



Submission to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade consultation on Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

Background

Akina Dada wa Africa-AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Established in 2001, AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women, with a vision for a just society where there is equal opportunity and access to resources in all aspects of society: social, cultural, economic, civic and political. The organisation promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping, and applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services, as well as encouraging migrant women's access to mainstream services and initiatives.

For AkiDwA and for the purpose of this submission, the term 'Migrant Women' includes not only recent immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, but also migrant workers, students, trafficked and undocumented women. It also includes those who have acquired Irish citizenship but who still consider themselves to be outside mainstream society in terms of their linguistic, racial or cultural backgrounds, and who therefore still define themselves as Migrants.

Migrant women in Ireland are therefore not a homogenous group. They come from diverse backgrounds, family status, religious and cultural identities. In most cases, immigration and individual status of different categories determines their ability to cope and adapt to Irish society. The status of women asylum seekers, for example, hinders their well-being from the very beginning, and prevents their integration into Irish society, with many of them living for years in fear of deportation as they wait for their cases to be determined, adding extra stress and poor health that also affects their psychological and physical well-being.

Migrant Women in Ireland

The social, cultural, economic, civic and political prosperity of migrant women in Ireland is intrinsically linked to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda of empowering women as full societal participants, leaders and decision-makers.¹ Therefore, empowering migrant women within these spheres at a domestic level and addressing the barriers they face ought to be prioritised within Ireland's third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

¹ Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2015–2018.

In April 2016, there were 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland with 50.1% of them being women.² Of these women, special consideration must be given to those who have experienced armed conflict and have come to reside in Ireland through the direct provision system. This relatively new subsection of Ireland's demography has both diverse characteristics and distinct psycho-social needs. According to a report by Wezesha in 2016 on women fleeing from armed conflict, the majority suffer poor health conditions as a result of the traumatic experiences they have endured in their country of origin.³ The untreated physical and psychological manifestations of trauma undermine their living conditions within their countries of destination, with constant headaches, sinusitis and body pain commonly reported.⁴ Unaddressed health issues affect migrant women's ability to participate fully in the social and cultural life that surrounds them and effectively serve as a limitation to their capacity to positively integrate into Irish society and become key leaders and decision-makers within it.

The Economic and Social Research Institute's (ESRI) 2018 Monitoring Report on Integration, commissioned by the Department of Justice and Equality, outlines the outcomes for migrants within core spheres of integration in Ireland.⁵ In terms of economic outcomes in the employment sector, Irish and non-Irish nationals have similarly positive experiences of the labour market in the recent years of economic recovery.⁶ However, this does not address the barriers migrants face to mobility between sectors as well as along workplace hierarchies. Furthermore, people of African descent are significant outliers within the reported data with consistently poorer labour market outcomes when compared with all other identified groups.⁷ African-born women are 3.5 times more likely to be unemployed than Irish-born women. Discrimination and racism are identified by the report as key contributing factors, as well as the dissolution of the national institutional infrastructure for responding to racism in Ireland.

Although Ireland is more open than other European countries with regards to the civic and political participation of migrants at a local level, there is a distinct disparity between the size of the migrant resident population and their representation in Irish political life. In the 2014 local elections, only 0.32% of elected city and county councillors were migrants, whilst in the 2016 general elections only 1 out of 166 elected members of the Dáil had a migrant background.⁸ When these figures are compared with the fact that migrants represent almost 17% of Ireland's resident population, it is clear that the political representation of migrants in Ireland is a critical issue.⁹

Furthermore, a significant proportion of migrant women in Ireland are at risk of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as well as Gender-Based Violence (GBV). According to research undertaken by AkiDwA, 2017 statistics on FGM identify 5'795 women living in Ireland who have undergone FGM compared to 3'780 women identified in 2013. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality's 2015 report on the estimation of girls at risk of FGM in the European Union, in Ireland up to 11% of 14'577 girls aged 0-18 originating from FGM risk countries (born in country of origin or Ireland) are likely to be at risk of female genital mutilation.¹⁰ Furthermore, with regards to domestic violence Women's Aid

² CSO 2016.

³ Mbugua, Salome, "Healing the Wounds of War, Narratives of Women from Armed Conflict", Wezesha, 2016.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ McGinnity et al., Monitoring Report on Integration 2018, Economic and Social Research Institute, 2018.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.21-34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.25-27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.76.

⁹ CSO 2016.

¹⁰ AkiDwA, Towards a National Action Plan to Combat FGM, AkiDwA, 2016.

2017 impact report highlighted out of the 669 calls to their 24 hour national helpline, the biggest group calling was migrant women (87%).

Recommendations:

Based on AkiDwA's work with migrant women for the last seventeen years we highly recommend the following to be incorporated into the third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.

Coordination & Promotion of UNSCR within Government departments and Agencies

Establish and ensure a coordinated and holistic approach to secure the best outcomes and capture all support and services being provided to Migrants including women from armed conflict living in Ireland. This will ensure migrant women living in Ireland from armed conflict countries are fully supported, protected from further harm, fully integrated into society and that their rights are upheld. In this regard, the Department of Justice and Equality has a major role given its mandate under immigration, this department has several units which are all relevant to women from armed conflict including, the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration, Cosc, RIA and the Gender Unit (these units in recent years have developed several policies and strategies which include, Integration strategy, Women's strategy, Sexual and gender-based violence strategy and National standards in response to McMahon report on direct provision). Other relevant departments include Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Department of Health, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and department of Children and youth Affairs.

Promote and share information on UNSCR 1325 within and between all Government Departments and agencies.

Prevention:

- Increase awareness of women's rights, gender equality, gender specific harms which affect women and about 'Women, Peace and Security' and among officials in the relevant departments in particular those dealing with women seeking international protection from fragile, conflict and war affected countries.
- Promote education on gender equality, women's rights and the prevention of violence against women at the educational level.

Relief and recovery:

- Support domestic non-government organisations, such as AkiDwA, the Irish County Women's Association and the National Women's Council of Ireland to engage in peace and security initiatives, including raising awareness of UNSCR 1325.

- Encourage an understanding and awareness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda amongst the Irish public.
- Support programmes and women's civil society networks in armed conflict zones, which aim to deliver training for transformative leadership, movement building, etc. as well as social empowerment projects (e.g. literacy, education). This includes migrant women linking up and sharing learning and experiences with women from Northern Ireland.
- Provide increased funding for programmes that facilitate the formulation of diaspora networks of women from armed conflicts living in Ireland, particularly those programmes that aim to increase participation and representation of women. 'Training of trainers' projects can be promoted, with an ultimate goal of training those in their home countries (armed conflicts).
- Provide sensitive protection for refugee and asylum-seeking women from armed conflicts and offer them opportunities to be empowered, e.g. education, language, literacy, business training.