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Domestication of the UK National Action Plan: Considerations from Northern Ireland

0 comments

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This blog is part of the [WPS Forum on 15 Years of UK WPS](#)

Jonna Monaghan and Aisling Swaine discuss how institutions and civil society in Northern Ireland have a role to play in advancing implementation of WPS. They outline two key areas where 'domestication' of WPS through the next UK NAP would be relevant.

Women in Northern Ireland, as anywhere, are a diverse population, with widely differing views on social, political and economic issues affecting the region, including those related to the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and its ongoing peacebuilding processes. However, gender responsive structures, access to high quality services and inclusive decision making systems are vital to the lives of all women and girls. This has long been the focus of women's civil society in Northern Ireland, as a cornerstone for an equal, sustainable and peaceful future for all. Engagement with women by for example [Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network](#) and [Women's Resource and Development Agency](#) shows that women value the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which remains the basis for many of the equality provisions that inform public policy.

Prior to the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 [and indeed since, women's civil society have been instrumental in advancing peace in Northern Ireland.](#) Many organisations see [see](#)

the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda as a significant and relevant international framework that should both inform implementation of the broader peace agreement, as well as be implemented as a distinctive policy agenda in itself. In particular, the sector feels this would help strengthen women's meaningful participation in policy and decision making, and to prioritise gender equality.

Opportunities have been missed, [not least in the context of the UK's National Action Plan \(NAP\) on WPS](#), three iterations of which [have failed to substantively recognise](#) that institutions and civil society in Northern Ireland have a role to play in advancing implementation of WPS.



A gendered approach to peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, particularly in the context of the UK's obligations under the WPS agenda, is as relevant here, as it is anywhere else. While advancing the participation and representation of women, and ensuring gendered responses to the legacy of the Troubles remain ongoing priorities, they also remain to be fully realised.



The next UK NAP should thereby be designed in line with existing [global good practice that evidences the importance of coordination and inter-departmental involvement](#) and leadership on WPS implementation, framed through a NAP. In the case here, it is the leadership available through the devolved administration in Northern Ireland, along with women's civil society actors.

We outline two key areas where 'domestication' of WPS through the next UK NAP would be relevant – participation, which we tie to broader policy concerns across the UK in terms of women's basic needs and rights; and legacy issues related to the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Devolution in Northern Ireland remains volatile, while at the same time,

its role in leading gendered approaches to peacebuilding is an ongoing imperative. The contribution of women and women's organisations to peacebuilding has always been and remains significant, but also goes largely unrecognised. There is ongoing need to address gendered barriers to peace and peacebuilding and for building trust with local communities, a key opportunity through a policy planning tool such as a NAP on WPS which is relevant to this context.

First, while advancing women's participation, a key aim of UNSCR 1325, is a critical concern for Northern Ireland, the UK NAP must also recognise that women's participation is dependent on an effective, rights based policy framework realising gender equality in everyday life – otherwise it is a meaningless concept for the majority of women. Access to childcare, adult social care, transport, education and other basic services is an essential part of this, as is employment legislation and social protection systems that enable women to both make and support their families with dignity.

The current cost of living crisis is disproportionately affecting women, who typically work in the lowest paid, most precarious jobs and manage household budgets on top of other responsibilities. Recent [research](#) by the Women's Regional Consortium on women and debt show that women in low income households often forgo essentials, even food, to provide for their children, with significant physical and mental health consequences. Over half of respondents in this study were in debt, with many forced to resort to high cost lending including loan sharks and in some cases illegal lending, which has links to paramilitarism.



A meaningful approach to WPS must include a commitment to gender responsive policy making, building on mechanisms such as gender budgeting. In a UK context, this could helpfully be implemented by emphasising the principles of UNSCR 1325 as a cross cutting mandate for devolved administrations to prioritise such action.



Research has shown elsewhere that [NAPs can be effective if they get a balance between addressing the practical and strategic needs of women and girls](#) i.e. planning the implementation of WPS in ways that respond to fulfilling the basics of women's everyday and in some cases such as the current financial crisis, basic survival needs, so that from there, their more strategic rights, such as political participation, can be availed of and achieved more equally across diverse demographics of women.

Second, through the devolved administration's implementation of the WPS agenda, it is imperative that peacebuilding responding to the legacy of the Troubles becomes better at being gender responsive. There remains need for recognition of women's experiences of [conflict violence](#) and the associated and ongoing impacts of gendered harm in women's lives. This is particularly important in the context of evolving approaches to dealing with the past, where [gendered responses more broadly](#), and [particularly to gendered violence](#), are lacking.

There is also need for specific recognition and support to the vital work of peacebuilding led by women's organisations at community levels. That includes ensuring that local policy agendas that connect with the WPS agenda, such as the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy currently being [developed by the Department of Justice](#), recognises and takes specific measures to respond to the ways that [enduring paramilitarism influences women's experiences of gendered violence](#), including their [engagement in political leadership and peacebuilding](#).

Fundamentally, the WPS agenda grounds the views of grassroots women and girls as valid representations of the conditions and circumstances faced by their communities and societies. Therefore, an effective UK NAP implemented in Northern Ireland needs to reflect community led and responsive approaches, recognising that the context in each setting will vary, enabling concrete action to be defined, developed and delivered with local women and organisations fully familiar with each context. This would also assist in ensuring domestic and foreign policy coherence, which is significant for the NAP as a meaningful element of UK policy.

The UK NAP should affirm the importance and relevance of implementation of WPS within the UK and as outlined here, with sensitivity particularly important in a domestic scenario with respect to devolved administrations and the specifics of each context, such as outlined here for Northern Ireland. It should legitimise and provide a platform from which responsibility for implementation of WPS is advanced by devolved administrations, responding to, working with and being led by priorities identified by women's civil society.

The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this blog post are those of the author(s) only, and do not necessarily reflect LSE's or those of the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security.

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