

An All-Island Vision for Women's Equality: All-Island Women's Forum Strategy

2026
—2028

nwlc

National Women's Council



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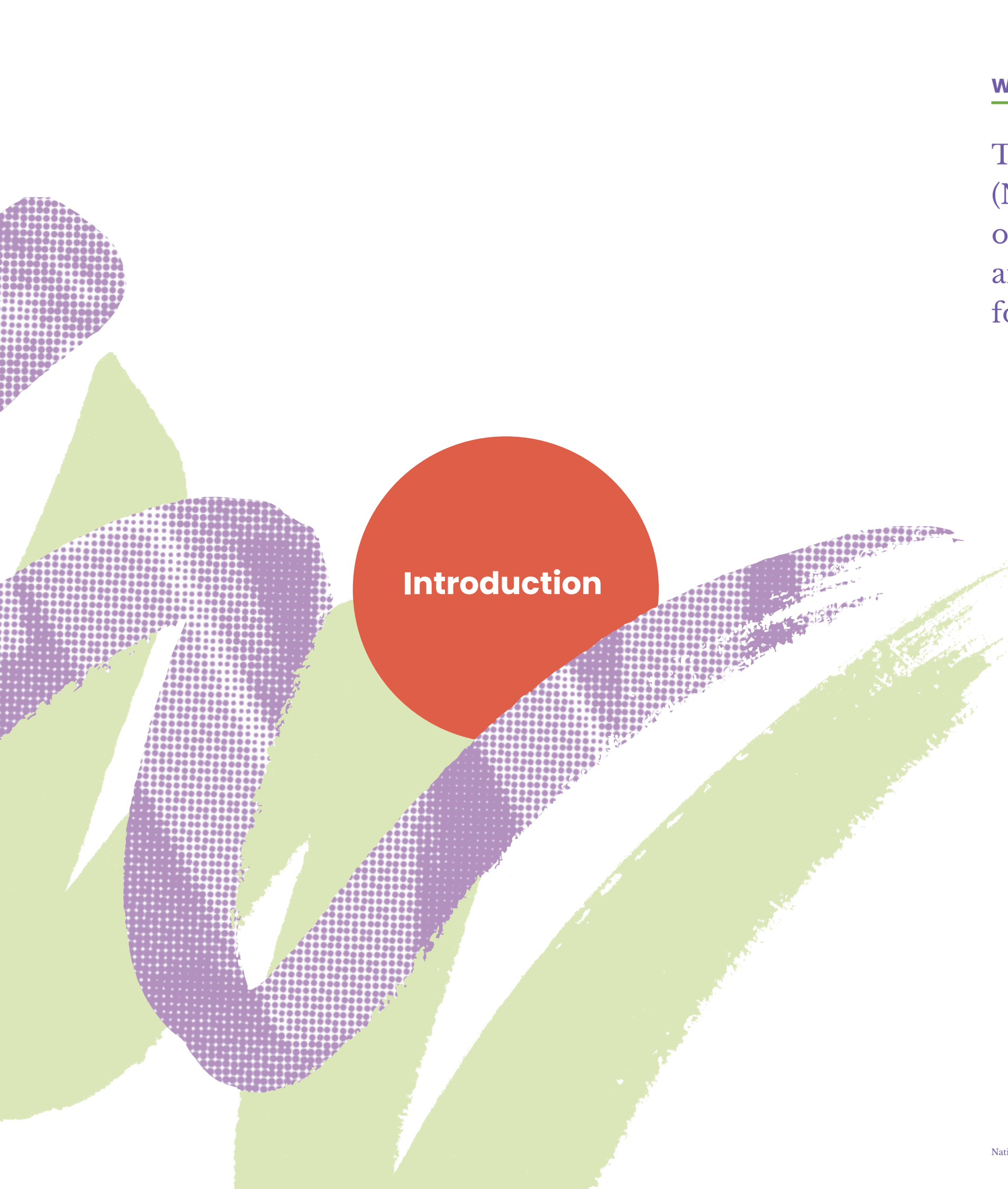


Shared Island
Initiative



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade





Introduction

Who We Are

The National Women's Council (NWC) is the leading representative organisation working for women's rights and equality across the island of Ireland, founded in 1973.

We are rooted in our membership. We work together with our almost 200 member groups across the island of Ireland and a growing community of individual supporters to deliver on our purpose – to achieve women's rights and equality.

We are a feminist organisation. We define feminism as a movement striving for the social, cultural, political, and economic equality of women and men. This involves challenging gender inequalities and the systems and structures that oppress women. It also involves mobilising our members and advocating for true equality for all women and girls. Feminism is a core value for us, guiding our actions to achieve our goal of women's rights and equality. We are funded both from grants from Government, the largest being the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, from state agencies including HSE and Pobal, from fundraising and from our members and individual supporters.

Our work is for women and girls in all their diversity.

Our role is:

- to stand firm and advance women's rights and equality;
- to promote a feminist analysis and solutions;
- to inform, set the agenda, empower and campaign for women's rights and equality;
- to represent and speak up on issues important to our members;
- to listen deeply and create spaces for women to be heard.

What is the All-Island Women's Forum?

The All-Island Women's Forum (AIWF) is an all-island initiative established by NWC in 2021 to bring together women's groups and activists from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Its goal is to foster cooperation, dialogue and inclusion on issues affecting women across the island, especially around the topics of peacebuilding, violence against women, leadership and equality. The skills, lived experience and sectoral knowledge within the Forum are a unique and powerful resource rooted in real life expertise for shaping policy throughout the island.

The main objectives of the AIWF are to:

- 1. Foster all-island collaboration and solidarity**
Create a trusted space where women from North and South can build relationships, share experiences, and strengthen cooperation on issues affecting women across the island.
- 2. Drive coordinated policy and advocacy**
Promote cross-border collaboration to influence policy and advance shared solutions on issues affecting women, bringing feminist perspectives to all-island, national and international policy discussions.
- 3. Advance women's equality and leadership**
Champion women's rights and equality by supporting women's leadership, participation and representation, while addressing the structural inequalities that affect women through an intersectional feminist approach.
- 4. Strengthen women's role in peacebuilding**
Support women's leadership in peacebuilding, reconciliation and civic dialogue, ensuring women's voices shape the future of the island in line with the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
- 5. Centre the diversity of women's voices**
Ensure the experiences and expertise of women in all their diversity are meaningfully included. Membership should be inclusive of migrant, Traveller, disabled, rural, working-class, LGBTQIA+, and minority ethnic women.

Context for this All-Island Women's Forum Strategy

AIWF Relationship to NWC's Strategic Plan

This AIWF Strategy forms a core pillar of NWC's Strategic Plan, Time to Act for Women's Rights & Equality (2025-2029), and will support the implementation of the relevant Strategic Objective and Outcome:

Strategic Objective: Building an all-island feminist approach and movement.

Outcome: NWC has developed a strong all-island approach to our work, leading change in both jurisdictions, advocating for greater harmonisation of laws, supports, and rights for women, playing a key role in building understanding and reconciliation across the island of Ireland.

This all-island approach is reflected not only in the dedicated work of the All-Island Women's Forum, but also across NWC's policy programmes with respect to care, economic equality, women's health, leadership, climate justice, and tackling violence against women.

Why does this AIWF Strategy Matter Now?

The island of Ireland is at a critical moment for women's rights and equality. Women continue to face persistent and emerging challenges, including shockingly high rates of gender-based violence, increasing hostility towards migrant, minority ethnic and LGBTQIA+ communities, barriers to accessing healthcare, disproportionate impacts across health, housing, transport and safety due to the accelerating climate crisis and widening social and economic inequalities. More than ever, there is a need for spaces that build solidarity, strengthen relationships and enable collective action across the island.

Women's representation and participation in decision-making also remains uneven. While progress has been made, women continue to be underrepresented in political, civic and community leadership, and many forms of women's leadership - particularly at grassroots and community level strengthening social infrastructure - remain undervalued and under-recognised. A functioning Northern Ireland Assembly, and local council elections on the horizon in 2027, presents an important opportunity to strengthen women's participation and leadership and to support the next generation of community organisers and changemakers.

At the same time, there is growing recognition of the value of all-island cooperation in addressing shared social challenges. The Government's Shared Island Initiative, led by the Department of the Taoiseach, together with the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund and Shared Island Civic Society Fund, have created important opportunities to strengthen civic dialogue, collaboration and relationship-building across the island. These initiatives provide a strong foundation for deepening partnerships between women's organisations and supporting cross-border cooperation on issues of shared concern.

The Forum is uniquely placed to build on this momentum. As a well-established all-island space, it provides opportunities for women to connect across jurisdictions, share learning, influence policy and ensure that women's rights and equality - including reproductive rights, economic equality, feminist climate justice, peacebuilding and ending violence against women and girls - remain central to all-island dialogue and future cooperation. It reinforces the commitments of the Good Friday Agreement to rights, inclusion, and cooperation.

This Strategy is also timely, as it follows the publication of The Evaluation of the All-Island Women's Forum report in early 2026. The Evaluation highlighted the Forum's achievements and strengths, including the growth and diversity of its membership, the value of information-sharing, relationship-building and network creation, and the importance of providing a trusted space for women's organisations and activists across the island. It also identified clear recommendations for strengthening the Forum's future direction, including the development of multi-annual priorities and a more strategic approach to impact, action and collaboration.

Working Circles are a direct response to one of the Evaluation's recommendations. They are thematically focused groups established to advance the Forum's aims via targeted work such as research, policy brief development, advocacy and other relevant outputs. For the first 12 months of this Strategy, the WCs will focus on All-Island Approaches to Leadership and Tackling Violence Against Women.

This Strategy responds to those recommendations by setting out the Forum's priorities for 2026-2028 and providing a framework for the next phase of its development. It builds on the Forum's achievements to date while strengthening its role as a platform for collective action, feminist leadership and coordinated advocacy to improve outcomes for women across the island.



Strategic Priorities 2026-2028

Priority 1

Build a stronger, connected and action-oriented All-Island Women's Forum

Why this matters

Over its first five years, the All-Island Women's Forum established a trusted network of women's organisations and activists across the island. It created space for dialogue, relationship-building, peacebuilding, and reconciliation across different communities, sectors and jurisdictions. This strong foundation now provides an opportunity to move from connection to coordinated action, while continuing to invest in the relationships and trust that underpin the Forum's success.

Our focus

- Establish the thematic Working Circles to enable members dedicated spaces to collaborate on agreed priority areas and to develop shared work programmes
- Grow and diversify Forum membership to ensure it reflects women in all their diversity across the island
- Strengthen relationships and collaboration between members through regular engagement and networking opportunities
- Develop leadership opportunities for members and support greater participation in the Forum's work
- Strengthen the Forum's governance, communications and evaluation to ensure it remains sustainable, transparent and impactful
- Secure multi-annual funding to ensure the sustainability of the Forum's work

Success looks like

- Working Circles are established and delivering agreed programmes of work e.g. in the areas of Leadership, Tackling Violence against Women, etc.
- Membership grows and becomes more representative of women in all their diversity across the island
- Members report stronger relationships, increased collaboration and greater opportunities to influence the Forum's work
- The Forum is recognised as a trusted, inclusive and influential all-island feminist network

Priority 2

Influence key issues concerning women's equality through coordinated all-island responses and advocacy

Why this matters

Women across the island of Ireland face many shared challenges, despite differences in policy and legislative frameworks. By bringing together expertise, evidence and lived experience from both jurisdictions, the Forum can develop stronger feminist analysis, coordinate advocacy and influence decision-makers to improve outcomes for women.

Our focus

- Develop shared policy positions and recommendations on key thematic issues identified through the Working Circles
- Produce collaborative research, policy papers, reports and practical resources to inform advocacy, policy changes, and public discourse
- Coordinate engagement with governments, elected representatives, statutory bodies and other key stakeholders across both jurisdictions
- Ensure the lived experience and expertise of women are central to all policy development, research and advocacy
- Raise the profile of the Forum as a leading voice for women's rights and equality through strategic communications and public engagement opportunities

Success looks like

- Joint policy submissions, reports and advocacy resources are produced and widely used
- Forum recommendations contribute to policy discussions and decision-making across both jurisdictions
- Members undertake coordinated advocacy on agreed priorities
- Relationships with political representatives, government departments and statutory bodies are strengthened via the Forum
- The Forum is recognised as an influential all-island voice on women's rights and equality, embedded in the social fabric of communities
- Increased visibility of women leaders both North and South

Priority 3

Advance feminist all-island influence and leadership

Why this matters

Women have played a vital role in building peace, strengthening communities and driving social change across the island of Ireland. Yet women continue to be underrepresented in political, civic and community leadership, and their contributions remain undervalued. As conversations about the future of the island continue to evolve, women's voices, experiences and feminist perspectives must be central to the conversation. The Forum has a unique role in supporting women's leadership, strengthening civic dialogue and ensuring that all-island cooperation on key issues.

Our focus

- Create opportunities for dialogue on the future of the island from an intersectional feminist perspective
- Build partnerships with organisations and initiatives working to strengthen all-island cooperation, democracy and social infrastructure
- Support emerging feminist leaders, grassroots activists and community organisers to shape future policy and public debate

Success looks like

- More opportunities created for civic dialogue and the visibility of women in these spaces increased
- Women's voices and feminist perspectives are reflected in discussions on the future of the island and shared policy challenges
- The Forum is recognised as a leading platform for feminist leadership and all-island cooperation



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