

All-island Women's Forum

Report 2021–22



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

nwC

National Women's Council

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All-Island Women's Forum

The All-island Women's Forum has been a historic opportunity for the National Women's Council to develop its all-island work through its Strategic Plan 'No Woman Left Behind'¹. We were very pleased to receive a grant through the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund to develop this work and the appetite for meaningful structures to provide greater engagement and understanding on this island is evident from the overwhelming interest we received in the formation of this forum. We have been grateful for the high level of engagement from Women's Forum members and thank them for their participation and collaboration. The Women's Forum actively sought participation and representation of underrepresented and marginalised communities including ethnic minorities, loyalist women, LGBTQI+ women, rural women, and more. These diverse women have demonstrated generosity of spirit and time to meet, to share and to learn together.

Building on the work of several National Women's Council member groups, and on the many links and cooperative projects that already exists between women leaders and women's organisations both North and South of the border, the Women's Forum has contributed toward highlighting and improving cooperation on key issues for women, including violence against women, women's political participation, and the urban-rural divide. The Women's Forum represents a contribution by the National Women's Council to the Irish Government's Shared Island initiative in the Department of an Taoiseach, by enhancing civil society links and supporting engagement by women, across communities and traditions on the island, on issues of common concern.

The Good Friday Agreement includes a commitment to North-South equivalence on rights as well as the full participation of women in public and political life. The Women's Forum has sought to build and embed these commitments on the island of Ireland, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325. We know there is empirical data to support the benefit afforded by women's voices in peacebuilding, and yet, women continue to experience persistent threats to their personal safety and security across the political spectrum. The National Women's Council stands in solidarity with all women who experience gender-based abuse and harassment and is ambitious in seeking substantial reforms to enable women to take their rightful place as leaders in our society.

Taking forward the work of All-island Women's Forum is a key priority for the National Women's Council, much work remains with a need to focus on community development across our shared island and we look forward to developing this together.

Orla O'Connor,
Director, National Women's Council

1 No Woman Left Behind NWC Strategic Plan

Acknowledgements

The National Women's Council (NWC) would like to extend our sincere thanks and gratitude to the Reconciliation Fund in the Department of Foreign Affairs for funding this project. In addition, NWC would like to extend thanks to the Shared Island Unit in the Department of an Taoiseach for supporting this work.

NWC further wishes to extend our gratitude to Ailbhe Smyth, who expertly facilitated the Encounters programme, as well as all of the participants in both the Encounters and the Forum, whose expertise and insight informed and elevated the work of the All-island Women's Forum.

NWC wishes to extend special thanks and gratitude to the Forum members, who entered into this space with shared determination and ambition to foster an inclusive space for meaningful dialogue and effective change.

Finally, NWC would like to acknowledge the work of NWC Leadership Co-ordinator Emma DeSouza in acting as Chair and Facilitator of the All-island Women's Forum and extend our thanks for her work in development of this report, as well as that of NWC All-island Women's Forum Administrator Jane Finn for her work in supporting the Forum and Encounters programme.



“This forum will be an opportunity for cooperation, dialogue, and the powerful sharing of experience, ideas, and solidarities.

I have no doubt that the 28 women who will lead this dialogue will bring great collective and individual capacity and insight to this historic task.

We must ensure that women are empowered to engage meaningfully at all levels and in all aspects of society to have their voices heard.”

— Sabina Higgins

All-Island Women's Forum Overview

Led by the National Women's Council (NWC), the All-island Women's Forum comprises 28 members, 14 members from the South and 14 members from Northern Ireland. The Women's Forum aims to address underrepresentation of women and further develop women's role in peacebuilding and civic society.

The Women's Forum brings together women's groups and individuals on a cross-border basis to examine issues and areas of commonality between both jurisdictions. Recognising the range and diversity of civil society across the island of Ireland the Women's Forum invited expert advisors on selected items to inform the work and recommendations of the Forum.

The purpose of the Forum is to encourage greater all-island cooperation within civil society organisations and identify key areas that can be addressed on an all-island basis. The Women's Forum works to empower marginalised groups to participate in similar structures and initiatives, encourage and foster greater all-island partnerships and model the potential for greater cooperation across the island of Ireland.

Women's Forum members began by focusing on developing a basis to build relationships, with external consultants guiding members through the process of working across difference and applying a trauma lens to the Forum's work. Following the establishment of this foundation the Forum met monthly to identify areas that can be worked on together, on a collaborative basis. Topics included 'Women's Political Participation: Threats to Security,' 'Engaging with International Mechanism,' and 'Rural Women on Our Shared Island.' The Forum established an internal business committee to assist in setting the agenda for each meeting and opted to livestream the external testimonies of speakers to function as a platform for women and to increase participation and transparency. NWC monitored the work and progress of the Forum with an internal working group, as part of this reviewing process a mid-term survey was circulated with all forum

members to improve the work of the Forum and experience of members. In preparation for the formulation of recommendations, the final two meetings of the Forum were closed reflective spaces for members to review the year and discuss the objectives of the recommendations and final report.

Objectives

1. Provide a space for open dialogue.
2. Examine issues through a gender equality and justice lens and with awareness and attention to intersectionality, with the purpose of improving equality for women on all-island basis.
3. Improve the representation and participation of marginalised groups with awareness and attention to intersectionality.
4. Improve North-South links.
5. Expand the role of women in peacebuilding in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
6. Provide a critical analysis of women's participation in peace process structures, civil society structures and political spaces.
7. Produce a series of recommendations on how to further progress women's rights and equality on the island of Ireland.

In addition to the monthly meetings the Forum also hosted four public webinars, 'Expanding Good Relations: More Than Two Communities,' 'The Impact of Covid-19 on Women,' 'Women as Changemakers,' and 'Women's Hour: Stories on Identity Across Our Shared Island'. Inclusivity and participation were of the utmost importance to NWC and the Women's Forum, ISL supported all livestreamed meetings and webinars

In tandem with the main Forum was the Encounters Programme, a community-based programme that brought together groups North and South for an information sharing session to help build understanding. The programme was independently facilitated by Ailbhe Smyth.

Recommendations for Governments North and South

1. The All-island Women's Forum calls on both governments to make a joint commitment to developing an All-island approach to ending Gender Based Violence
2. The All-island Women's Forum calls for the reformation of the Civic Forum, in addition to the establishment of an All-island Citizens' Forum on topics incl.
 - Climate and Biodiversity
 - Gender Based violence
 - Rural Issues
 - The expansion of integrated education and educate together models
3. The All-island Women's Forum calls for a joint North-South education scheme that encourages free movement and education exchange should be established to incentivize North-South exchanges.
4. An All-Island media partnership with adequate investment from State broadcasters, North and South, should be developed to increase women's voices on all-island issues, e.g., a women's only all-island podcast series examining topics incl.
 - Post-Brexit rights
 - All-island Health
 - Cross-border travel and infrastructure
 - Political participation
 - Violence against women
5. The All-island Women's forum calls for gender quotas at candidate selection in local level elections North and South, and for gender quotas at candidate selection for Assembly elections in Northern Ireland

Recommendations for Our Future Work Together

North South Relations:

The All-island Women's Forum will work with other All-Island Organisations to develop the practicalities of all-island work

The All-island Women's Forum will examine expanding the work into an east-west dimension

The All-island Women's Forum will work to advance an All-island Charter of Rights and All-island Civic Engagement.

Women's Political Participation and Representation:

The All-island Women's Forum will examine the development of an all-island approach to increasing women's political participation, including increased participation of marginalised women.

The All-island Women's Forum will work in partnership with youth organisations, in building awareness in active citizenship in education and will support calls for lowering the voting age to 16

Violence Against Women:

The All-island Women's Forum will advocate for research and development on establishing a pathway for equivalence of rights and the harmonisation of services, policy and legislation North and South

Media:

The All-island Women's Forum will be a source for diverse women's voices providing information and expertise for media on gender equality, feminism, democracy, equality, and human rights.

Testimonials from Forum members

“Being part of the All-Island Women’s Forum has been a wonderful experience. Most valuable of all, from my perspective, was the opportunity to sit with, listen to, and learn from other women across this island working on issues both similar and very different to my own work. For a small place we share a lot in common, but there are real differences in how the issues we face present themselves in different contexts. The Forum gave us an opportunity to step outside our daily work and look at the issues from different angles. It also allowed the platforming of expert voices, all of which fed into the recommendations we made. This experience has really demonstrated the value of pulling together in the same direction for all women on this island.”

— **Elaine Crory**, Women’s Resource and Development Agency (WRDA)

“The Women’s Forum has provided a timely space to share ambitions, challenges and concerns about not just the future, but the lived present of women and women’s groups across the island. I have met with campaigners and learned from agitators - I have been confronted with my own biases and I’ve been made do better and think differently as a result. You cannot underestimate the power of constructive and safe spaces for dialogue and learning. We need to keep going. This stuff doesn’t happen overnight, and it doesn’t happen over a year. It takes commitment over generations, and it takes the resource to manage it. The forum was an eye opening and wondering experience to be part of in 2022 and I can’t wait to see what we can work together towards next.”

— **Síona Cahill**

“The forum provided a space to both learn from others and share our expertise, so it was mutually beneficial rather than top down. This format recognised that all the members had something to say and created an environment where everyone had the opportunity to engage. It was interesting to note the similarities between the experiences of different women, as well as the particular challenges they faced.”

— **Danielle Roberts**, HEReNI

“Having the opportunity to participate in the All-Island Women’s Forum and being able to meet regularly with women of all ages from all walks of life, from all parts of the island and from a diversity of communities and traditions has been a truly enriching experience.

Our dialogues and discussions have, in significant ways, helped to identify pathways for thinking creatively, collectively, and collegially about how to make life better for all people and all traditions across this island.”

— **Mary C. Murphy**, University College Cork

“As a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, Deputy Speaker of the first new NI Assembly and Vice President of the EESC, I have been involved in peace-politics and the role played by the EU for many decades. While my work brought me into contact with people from across the divide in NI and continental Europe it rarely involved any cross-border collaboration.

The all-island Women’s Forum is, in fact, my first ever ‘regular’ encounter with women from the south of Ireland. This, I believe, has been a major weakness in the shared island approach to peacebuilding. Like many of my unionist friends and colleagues, we have little or no experience of Irish culture, history, and way of life south of the border.

The forum enables us to exchange ideas, expertise, and experience on a wide range of issues, from integrated education to reproductive rights to cultural diversity and is of tremendous value as a means of increasing understanding between us.

I am convinced this type of dialogue and cross-fertilisation is of vital importance to the future of this island. Not only should our work continue but it should be extended to include youth and eventually all people North and South learning how to understand and respect difference and live together in harmony.”

— **Dr Jane Morrice**

“Keeping safe spaces open and active for important conversations is more important than ever. Keeping civil society connected and engaged is also more important than ever as political institutions remain inactive. Maintaining and increasing relationships of trust is a vital protective measure against the general erosion of trust that is taking place in so many spheres of life, in Northern Ireland also. AIWF is an excellent vehicle for achieving this trust and can achieve more by continuing and expanding its reach. Taking a shared island perspective, it also proved quite easy and hugely relevant to think of my current work on an all-island basis which was not the case before joining the AIWF.”

— **Collette O’Regan**, LGBT Ireland

“Being a member of the All-Island Women’s Forum enabled me to connect and appreciate the issues and struggles of women and underrepresented groups from all over the island. It brought matters to my attention that I had no knowledge or background of and was able to broaden my perspective of the lived experience of minority and ‘forgotten’ communities. The Forum has enriched my life in so many ways, and I have been able to use the knowledge and information gained in my work with my own organisation. It has been an incredible year with the Forum, and I am eager to see our hard work shared with the public.”

— **Kimberly Robertson**, Cathaoirleach/
Chairperson, East Belfast GAA

Women's Political Participation: Threats to Security

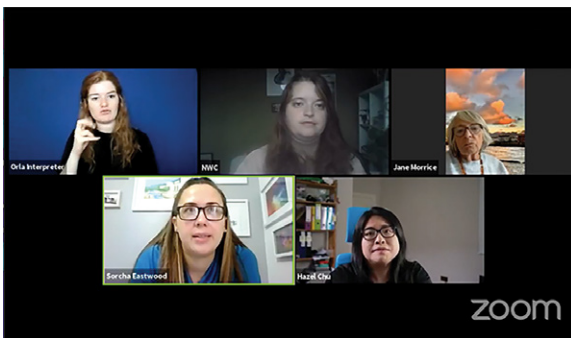
“There is a fundamental poison in the well of how we as a society, are so quick to dismiss the lived experience of victims, and I think the media plays a massive role in perpetrating that sadly.”

— **MLA Sorcha Eastwood**, Alliance Party

The United Nations report on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) defines the phenomenon as “any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman or affects women disproportionately”.² Violence against women in political spaces is rooted in deep misogynistic behaviour that targets women to silence them as political actors. This behaviour can take form as online abuse, verbal harassment, visual harassment, stalking, intimidation, unwelcome sexual advances, and acts of physical or sexual assault. This was the experience of several women who spoke to the Forum on threats to their safety and security that was explicitly linked to their roles and work in public and political life.

² Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993

The Forum heard from experts working in improving women's security, and both the Northern Ireland Justice Minister Naomi Long and Ireland's (interim) Minister of Justice Heather Humphreys. This allowed the forum to examine similarities, and contrasts, in terms of legislation North and South., It is clear that the systemic abuse of women operating in political spaces, be that in politics, the media, or civic society, is endemic across the island. The Forum agreed there is an urgent need to adopt a joined-up approach to tackling gender-based violence in all its forms.



Speakers

MLA Sorcha Eastwood, Alliance Party

Cllr Hazel Chu, Green Party

Eve McDowell, Co-founder, Stalking Ireland

Elaine Crory, Good Relations Coordinator,
Women's Resource and Development Agency
(WRDA)

Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist,
Women's Resource and Development Agency
(WRDA)

Dr Salome Mbugua, Head of Operations
and Strategy, AkiDwA

Dr Claire McGing, Gender and Politics
Researcher, Maynooth University

Naomi Long, Northern Ireland Justice Minister

Ireland's Minister for Justice (interim) Heather
Humphreys

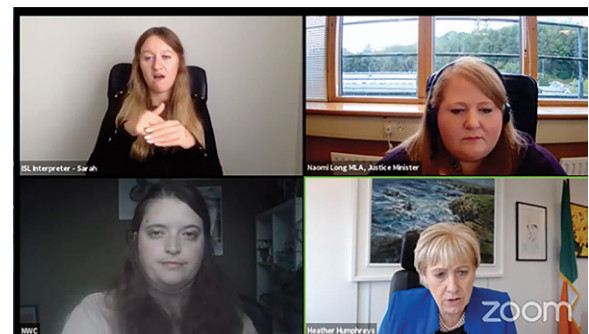
“We have some of the highest rates of domestic abuse and femicide in Europe, some of the lowest conviction rates for sexual violence, the Istanbul convention has not been ratified, we have no VAWG strategy, no implementation of the vast majority of CEDAW recommendations and women's organisations are losing funding left, right and centre for crucial good relations and peacebuilding work.”

— **Rachel Powell**, Women's Sector Lobbyist,
Women's Resource and Development Agency
(WRDA) speaking on Northern Ireland

“The culture of secrecy and almost shame around speaking out about violence, the kind of consequences of speaking out about violence, where the same people who harass you come back and say you're playing the victim card. All of that is designed to do the same thing, and that is to silence women, and I am not willing to be silenced, on that or any other issue”

— **Justice Minister Naomi Long** [speaking personally on the harassment and abuse experienced during time in public life]

The Forum welcomed learning the notable fact that the two offices operate a practice of sharing best practices in tackling Domestic, Sexual & Gender-based violence but noted the challenge of a lack of disaggregated data in both jurisdictions.





Engaging with International mechanisms

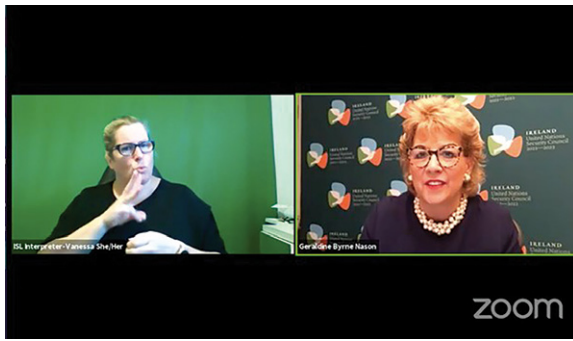
“Gender equality remains one of the most contested and political issues facing the United Nations. The importance of empowering women to transform the world which leads to fundamentally disrupting the status quo.”

— **Geraldine Byrne Nason**, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Chair 62nd and 63rd sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

International mechanisms have long been used to advance human rights protections across the island of Ireland, but it is notable that despite being inspired by the work of the NI Women’s Coalition, UNSCR1325 has not been implemented in Northern Ireland.³ Ireland has a global presence in advancing human rights, with the current UN Security Council seat being utilised as an opportunity to advance a Women, Peace and Security (WPS) strategy. However, challenges remain, forum member Tara Grace Connolly spoke of being the first Northern Ireland-born UN Youth delegate for Ireland, greater inclusion of Northern voices to Ireland’s WPS strategy is needed. It was noted that a human rights framework exists within the Northern Ireland protocol, but that heightened political tensions was obscuring that view. Social Change Initiative, working with the human rights centres at Queen’s and at the University of Michigan published an accessible guide to the new procedures established under the Protocol to protect rights.⁴

³ Submission to the Consultation on Irish NAP on Women, Peace and Security. August 2014.

⁴ <https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/human-rights-and-equality-in-northern-ireland-under-the-protocol-a-practical-guide>



To monitor and enforce these obligations, Article 2 provides for the establishment of a 'dedicated mechanism.' If there has been a breach of Protocol Article 2 by the UK, legal action can be taken through either this 'dedicated mechanism' or by individuals, groups, or companies. The new 'dedicated mechanism' has been housed in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. Both bodies have been given various new powers and responsibilities (which may be exercised jointly or separately):

- to launch legal proceedings if violations of Protocol Article 2 occur or if they may occur in future
- to assist others to take cases relating to Protocol Article 2
- to bring violations to the attention of the international dispute procedures

It was clear across the speakers' testimonies that it is greater effort is needed to ensure women's participation in engaging with international mechanisms and institutions with a focus on adopting inclusive language, greater education, and broader participation.

Speakers

Anastasia Crickly, former Chairperson Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, and Former chairperson UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Louise Kennedy, Chair, Northern Ireland Women's European Platform

Rhyannon Blythe, Director (Legal, Research and Investigations, and Advice to Government), Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)

Tara Grace Connolly, UN youth delegate 2020-21, and Forum member

Diandra Ní Bhuachalla, UN Youth delegate 2021-22

Geraldine Byrne Nason, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Chair 62nd and 63rd sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

Martin O'Brien, Director, Social Change Initiative

Dr Mary C Murphy, Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration, University College Cork, and Forum member

The Forum particularly noted that the North of Ireland does not have a comprehensive international relations strategy. Speakers also highlighted the often-inaccessible language of human rights work which provides challenges for grassroots communities to engage with international frameworks

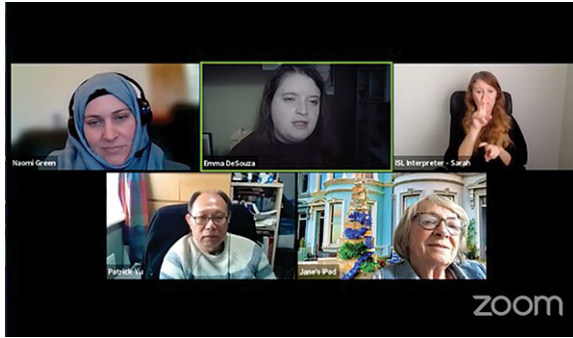
Violence Against Women

“We don’t recognise that people from ethnic minority backgrounds have been part of Northern Ireland since its formation. And the result of this is that although they are officially equal citizens of Northern Ireland, the constant focus on the two majority communities has meant that they have been easily overlooked, underappreciated, and failed by government.”

— **Naomi Green, Vice-Chair**, Northern Ireland
Council for Racial Equality (NICRE)

Protection Under the Law

The focus of this Forum session was on how a lack of an intersectional approach in our justice systems and in our legislation and the failure to implement monitoring on the impact of racism can leave entire communities invisible in the work to end Violence Against Women. In examining protection under the law, the Forum heard evidence on the status of the hate crime legislation review in the North and hate crime legislation in Ireland. Misogyny is an ideology of hatred and manifests itself in crimes but is not currently included in the legislation in Northern Ireland, efforts are being made to add a protected characteristic of misogynist hate crime. The lack of disaggregated data on violence against women is a systemic issues North and South that creates barriers in consideration of hate crime legislation.



Speakers

Daniel Holder, Deputy Director, Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

Sarah O'Malley, criminal justice policy officer, Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)

Naomi Green, Vice-Chair, Northern Ireland Council for Racial Equality (NICRE)

The lack of a standalone Domestic Violence offence in legislation North & South and the lack of disaggregated data on the intersectionality of racism, hate crime, and sectarianism were key issues in this session.

Poverty as a Form of State Violence

“We work to address personal barriers and structural barriers but much of our parenting, therapeutic work may be to enable a parent to cope with the limited situation they are in – either because they are living in poverty with no real means to move out of it; they are living with violence; ill health etc. so they need to cope with an awful situation rather than be able to transform out of it”

- Karen Kiernan, CEO, One Family

Eradicating poverty is one of the greatest challenges faced by Governments the world over and has been recognised by the United Nations in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In general, women have fewer resources, less wealth, lower incomes, greater unpaid care responsibilities which limits their choices around paid work and greater reliance on low paid and precarious work. People most affected by rising cost of living are those who have not recovered from the impact of austerity era cuts. Lone parents have less wealth, savings, land, business wealth or vehicles; are less likely to own a home or to be able to access credit.⁵

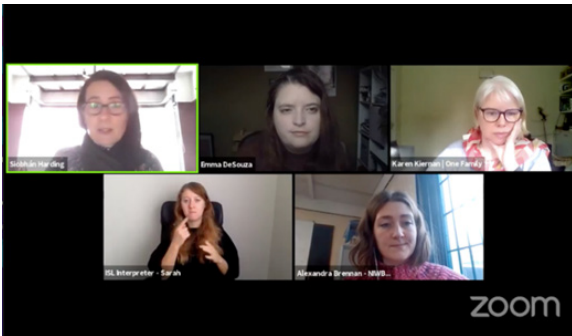
Research presented by Siobhan Harding to the Forum confirmed the strong links of women's poverty to child poverty and the long-term impacts of welfare reform such as universal credit. 23.8% of women are on low pay in Northern Ireland compared to 16% of men. Siobhan also raised the impact of debt, and other debt forms in Northern Ireland including paramilitary lending⁶, highlighting the challenge in gathering data on this form of debt as women are often fearful in speaking about this.

Karen Kiernan highlighted the lack of solutions being implemented to address substantial evidence of structural barriers keeping mostly women who are mothers in poverty in Ireland and called for the strengthening of equality grounds in the review of Equality Legislation, including the addition of a socio-economic ground. Karen also called for a National Child Poverty Action Plan across departments in addition to child-safety centred family law reform with appropriate out of court services; assessments; therapeutic supports; trained staff; specialist courts; publicly funded etc “if we know an experience, process or service is traumatising to people why would we keep doing it?”

⁵ CSO (2022). Household finance and consumption survey.

⁶ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/more-families-may-turn-to-illegal-lenders-this-christmas-svp-warns-1.4737614>

Further structural barriers exist for migrants and asylum seekers with immigration restrictions such as no recourse to public funds, and the low level of financial support provided to asylum seekers placing vulnerable women at high-risk of destitution and unsafe relationships. Kendall Bousquet presented stark insights to the Forum on the connection between poverty and immigration status, “Asylum seekers are confined to poverty since the majority are barred from working, because of this asylum seekers and refused asylum seeker are at a particular risk of destitution. As a result, to homelessness due to no recourse to public funds, one quarter of destitute asylum seeker women in the UK reported being raped or sexually assaulted while rough sleeping or sleeping in other people’s homes. With reporting rates remaining extremely low”.



Speakers:

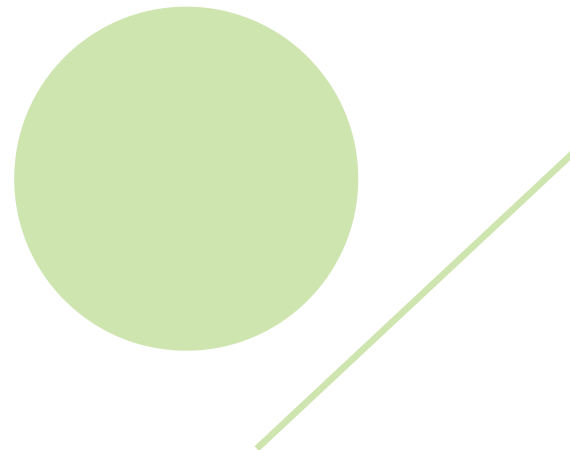
Karen Kiernan, CEO, One Family

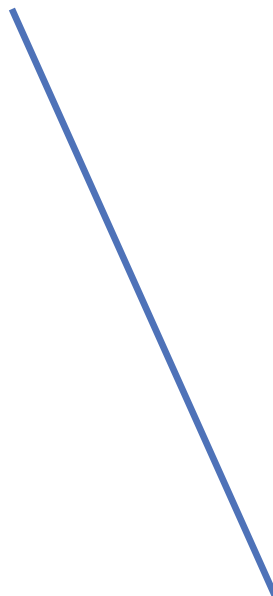
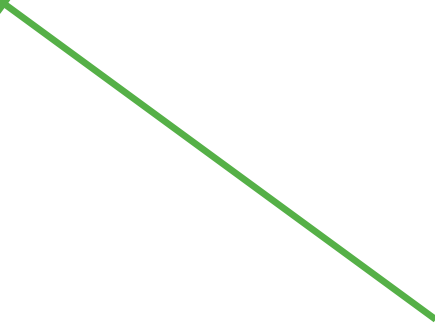
Louise Bayliss, Campaign Coordinator, Focus Ireland

Siobhán Harding, Policy Worker, Women’s Support Network

Kendall Bousquet, Migration Justice Advocacy Officer, Migrant Centre NI

The Forum noted that there is an information gap in what rights asylum seekers have in Ireland North and South, and further that the systems in place in both jurisdictions place asylum seekers at high risk of poverty and sexual exploitation.





Rural Women on Our Shared Island

Amplifying Women's Voices in Rural Communities

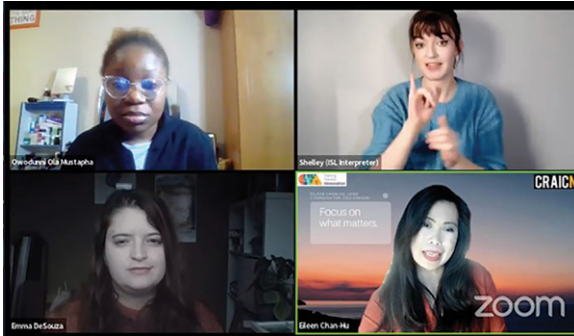
“Democracy cannot be said to be at its best when half the population are so seriously underrepresented.”

— **Ola Mustapha**, founder, Ballyhaunis Inclusion Project

In Ireland, just over 30 per cent of the population lives rurally⁷, higher than the EU average. In the North rural women account for over 20 per cent of the Northern Irish population, yet they receive just 1.3% of government funding distributed to women in the region.⁸ Paula McAliskey stated that resourcing in Northern Ireland still tends to be urban centric with a de-prioritisation of addressing challenges faced by rural women. Rural women traditionally bear most of the caring responsibilities, which often isolates women from participating fully in social, economic, and community-based activities. The lack of public transport provision places a further burden on rural women, pushing families further down the poverty line due to the rising cost of fuel, and creating challenges in terms of accessing public services including healthcare.

7 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-urli/urbanandrurallifeinireland2019/introduction/>

8 <https://www.nirwn.org/15yearsofnirwn/>



Cathy McKeefry added that, “We have service depletion, hidden poverty, poor connectivity, there is a growing digital divide. We have outmigration of our youth, we have depopulation. We have older women filling childcare provision gaps childminding. If they aren't childminding there are older women looking after even older women, their parents. We have no female GP for our whole south Kerry area.”

Speakers

Dr Michelle Maher, Programme Manager,
See Her Elected (SHE)

Paula McAliskey, Community Engagement
Officer, Northern Ireland Rural Women's
Network, and Forum member

Cathy McKeefry, Coordinator, Women's
Collective Ireland, South Kerry

Kerrie Flood, Development Manager,
Fermanagh Women's Aid

Ms Ola Mustapha, founder, Ballyhaunis
Inclusion Project

The Forum noted with concern the challenges faced by rural women experiencing domestic violence are especially vulnerable due to their social isolation, worsened without a means of transportation to allow for an independent exit.






More Than Two Communities

Marginalised Voices

“Disabled women should be involved in all discussions on policy making concerning gender violence, nothing about us without us.”

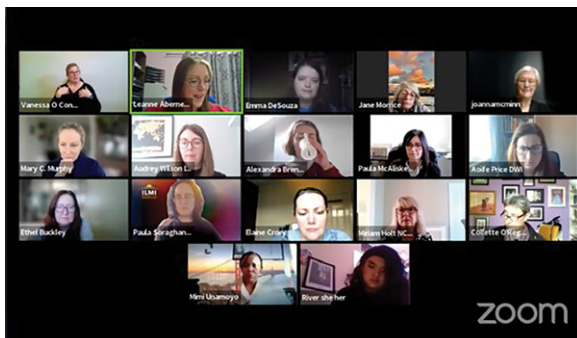
— **Audrey Wilson**, Independent Living Movement
Ireland

During this session of the forum, members invited experts to speak from the perspective of marginalised communities, including loyalist women, disabled women, ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTQI+ community. Intersectionality helps us to understand the impacts on underrepresented and marginalised communities. There was a common thread of fear among groups and the need for representation. On the experience of traditional loyalist voices and representation Leanne Abernethy said, “If you are constantly being told that your voice is not being listened to, you retreat into yourself”, adding, “It’s quite hurtful as well because people are speaking on behalf of us and it’s not our voice, and it might be something that we feel very strongly about.”



The lack of disaggregated data was once again raised with the forum, in capturing the experiences of disabled women across several areas including gender-based violence and the intersectionality of racism and sectarianism. Concerns were also expressed about the absence of disabled women, LGBTQI+ women, ethnic minority women, and loyalist women in decision making structures. Representation shapes policy, having more women in decision-making spaces leads to better decisions, and for our policies to be reflective of the diversity of women, we need diverse women present.

“People make policies, implement policies without consulting us...people need to listen to our voices, especially when they are trying to find solutions to problems that affect us. Especially regarding policies that are meant to serve us.” - Mimi Unamoyo, founder and project coordinator, Northern Ireland Refugees and Asylum Seekers Women Association (Bomoko NI)



Speakers

Leanne Abernathy, Project Manager of Herstory - Women in Loyalism and Community Restorative Practitioner

Mimi Unamoyo, founder and project coordinator, Northern Ireland Refugees and Asylum Seekers Women Association (Bomoko NI)

Independent Living Movement Ireland: Joint statement from Audrey Wilson and Paula Soraghan

Cara McCann, Director, HEReNI

A key issue highlighted in this session again was the lack of disaggregated data available to monitor the engagement and participation of diverse women and communities in all domains of public life. Of particular concern is the lack of diverse representation of women in decision-making spaces.



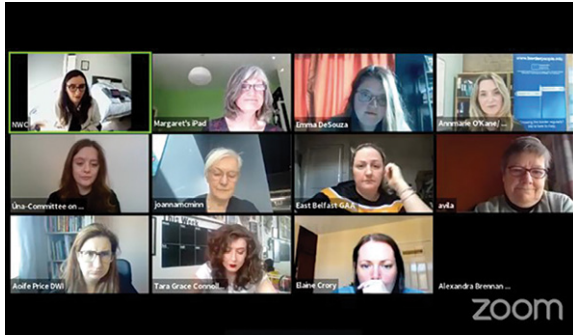
The Impact of Brexit on the Island of Ireland

“...we face into the biggest overhaul of the UK immigration system in decades and face threats to human rights and access to justice. The Nationality and Borders Bill, the review into administrative law and the proposed reform of the Human Rights Act demonstrate this climate of regression in rights and equality.”

— **Úna Boyd**, Immigration Project Solicitor and Coordinator, Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is a Protocol (or a formal international agreement) of the Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union (known as the UK Withdrawal Agreement).⁹ As a legal document the Protocol recognizes the unique situation of Northern Ireland (NI) post-Brexit, and the profound impact that Brexit is having on the politics, trade, and legal protections in Northern Ireland. “If you destabilise one part of the protocol you essentially destabilise the whole protocol. And therefore, you run the risk of destabilising human rights protection.” According to Ivanka Antova, Research Officer, Human Rights Consortium. “Main areas of concern: engagement with civil society...we have huge concerns about the replacing of funding, especially for those human rights bodies working with vulnerable groups. Access to cross border services, once the transitional period has ended there is very little clarity on what is going to replace the structure of EU law underpinning that cross-border element. The scope and nature of Article 2, domestic legislation, and of course best practice.”

⁹ Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community 2020, OJ L 29, pp.1-187.



Concern was raised during this meeting around two pieces of post-Brexit legislation; The UK's Borders and Nationality Bill, and the review of the Human Rights Act, which has since been published. Regarding the Nationality and Borders Bill, the introduction of an electronic pre-travel authorisation on the island of Ireland, such a pre-requisite would pose unique challenges on the island of Ireland, given that thousands of people cross the border every day, be that for work, education, or tourism. Whilst the UK government has claimed it will not enforce the newly introduced immigration system, those found to have entered the UK, by crossing the land border, without travel authorisation, could face 4 years in prison. The issue also flags concerns around the operation of the Common Travel Area, several experts that spoke to the forum on this topic recommended that the cohort of who falls under the Common Travel Area be expanded, and that the ad hoc agreement between the UK government and Ireland be placed on a firmer legislative footing.

Speakers

Úna Boyd, Immigration Project Solicitor and Coordinator, Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

Annemarie O'Kane, Information Manager/ Border People Project Manager, Centre for Cross Border Studies

Ivanka Antova, Research Officer, Human Rights Consortium

Tobias Lock, Jean Monnet Professor of EU Law at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Imelda Maher, Sutherland Full Professor of European Law, UCD School of Law, Member of the Royal Irish Academy

The crucial point raised in this session was the confusion and lack of awareness across the island on human rights protections and changing immigration rules. Clarity is needed on the status of various citizens on the island of Ireland post-Brexit, concern was raised about the prospect of cross-border checks, whilst not having a recommendation on this, the Forum does believe the lack of clear concise information should be addressed and further that exploration of mutual recognition of visas by the British and Irish governments could be beneficial.

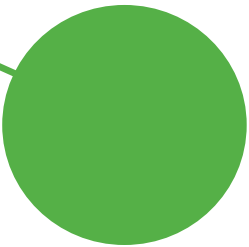


Women's Political participation

“Migrant women are particularly excluded from influencing policies, often left out of the key decision making, that affect the lives of these women”

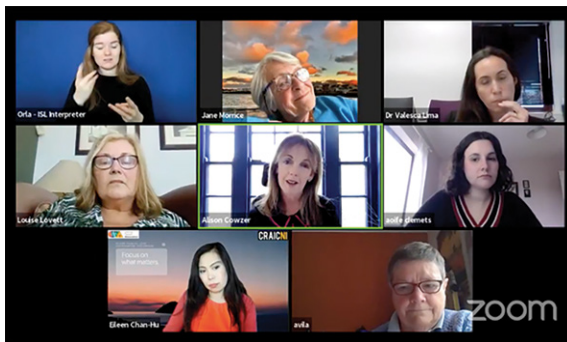
— **Dr Valesca Lima**, Assistant Professor at the School of Law, and Government at Dublin City University (DCU)

Women are consistently and significantly underrepresented at all levels of politics North and South. In Northern Ireland 22% of NI MPs are women, 26% of local councilors and only 18% of Council Chairs or Mayors are women. “When we look at the numbers of women in politics in Northern Ireland, women have been consistently and significantly underrepresented at all levels of politics,” according to 50:50NI founder Aoife Clements. In Ireland only 23 % of TD’s are women, and 25% of local councilors are women, 11 Dail constituencies have no women TDs. Several systemic barriers were identified including slow turnover of seats, no comprehensive childcare strategy, no parental leave for women in elected positions and a culture of sexism and misogyny. “There is no comprehensive childcare strategy in Northern Ireland, and there is no maternity leave for women in elected positions so that is a major barrier to women who are younger and who maybe want to start a family, or already have kids,” says Aoife.



Women for Election Chair Alison Cowzer estimates for real change on women's representation in Ireland 1,000 women need to run in the 2024 local elections, and 250 women candidates for the next general election, "One way to speed up the pace of change is through legislative gender quotas."

In addition to gender quotas there is an urgent need to recognize the additional barriers faced by migrants and ethnic minorities in participating in political structures. A recent Report by National Traveller Women's forum entitled "Different paths, shared experiences"¹⁰, on Ethnic Diversity explores the need for "nested quotas" or quotas within quotas. Targeted education around registration, running in elections, and voting rights is a further measure to increase participation.



Speakers

Aoife Clements, Founder and CEO, 50:50 NI

Alison Cowzer, Chairperson, Women for Election

Eileen Chan-Hu, Executive Director, and Founder, CRAICNI, and Forum member

Dr Valesca Lima, Assistant Professor at the School of Law, and Government at Dublin City University (DCU)

The Forum noted that the barriers to women's political participation are increasing, years ago it was the 3 C's, now it is 6 C's (Confidence, Candidate Selection, Culture of Political life; Cash, Childcare, Cyberabuse), and growing. Challenge remains in creating a level playing field for women in politics.

10 https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/15754_NTWF_Summary_Report_V4.pdf



Women's Voices in Peacebuilding


The Unfinished Work of the Peace Process

The appetite for meaningful structures to provide greater engagement and understanding on this island is evident from the overwhelming engagement received in the formation of this forum. At a time of political instability, with the collapse of the Northern Ireland executive, the National Women's Council convened an in-person meeting of the All-island Women's Forum in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh. This gathering marked the first-time forum members were able to meet, alongside women from across the island, to critically examine women's voices in peacebuilding and the unfinished work of the peace process.

Scholar Desiray Nilsson demonstrated that peace agreements are 64% less likely to fail when civil society representatives participate.¹¹ An International Peace Institute Study of 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011¹² found that when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35% increase in the probability that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more. Yet women continue to be underrepresented in peacebuilding structures and decision-making spaces. The Women's Forum was joined by one hundred women for a full session of the forum on North-South equivalence of rights, followed by an afternoon of panel discussions.

11 "Anchoring the Peace: Civil Society Actors in Peace Accords and Durable Peace" Desiray Nilsson, April 2012

12 UN Women, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections Between Presence and Influence," October 2012





North-South Equivalence of Rights

Speakers:

Alyson Kilpatrick, Chief Commissioner,
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
(NIHRC)

Sinead Gibney, Chief Commissioner, Irish
Human Rights and Equality Commission
(IHREC)

Alyson Kilpatrick outlined the human rights protections codified in the incorporation of the European Convention on Human rights (ECHR) into domestic law under the Good Friday Agreement. She proposed this was an essential recognition if Northern Ireland were ever to emerge from the conflict and to achieve a peaceful and democratic society that allowed everyone to enjoy their rights fully. Alyson outlined challenges posed by Brexit in advancing equivalence of rights, “The subsequent Brexit process caused a rift to put it lightly, equivalence as an aspiration on the island of Ireland suddenly became less likely.” Kilpatrick quoted key phrases from the Good Friday Agreement – “partnership, equality, and mutual respect,” “reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust”, “When the language of human rights was developed, the narrative was that these

rights belonged to every person. Not just groups across society, but every human being and they should be enjoyed equally regardless of identity... all people are exactly the same. Not just the rights that they have but their opportunity to fulfil them. ‘Partnership, equality and mutual respect, reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust’ those are words that tick off quite lightly, much more difficult when you try to put these into practice, and certainly if you measure if they have been achieved”.

Chief commissioner Sinead Gibney advised we are experiencing a slippage of rights, furthermore, Northern Ireland has fallen behind in terms of equivalence of rights, since the Good Friday Agreement. She echoed “the importance of the human rights and equality emphasis within the Good Friday Agreement and the equivalence principle. This is the catalyst both the before and after the signing of that agreement for the development of rights and equality on this island and it has had long lasting impact right through to the very organisations that we both lead [IHREC and NIHRC respectfully] and the laws and practices that we all rely on to realise rights and to prevent and combat discrimination.”

The Commissioners raised concern over the operation of the Common Travel Area post-Brexit and recommended that the Common Travel Area be placed on a legislative footing. Further, the Commissioners recommended the development of an implementation plan on a Bill of Rights.



North-South Equivalence of Rights: Abortion access across our island

Speakers

Naomi Connor, Co-Convener, Alliance for Choice

Alana Ryan, NWC Women's Health Coordinator

Two separate legal jurisdictions operate on the island of Ireland, and yet, there are significant similarities in the challenges that women face in accessing abortion healthcare. In 2021, at least 161 pregnant people travelled from Northern Ireland, and 775 from Ireland to England or Wales for an abortion, according to UK government figures.¹³ Despite legalisation of abortion adequate service provision remains a barrier for women and pregnant persons who need access. Abortion services need to be free, safe, legal, and local. As evidenced by the rollback of abortion rights in

some EU countries and the US there are attempts to undermine reproductive health rights globally.

NWC coordinator Alana Ryan said that “The three-year review of the operation of the Termination of Pregnancy Act overseen by independent Chair, Marie O’Shea, is our unique and essential opportunity to improve access to and experience of abortion care.” Adding that, “The process to reach this point has been challenging and we are continuing to push for clarification on key points, including crucially that where the evidence points to barriers arising from the legal framework, that the necessary changes will be made to the Act. At NWC, our position is clear, both North and South of the border, all women and pregnant people must be able to access abortion care. We firmly believe that all women should be able to choose if or when to have children and that it is women who are best placed to make decisions regarding their health with the advice and support of their doctor. This is our core principle whether you are based in Enniskillen or Enniscorthy, Belfast or Dublin.”

Naomi Connor spoke of the ongoing fight for access in Northern Ireland and the persistence of stigma and isolation around abortion access, “Rights are necessary, and rights are what we have, but justice is what law looks like in public.” Naomi Connor, Co-Convener, Alliance for Choice

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales-2021/abortion-statistics-england-and-wales-2021>

Keynote Address from President Michael D. Higgins

“Throughout history women have struggled against adversity in order to enable future generations of women and men to have a greater freedom of choice, a more inclusive and peaceful society.”

— President Michael D. Higgins

President Higgins' address focused on the theme of peacebuilding.¹⁴ An area in which he is passionate about. He spoke of the values that women bring to embedding cross-community participation in peacebuilding. He illustrated this by highlighting notable groups that have succeeded in the promotion of a peaceful future in Northern Ireland such as the Shankill Women's Centre, and Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

President Higgins explored the historical role of women in peacebuilding, recognising that while history favours the warriors, monarchs and rebels, female pacifists and mediators were as vital in the fight for equality. He referenced Ruth Fry, Ethel Snowden, Kathleen Lonsdale, Hilda Murrell, Maria Ressa, Inez McCormack in his illustration of women who have fought to deliver a more inclusive, more peaceful future. He highlighted their many accomplishments throughout. The President added that, “The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has a powerful resonance in Ireland as we have witnessed at first hand the transformative impact women have had on the Northern Ireland peace process, both in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement and continuing the essential work of peacebuilding today.” But noted that significant challenges remain, “Despite progress on some counts, many challenges remain: discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive, women continue



14 <https://president.ie/en/diary/details/president-delivers-keynote-address-at-the-all-island-womens-forum-conference/speeches>

to be under-represented at all levels of political leadership, and one-in-five women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period.”

The President continued his address by focusing on the 2030 Agenda and the related Sustainable Development Goals. He drew particular attention being to the critical role that women have in the creation of a peaceful society and peacekeeping activities. Acknowledging his role as a United Nations HeForShe Champion in relation to Goal 5 on Gender Equality, President Higgins called for reflection on the actions necessary to achieve positive and consistent change in Irish society.

In examining women, peace and security at the multilateral level, President Higgins referred to the transformative role that UN1325 plays in including the role of women in a post-conflict society. Concluding he stated, “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that great document of the United Nations, has affirmed that “recognition of the inherent dignity, and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. If we are to create such a world, a world where all our fellow citizens can live in peace, security, safety, respect, and dignity, we must not only reject all forms of violence, but envision an inclusive, sustainable, diverse world – one that can be shared equally by all citizens, in all their wonderful diversity. Many of you gathered today who work in non-violent ways to end conflict – through dialogue, negotiation, and peaceful protests – are more than sowing seeds, you are demonstrating the great power of positive action in effecting real and lasting change, doing so with compassion and wisdom.”

Ambassador Melanne Verveer, Executive Director, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

“Those countries where the wellbeing of women is high, where their rights are protected, and they are empowered, those societies are far more peaceful and prosperous. The wellbeing of women, and the wellbeing of nations, goes hand in hand.”

— Ambassador Melanne Verveer



Amb. Verveer previously served as the first U.S. Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, a position to which she was nominated by President Obama in 2009. President Obama also appointed her to serve as the U.S. Representative to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. From 2000-2008, she was the Chair and Co-CEO of Vital Voices Global Partnership, an international NGO that she co-founded to invest in emerging women leaders. During the Clinton administration, she served as Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady. She also led the effort to establish the President's Interagency Council on Women and was instrumental in the adoption of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Secretary of State's Award for Distinguished Service. In 2008, the President of Ukraine awarded her the Order of Princess Olga.

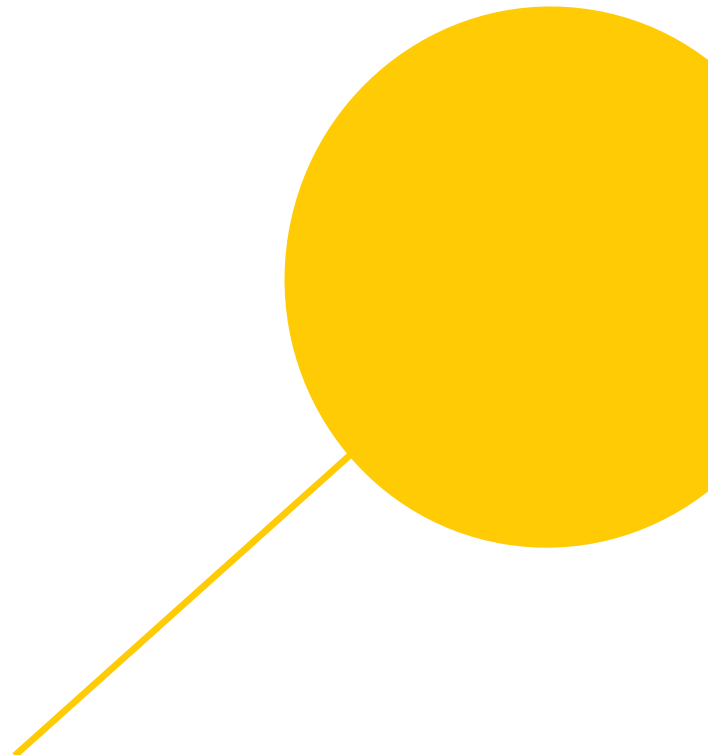
“Women also help to create community, as you are also doing, and to ensure inclusion, a great women’s peace advocate in Northern Ireland, Inez McCormack, always asked who is not at the table, where are marginalised. You understand whether you are from the North or the South, if you are a seasoned longtime activist or just getting started whether you are a professional or a student no matter your religion there is so much that unites you in promoting greater cooperation on both sides of the border to advance peace and reconciliation and a better life.”

— **Simon Coveney TD**, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence



“This is a very significant initiative that is bringing together a truly diverse and talented group of women from North and South, it provides a space for you to pool your huge experience and expertise, give voice to issues of common concern and build connections and relationships that can make a meaningful contribution to peacebuilding on this island.”

Minister Coveney acknowledged the significance of the Forum, remarking that the Forum is a testament to the appetite for an all-island approach to women and peacebuilding, and that he was glad to see the significance of the progress made.



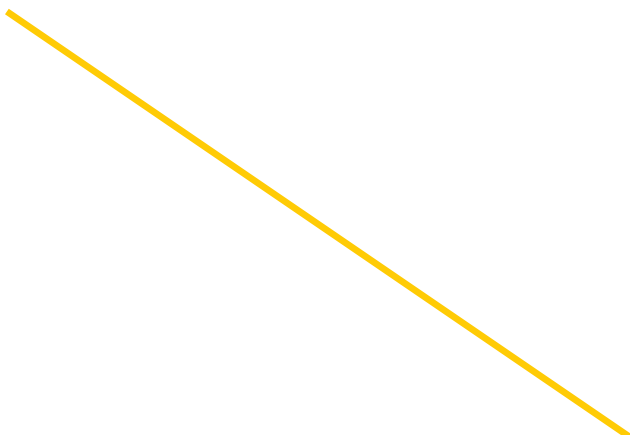
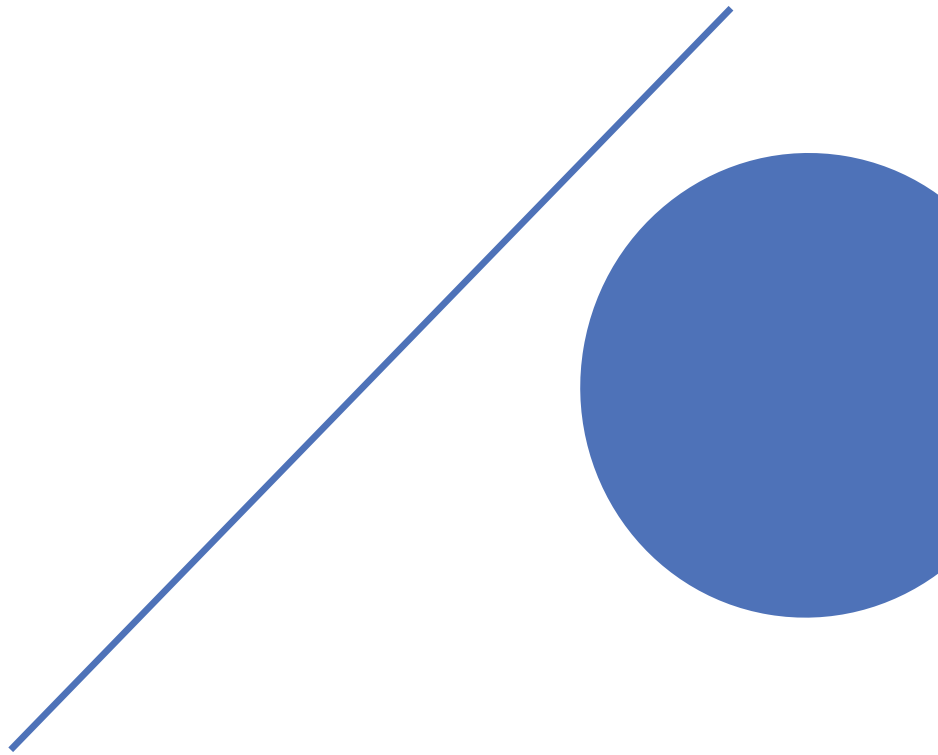


Voices in Peacebuilding panel

Evidence demonstrates that women in peace processes are more likely to focus on reconciliation, economic development, and transitional justice – all critical elements of a sustained peace. Such alliances are already evident across civil society on this island but remain an underutilised resource in advancing the peace process. Panellists discussed the progress, and the barriers, that women peacebuilders face on our shared island, with particular focus on threats to safety, insecure funding, and a lack of visibility for women peacebuilders.

The role of education in peacebuilding and reconciliation panel

There is a strong global imperative for understanding the essential connection between positive human development outcomes and ending recurrent cycles of conflict and violence. Education has an essential role to play in breaking that cycle by building understanding and reconciliation. Panellists discussed the role of education in peacebuilding, reconciliation and understanding, with particular focus on the failure to provide adequate integrated education provision and the underutilisation of education in building better understanding between communities. It was agreed that a more joined-up approach to utilising education as a peacebuilding tool is needed North and South.



Encounters Programme

The Encounters Programme runs in tandem with the All-Island Women's Forum as a series of monthly meetings bringing together one organisation from the North and one from the South, who work in an area of commonality but who may not have had an opportunity to build a working relationship. The programme has been facilitated by Ailbhe Smyth. Ailbhe was the founding head of Women's Studies at University College Dublin and is a long-standing LGBTIQ and feminist activist. She played a central role in the marriage equality and abortion referendum campaigns.

Programme Aims

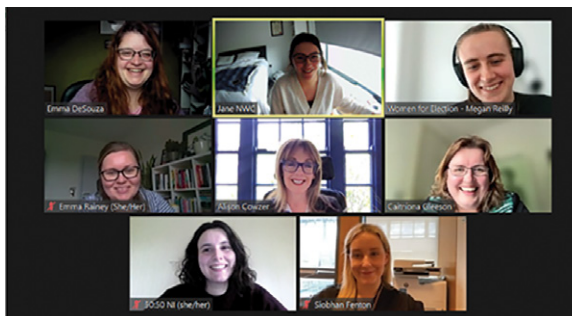
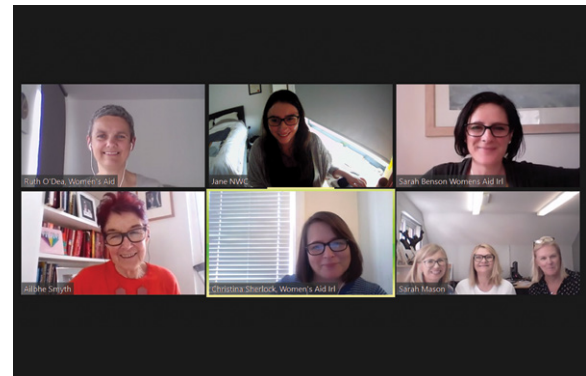
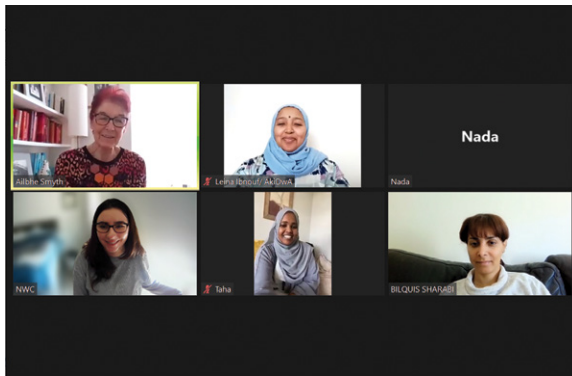
The Encounters Programme identifies organisations North and South, including at local, regional, and national levels, who may have areas of commonality.

The objective is to facilitate an information-sharing meeting where two organisations can meet to get to know one another, discuss their work and build a relationship.

It is hoped that through these encounters, organisations will be inspired to look at how they can partner or collaborate with others in practical ways to achieve shared outcomes, by:

- building greater understanding of the issues and challenges they face in their work
- establishing practical channels of cross-border communication and exchange
- potentially leading to greater opportunities for collaboration on specific aims and issues

A clear overall theme of the Encounters programme was the challenge of ensuring women are seen and heard within their community. In the Encounter between Herstory – Women in Loyalism, Women's Collective Ireland Monaghan, and Women's Collective Ireland North Leitrim the challenge of ensuring women are seen and heard within their community was a recurring theme, with some very practical questions being explored on how each organisation has and continues to manage this challenge. This Encounter proved



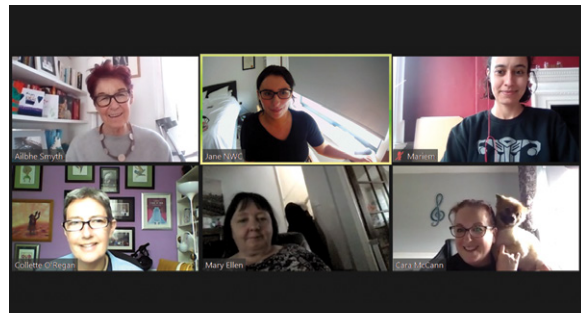
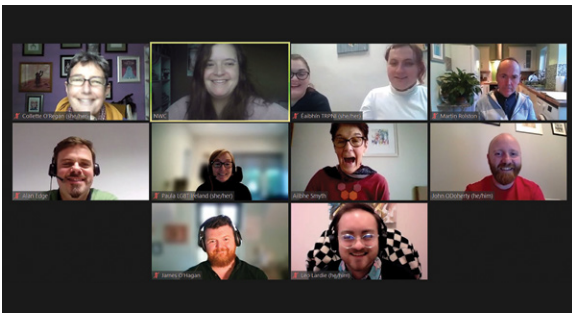
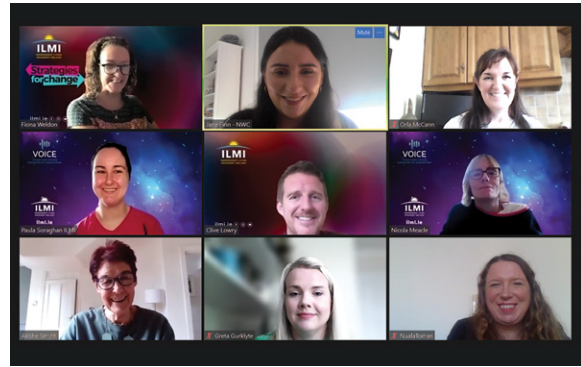
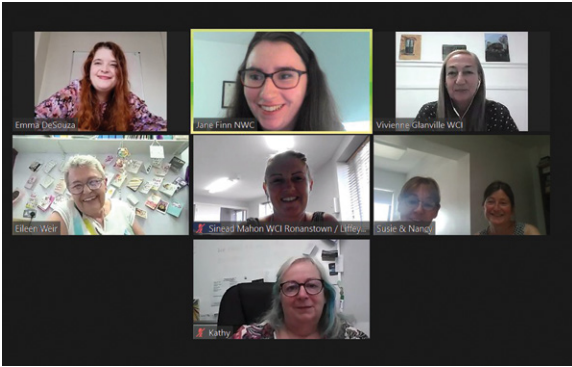
particularly effective in building understanding and finding common ground, the three organisations spoke about some of the everyday challenges currently facing each organisation, and the impact COVID-19 has on their work. It was noted that for the Women in Loyallism group that there were challenges that were specific to the identity of loyalism and how this can pose a bigger challenge than being a woman, a distinct point had been made about the curiosity of the topic of loyalism, and an interest to learn more about this.

At the conclusion of the Encounter, on reflection, participants were incredibly enthusiastic and encouraged to continue contact. Several groups that participated in the Encounters Programme spoke enthusiastically about further contact with a notable interest in meeting in person.

Whilst many of the Encounters presented organisations who have never interacted with an opportunity to connect, it was also an opportunity for some participants to reconnect. The Encounter between Women's Aid Ireland and Women's Aid Federation NI presented an opportunity to reconnect participants who through this sector of work, had previously encountered one another. It was noted that several the participants had in fact visited each other's offices on previous

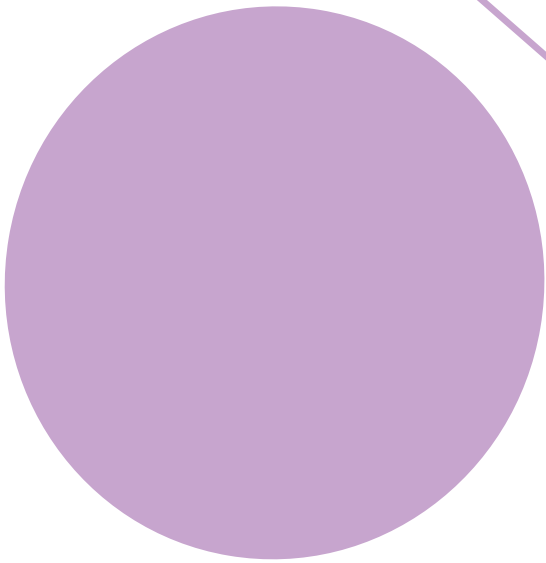
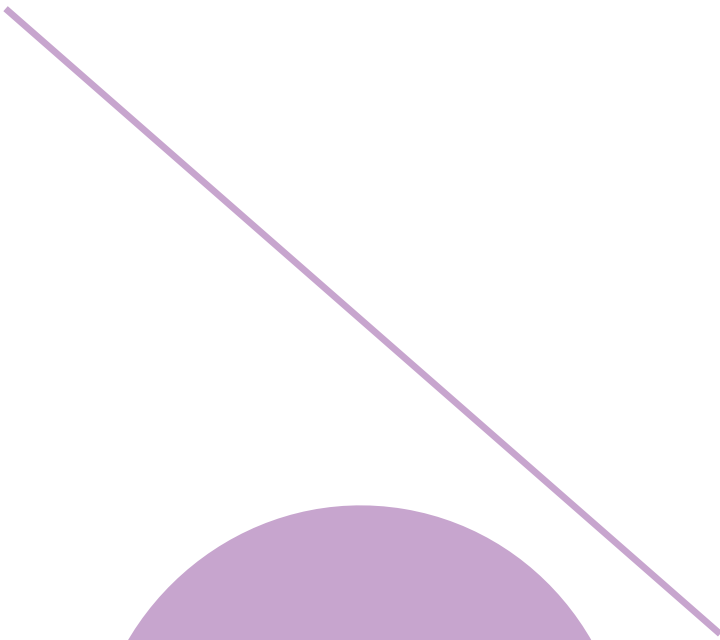
occasions. It was clear in this encounter that many of the participants would have welcomed the opportunity for an in-person meeting and a continuation of the conversation. The suggestion of regular meetings was raised as a potential way for Women's Aid Federation NI and Women's Aid to stay in communications. It was particularly noted at the conclusion of the 2-hour session, how the organisational leads exchanged contact information for immediate follow-up at the conclusion of the session. This was seen to be greatly encouraging and welcoming from the facilitator.

There was general curiosity in the operational aspects of each other's work across all the Encounters with a lot of practical questions being asked about funding, premises and where there was commonality and differences in this. At the conclusion of the Encounters programme, on reflection, participants were incredibly enthusiastic and encouraged to continue contact, with a notable desire to meet in-person, it is considered that there is enormous potential for follow-up with many of the participant groups. All participants found a range of similarities between their groups, and the ideas of ensuing that women's voices are heard and seen was something they had all had challenges with.



Groups that participated in the Encounters programme include:

- Women's Collective Ireland (WCI)
- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network
- The Rainbow Project
- LGBT Ireland
- HEReNI
- Women's Collective Ireland Monaghan
- Women's Collective Ireland North Leitrim
- Herstory – Women in Loyalism
- Corrymeela Community
- Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation
- Horn of Africa People's Aid Northern Ireland (HAPANI)
- AkiDwA
- 50:50 NI
- Women for Election
- Women's Aid Federation NI
- Women's Aid Ireland
- Shankill Women's Centre
- Falls Women Centre
- Women's Collective Ireland – Rowanstown
- Disability Action NI
- Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)





Public webinars

The All-island Women's forum also hosted a series of public webinars. These webinars were an opportunity to highlight a particular issue or mark a moment in time and included a broad and diverse range of speakers. The Forum marked both Good Relations Week, and International Women's Day 2022.

Expanding Good Relations – More than Two Communities

“Migrant women from so many different backgrounds have so much to contribute to

the conversation, once we have conversations, testimonies from those with lived experience, we can't go wrong with the actions and the strategies and the way we are moving forward”.

— **Oluchi Porter**, Chairperson of Board of Directors, AkiDWA

To mark Good Relations Week 2021, the All-island Women's Forum hosted a panel discussion exploring the diversity of the island and how as a society we are moving beyond the binary concept of “two communities”, yet outdated dualities remain – unionist or nationalist, British or Irish, North, or South. Panellists discussed shifts in

identity, the emergence of multiculturalism and the many ways in which we are one community such as Climate, Women's Rights and Equality. Environmentalist Saoirse McHugh highlighted the incompatibility of borders with climate justice, "Borders in general are so problematic in terms of climate action" "It solidifies this idea that climate breakdown and environmental collapse can be contained within borders, which it unfortunately can't."

Speakers

Co-Host

Orla O'Connor, National Women's Council Director

Co-Host

Emma DeSouza, National Women's Council Women in Leadership Coordinator and Chair and Facilitator of the All-Island Women's Forum

Oluchi Porter, Chairperson of Board of Directors, AkiDWA

Alexa Moore, Founder and Director, TransgenderNI & Activist

Kellie Turtle, Feminist Activist and Researcher

Saoirse McHugh, Environmentalist

The Impact of Covid-19 on Women

"For a lot of the women we work with, lockdown is what they were experiencing their whole lives, they were restricted to who they saw, their relationships, their families"

— Sarah Mason, CEO, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

The immense and disproportionate impact of Covid-19 has been felt by women across Ireland, with many carrying additional caring responsibilities. The European Commission predicts that the Covid-19 crisis will increase the levels of those at-risk of poverty, particularly for already at-risk groups unless policy measures are introduced to prevent this from happening. There is already evidence that this is the case with research showing that more than a third of lone parent families cut back on heating or had fallen behind on bills, and a quarter had cut back on food due to the cost. In addition, 42% of people out of work due to illness or disability had gone without heating due to the financial pressure of the pandemic.

During this panel discussion speakers covered topics including rural isolation, domestic violence, and women's healthcare, all of which were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. On rural isolation, WCI North-Leitrim Coordinator Assumpta Kelly said, "Isolation and exclusion is nothing new to us in this work, our core is connecting women together, to break down that sense of isolation that is so endemic within rural communities. Covid just added a whole new dimension to what was already a difficult situation, all of the issues that women face, also impact upon rural women. They are all exacerbated by distance by being in a rural community".

Speakers

Chaired by Aoife Moore, Political Correspondent of the Irish Examiner

Sarah Mason, CEO, Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

Linda Kelly, Founder of Women Ascend and Member of Covid Women's Voices

Rachel Powell, Women's Sector Lobbyist, Women's Resource and Development Agency

Assumpta Kelly, Coordinator, Women's Collective Ireland North-Leitrim



Women as Changemakers

“You need to look at the process and look at who is not at the table, who is not here to talk about what is on the agenda. Often women and young people are discussed as objects at the table, but they are rarely around the table, deliberating and indeed developing the policies for their own lives. The politics of presence is very important.”

— **Professor Monica McWilliams**, Co-founder of the Women's Coalition, Academic & Author

To celebrate International Women's Day 2022, the All-island Women's Forum hosted an online webinar on the role of women in enacting meaningful change. Understanding and accepting difference was a key theme of the conversation, in speaking about approaching dialogue and changing perspectives, Linda Ervine said, “I wanted us to be respected, but I also wanted to show other people respect as well. And I think that is what has worked for us, and that is what is really important”. Lydia Gratis added that, “The more I engage with people who have different opinions as me, and the more I talk to people, the more I realise you can't be mad at people for what they don't know”. Respect for difference is at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement, in looking forward, speakers spoke about finding common ground in our differences and working collectively to improve the lives of women across the island

of Ireland. The challenges faced by changemakers was discussed with cash and culture remaining significant barriers to women effecting change. In closing Monica McWilliams said, “I learned more from someone who has a very different ideology perhaps, different background, but very likeminded in the way we wanted the political situation in Northern Ireland to change. That was a challenge, and it ended up being one of the most enriching experiences of my life.”

Speakers

Chaired by

Emma DeSouza, NWC Women in Leadership Coordinator and Chairperson and Facilitator of All-Island Women's Forum

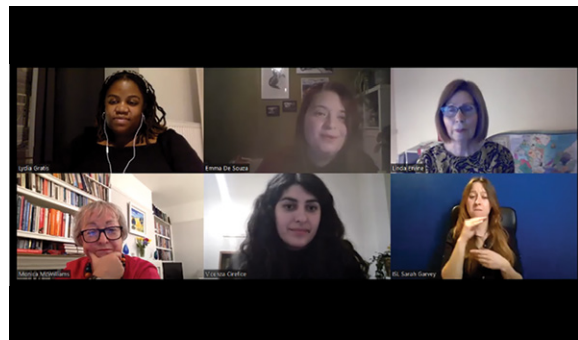
Co-Host

V'cenza Cirefice, Artist, Activist, Eco-feminist & Researcher

Professor Monica McWilliams, Co-founder of the Women's Coalition, Academic & Author

Lydia Gratis, Anti-racism Educator & Activist, Black Wellness Content Creator & Deaf Advocate

Linda Ervine MBE, Language Rights Activists, Manager at Turas & President of East Belfast GAA



Women's Hour: Stories on Identity Across Our Shared Island

"Duality is something that a lot of people struggle with. But it is something very beautiful to be able to have multiple cultures in your life. Something to be cherished."

— **Ola Majekodunmi**, broadcaster, freelance journalist, Gaeilgeoir, public speaker

Women make up over 50 per cent of the population, yet remain underrepresented in the media, as a result the lived experiences and perspectives of women are often unheard. For this final public webinar, the All-island Women's Forum wanted to give women a voice. Women's Hour: Stories on Identity Across Our Shared Island brought women together to recount their lived experiences, Lydia Gratis recounted the challenges of having multiple identities. "It is often met with the response of not knowing how to navigate spaces..." For Dr Claire Mitchell it was complicated being raised Irish in a Protestant family in Northern Ireland, "We were raised to feel Irish. But an awkward sense of Irish-ness because it didn't come with the usual identity markers". The impact of the peace process and concern over the challenges posed by Brexit was a recurring theme, "Part of my identity has been shaped by trying to build as inclusive a future as possible. Learning from others about having difficult conversations, chairing difficult conversations, and mediating agreements", said Bronagh Hinds, while Doire Finn added that, "In the North I believe we are moving away from a binary of Orange and Green. We are welcoming and vibrant. I truly believe these are the most important aspects of our identity, and the most universally shared".

Speakers

Chaired by

Emma DeSouza, NWC Women in Leadership Coordinator and Chairperson and Facilitator of All-Island Women's Forum

Nandi Jola, award winning and international poet

Dr Claire Mitchell, Writer

Doire Finn, activist, and senior constituency manager

Ola Majekodunmi, broadcaster, freelance journalist, Gaeilgeoir, public speaker

Lydia Gratis, Creative, Activist, Educator

Bronagh Hinds, Founder DemocraSHe, and founding member of the NI Women's Coalition

Jennifer Okeke Campbell, NWC Deputy Chair and Anti-trafficking Coordinator, Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI)

Colette O'Regan, Senior Training and Advocacy Coordinator, LGBT Ireland



Our Future Work Together

It has been clear from the level of engagement and the breadth of issues raised that the All-island women's forum is an essential and evolving space in civic society across the island of Ireland, with huge untapped potential. NWC sees this project as a long-term strategic piece of work and will be seeking funding to continue to grow this essential work.

Challenges and learnings

The first term provided many learnings, it became evident that there are barriers to understanding North and South, and that at times there can be a nervousness in engaging, particularly around issues that have become politicised such as post-Brexit rights. The level of work involved to alleviate concerns, build trust, and encourage participation was far greater than originally envisioned, in both the main forum and with the Encounters programme. Additional funding provided at the mid-term point allowed for a part time administrative assistant which was beneficial to the project. Maintaining consistent membership also proved challenging at times, with difficulty in maintaining representation from highly marginalised communities on the forum. To ensure inclusion of underrepresented, marginalised, and often overstretched groups, more supports are required and have been included in a funding application for the forum's second term. NWC has worked in consultation with forum members to gather feedback on how to improve the space, which requires considerable time and commitment from members. We have developed a strategy for the second term which we feel will build on the strengths of the first term and continue to deepen understanding and learnings.

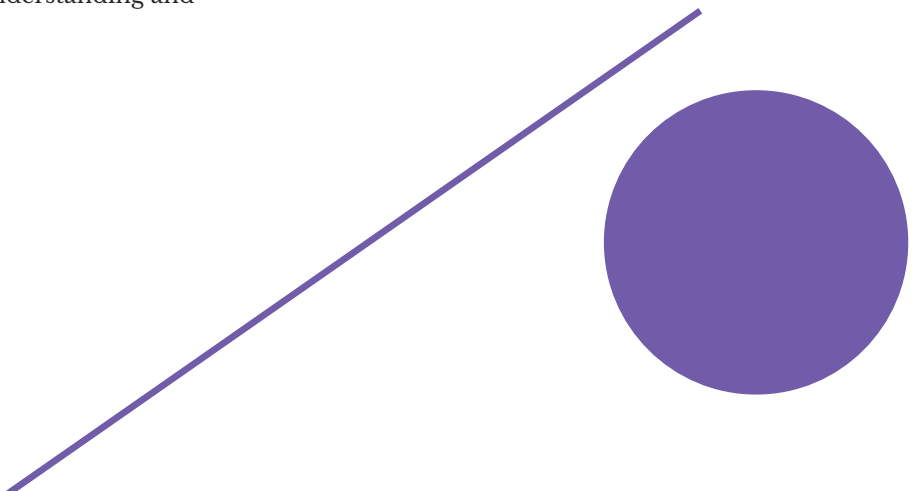
Future work of the forum

The project has clearly demonstrated its ability to break down barriers in understanding, both between communities in Northern Ireland, and between North and South, creating a new space for dialogue and building understanding. The forum has the potential to further strengthen North-South links through the development of new strengthened relationships. It serves as a necessary and timely reminder of the value of women's voices in peacebuilding and the need to redouble efforts for the inclusion of women's voices.

The forum will continue to successfully repair relationships, and issues which have led to barriers and division as well as build on developing strong civil society links that encompass all communities and foster greater understanding.

The forum does this by bringing together a diverse group of representatives from civil society across the island of Ireland, including those often left out of the conversation. The strategic aim of the forum is to provide a space for dialogue to build understanding and repair relationships as well as developing and identifying key areas of commonality for women across the island. In its second term the forum will be taking forward a community development strategy as we work to expand the reach, learnings, and opportunities of this space.

Further, the work of the forum will help inform policy decision makers on how to better include women's voices at the decision-making table.



Membership of the Forum



Forum Chairperson and Facilitator

Emma DeSouza is the Women in Leadership Coordinator at the National Women's Council of Ireland, and Chairperson and Facilitator of the All-island Women's Forum. Emma leads on NWC's national-level work in furthering women in leadership and decision-making spaces. Leading on campaigns such as 'Balance the Odds', for a legislative gender quota for women on boards and the 'Stop Online Abuse' campaign to address social media abuse against women in politics. Emma is also a writer and civil rights campaigner who successfully reaffirmed the identity and citizenship provisions of the Good Friday Agreement by securing legislative changes to domestic UK immigration law. She works in constitutional law, enforceable human rights protections, and peacebuilding across Ireland. Emma was honoured by the Brehon Law Society in New York in 2022 for her work in protecting international human rights on the island of Ireland. Emma is the Vice-chair of votingrights.ie and sits on the board of Directors of 50:50NI. Emma has a BA (Honours) in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics. She is a regular contributor to the Irish Times and has by-lines in the Irish Examiner, The Guardian, HuffPost UK, Byline Times, Open Democracy, and more. Her first book, on how individuals can challenge the state and change the law, is in development.



Nicole Parkinson-Kelly is 23 years old and living in Belfast where she works as a Talent Acquisition Consultant for AMS. She graduated from Ulster University in 2019 with a degree in Social Policy. Nicole has been passionate about social justice, social mobility, and cross-community organisations since being involved in the National Citizen Service with Cooperation Ireland as a teenager and now as the Vice Chair of the Northern Ireland Youth Forum. She is passionate about meaningful youth participation in politics and creating a fair, equal and diverse society. She is a current member of the Integrated AlumNI and has previously served two terms as Vice President for Education in UUSU striving to make Higher Education more accessible and organising Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion campaigns.



Danielle Roberts is the Senior Policy Development Officer at Here NI, a Belfast based charity which empowers and supports lesbian and bisexual women and their families. In this role she is co-chair of the LGBTQI+ Strategy co-design group and co-chair of Reclaim the Agenda. For the past few years Danielle has been working on a PhD project at UU researching barriers to PUL women's political participation. Danielle is also involved in feminist activism with Belfast Feminist Network and Alliance for Choice, and co-organiser of the annual Reclaim the Night Belfast march against street harassment and gender-based violence.



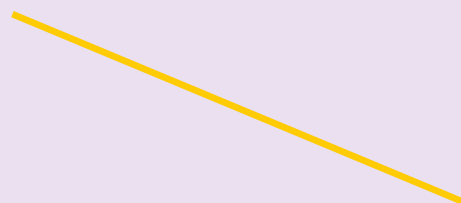
AnnMarie O'Kane is the Information Manager for the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Annmarie manages the Border People project which provides practical information for people crossing the border to live, work, study or retire. The implications of Brexit and the diverging right of citizens is a priority concern for the project and has guided activities in recent years.



Dr Jane Morrice was a teenager when the 'troubles' began. This led to a career centered on peace building, Europe, and equality. A founder member of the NI Women's Coalition, involved in the Good Friday Agreement, she was elected to the first NI Assembly and Deputy Speaker in 2000. Previously she was EC representative to NI and helped set up the EU PEACE Programme. A BBC Belfast reporter, she also served as Deputy Chief NI Equality Commissioner. She represented NI on the Brussels-based Civic Forum (EESC) and Vice President in 2013. She currently serves as Director of the Integrated Education Fund, Member of the Brussels branch of Women in International Security (WIIS), Co-Chair of the Museum of the Troubles and Hon President of the European Movement NI. Jane has authored several reports on EU peace building and has been on missions in Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Turkey promoting the role of women in conflict resolution. In 2021, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Queens University Belfast.

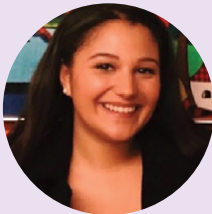


Eileen Chan Hu is a social entrepreneur and Founder and Executive Director, CRAICNI. Born in Belfast, of first-generation Chinese, Eileen is passionate about adding diversity, inclusion, creativity, and colour to our society. Her 25 years' experience in the field of race covers English language teaching, community development, community safety initiatives and health and wellbeing. Eileen has sat on an array of boards, was a member of the Centenary Forum and an Equality Commissioner (2018 – 2020). She is currently on the All-Island Women's Forum and is Vice Chair of Migrant and Minority Ethnic Council NI, Trustee on New Europeans UK, and Horatio's Garden. Eileen has been a member of the Belfast Speakers circle and has spoken on race equality, social entrepreneurship, and women issues. In 2021, Eileen was a TEDx Speaker. Her TEDx talk: 'GaiWaak, Made in Belfast, Made with Purpose', presented both her cross-cultural experience and the philosophy she inherited from her parents. Running an award-winning social enterprise, 2021 Best Education Initiative in Inclusion and Diversity, SME News, CRAICNI's mission is to Cultivate Respect, Appreciate Inclusion in Communities in Northern Ireland, working regionally across the island of Ireland, Europe and globally. CRAICNI's goal is to develop and deliver quality learning experiences that focus on integration, cohesion, and inclusive action through raising cultural awareness. <http://www.craicni.com/> One of Eileen's most enjoyable activities is running the South Belfast Lantern Parade. These lanterns bring hope in the dark winter months and symbolise the future she wants for everyone who lives here.





Kimberly Robertson is the Chairperson of East Belfast GAA, as well as the camogie secretary. She works in Financial Compliance and has lived in Belfast for eight years, having emigrated from the United States. She has a bachelor's degree in British and Irish History with a minor in Peace and Conflict Studies from UMass Lowell and a Master of Arts in Irish Studies from QUB.



Kendall Bousquet is the Migration Justice Advocacy Officer at Migrant Centre NI, an organisation that provides advice and support to migrant and ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland and tackles racism and discrimination through education, advocacy, awareness raising, and direct services. She has worked at MCNI since 2019 and her work focuses on migrant rights and lobbying for a more just immigration system. She sits on the Women's Policy Group for Northern Ireland.



Alexandra Brennan is the Coordinator of the Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group (NIWBG), which scrutinises policy and budgetary matters with a gendered lens to bring attention to the different ways in which women and men are affected by government-level decision-making; our ultimate aim is to secure a gender equal economy. Prior to coming into this role in

October 2020, Alex completed my MA degree in Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at QUB and have worked in various media and communications roles in the US. She is passionate about gender equality and how economic policy can be used to promote equality.



Avila Kilmurray, a native of Dublin, has an active involvement in the community sector in Northern Ireland since 1975. She has also actively worked on women's issues - from domestic violence to women's rights and from antipoverty activism to be a founder member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC). Avila was Director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (1994-2014) and is currently working with the Social Change Initiative (SCI). She is author of 'Community Action in a Contested Society: The Story of Northern Ireland' (Peter Lang, 2017)



Dr. Joanna McMinn is in adult education, community development and feminist activism in the women's sector. She worked as the Director of the Women's Resource and Development Agency in Belfast from 1983 until 1994, when she undertook a doctoral thesis, *The Changers and the Changed*, on women's education and the promotion of social justice for women in Ireland, north and south. From 2001 to 2009 Joanna worked as the Director of the National Women's Council, and was a founding board member of Hanna's House, an all-island feminist network. Currently, Joanna is facilitating workshops north and south, as part of an Ulster University research project: Constitutional Report Name 4 Conversations: Gendering cross-border debates on the question of Irish unification



Eileen Weir is a well-respected community development practitioner with extensive experience in building community capacity, supporting community cohesion and strategic community development. Eileen has project managed the Report Name 7 design, implementation, and evaluation of a broad range of community development programmes. Eileen has been involved in community development practice for most of her working life, using a Community Development approach in her community relations work, with the aim of empowering communities to identify their needs and to be pro-active in addressing these needs. Eileen has also worked to establish neighbourhood networks to enable the groups to meet, share information and build capacity. Eileen is also a fully qualified STEPS practitioner, accredited by the Pacific Institute. Eileen has delivered the programme to a wide range of groups across Belfast, including Rathcoole. Eileen's unbiased approach through her community development work has helped her to reach out to various communities and build relationships and networks throughout the Island of Ireland. In 2018 Eileen received two prestigious awards the first presented by CRC Community Relations Council "Exceptional Achievement Award" and the second the "McCluskey Civil Rights Award" for her role in Human Rights, Civil Rights and Peace Building activities.



Elaine Crory has been the Good Relations Co-Ordinator with Women's Resource & Development Agency (WRDA) since July 2018. In that role, she has delivered community relations programmes to hundreds of individual women and multiple women's groups across Northern Ireland in multiple projects and produced a number of reports on this work. She also works on the Raise Your Voice programme with WRDA which tackles sexual harassment and violence in communities. She has a background in academia and also deliver adult education programmes on history and political thought in various community settings and am an activist with several feminist groups in NI.



Paula McAliskey is the Community Engagement Officer for Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) which is a membership-based organisation established in September 2006 to promote and support rural women in Northern Ireland. Her main focus is to listen to the issues affecting rural women and identify what support NIRWN can provide. She is responsible for increasing the capacity of NIRWN to reach more rural women regionally, gathering and sharing information and providing a link between rural women and decision makers. Some of these issues include Childcare & Caring Responsibilities, Rural Transport, Social Isolation, Health & Wellbeing, Digital Poverty and Broadband Access, etc.



Tara Grace Connolly is a long-standing youth activist and volunteer from Belfast. A double graduate of Queens University Belfast, Tara Grace holds a Bachelor of Law with Politics and a master's degree in International Relations, where her thesis studied the implementation of United Nations Security Council Report Name 5 Resolution 1325 in Northern Ireland during and after the Good Friday Agreement. Tara was Ireland's UN Youth ambassador 2020/21 - first person from Northern Ireland to hold this position. Tara Grace is currently an Adult Advisor to the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, having previously served as Treasurer and Chairperson, and Chairperson of the Belfast Youth Forum. An alumni of the Washington Ireland Programme in 2017, Tara Grace is currently a Workplace Coordinator for the Class of 2021. Tara Grace is also a member of the US Embassy Youth Council and Rethinking Conflict's "Emerging Young Leaders Programme." In 2018, Tara Grace co-founded "Our Future, Our Choice NI," a UK-wide campaign calling for a People's Vote on Brexit and encouraging young people to vote in the 2019 UK General Election. Tara Grace currently works with BBC Northern Ireland.



Dr Salome Mbugua is a researcher, gender equality activist and human right advocate. She is the CEO of AkiDwa -The Migrant Women's Network Ireland. Her professional experience spans over 20 years of work experience in civil society working with under-represented groups in particular women, children, and the youth, in Europe and Africa.

Her strong belief in equality and justice has shaped her career, leading to engagement

with policy makers in Ireland, Europe and International level. Dr Mbugua serves at various advisory committee, expert groups and boards in Ireland and at European level. She is the co-president of European Network of migrant women and seats in the expert group on violence against women with European Women Lobby, seat on EU expert group on economic migration. In Sept 2018 she was appointed by Tánaiste to chair the working group developing Ireland 3rd National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. She serves as the chair of Equality Diversity & Inclusion project board with Public Appointment Services. She is 2015 OHCHR-UN Fellow of people of African Descent and 2010 Eisenhower Fellow on women Leadership

Dr Mbugua holds a Doctorate from Trinity College Dublin with her research focusing on integrating women into peacebuilding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a specific case study of Goma. She also holds a master's degree in Equality Studies from UCD.



Collette O'Regan has been working with LGBT Ireland since 2017. As Senior Training & Advocacy Coordinator she is responsible for internal training (helpline volunteers, peer support group facilitators) and external training (delivering LGBT Awareness training to various service providers). Strong priorities in Collette's advocacy role are older LGBT+ people's visibility/inclusion through the LGBT Champions Programme; peer support to and advocacy on LGBT+ asylum seekers living in Direct Provision; and visibility and inclusion of LGBT+ Travellers & Roma in key support services. Before LGBT Ireland, Collette worked for 8 years in human rights and advocacy in Cambodia, where she also co-founded Rainbow Community Kampuchea (RoCK) in 2009, Cambodia's first and (since 2014) legally registered LGBT+ NGO. Collette's professional background is community development, community & adult education, and grassroots advocacy. For a period of 10 years 1997-2007 Collette worked in community development and leadership in the border counties and

in Northern Ireland using the Training for Transformation methodologies and it. Collette holds an MSc in Equality Studies from the School of Social Justice, UCD.



Clare Austick is the current President of the Union of Students in Ireland for the academic year of 2021-2022. She is also the former USI Vice President for Welfare. Clare is from Galway and studied Science, specialising in Chemistry at NUI Galway. She became involved in student activism as a Class Rep where she enjoyed representing the views of her class and resolving course issues. She then went on to being the part-time Equality Officer, Vice President for Welfare & Equality and President of NUI Galway Students' Union. Clare is passionate about breaking down the barriers to accessing third level education, student wellbeing, social justice & equality, promoting consent, body image and women's rights.



Dr Mary C. Murphy holds a Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration and is a senior lecturer in politics in the Department of Government and Politics, University College Cork. Mary is the President of the Irish Association for Contemporary European Studies (IACES), a former Fulbright-Schuman Scholar, and a fellow of the Centre on Constitutional Change at the University of Edinburgh. Mary specialises in the study of the European Union relationship with Ireland, north and south, and has published extensively on Brexit. She is the author of *Europe and Northern Ireland's Future: Negotiating Brexit's Unique Case* (Agenda Publishing 2018) and is co-author (with Jonathan Evershed) on the forthcoming *Northern Ireland after Brexit: A Troubled Constitutional Future* (Agenda

Publishing 2021). She was co-investigator with colleagues across the UK, on the three-year ESRC project 'Between two unions: The Constitutional Future of the Islands after Brexit' (2017-2020).



Amina Moustafa is the Programme Manager of Glencree's Women's Leadership Programme. She holds a BA in Neuroscience at Trinity College Dublin and is currently completing a PhD at Nottingham Trent University exploring the contentiousness of Muslim women's involvement in sport considering themes such as identity, belonging and anti-Muslim racism within the Irish context. Using sport as a non-formal learning tool to tackle racism, discrimination, and gender inequality, she has worked with various organisations on a local, national, and international level such as Swim Ireland, the GAA and FIFA Foundation to emphasise the need for cultural and religious considerations in the design of community development programmes. She is a Board Member of Sport Against Racism Ireland and has previously been the Project Coordinator of their Hijabs and Hat-Tricks programme encouraging Muslim women to play football after the lifting of FIFA's hijab ban in 2014. In 2018, Amina was selected as one of 10 Michael Johnson Young Leaders from around the world for her contribution to community development and in 2019, she acted as an Ambassador Coach for Ireland encouraging female leadership, gender equality and the sustainable development goals through the medium of sport and brought the Irish women's team to the Final in the Global Goals World Cup in Copenhagen. Amina has also acted as the Project Lead for a variety of EU-funded programmes that engaged young people, youth workers and trainers from various backgrounds across Report Name 13 Europe in Youth Mobility, Leadership Development, Education and Training, and Capacity Building.



Mary Moynihan is a writer, theatre and filmmaker, and Artistic Director of Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality and Smashing Times Theatre and Film Company and a Theatre Lecturer at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama. As Artistic Director of Smashing Times, Mary specialises in using the arts to promote human rights, peace building, gender equality and positive mental health, developing cutting edge, arts-based projects with a range of organisations. Award winning projects include Acting for the Future which uses theatre to promote positive mental health, run in partnership with the Samaritans and the highly successful Women War and Peace using theatre and film to promote equality and peace. Company patrons are First Lady Sabina Coyne Higgins, Senator Joan Freeman, founder of Pieta House, Ger Ryan, actor and Tim Pat Coogan, writer, and historian. Mary has an honours MA in Film Production from DIT and an honours BA in Drama and Theatre Studies from the University of Dublin Trinity College. Mary originally trained as an actor and director at Focus Theatre under the direction of Deirdre O'Connell, her friend and mentor. Mary's theatre and film work are physical-based and focus on primal, visceral, and intuitive responses to vulnerability and conflict and an exploration of self and the other. She focuses on the interconnectedness of the body, voice and imagination and the use of creative physical and spiritual energies, revealing the inner life through physical and intuitive engagements.



Aoife Price is a member of Disabled Women Ireland (DWI) working for the rights of disabled women and non-binary people. She has recently joined the Governments Disability Stakeholders Group which monitors the implementation of government policy around disability. Over the past decade, Aoife has been an active advocate in the area of mental health at national and international level. Aoife works with the European Disability Forum and is an Early-Stage Researcher on the Disability Advocacy Research in Europe project. She is researching social movements with a particular focus how the disability and women's movement work together. As part of this project Aoife is completing a PhD at the Centre for Disability Law and Policy, NUIG. Prior to her current position Aoife worked with the Union of Students in Ireland managing a Student Report Name 11 Mental Health Project. She has also worked with the Centre for Effective Services in Ireland, an organisation linking social research, policy, and practice. She is a graduate with a MSc in Applied Social Research from Trinity College Dublin and a BA in Politics and International Relations from University of Limerick.



Jennifer Okeke Campbell is a community activist and former chairperson of a migrant women's organisation based in Ireland. She is an Executive Board member of the National Women Council of Ireland and was recently elected on the European Network of Migrant Women board. She is currently the Anti Trafficking Coordinator with the Immigrant Council of Ireland and has extensive experience on gender, human rights, and migration issues (refugees, asylum seekers, direct provision). Jennifer holds a BSC from University College Birmingham, and a master's in international Relations from the School of Law and Government, DCU, where she is a PhD candidate exploring the experience of migrant women trafficked into/through Ireland for sexual exploitation.

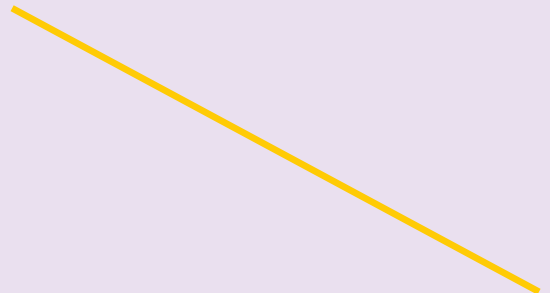


Ethel Buckley Active from a young age in various women's rights, anti-racist and political campaigns in her native Cork, she continued her social activism during several years of working and studying in San Francisco in the United States. She joined the union's Strategic Management Team in 2011 when she was promoted to National Campaigns and Equality Organiser. In this role, Ethel led campaigns to mobilise young, migrant and LGBT workers. As Services Division Organiser since 2015 she has been central to the Justice for Clerys Workers campaign, organising the National Women's Football Squad and securing legislation to restore collective bargaining rights to certain categories of freelance workers. She has also worked on ending involuntary low working hours and zero hours contracts. She is a serving member of the Executive Council of the ICTU having first been elected in 2013. She had the honour of being appointed the inaugural Trade Union Organiser

in Residence at Ruskin College, Oxford, England. She lives in Dublin with her husband and their three children.



Síona Cahill (pronouns: she/her) is a campaigner, organiser, and radio contributor from Co. Longford. Síona is 29 and holds a BCL Civil Law and Sociology from Maynooth University. In 2020 she was appointed head of public affairs and communications with Gaisce - The President's Award. Síona is the former President of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) and has led campaigns on social justice issues from #MakeGráTheLaw (Ireland's Marriage Equality referendum, 2015) to Students for Choice (Repeal of Ireland's Eighth Amendment, 2018). Ms. Cahill was appointed to the expert group regarding issues of Sexual Consent on campuses for the Department of Education and has previously sat on the steering group for the Irish National strategy for women and girls as well as working on the first National LGBTI+ youth strategy. She is a non-executive director of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre as well as the Irish Family Planning Association. Ms. Cahill was shortlisted alongside Greta Thunberg in the 'Women in Youth Activism' category of the Women in Europe Awards for her work on civic participation and voter registration, received an NXF GALA for her work on LGBTI+ awareness, and was recently listed by the Irish Examiner as one of 100 women changing Ireland today.





Lydia Gratis is the President of the European Union for Deaf Youth (EUDY), making her the 1st Black president in its 35 years of existence.

Prior to being president, she was president of the Irish Deaf Youth Association, one of the 30 deaf youth associations across Europe (2017-2019) Lydia then went on to establish Ubuntu European Deaf Youth, a youth group for Black and Brown Deaf youth all over Europe, supported by the European Union for Deaf Youth, a European non-profit organisation consisting of 30 national associations all over Europe. With the mission to create a Europe where all young deaf people are able to come together and share their experiences across cultures and boundaries, so they can enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. Full social and political participation empowered by non-formal training and cross-cultural youth exchange, including access to education and employment.

Lydia directs non formal education workshops on social justice and wellness topics specifically tailored and centred to community development, under her company Saved By The Sign. Lydia is also on the board of Ireland's national association of the deaf, Irish Deaf Society, and the media manager for the platform "Deaf Women's Space", a global platform dedicated to host workshops and seminars for deaf women by deaf women globally in international sign language. Lydia majored in Anthropology and International development at Maynooth University and works at the Sign Language Interpreting Agency (SLIS), as the Social Inclusion and Communications Officer.



Miriam Holt has over 20 years' experience of working in the area of women's human rights in the community sector, at local and national level. She is CEO of Women's Collective Ireland supporting and advancing disadvantaged women's equality through its' 17 locally based Women's Community Development Projects, in urban and rural communities. The main aims of Women's Collective Ireland are to help to address poverty, social exclusion and gender inequality experienced by women and to give a voice to community women at local and national level. Miriam is committed to a collective feminist movement across the Island and strongly believes that Women's voices, particularly those of marginalized, socially excluded, minority and working-class women, must be included to result in meaningful gender equality.



Tara Farrell has over 20 years' experience in the Community, Voluntary and Education sectors, working in a variety of areas including Project Management, Social Economy, Women's Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and engaging in Broadcast and social media. Tara is the Chairperson of AONTAS, the national Adult Learning Organisation and a Director of Irish Rural Link and Roscommon Women's Network. Tara also lectures in Human Rights and Equality at St. Angela's College (National University of Ireland Galway) in Sligo. Tara is a member of the Steering Group of The New Common Charter and is also part of the Ad-Hoc Group for North-Southeast-West Co-operation. She holds an LLM in International Human Rights Law and has also lectured in Political Science in the University of Limerick and Management Development at Dublin City University.



Encounters Programme Facilitator

Ailbhe Smyth was the founding head of Women's Studies at University College Dublin and is a long-standing LGBTIQ and feminist activist. She played a central role in the marriage equality and abortion referendum campaigns.



NWC Executive Board Representative

NWC Chair Margaret Martin. Most of Margaret's working life centred on women's issues, particularly violence against women, and community education. Recently retired from her role as Director of Women's Aid other key posts included: Women's Education Officer and Deputy Director at AONTAS; Coordinator with POWER Partnership (NWC, WERRC, UCD, Women's Support Network, Belfast, and University of Ulster); and Projects Manager in NWC.



Former Executive Board Representatives

Former NWC Chair Louise Lovett is the CEO of Longford Women's Link (LWL), a substantial rural women's NGO that advocates on the issues that impact women and their families. Louise was recognised for her work by being awarded the Image Magazine Social Entrepreneur Businesswoman of the Year 2017. Prior to working in the community and voluntary sector, Louise gained extensive management and strategic planning experience working in the corporate sector for over 27 years. Louise is Chairperson of Longford County Childcare Committee (LCCC), a member of the Longford LCDC, the Midlands Regional Joint Consultative Housing Forum (MRJHCF), the Longford Westmeath Children & Young People's Services Committee (CYPSC) and of Longford County Council's Socio-Economic Strategic Policy Committee.

