

PROJECT PROFILE

Gender and Conflict Transformation

Hub Members

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About the Project

This project addresses the relationship between gender norms and counter-terrorism policy and considers masculinities in the context of fragile conflict settings that intersect with terrorist groups and engagement with violent actors. The research uses a gender analysis to examine how states manage conflict, violence and terrorist threats while paying close attention to the gendered impacts of both terrorism and counter-terrorism. Informed by project lead Professor Fionnuala Ní Aolain's work as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Counterterrorism, this project draws on insights gained during Special Rapporteur country visits, reports to the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, interface with UN entities and policy analysis to explore these issues in detail.

The project overlaps with several outputs specific to Northern Ireland, focused on learning the lessons from the Northern Ireland conflict related to gender, conflict and violence on a global scale. Northern Ireland is widely regarded as a triumphant story for transformation to a more peaceful coexistence. However, this success narrative requires further examination and critique. This project looks at the limits and temporality of the Northern Ireland peace and gender inclusive "success" story and questions the limits of gender and conflict transformation if Northern Ireland is one of its best-case scenarios – where it is only some 30 years after the peace agreement that we begin to see real shifts towards a gender-inclusive politics.



Everything I've learned and everything I know about conflict and violence is rooted in that fundamental experience of growing up and being shaped by the Northern Ireland conflict. "

PROFESSOR FIONNUALA
NÍ AOLÁIN

Key Findings

- **There is a false assumption that counter-terrorism measures are neutral, and that men and women are not differently affected by their use.** For example, most of the targets of countering terrorism finance measures are men in the Global South. But in reality, the impacts of these measures also acutely hit women and children, especially in cases where the women's income is tied to the man's and their access to banks or capital is negotiated through the man. When you target a man, you are effectively targeting a woman who might have very little financial autonomy to be able to then mediate or mitigate the harm that is done to her.
- **Absence of women in security spaces. Women remain under-represented in security roles and processes.** When women are present, it is often in lower-ranking positions of power and done so through tokenistic efforts aimed at the appearance of gender diversity rather than the practice of addressing structural gender inequalities and redistributing power more equitably.
- **Anti-terrorism and security measures are not detached from fundamental inequalities, and security measures are increasingly being used against persons of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and women.** Counter-terrorism misuse has pervasive and evidenced discriminatory aspects, specifically the misuse of counter-terrorism measures against religious, ethnic and cultural minorities, women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ and gender-diverse persons, Indigenous Communities, and historically discriminated against groups in society. With no globally agreed definition of terrorism, states have unilateral power to define who is a terrorist or extremist often without consequence.



Counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism are being used to target, constrain, and attack civil society across the globe. But civil society are the ones who protect and insulate our societies from the conditions that produce violence. "

PROFESSOR FIONNUALA NÍ AOLÁIN



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- **There are layered and multi-dimensional consequences for civil society actors being subject to counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism misuse.** These consequences include judicial harassment, administrative measures, counter-terrorism financing restrictions, listing and sanctions, and the weaponisation of new technologies such as spyware and drones. The misuse of multiple measures sequentially or together compounds the scale of human rights violations experienced by individuals, their families, and the communities to which they belong.

Recommendations

These recommendations are drawn from the “Global Study on the Impact of Counter-Terrorism on Civil Society & Civic Space” and Ní Aoláin’s UN General Assembly reports.

The United Nations and Its Member States

- **Reorient away from militarised approaches to counter-terrorism programmes, and prioritise investments in rule of law-based approaches throughout the work of all UN entities, to focus on addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism and violence.** This includes agencies, funds and programmes that specialise in legal and security sector reform, good governance, gender equality and women’s peacebuilding, and broader community-based violence prevention focusing on those core areas of work rather than adapting programming to demands of counter-terrorism narratives.
- **Assume accountability for existing commitments to concretely mainstream gender equality and human rights.** This should specifically be done through transparent and urgent implementation of the gender-marker within the UN Office of Counter Terrorism, in consultation with UN Women and the Controller’s Office, and adopt overdue procedures on the allocation of a minimum 15% of all funds for counter-terrorism efforts to human rights and gender equality, as originally recommended in 2015 by the United Nations Secretary-General.
- **Establish effective and transparent accountability mechanisms for violations of human rights resulting from the misuse of counter-terrorism measures.** Where such patterns of misuse are identified, they must be named, and where cumulative patterns of misuse are identified, technical assistance and capacity building must cease and be subject to a revised risk assessment. The Counter-Terrorism Committee and its Executive Directorate must find effective measures politically and legally to address such misuse including consideration of “grey lists,” namely a formal mechanism to identify member states who abuse human rights while countering terrorism.
- **Rebalance domestic budgets and allocations to address the prevention of violence in a sustained, long-term and meaningful way.** This requires

participatory budget processes, budgeting, and allocation of adequate resources to strengthening of the rule of law, the institutionalisation of human rights; the advancement of accountability; and mainstreaming of anti-corruption and structural commitments to ensure prevention. It means less growth in counter-terrorism norm production and institutions and accepting the value proposition of investment in creating the conditions that effectively prevent terrorism, including a functional and diverse civil society.

Regional Organisations

- **Enhance procedures for overseeing the impact of counter-terrorism measures on civil society.** Strengthen the role of regional human rights mechanisms in building connectivity between positive commitments to addressing the conditions conducive to terrorism and preventing violence in line with international and regional human rights law commitments. Practices should also be standardised to prevent, address, and respond to reprisals for civil society’s engagement in regional processes at the national level among members.
- **Engage with regional human rights mechanisms to improve working relationships and entry points for civil society in regional systems mirroring the UN recommendations.** This should also facilitate cross-fertilisation or twinning across diverse regions for member states and regional organisations investing in and developing human rights-based and prevention-based approaches to counter-terrorism.
- **Take note of evident power imbalances and funding challenges that disproportionately impact organisations working at the local level.** Here, dedicated efforts should be made to facilitate those organisations close to the ground, in touch with affected communities and elevating their voices and their access to resources and political spaces.

Civil Society

- **Continue to engage in cooperative relationship building locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally drawing on and building out from existing relationships.** This includes the continued elevation of local partners to ensure that those most marginalised and at the centre of these violations remain at the centre of responses to counter-terrorism and are given the space and support to speak globally, consistent with the mantra of “nothing about us without us”.
- **Continue to engage proactively with the Human Rights Treaty Body Mechanisms and Special Procedures Mechanisms in elevating their experience of human rights violations for themselves and for those they represent.** Civil society has created the evidence basis to date and will remain imperative to the work of these Mechanisms in continued documentation and jurisprudential development and augmentation.



To learn more about this research project and read its publication visit:
<https://thegenderhub.com/stories/gender-and-conflict-transformation/>



This Project Profile was first published in the Hub's final report, *Gender, Justice and Security: Structural Challenges, Feminist Innovations and Radical Futures*. Go to www.TheGenderHub.com to read the full report and to learn more about all 38 research projects in the Hub.



This research is part of the UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub. The Hub is an interdisciplinary, transnational research network working with local and global civil society, practitioners, governments and international organisations to advance the delivery of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality; SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; and the implementation of the UN Security Council's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

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