shared concern by CSOs about the failure to integrate properly the recommendations from the evaluations of the first and second NAPs and the need for a mechanism to ensure progress on it.

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See <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebstitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/ourwork/empoweringwomen-peaceandsecurity/Consultative-workshop-report-final.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> These include the following actions to improve: accountability mechanisms; consultation with women in local communities, CSO NAP beneficiaries and implementing agencies; provision of dedicated, additional financial resources for NAP implementation; and ways to bring greater coherence and synergy between domestic and international policy and practice on WPS as part of the NAP.

## Implementation

The second Irish NAP is only in the first year of implementation. There are, however, a number of specific areas where progress on relationships, results and processes on NAP implementation is building. Key achievements include:

- **The operation of the Oversight Group:** CSOs felt that there was a renewed purpose and energy within the Oversight Group, with a better cross section of representatives and a growing understanding of the respective roles of CSOs and implementing bodies. There is a growing commitment to strengthening the role of the Oversight Group in advocating more directly on specific obstacles/issues in relation to NAP implementation. A work plan to structure the Group's meetings has been developed which reflects some of the key priorities of the current NAP including: (1) concerns about the marginalisation of women in post-conflict Northern Ireland; (2) GBV; (3) diplomatic efforts to promote UNSCR 1325; (4) strengthening women's participation in peace processes; (5) engagement of men and boys; and, (6) the role of the media. Each implementing department leads a meeting on a particular priority theme and provides information/updates on WPS-related activity. The introduction of specific themes for each meeting has been valuable in deepening understanding within the Oversight Group. To date, there has been an input on prevention of and response to GBV in conflict-affected/emergency settings and a visit to locally-based women's groups in Northern Ireland (although it was felt a more strategic input from women's CSOs may have added value to this).
- **Greater clarity and contributions from CSOs:** The NAP is helping to strengthen dialogue and engagement on gender equality and WPS more broadly between government agencies and CSOs. The expertise of CSOs, in bringing different perspectives to the table, is helping to deepen and broaden NAP implementation such as a focus on work on masculinities as part of the WPS agenda.
- **Supporting the protection of women and girls:** Commitments on the protection of women and girls from GBV and GBSV continue to be a key priority, particularly through the provision of funding to Irish Aid partners. Key actions include the development of a five year action plan towards ratification of the Istanbul Convention which Ireland signed in 2015 (although there are concerns from CSOs about the absence of adequate resources and focus of the plan) and more strategic targeting of funding for the protection of women from GBV and GBSV in emergency and recovery contexts which is strengthening CSO skills and capacity. Ireland has also played a significant leadership role in the process of agreeing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring that specific targets on gender equality, including violence against women and girls, were included both under a standalone goal, and mainstreamed across the framework.
- **Actions to strengthen the participation and empowerment of women:** Ireland has contributed funding to the Global Acceleration Instrument (GAI) for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action which seeks to focus resources directly to women's CSOs at the forefront of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and recovery efforts. The NAP has also supported efforts to include women actively in all peace dialogues , including support for the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue's 'Women at the Peace Table' initiative in Nigeria or support for CSO work on women's participation at all levels of decision-making in Northern Ireland). The Defence Forces have been engaging with the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) on exploring ways to increase the recruitment of women into the Defence Forces.
- **Engagement with the EU:** Ireland has been an active contributor to the EU Task Force on Women, Peace and Security since its establishment in 2009. The Task Force is regarded as a valuable forum to help contextualise Ireland's NAP within the broader EU system, as well as being a facilitator for lesson- and best practice-sharing on NAPs with other Member States. However, the informal nature of the Task Force can also restrict momentum built at the meetings as often more than half of the Member States do not attend. A more formal mechanism for UNSCR 1325 implementation in the EU could strengthen the EU's capacity and impact on WPS and UNSCR 1325.

- **Building a whole-of-government approach:** The NAP is beginning to act as a reference point for collaboration between departments and agencies on issues such as GBV, lobbying on FGM and the need to improve the provision of support services to migrant women. This is helping to develop the model of a whole-of-government approach for effective NAP implementation.

However the Oversight Group and implementing departments face a number of challenges, including:

- **The need for a more systematic and constructive mechanism for scrutiny and feedback within the Oversight Group:** Whilst the format of thematic presentations from implementing bodies is a useful reporting mechanism in building understanding, this operates on an information sharing level, rather than building a process and culture of accountability for actions assigned to actors in the NAP. Opportunities to discuss specific challenges and obstacles facing implementing bodies need to be created as part of the ongoing agenda. Regular written reports with monitoring data to indicate progress would strengthen the overall debate and contributions from civil society representatives to the Oversight Group.
- **Balancing the priorities of women's participation and protection:** There is still an imbalance between commitments on and investment in protection and participation activities. The focus on women's participation and empowerment is still not central to NAP actions. The NAP continues to prioritise service provision rather than strengthening localisation and direct engagement and the empowerment of women's CSOs.
- **Delivering effective support for women and girl refugees and the changing context for implementation:** For some CSOs, the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe has changed the context for NAP implementation. It has brought a greater urgency and an increased sense of responsibility to deliver a more effective response to migrant women and girls from conflict-affected countries living in Ireland and elsewhere in the EU, broadening the relevance of Ireland's NAP. In Ireland, domestic policy implementation on refugees has been inadequate in supporting women and girls from conflict-affected regions who have experienced severe levels of violence. The capacity of services and lack of gender-sensitive provision remains a significant concern. Access to basic services such as women GPs and services for women and children in the reception centres accommodating asylum seekers and migrants coming to Ireland require urgent attention.
- **Improved consultative role for CSOs on WPS:** CSO expertise is not being used as effectively as possible within the NAP process. National and international CSOs including women's CSOs are significant stakeholders in the development and implementation of work on WPS and have a pivotal contribution to make to Ireland's NAP. Putting local actors in the driving seat is a key element of delivering transformative change. The contributions from CSOs working on the ground in Ireland and overseas are not being effectively enabled or resourced. Greater investment in a more structured process for consultation with migrant women living in Ireland and from women's CSOs in Northern Ireland and overseas is needed. This would also strengthen direct links with women affected by violence at the grassroots and tap into those women as a resource to strengthen NAP actions as well as drawing on their experiences in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- **The need to mainstream UNSCR 1325 and improve coherency between foreign and domestic policy:** Mainstreaming UNSCR 1325 commitments in the national strategies (such as the GBV policy) would make WPS more visible in the national context. Greater engagement and input from overseas missions/embassies into NAP implementation and strengthened WPS advocacy and activity across the development, political-diplomatic, and trade functions at country levels is also needed.
- **Budget allocation and CSO funding:** Greater clarity on budget allocation within departments for NAP activities would enable more strategic implementation and effective monitoring and add value to the NAP. A deteriorating funding context for CSOs working on WPS-/gender-related activities in Ireland is weakening their capacity

and contribution. International and locally-based CSOs offer a vital resource for the successful implementation of Ireland's NAP overseas and at home and they require adequate funding.

- There is also a need for a more strategic approach to training and capacity building on WPS and gender mainstreaming in order to enable more informed and dynamic approaches and to address patriarchal attitudes and norms within key institutions and agencies at local, national, EU and global levels. This would help to strengthen the protection, participation and empowerment of women in conflict-affected regions.