

OHCHR – Analytical report on a comprehensive approach to promoting, protecting and respecting women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian settings

Submission of Ireland

June 2021

- 1. Please provide information on the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls in humanitarian situations, which include humanitarian emergencies, forced displacements, armed conflicts and natural disasters, including sudden-onset natural disasters and slow-onset events.**

The human rights of women and girls are disproportionately affected in humanitarian crises. Whether from the impact of conflict, displacement, or natural disasters, women and girls are at heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking, unintended pregnancy, maternal morbidity and mortality, unsafe abortions, and child, early and forced marriage. There is also a growing body of evidence, which shows a disturbing trend of sexual violence being employed as a tactic of war. Women also experience higher mortality rates from disasters – some 60 per cent of all preventable maternal deaths in the world take place in conflict, displacement or disaster settings – and their livelihoods tend to be worse affected than those of men. In the context of education, girls in conflict settings are far more likely to be out of school than boys.

- 2. Please provide information on patterns and structures of discrimination and inequalities exacerbated or created by humanitarian settings, which undermine access to health-care services and information, housing, water, sanitation, education and employment, and disrupt protection systems for women and girls.**

Crises compound and aggravate existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities, increasing risks of violence against women and girls and other vulnerable populations such as LGBTIQ+ individuals. In times of conflict, women and girls are at higher risk of, for example, intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household. They also face increased risks of other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) including sexual exploitation and abuse in these situations. While both men and women, and boys and girls, can be victims of conflict-related sexual violence, the overwhelming majority of victims are politically and economically marginalized women and girls. In particular, women and girls face an increased risk of GBV in emergency settings, including refugee camps and IDP settlements.

- 3. Please provide examples of concrete measures taken by your Government or organization to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings. In the context of the humanitarian programme cycle, please provide examples of measures taken to ensure protection of the human rights of women and girls in the different stages of programming (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).**

Since 2013, Ireland has been a member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, and we continue to be active participants in this global initiative of more than 90 governments and donors, international organisations and non-governmental organisations. Its aim is to drive change and foster accountability from the humanitarian system to address GBV from the earliest phases of a crisis and to integrate policies, systems and mechanisms to mitigate gender-based violence and to provide safe and comprehensive services to those affected by sexual and gender based violence.

Most recently, on foot of credible reports of systematic sexual violence against women and girls in Tigray, Ethiopia, the Call to Action grouping, including Ireland, issued a Joint Statement on gender-based violence within the Tigray region condemning this abuse and calling for the humanitarian response to prioritise GBV prevention.

In 2020, Ireland increased investment in the implementation of its Policy for International Development, *A Better World*. *A Better World*¹ commits to scaling up resources and capacity across four policy priorities: Gender Equality; Reducing Humanitarian Need; Climate Action; and Strengthening Governance. On gender, Ireland takes a transformative approach, which involves going beyond the needs of individual women and girls and aiming to address the key structural and institutional barriers to achieving gender equality. In 2020, progress was made in rolling out training, both at Headquarters and Embassies, on gender equality and Women, Peace and Security (WPS). Guidance to ensure that gender equality is integrated into COVID-19 response was issued to staff and partners.

Ireland continues to prioritise WPS implementation through its network of Embassies and Consulates, including through Ireland's Third National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (2019 - 2024)², which is in its third year of implementation. The NAP strengthens Ireland's work in achieving gender equality in conflict-affected contexts, recognising the distinct impact of conflict on women and girls, and the importance of women's participation in leadership and decision-making in conflict and post-conflict situations. Our WPS country-level programming pivoted in response to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first year's progress report was prepared for publication in 2021.

In 2020, Ireland used its platform as Co-chair of the International Committee of the Red Cross Donor Support Group to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including by organising a Policy Forum focused on a 'Gender Sensitive Approach to Humanitarian Action'. Also in 2020, as an outgoing member of the OCHA Donor Support Group, Ireland lobbied for OCHA to deliver on its commitments on gender policy.

¹ <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf>

² [Third-National-Action-Plan.pdf \(dfa.ie\)](https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf)

Significant progress was made on the revision of the UN OCHA Gender Instruction Policy and the Gender Action Plan for 2021.

Ireland has a long-standing relationship with the International Rescue Committee (IRC), including through a three-year Strategic Partnership of €4.8 million for the period 2019 - 2021. This Strategic Partnership was made possible by the establishment in 2013 of a dedicated gender and protection budget line in line with our commitments under the Call to Action. Under this partnership, IRC teams work at the frontline, delivering life-saving services for women and girl survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The partnership covers Burundi, Cameroon, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya, demonstrating Ireland's commitment to responding to the particular needs of women and girls in conflict-affected and fragile contexts and in some of the most protracted and underfunded humanitarian settings in the world. This year we are developing a new multi-annual strategic partnership with the IRC for a three- year period (2022- 2024). This will afford us an opportunity to more fully integrate both practical support and capacity-building of local women's organisations, and to further advance Ireland's commitment to Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Ireland has contributed to the Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap) since 2014, as support to GenCap is in line with Ireland's international commitments to address gender issues in humanitarian crises, including the Grand Bargain and the Call to Action. From 2014-2019 Ireland provided €1.1 million in funding to GenCap (€150,000 in 2014 and 2015 respectively, and €200,000 each year from 2016-2019).

GenCap is an initiative developed by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) since 2007. GenCap seeks to facilitate and strengthen capacity and leadership of humanitarians to undertake and promote gender equality programming to ensure the distinct needs of women, girls, boys and men of all ages, are taken into account in humanitarian action at global, regional, and country levels.

Through GenCap, Gender Advisors are deployed to humanitarian crises to support the Humanitarian Coordinator, Humanitarian Country Teams, UN agencies, cluster leads, NGOs and governments. GenCap advisors fill a critical gap by supporting humanitarian organisations to strategically address issues of gender inequality in the planning and implementation of humanitarian responses.

4. What challenges does your Government or organization face in promoting, protecting and respecting women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations? Please elaborate on the nature of these challenges and steps taken to address them.

The challenges posed to protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls in humanitarian crises are being exacerbated by new forms of extremism, xenophobia, intolerance, and isolationism, which

themselves threaten to erode international human rights and humanitarian law. Growing conservatism and increasing pushback against the advancement of rights for women and girls globally are giving rise to conditions whereby even the most basic rights of women and girls are being increasingly undermined.

Ireland engages with and is a member of a range of international groups and organizations focussed on increased advocacy and policy development around gender equality. Examples of these include the Call to Action discussed above and the Generation Equality Forum Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. Ireland's humanitarian funding also supports the implementation of gender mainstreaming in humanitarian responses, to ensure that the increasing needs of women and girls in response to growing challenges to their human rights are specifically targeted in interventions. In 2020, the Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP) – Ireland's primary modality for humanitarian funding to Irish NGO partners – provided €15.8m in funding to support Irish NGOs' response to humanitarian crises in 59 country programmes; 68% of these country programmes included gender equality as a significant or principal objective.

A key feature of activities under Irish Aid's³ Strategic Partnership with the IRC has been the establishment and coordination of Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) as part of the humanitarian response. These safe spaces provide an environment for women and girls to reflect upon and collectively challenge gender inequality, discriminatory social norms and prevailing power imbalances. These WGSS also serve as environments for gender-based programming more broadly, with activities including, for example, individual counselling, culturally familiar recreational activities, skills building, and social integration activities. These WGSS help to aid recovery from experiences of violence, strengthen solidarity and promote social cohesion among women from different backgrounds.

5. Please provide information on international cooperation, technical assistance and humanitarian support provided by the international community, including Member States, and by relevant United Nations agencies and humanitarian actors, to address the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian situations, with a focus on good practices, challenges and lessons learned.

During 2020, Ireland campaigned for an elected seat on the UN Security Council. Taking its seat for 2021-2022 Ireland serves as co-Chair, alongside Mexico, of the Council's Informal Expert's Group on Women, Peace and Security.

Ireland plays an active role in trying to improve the efficiency, quality, and inclusivity of the global humanitarian response. In 2020, Ireland made the case – both bilaterally and through membership of the Call to Action States and Donors Working Group – for the revision of the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and the inclusion of a thorough

³ Irish Aid is the Irish Government's programme for overseas development

assessment of the gendered impacts of the pandemic – in particular the rise in GBV that quickly became apparent.

In 2019, Ireland co-chaired a process to agree an OECD DAC recommendation on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in the development and humanitarian sectors. In 2020, Ireland continued to engage with the OECD DAC reference group on preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, to support implementation of the recommendation.

Ireland also engages with the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, a key forum for promoting international best practice in this area, in order to enhance and promote effective local leadership and international best practice in GBV and gender equality interventions. The Consortium builds leadership to support its shared vision of a world free from GBV including through training, cross learning, and peer-to-peer learning events, and the production of guidance and knowledge products.

Two of the pillars of Ireland's 2019-2021 Strategic Partnership with the IRC are titled "GBV in Emergencies, Policy and Advocacy" and "GBV Learning". Their aims are, respectively, to give increased prominence and priority across global humanitarian frameworks and policies to the needs of women and girls in acute and protracted emergencies, and to consolidate and share learning from across the Strategic Partnership and WPE programming to promote adaptive, inclusive GBV programming, which is accountable to women and girls.

6. Please provide information on the barriers women and girls face in reporting and seeking justice, as well as protection for violations of their human rights in humanitarian settings, including women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination? Please also provide information on mechanisms that operate in your context to ensure access to justice and remedies for human rights violations and abuses that women and girls may experience, thus ensuring accountability. (E.g. judicial and non-judicial mechanisms; truth-seeking initiatives; community-based initiatives; investigative and independent monitoring and/or reporting bodies, community complaint mechanisms; parliamentary-led oversight etc.).

7. What steps has your Government or organization taken to ensure women's and girls' meaningful participation, empowerment and leadership, including that of survivors and victims, in efforts to prevent, reduce the risk of, prepare for, resolve and rebuild from humanitarian emergencies. Please elaborate on any lessons learned, good practices as well as challenges faced.

A central element of Ireland's development policy is ensuring the meaningful participation of women in efforts to promote and protect peace, security, and equality. As a signatory to the Grand Bargain, Ireland ensured that its funding mechanisms and partners increased their support and on-granting to local actors, including women-led organisations. Our

funding to IRC included a component dedicated to capacity strengthening of local actors, and the inclusion of survivors and victims in the humanitarian programme cycle. The next phase of the Grand Bargain will re-commit and strengthen this commitment to locally led humanitarian action, with clear commitments around funding and institutional strengthening to women led organisations.

Through Ireland's core funding to UN OCHA, we provide direct support to the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC). A key focus of the HPC is the full participation of and accountability to affected populations as part of humanitarian responses and development work and in particular the most vulnerable beneficiary constituencies, such as women and girls.

As a Board member of the Generation Equality Forum Compact on Women, Peace and Security, and Humanitarian Action, Ireland has committed to investing at least \$50 million in feminist and women's rights organisations over the next 5 years. Ireland has also pledged \$1.5 million to the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund over the next five years, with earmarked funding for the Rapid Response Window on Women's Participation in Peace Processes. We will invest an additional \$18 million on ending gender-based violence in emergencies and female genital mutilation, and we will continue to support the work of UN Women, having committed to a 60% increase in funding already this year.