

Issues of Protection
and Security



The Women and Peacebuilding – Sharing the Learning project is funded under the EU PEACE III programme for Northern Ireland and the six southern Border Counties. It recognises the fact that the European Union has defined equality between women and men as a fundamental right and builds on this to examine equality in the context of the centrality of conflict transformation in Northern Ireland/Ireland. As such the project draws on the global commitment to women's rights in contested societies as epitomised in the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, on Women, Peace and Security.



WOMEN AND PEACEBUILDING: SHARING THE LEARNING

Drawing on the main provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project focuses on –

PREVENTION: Strengthen the efforts to prevent violence against women, including various forms of gender based violence.

PARTICIPATION and REPRESENTATION: Promote and support women's active and meaningful participation in all peace processes as well as their representation in formal and informal decision-making at all levels.

PROTECTION and SECURITY: Strengthen efforts to secure the safety, physical and mental health, well-being, economic security and/or dignity of women and girls; promote and safeguard the human rights of women and mainstream a gender perspective into legal and institutional reforms.

RECOVERY, RELIEF and REHABILITATION: Promote women's equal access to aid distribution measures, including those dealing with the specific needs of women and girls in all relief and reconstruction programmes.

The material and recommendations contained in this Women and Peacebuilding Briefing Note are based on the views expressed by 700 plus women, from across Northern Ireland and the six northern Border Counties of Ireland, at a series of seminars over the period 2012/2014.

The partnership that designed the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning initiative includes:

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

An independent grant-making Community Foundation that has been active in Northern Ireland since 1979 and has a long commitment to supporting a more just, equal and peaceful society.



Foundations for Peace Network

A peer Network of in-country based independent Funds and Foundations working in contested societies – Bangladesh; Colombia; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Israel; Mexico; Northern Ireland; Palestine; Serbia; Sri Lanka – that are united by a commitment to social justice and conflict transformation.

National Women's Council of Ireland

The national women's membership organisation of Ireland committed to equality and the recognition of the positive contribution of women to society.

Women's Resource & Development Agency

The support organisation for Women's Groups and Networks across Northern Ireland which works to advance equality and participation of women in society.

ISSUES OF PROTECTION AND SECURITY

Governments and the United Nations' responsibility lay within the resolution of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) and Resolution 1820 (Sexual Violence in Conflict) primarily as a responsibility to protect. This responsibility requires a commitment to combat violence and promote human security. While it is widely accepted that gender-based violence is present in all societies in the forms of domestic violence, sexual abuse and exploitation and harmful traditional practices (such as Female Genital Mutilation), the targeting of women as victims of violent conflict is specifically noted in the UN Resolutions. It is recognised that women in conflict situations are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, whilst the normalisation of violence in post-conflict societies can result in heightened levels of violence against women and impunity for such acts. UNSCR Resolution 1820 holds rape and sexual violence in conflict to be determined as crimes against humanity.

The implementation of the provision of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 through National Action Plans requires issues of Protection and Security to be addressed by national governments.





WHAT WOMEN SAID ABOUT ISSUES OF PROTECTION AND SECURITY

Workshop discussions were organised to consider the theme of Women: Violence, Safety and Security. Four key questions were considered –

- Do you feel more or less safe since the peace process started in 1994?
- What makes you feel unsafe/threatened in your community?
- What needs to change in your community in order for you to feel safer?
- What role do/can women play in achieving these outcomes?

The answers to these questions varied depending on factors such as the age of the women respondents and their community background/identity; however there were a range of points made that drew broad consensus and that require attention.

i) **Do you feel more or less safe since the Peace Process started?**

- The steep reduction in shootings and bombings that had characterised the pre-Peace Process period was welcomed, however the perceived 'risks' in terms of community safety and security have changed over the years. As the 'risks' were different, the associated fears also changed. The main view expressed was that as the Peace Process progressed, 'fear' had changed from a 'community fear' to a more 'personal fear'. During the height of the conflict 'fear' was attached to the actions of external communities, whereas now it is more focused within communities.
- While some participants stated that they felt less safe because of the reduction in police numbers and patrols, others said that the absence of checkpoints and less visibility of police and soldiers made them feel safer. A perspective from a serving police officer was that she felt less safe due to the ongoing threat of continued anti Peace Agreement paramilitary activity. A general view held that the lack of deterrent for 'anti-social behaviour' exacerbated the threats felt within all communities.
- It was argued that the perceived increase in domestic violence over the past two decades may in part be due to an increase in preparedness to report cases to the police, but it was also felt to be an indirect result of the culture of violence and continued access to legal arms in the society.

ii) **What makes you feel Unsafe/Threatened within your community?**

- Women expressed fears about being out alone at night and how women and girls were conditioned at an early age, by their own parents, to be wary and fearful of becoming a potential victim of crime and physical attack.
- Fears were expressed about paramilitary groups in both Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist communities and the 'controlling personalities' that were associated with them. In this context women spoke about specific fears concerning their children either becoming caught up with paramilitary organisations or becoming



victims of them. This applied to girls as well as boys, referring to a culture of ‘trophy girl friends’ that often resulted in abuse.

- In some communities women saw the police as a threat and still unacceptable due to both historical and political issues, but also as a reaction to the perceived role of policing in deprived communities. In other cases the fear expressed was for the lives and safety of family members who worked for the Police Service that were seen as being under threat of attack by paramilitaries.
- Conditions of dereliction in some communities made people feel threatened and unsafe – these included empty houses left unsecured; the increase in theft and burglary; drug dealing; car crime; no street lighting; rubbish being burned; and strangers being seen as potentially threatening.
- Large groups of young people gathering in local communities were identified as a source of fear, particularly for older women who might be living alone. This was exacerbated where there was street drinking, incidences of verbal abuse, and possible drug abuse. The lack of any sense of community control over what was perceived as ‘anti social behaviour’ was seen as the source of concerns about women’s safety at night.
- The high rate of domestic violence – which often remains under reported – was noted widely as a matter of concern.

iii) **What needs to change in your community in order for you to feel safer?**

- Policies, strategies and resources to tackle poverty and inequality were viewed as crucial to enhancing community safety and feelings of human security. Concerns were expressed that welfare policies introduced since the economic recession were increasing the vulnerability of people in deprived communities to poverty. Financial autonomy enables women to be less fearful about their future and, if necessary, to escape from abusive partners.
- Community action and structures need to be supported to increase a sense of local solidarity and resilience that people can identify with. It was felt that much of the individual community cohesion that had existed during the conflict had been undermined and that there was less community involvement than in previous years.
- A greater range of youth programmes and initiatives was called for and that communities should have designated areas as safe places for young people to ‘hang out’. The current association of young people with a culture of excessive drinking needs to be addressed. Policies and programmes also needed to be put in place to offer realistic economic opportunities to young people, and in rural areas, these needed to be linked to adequate public transport.
- The need to end ‘punishment beatings’ and related attacks by paramilitary groups was seen as important, although it was recognised that these needed to be replaced with appropriate criminal justice policies.
- The issue of community policing was discussed with a range of views emerging – some argued for the need for more community police and Neighbourhood Watch



schemes; other women expressed reservations about the police. It was argued that in some cases community views on police need to change, and simultaneously, that police views of some communities need to change. Community pressure and stigma attached to the reporting of crime need to be addressed, as does the issue of whether the police are seen as being responsive to community issues. The increase in the number of female police officers was generally welcomed.

- Sensationalised media reporting of crime and violence was seen as augmenting the sense of personal insecurity.
- Education, leading to a change in attitudes, was seen as important in terms of how girls and women are seen, but also in raising awareness about issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse.
- A zero tolerance approach to gender-based violence was advocated. This should include controls being put in place to alleviate the threat of social media/messaging being used for the purpose of abuse.

iv) What role do/can women play in achieving these outcomes?

- Women's views need to be actively sought out on these issues, and their insights and concerns need to be listened to and acted upon in various decision-making institutions. A proper community infrastructure could facilitate this process.
- There is a specific need to engage and support younger women and to encourage them to become involved in community-based groups and initiatives. Older women could be encouraged to become mentors for younger women.
- Women must continue to press for sexual abuse and domestic violence to be treated in a serious manner and to be prioritised by relevant agencies. The reasons why women do not report abuse or violence must be addressed, as should the particular problems that women face in this regard when either living in smaller rural communities or within minority ethnic communities.
- Highlighting circumstances that lead to women feeling 'inferior' was felt to be important,
- Incidences such as men/boys shouting sexual innuendos and remarks at women was cited as contributing to an atmosphere of abuse and control. Inappropriate and sexist language should be named and shamed.
- Lobbying for a criminal justice system that can ensure that the needs of victims are properly acknowledged and responded to in a positive fashion at all levels of the judicial process is a priority.
- Raising the often hidden issues of human trafficking and abuse experienced by women with disabilities remained important.
- The abuse and stereotyping, sometimes of a sexual nature, experienced by some ethnic minority women (such as the Roma community) and the treatment of refugee and asylum seeking women were recognised as issues of concern for women more generally.





WHAT OTHERS SAY

Both Northern Ireland and Ireland have strategies in place to address Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence. Definitions agreed were –

Domestic Violence and Abuse: Threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.

Sexual Violence and Abuse: Any behaviour (physical, verbal, virtual/digital) perceived to be of a sexual nature which is controlling, coercive, exploitative, harmful or unwanted that is inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation) without their informed consent or understanding.



What the STATISTICS Tell Us

- 1 out of every 5 murders in Northern Ireland is a direct result of domestic violence and abuse, with on average 5 sexual offences committed every day. In 2012/13 over 27,000 domestic abuse cases were reported and just under 2,000 sexual offences were recorded.
- Children with disabilities are 2.9 times more likely to suffer sexual violence and abuse.
- In 2012/13 the 24 Hour Domestic Violence Helpline provided through the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation answered 47,597 calls – the majority relating to domestic and sexual violence, mental health issues and substance misuse. There was a noted increase in calls from members of Black and Minority Ethnic communities.
- In 2012/13 Domestic Abuse crimes (11,160) represented some 11% of reported crimes in Northern Ireland, some 2.5 times greater than drug offences.
- In Ireland a study carried out in 2005 held that 15% of women and 6% of men experienced severe domestic abuse – with 9% of women suffering from severe physical abuse; 8% of women suffering severe sexual abuse; and 8% of women suffering severe emotional abuse.
- In 2012 in Ireland, 50,077 Help calls were answered on issues relating to domestic and sexual violence and abuse.



Refuge accommodation was provided to 2,324 women and 3,470 children, with an additional 3,279 women being unable to avail of these services due to lack of space. That same year 8,449 women and over 3,000 children were helped through Domestic Violence services, representing a 15% increase since 2010.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of the criminal code in Ireland to enable it to define, and deal specifically, with issues of domestic violence.
2. There is a need to reduce delays in the hearing of domestic violence and sexual abuse cases in the Northern Ireland Court Service, where delays can contribute to the re-traumatising of victims.
3. The possibility of introducing specialist Domestic Violence Courts should be examined and taken forward in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.
4. The challenge of addressing the continued under reporting of crimes related to domestic violence and sexual abuse and violence needs to be addressed. In both Northern Ireland and Ireland it is estimated that women do not report such criminal acts in some 80% of cases.
5. The importance of clearly identifying victims of domestic violence that become homeless as a result of the situation and to put in place priority measures for their re-housing in appropriate accommodation.
6. Voluntary organisations that meet the needs of women without recourse to public money (asylum seekers, refugees, immigrant communities) must be funded to provide support services to victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse.
7. The Government of Ireland should sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. The United Kingdom Government should ratify the Convention.
8. Legacy issues of violence experienced by women during the conflict (either directly or as family members) should include women that suffered punishment attacks; strip searching; exclusion from communities, in addition to the Victims and Survivor Services available for those that were directly injured and/or bereaved during the conflict.
9. Both policies and resources must be put in place to support work with refugees/ asylum seekers and trafficked women who are victims of gender-based violence and sexual abuse. This should be underpinned by increased collaboration on a cross-Border basis to support victims of gender-based violence, and the recognition of a duty of care towards those women that have fled conflict-affected regions and states.
10. There should be support for women's groups and networks in those communities that both experienced the brunt of the impact of the conflict in past years, and continue to face challenges of paramilitary influence and anti-social activities, with an emphasis on raising their own awareness and capacity about issues of gender-based violence.

