



Submission by the National Youth Council of Ireland for Ireland's Third National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security Public Consultation

IT'S TIME TO
CHANGE
THE WORLD



“Together, we can build a world that leaves no one behind, but we must not build it *for* everyone. We must build it *with* everyone” – UN Youth Delegate for Ireland

Introduction

The National Youth Council of Ireland is a national organisation which represents and supports community, voluntary and not for profit youth organisations in Ireland. Founded in 1967, we currently have 51 members across Ireland who represent the scope, scale and diversity of the youth work sector (www.youth.ie/members). At a conservative estimate, youth organisations influence the lives of almost 400,000 young people in every community in Ireland – rural and urban. In turn NYCI works in partnership with other local, national, European and global organisations and institutions to deliver strong outcomes and results that positively impact and support young people in Ireland and internationally.

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) together with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Irish Aid manage the UN Youth Delegate Programme for Ireland with the goal of supporting young people to be agents of change through active engagement in the United Nations. Youth, Peace and Security as a policy issue and focus has gained much ground over the past few years and it is with this in mind, we make our submission.

What action do you think Ireland should take on Women, Peace and Security?

Young People in Conflict – the Missing Peace

- The National Youth Council of Ireland calls for the inclusion of the specific role played by young women and girls, and young men and boys, in conflict in the Third NAP. In line with the recommendations of the UN independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security (The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, 2018), NYCI recommends that the Third National Action Plan systematically applies a gender **and age** lens to all conflict assessments and peacebuilding programming.
- **NYCI calls for a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security** – similar to that in place on Women, Peace and Security. This is something that the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence (2018: 29) said should be strongly considered in its Review of the Irish Aid Programme (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_foreign_affairs_and_trade_and_defence/reports/2018/2018-02-22_report-review-of-the-irish-aid-programme_en.pdf)
- Women and girls are mentioned throughout, but the particular impacts of conflict and violence on young women (and young men) due to their age is not engaged with. This intersection of age and gender is crucial as it further silences and marginalises young women and girls, and prevents them from contributing their valuable input.
- While young people are mentioned in Pillar 4 d), which commits to build public awareness of Ireland’s commitment to the Women, Peace and Security agenda through education with “a particular focus on the empowerment of women among young people, boys and girls,” and girls are mentioned throughout Pillar 3, there is space for more inclusion of young women and girls in more proactive positions. The inclusion of girls in Pillar 3 is important, but it is also key that young women and girls are not exclusively viewed as victims. Similarly, while it is very important to educate young people on Ireland’s commitment to Women, Peace and Security, it is important to acknowledge that young people are themselves disproportionately impacted by conflict and violence.
- Pillar 2, the empowerment, participation and representation of decision making, parallels well the same recommendation made regarding the involvement of youth in all aspects of decision making. It is important to ensure that where women gain representation in formal and informal peace building processes, those women are representative of *different ages* as well as other factors.

Why focus on youth as a specific group, and why include in a report on Women?

- In 2016 approximately **408 million young people between 15 and 29** resided in settings affected by armed conflict or violence, which equates to **1 in 4 young people. 90% of all direct conflict casualties are young men.** The abuses and human rights violations experienced by young women and girls due to their gender is compounded by their age, which so often renders them voiceless and powerless in formal power structures. This is using a definition of young people as those between the ages of 18 to 29.
- Young people face a rights realisation gap that must be addressed to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This grey area emerges when young people are no longer covered under the rights of the child, yet they cannot fully assert their rights as adults yet. This especially makes them vulnerable to state violence, as states use pre-emptive repression out of fear of youthful dissent, particularly due to fears around social media use and false theories of 'youth bulges', which ignores the power differences in society.
- The European Youth Forum notes that the Youth, Peace and Security narrative has so far been too negative, with young people framed as extremists/radicals. This is being countered by UNSCR 2250 and 2419, which recognise the *positive* role of young people and youth movements in peacebuilding.
- Young people are consistently associated with conflict, and framed as 'a problem to be solved' rather than 'partners for peace.' Young men are framed as violent predators or potential spoilers of peace, unfairly demonising all young men, while **young women** are characterised unfairly as **passive victims**, robbing them of their autonomy. **Alternatively, young women are simply invisible in peace building programs that prioritise young men.** Perversely, the young people most likely to gain a seat at the table are those who are themselves leaders of violent groups or militias, who gain access as active agents of violence and conflict. In the case of both young men and young women, gender is unfairly used to stereotype entire groups, weakening their position as agents of peace and change (TMP, 2018).
- Considering that the majority of fighters in conflict are young people, usually young men, it seems strange that the role of young people in conflict prevention is not further explored. The Missing Peace explores the myths that attribute violence to 'Youth Bulges' or a simple lack of employment opportunities, and notes that the majority of young people are peaceful. However, it also outlines how the 'violence of exclusion', relegation of youth to the informal and illicit economies, horizontal inequality and elite capture act as contributing factors to youth recruitment to violent causes.
- The **different experiences of young women**, who often transition to adulthood early due to childbearing and child marriage, and young men who can be left in limbo or

'waithood' due to inability to find financial stability or social status, is an area worthy of exploration and discussion.

- Young people are also disproportionately represented among migrant, refugee and asylum seeking populations. These young people are framed, unfairly, as drains on the social security system or potential threats, rather than as resilient and economically innovative. Therefore young people are highly relevant to Pillar 3c.
- 5551 asylum seekers currently 'live' in the Irish reception system, and 4185 over the age of 13
 - (<http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%2006-2018.pdf/Files/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%2006-2018.pdf>).
 - Between 2014 and 2017, some 219,575 minors came to the EU and Norway unaccompanied, i.e. without a parent or another adult responsible for them, to seek asylum.
 - At least another 48,591 minors came unaccompanied for other reasons, though the number of those outside the asylum system remains largely unknown.
 - The countries with highest numbers of minors applying for asylum in the EU were Germany (71,675), Sweden (45,065), Italy (22,540) Austria (15,500) and Hungary (10,860).
 - The majority of unaccompanied minors were boys (89%). Most were young boys of 16 and 17 years of age (65%) with only a small proportion being less than 14 years old.
 - The majority of unaccompanied minors arriving in Member States are granted refugee status or subsidiary protection, and Member States provide (temporary) residence permits once a positive decision on the application has been taken.
http://emn.ie/files/p_201808090907072018_emn_sythesis_unaccompanied_minors_09.08.2018.pdf

What is different about how young people view peace?

- Young people also have different perspectives on what 'peace' truly means. Peace, according to young people, amounts to more than just the absence of violence – it should include addressing the **symptoms (negative peace)** and engaging with the underlying **injustices (positive peace)**. Conceptions of peace and security deeply **personal**, associated with well-being and happiness. These perspectives were **fundamentally gendered**, especially personal safety, as young women and girls face particular threats including child-marriage, FGM, sexual harassment as a barrier to education or work, and other peace-destroying experiences that are not related to the traditional view of 'conflict.'
- The European Youth forum also notes that security extends to more than just "hard" security terms like policing, borders, peacekeeping etc. It defines security as "about more than the absence of violence," linked to "soft" aspects like social inclusion,

opportunity and wellbeing of society. (From Theory to Practice – Youth Peace & Security Advocacy meeting, 2018).

- The National Youth Council of Ireland produced an educational resource on Peace and Justice (SDG16) in 2017 which looks at Peace from a holistic perspective <http://www.youthdeved.ie/sites/youthdeved.ie/files/PeaceJusticeSDGsResource.pdf>

How can young people contribute to peace? What unique element can they bring?

- Young women, young men, girls and boys contribute to **peace at each phase of the process.**
- **Prevention** of the outbreak of conflict through early intervention approaches
 - E.g. Youth in Kenya adapted the local language, especially Swahili and Sheng, to frame and brand peacebuilding ideas, messages and activities in ways that attract broad understanding and participation (TMP, 2018)
 - E.g. Young women in Gambia organising to address female genital mutilation.
- Build peace in situations of **ongoing conflict**
 - E.g. In Kyrgyzstan girls sought peer-to-peer engagement in their madrasa (religious school) by recording songs of positive narratives of Islam, to prevent their potential support for or recruitment by extremist groups (TMP, 2018)
- Provide **humanitarian support** during conflicts e.g. Yemen or Colombia;
 - E.g. In Yemen, a project run by the Youth Transparency and Building Foundation aims to document human rights violation in Taiz, a city in south-western Yemen. “It is important to grant a fair transitional justice, which is why documentation is crucial at this point”, noted one of its founders (TMP, 2018).
 - E.g. An online application to indicate unsafe urban zones for young women in India.
- **Consolidating** peace in post-conflict settings in both formal and non-formal ways.
 - E.g. Truth and reconciliation processes in Liberia and Sierra Leone.
- Reintegration into society after conflict can be particularly difficult for young people, as it was often a disconnection from society that drove them to violence or extremism initially. Therefore horizontal-level relationships are key for young people who are disengaging, and youth are themselves essential for this kind of mentoring and leadership.
- There is room for more consideration and analysis of the role of young women in these programmes, as The Missing Peace report notes that little attention has been given to the gendered dimensions of youth-led DR (p. 113), and argues that drawing on young women in these active roles has great potential to optimise the

disengagement and reintegration of young women, and possibly to address some of the issues related to gender identity for young demobilising men (TMP, 2018, p. 113).

- The OSCE also recognises the importance of youth, recommending that they must ensure the political participation of young people throughout the entire conflict cycle. They also recommend promoting computer literacy and online security awareness from a young age, particularly among young girls and women. (Group of Friends of Youth and Security, 2017.)

Resources:

1. Department of Justice and Equality Monthly Report, 'Reception and Integration Agency', 2018 (<http://www.ria.gov.ie/en/RIA/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%2006-2018.pdf/Files/RIA%20Monthly%20Report%2006-2018.pdf>).
2. European Migration Network, 'Approaches to Unaccompanied Minors Following Status Determination in the EU plus Norway', 2018 (http://emn.ie/files/p_201808090907072018_emn_sythesis_unaccompanied_minors_09.08.2018.pdf).
3. European Youth Forum, 'From Theory to Practice – Youth Peace & Security Advocacy meeting minutes', 2018.
4. Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and Defence, 'Review of Irish Aid Programme', 2018 (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_foreign_affairs_and_trade_and_defence/reports/2018/2018-02-22_report-review-of-the-irish-aid-programme_en.pdf).
5. National Youth Council of Ireland, 'Peace and Justice: It's up to YOUth', 2018 (<http://www.youthdeved.ie/sites/youthdeved.ie/files/PeaceJusticeSDGsResource.pdf>).
6. Permanent Mission of Spain to the OSCE, 'Group of Friends of Youth and Security', 2017.
7. Youth, Peace and Security General Assembly Security Council, 'The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security', 2018 (<http://undocs.org/en/S/2018/86>)