

# Brexit Case Studies from the Northern Ireland Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise Sector

How will Brexit affect Northern Ireland Society?

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From a report by Queen's University Intern Carys Brown produced for NICVA  
(Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action)

### **The NI Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector**

The Northern Ireland Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector encompasses over 6000 organisations, employing over 44,000 people, and providing a vast range of services and benefits to thousands of people, including:

- front line health and social care services
- medical research
- emergency services
- community development /representation/relations and peace-building
- sporting, faith-based, arts and environmental activities.

The sector reflects the full breadth of society in Northern Ireland.

### **NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action)**

NICVA (the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action) is the representative body for the VCSE sector and provides representation, advice, training and information services.

Recognising the major societal implications of Brexit, NICVA became involved in the debate on Brexit before the 2016 referendum. At the end of 2017 it commissioned research to identify and document a range of Brexit case studies from wide-ranging organisations across the sector, to help increase understanding of its implications for these organisations and the wider Northern Ireland society they serve.

Below is an abridged version of the report produced through this research, which documented the following six case studies.

1. The Belfast Interface Project – Peace and Stability
2. Disability Action – Rights and Protections: Past, present and future
3. Northern Ireland Forest School Association – Low level Knock on effects
4. Children’s Law Centre - Rights, Networks and Opportunities
5. Women’s Aid Federation NI – Access to services
6. National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland - Opportunity, Exchange and Culture

The full report can be read at - <http://www.nicva.org/resource/what-does-brexit-really-mean-for-us-case-studies-from-the-voluntary-and-community-sector>

## 1. The Belfast Interface Project (BIP) – Peace and Stability

### The Peace Process:

The peace process in Northern Ireland has been underway at best from the early 1990s; Northern Ireland has successfully achieved approximately twenty years of relative peace. The process has received accolades of praise on the international stage and has been exported as a blueprint for reconciliation. However, the peace process is a dynamic in Northern Irish political culture which requires continual work; it is yet to come to resolution.

The Belfast Interface Project (BIP) works with interface communities across the city. Interface barriers still furnish the landscape of Belfast today, BIP calculating that walls and fences alone stretch over 11,528 meters. (Campbell, 2017) These interfaces are physical manifestations of the ethno-political divide which is still healing in Northern Ireland.

Joe O'Donnell, the Strategic Director of BIP, has been involved in the field of community peacebuilding for over twenty years, yet, referring to Brexit he claimed, "I don't want to sound alarmist but, it [Brexit] poses the biggest challenge to date for the peace process", signalling the extent of the problem Brexit is posing.



**"I don't want to sound alarmist but, it [Brexit] poses the biggest challenge to date for the peace process."**

Joe described how the idea of empowerment is at the crux of community development. He noted that the EU have sought to perform a role in empowerment from the outset in NI. The EU has been a friend in support of people from both sides of the community.

### The Bigger Picture:

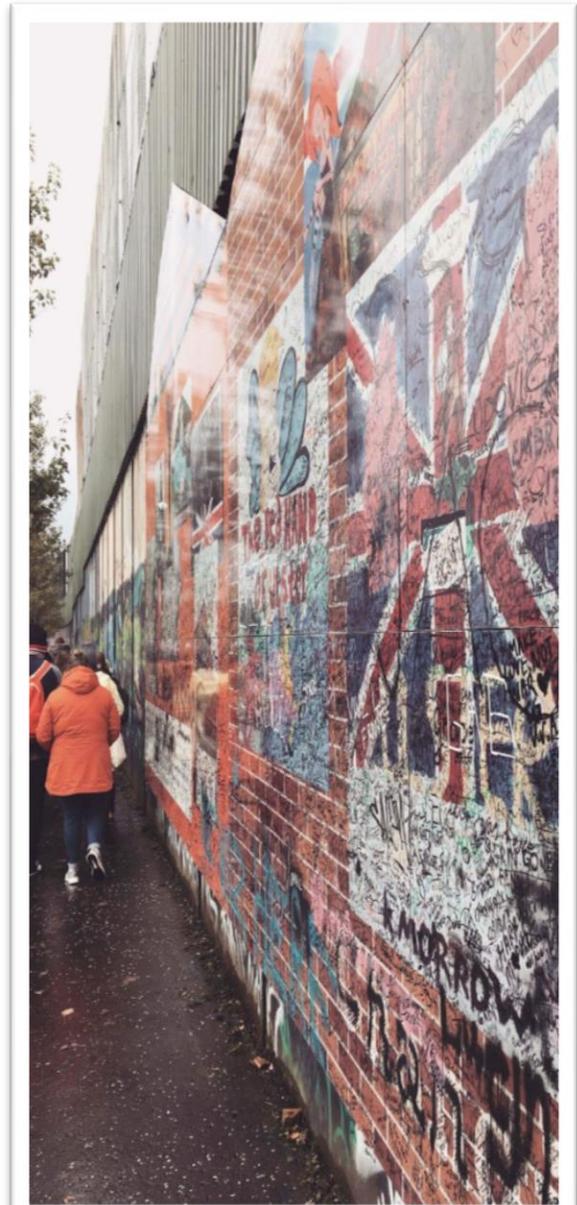
Debate has been circling around the likelihood, if not certainty, of trickledown effects which will accompany Brexit. However, in the context of peace-building, Brexit has the possibility of heaping down an avalanche of difficulties. Joe O'Donnell sees the impacts on the ground as 'potentially devastating'.

Joe stresses the removal or transformation of interface barriers is viewed as a risk. It requires community confidence and support which may not be there yet. Change needs to be organic. In 2016, the Stormont Executive committed to removing interface structures by 2023. Joe sees this as an ambitious target, but at least it is a target. Brexit and

the potential for a hard border, despite the rhetoric of a 'seamless' and 'invisible' border advocating the contrary, could set this target back even further. Brexit adds a further layer of risk to questions of interface regeneration. Joe sees Brexit as heightening the existing reluctance to keeping moving forward.

Vitaly, Joe highlighted that unfortunately we in Northern Ireland have seen what happens when there is a political vacuum. Brexit has compounded political stagnation in Northern Ireland which is a fear for the peace process. Brexit has become highly politicised. Sinn Fein are not a traditionally pro-European party. However, Sinn Fein have firmly placed the concept of 'special status' for NI under the banner of Nationalism. In reaction the DUP moved to block any potential for regulatory divergence from the rest of the UK.

Both sides of the ethno-political divide have adopted entrenched positions which does not bode well for the compromise which Brexit is likely to require. Brexit has been painted in the colours of green and orange and has become yet another divisive issue for NI.



The Good Friday Agreement was ratified in Northern Ireland by a majority of 71.12% with a turnout of 81.10%. Joe noted that, from his experience, most people are content to resolve any future change to Northern Ireland's constitutional position by democratic means. However, 'Brexit has thrown a whole new light on things', it raises re-emerging question marks over identity in the minds of those on either side of the community.

In the broader peace context, the EU has been a vehicle for change in terms of conflict in Europe. Vitaly, the EU have spurred the population of Northern Ireland in the direction of peace via financial means. The EU has funded projects supporting community development, social cohesion and peaceful reconciliation whether it be through the EU regional development fund, structural funds or IFI funding, as was from 1989. In terms of monetary value PEACE programmes in particular have contributed hugely to the peace process in

Northern Ireland. From 1995 to 2013 1.3 billion Euros was poured into PEACE initiatives in NI and Ireland. The phase of PEACE IV funding we are currently operating under is estimated to be worth the value of a further 270 million Euros. (EU Parliament, 2017) The EU has been the definition of an arbiter for peace, its raison d'être was, in part, to cement peace in what had been warring Europe. From the lens of peace and stability in Northern Ireland, the official absence of such influence after 11 pm 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019 will be felt deeply.

### **Temperature on the Ground:**

Interfaces are microcosms of the disruption a hard border could cause in Northern Ireland. As is seen in the case of BIP, it is much easier to erect a barrier than it is to dismantle barriers. The same is likely to be true of a border on the island of Ireland. It is hard to imagine, as the powers that be are finding it hard to imagine, what form an undisruptive border may take. Redefining boundaries is inevitably a difficult business, even one incident at a UK/EU border in Ireland could result in significant escalation of controls. Drew Harris the PSNI's Deputy Chief Constable told the DExEU select committee on their visit to NI, that "Infrastructure on the border would be an obvious point for dissident groups to rally around and attack". (The Belfast Telegraph, 2017) It is key that The Good Friday Agreement is enshrined in the eventual Brexit deal as promised.

Susan McCrory, who works for Falls Women's Centre, has two particular worries in relation to Brexit.

*Brexit is "not bearing in mind all the great work done in good community relations so far". Susan noted how the role of the EU goes further than funding and that the importance of the EU, "goes to the bigger picture". Notably, Susan highlighted that*

*Northern Ireland "hasn't fully dealt with the past yet", looking to the future without the stabilising factor of the EU "could be damaging".*

*Susan works in the Falls Women's centre and, as such, was keen to highlight that Brexit is not dealing well with gender issues, "they don't seem to appear on the horizon" and this is worrying.*

Eileen Weir, Good Relations worker across North and West Belfast for Shankill Women's Centre, articulated her concern around Brexit:

*Eileen has her ear to the ground in the Shankill community. She held two engagements prior to the referendum in which over 100 women were in attendance and is hoping to hold another event on Brexit in the near future. Stemming from Eileen's interaction with women in the community, she identified how Brexit will*

*impact day-to-day living as a particular worry. Eileen noted how, “everything is based around trade, but there is more than that.” Brexit is a huge issue and Eileen stressed that “we still don’t have the things promised to us under the Good Friday Agreement”, such as the Civic Forum which has yet to come to fruition. She sees Brexit as, “another instance in which we don’t know the dividend”. Crucially, Eileen believes due to Brexit “we [Shankhill Women’s Centre] are going to be working even harder”.*

### **What’s next?**

The Belfast Interface Project were keen to highlight that we in Northern Ireland already operate under unique circumstances. Joe O’Donnell does not see the concept of an individual arrangement for Northern Ireland as an unfamiliar idea, and so, sees it as very achievable. The importance of maintaining the arrangements such as the Common Travel Area, to name but one, cannot be overstated.

What’s more, a commitment to the Good Friday Agreement, in ‘all its parts’, has been made on both sides of the negotiating table in the Brexit talks. Essentially, this is a commitment to guarding the equilibrium of peace in NI. Joe only hopes such claims become more than lip service.

Joe sees Brexit in a similar light to interface barriers. We need to enlighten those in positions of influence to open new channels of discussion and exploration. With the looming risks Brexit poses to community peacebuilding in NI, Joe believes that, crucially, we need to be ‘persuaders for peace’.

## **2. Disability Action – Rights and Protections: Past, present and future**

In the UK, approximately five million people have a form of disability. (DWP, 2015) In Northern Ireland one in five people have a disability (Disability Action, 2015). Yet, when it comes down to landmark decisions, of which Brexit is the definition, disabled people’s worry and concern seems to become ‘invisible in key debates’. (Byrne, 2016)

### **So why is the EU important?**

The EU has been a driver for change and a guarantor of the rights and protections of people with disabilities. Notably, in 2000 the EU brought changes to the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) by replacing it with the Framework Directive for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation. This revision has meant that even organisations employing fewer than twenty people cannot discriminate against those with disabilities. (Disability Action, 2017)

The EU has ushered in positive developments ranging from regulation and co-ordination of social security in member states in 2004, to the harmonisation of the Blue Badge Scheme,

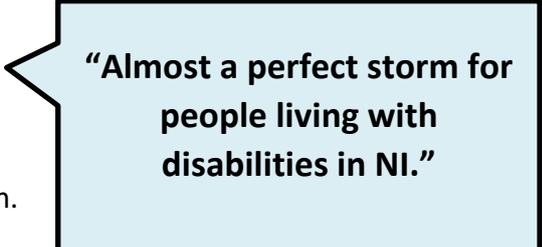
the instigation of a host of EU Travel Directives and a source of vital European Social Funding (ESF).

The EU pillar of freedom of movement has also allowed for the provision of health and social care staff from other EU member states to provide vital independence to many people in NI with profound care needs. Staffing is already an acute problem, the chief executive of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust noting in Oct 2017 that agency nurses have in some instances been costing the NHS ‘up to £100,000’ per annum. (The BBC, 2017)

European Social Fund provided a ‘lifeline’ for the VCSE sector during a time of austerity, (Byrne, 2016), in 2017 supporting 65 schemes that engage with people with disabilities. The potential to miss out on the benefits of the EU Accessibility Act coming down the pipeline is a most pressing concern. The EU Commission is hoping to standardise the requirements of services such as cash machines, to improve accessibility. (European Commission, 2015).

As a result of Brexit, it is likely that this legislation will have to be developed independently of the EU by the UK and NI. Disability Action believe in the wake of Brexit it is vital that we ‘keep pace’ with positive developments in EU disability rights work. (Disability Action, 2017)

Crucially, Northern Ireland is without an Executive, Westminster does not have a rights based agenda and Brexit is looming. An ‘almost perfect storm for people living with disabilities in NI’ is on the political horizon.



**“Almost a perfect storm for people living with disabilities in NI.”**

### **3. NIFSA (NI Forest School Association) – Low level knock-on effects**

NIFSA was set up by Brian Poots, Brian has worked for household names such as The Woodland Trust and The Conservation Volunteers and is a seasoned hand in environmental education. NISFA delivers environmental education and training to children, teachers and leaders across Northern Ireland. NIFSA aims to;



‘connect children to their outdoor environment, stimulating curiosity and inspiring love of the natural world.’ (NIFSA, 2017)

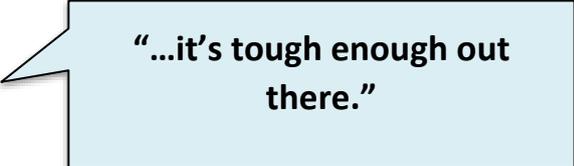
Since starting life in 2008 NIFSA has engaged with over 25,000 children and works with approximately 30-40 new schools or other organisations every year to get them through an accredited Forest School Leader Award.

## So why does Brexit matter to NIFSA?

### Relationships

May of this year saw the creation of IFSA (Irish Forest School Association), as is clear from the name, this is NIFSA’s sister organisation in the South. Relations are still in the embryonic stages. However, notably, Brian Poots commented that he believes there is more to be gained from North South co-operation than East -West collaboration. Our environment does not recognise boundaries, work on an all-island platform, in crude terms, ‘makes more sense’.

However, Brian highlighted the potential for Brexit to undermine this developing partnership. Brian commented ‘it’s tough enough out there’ without an atmosphere of growing tension being stoked by Brexit. Undoubtedly, Brexit is occupying a significant amount of space in the public mind and demands a huge volume of resources. Issues at macro level are the focus of discussion and vital in terms of progress in negotiation. However, by comparison, very little attention is being devoted to the potential low level, micro repercussions of Brexit.



“...it’s tough enough out there.”

### Culture

The concept behind NIFSA stemmed from a learning experience in 1995 in Denmark. A recognition of the relevance of the outdoors in education was sparked by this trip. Brian believes the diffusion of an ethos of environmental education throughout Northern Ireland was made easier because of the nature of our rapport with the EU.

Over the past years, NIFSA has benefited from the cutting-edge thinking coming from our neighbours within the EU. The collaboration and exchange of ideas, facilitated via membership of the EU, has kickstarted numerous spheres of thinking such as that which underpins NIFSA. The EU has the capacity to act as a catalyst for change. It is not that the UK is incapable of thinking outside the box, nonetheless, it is harder to be inspired unilaterally and Brexit, by definition, entails movement away from EU culture and expression.

### **One eye on the future:**

The impact Brexit may have on NIFSA is not black and white, however the government's post Brexit guarantees are also not concrete. The example of NIFSA is testament to the atmosphere of uncertainty among many smaller third sector voices. Brian believes the legacy of Brexit for NIFSA will mean having to 'become much more imaginative and alternative in approach', out of necessity.

Critics may put this type of unease down to scaremongering. Nonetheless, this accusation makes the feeling of hesitancy no less real. Organisations such as NIFSA are no doubt going to experience the trickle down effects of Brexit.



## **4. Children's Law Centre (CLC) – Rights, Networks and Opportunities**

### **Legislative Protections:**

The Children's Law Centre have facilitated a number of consultation workshops with young people aged 12 – 17 to ascertain their views on Brexit. During the consultation workshops, young people commented that the "impact [of Brexit] will not be on young people now, but the next generation. We are taking away opportunities for young people of the future". Others commented that "remain and leave has been divided by politicians down orange and green lines and young people will do the same" and that the "leave/ remain

debate has brought tensions up among friendships” and that “people are becoming polarised; it’s becoming personal and young people are afraid to speak their views [on Brexit]”.<sup>1</sup>

The EU has, enshrined in law, over 80 instruments for promoting the rights and wellbeing of children, ranging from entitlements in the spheres of migration, child protection and asylum through to the trafficking of children. The EU Withdrawal Bill currently making its way through parliament will translate current European legislation into domestic legislation and currently the UK Government do not intend to translate the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights into UK domestic law. Baroness Massey, speaking in the House of Lords stated: “There are numerous case studies on children as victims of crime—the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, criminal justice, and legal aid for victims. All these emphasise what it will mean to not have the European charter in place. Some have argued that our domestic laws on children are sufficient to protect them in all instances. This is not the case...”<sup>2</sup> Based on this analysis seeing Brexit as a retreat in children and young people’s rights is justified.

### **Membership of Networks:**

Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole has really profited from membership of EU-wide security, judicial and intelligence networks. Eurojust, Europol, second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II), The European Criminal Information system (ECRIS) and the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) are a selection of networks of which the UK is a part and which if not properly provided for, Brexit will endanger. (ECRU, 2017, pp. 16-17)

The EAW has become an important tool for law enforcement agencies in Ireland and the UK. In 2014, Ireland surrendered 21 wanted persons to the UK on foot of EAWs, of whom 6 were surrendered to the PSNI. In the same year, Ireland made 48 requests to the UK for surrender of persons under EAWs, leading to a total of 36 surrenders to Ireland by UK authorities, of which 32 were by the PSNI. A 2011 report by the European Commission on the implementation of EAWs stated that on average, contested surrenders under the EAW framework took 48 days to process, in contrast to an average of one year under previous arrangements<sup>3</sup>.

Given its record of support for the EAW, the UK Government may wish to negotiate a similar arrangement to continue to be able to avail of the provisions under the European Arrest

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-03-05/debates/AE7EB742-4BCD-4D00-B43D-AD7ED9A21911/EuropeanUnion\(Withdrawal\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-03-05/debates/AE7EB742-4BCD-4D00-B43D-AD7ED9A21911/EuropeanUnion(Withdrawal)Bill)

<sup>3</sup> RalSE (NIA) and Tithe an Oireachtais, Briefing Paper for the eighth meeting of the North/ South Inter-Parliamentary Association: Impact of Brexit on Cross-Border Activity – 18 November 2016  
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2016-2021/2016/northsouth/8816.pdf>

Warrant. However, during her last evidence session (as Home Secretary) before the Home Affairs Committee in May, Theresa May said:

*“If we are not in the European Union, we would almost certainly not have access to the European arrest warrant. Norway, for example, started negotiating with the European Union on access to something similar to the European arrest warrant in 2001. An agreement has been reached but has not been implemented yet. It includes, as I understand it, the caveat that could mean that nationals of some countries could not be extradited. There are some countries that will not extradite their nationals unless it is under a European arrest warrant. I think that would have a real impact on our ability to deal with criminals.”<sup>4</sup>*

However, the UK may be in a more challenging position in relation to the EAW than other non-EU countries. A UK Government briefing published prior to the referendum noted that there is no guarantee that the UK could secure a similar agreement whilst remaining outside the Schengen zone.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Day to day routine:**

Unlike children in the other jurisdictions in the UK children in Northern Ireland, as with the rest of the population, live their lives in a manner consistent with a fluid border on the island. Many children access healthcare on the other side of the border, particularly where there is not the specialist service available in NI such as paediatric cardiac services and mental health facilities. Young people that participated in CLC’s consultation workshops also voiced their concerns in relation to being able to access ERASMUS opportunities, such as school exchanges and university placements.



It is also vital to protect the rights of children from other EU countries living in Northern Ireland. Brexit has the potential to drastically alter the lives of such children. In the context of

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<sup>4</sup> Home Affairs Committee, Oral evidence: The Work of the Home Secretary, 10 May 2016, Q326

<sup>5</sup> HM Government, The UK’s cooperation with the EU and home affairs, and on foreign policy and security issues (background note), May 2016

increased racism post the Brexit referendum, young people consulted on Brexit are particularly concerned that the rights of these children and migrant and refugee children are protected through and post any Brexit process.

Young people from the Roma community that CLC have spoken to advised that their parents assume they will have to return to Romania, in the absence of being advised otherwise.

Children are not 'economically active', therefore establishing residency rights post-Brexit under the government's vision, set out in The United Kingdom's Exit from the European Union Safeguarding the Position of EU Citizens Living in the UK and UK Nationals Living in the EU, may become more complicated for children who are EU nationals. (HM Government, 2017) Despite this difficulty, it is crucial that 69,000 European national children who were living in the UK in 2016, and those born or who have arrived since, are seen as more than 'appendages of their parents/relatives'. (ECRU, 2017, pp. 11- 12) Nor should Brexit interrupt familial ties and support. CLC recorded one young person's concern that Brexit may make visiting his grandparents in Poland more difficult, especially if flying from Dublin<sup>6</sup>. Along the same lines, around a third of all Polish people's short visits (28 days or less) to the UK are to visit family and friends. Many visiting Polish relatives are a huge help in child care around holiday times. Brexit is likely to have an adverse impact on this pattern in many UK based Polish children's lives. (Kilkey and Bielewska, 2017). There will also be implications for looked after children where parents are/were EU migrants. The status of these children (some of whom were born in NI) who have not exercised their freedom of movement rights and who are in the care of the State needs urgent clarification.

### **The ongoing negotiations:**

Whether children are a consideration in the negotiations and decisions around Brexit are taken in children's best interests, as Article 3 of the UNCRC requires, remains to be seen. The rights of children and young people must be protected post Brexit, guaranteed equivalency with children in the Irish Republic (as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement) and future proofed against international human rights standards. There should be no erosion of children's quality of life, rights and protections. As CLC has so succinctly put it, any settlement arrived at must be made with 'the voices of young people ringing in the ears'.

## **5. Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland – Access to services**

### **Women's Voices:**

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/images/Childrens\\_Voices\\_on\\_Brexit\\_Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk/images/Childrens_Voices_on_Brexit_Report_FINAL.pdf)



The 2011 census estimated the UK population to be made up of 31 million men and 32.2 million women. (Office for National Statistics, 2011) Therefore it would be inaccurate to regard women's issues as niche or marginal. Yet, in the Department for Exiting the EU's negotiating team, there is only one female representative, namely Catherine Webb - Director of Market Access and Budget at DExEU. (DExEU, 2017) This absence of women's voices is worrying. However, it is not a new worry, either historically or in the context of Brexit. In the days preceding the EU Referendum, Women's Aid's chief executive Polly Neate, described the campaign as a 'macho standoff'. (Neate, 2016)

When David Davis was asked in July what the makeup of the UK negotiating committee was he said he didn't have the answer to hand. This gender asymmetry has been described as 'not only embarrassing. It's negligent'. (O'Brien, 2017)

Brexit is not to blame for the under-representation of women. However, the EU has an impressive record in relation to women's issues, whether that be in legislative terms, such as in relation to part-time workers' rights (disproportionately female), or in the currency of financial support. The Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the EU in part funds key networks such as WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe) of which the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland is a part. Vitally, the EU recognises gender inequality as a structural problem and has located the abuse of women, 'firmly in the context of human rights'. (Women's Aid Federation NI, 2016)

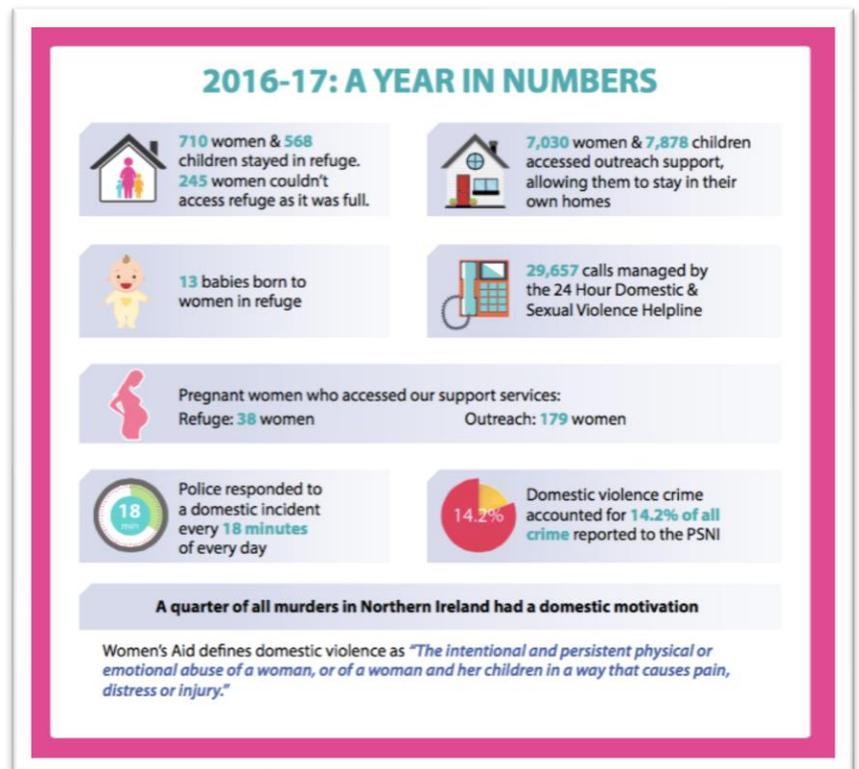
Post Brexit, Women's Aid NI are anxious not to let gender equality and combating violence against women slip off the political agenda. By way of example, the EU operate as a lobbying bloc in relation to the *UN Commission on the Status of Women*. In the past the UK have held an important seat around the table. However, it is unlikely that the UK will be able to be part of decisions at government level in the EU Council which precede lobbying efforts. Post-Brexit questions remain about how the UK will fit into this type of scenario.

To counteract the potential for issues primarily affecting women being kicked into the political long grass, Women's Aid NI are continuing to work on a five-nations basis – building relationships with other expert organisations across the UK and also in the Republic of

Ireland on a cross-border basis. Women’s Aid Federation NI focused on one issue of particular concern in any post-Brexit environment, that of women’s access to services.

### Access to Services:

In Northern Ireland, Brexit presents a potentially hugely damaging challenge, particularly in border areas. Women’s Aid NI noted that ‘domestic violence is a hidden crime, involving the control, coercion and isolation of victims. Accessing support in close knit and, a lot of the time, rural border communities in NI already provides a challenge. Questions of reputation and the ‘rumour mill’ come into play. Women’s Aid NI believe the potential for a hard border will make it easier to perpetrate abuse and make it more difficult to get support. Proximity and accessibility of services increases women’s likelihood of accessing help. In border areas, however, a women’s closest source of support may be across the border and Women’s Aid are concerned that a hard border in Ireland would only serve as an added barrier to assistance.



### Judicial Frameworks?

Women’s Aid Federation NI, *Annual Report 2016- 2017*

‘One of the greatest tests of the quality of our justice system is how well we treat our victims’. (European Commission, 2017) This is the view of the EU Commission, attested to in the EU’s proactive approach to victim’s rights.

The Directive on the European Protection Order (EPO) in 2011 is one particular EU action which is of particular relevance to women in NI. It enables victims and/or potential victims of crime to travel to another EU member state whilst retaining the right of protection, regulation and access to the criminal justice system. Therefore, women from Northern Ireland would be protected by a non-molestation order issued in NI no matter which EU country they travelled to.

Louise Kennedy, Policy Officer in Women’s Aid Federation NI, noted that EU Protection Orders currently operate under a simple certification process. Louise noted two occasions she is aware of in the past month where women have been sent across the border from the

south for their own safety. Louise was keen to emphasise that this number only relates to court mandated cases and does not bear witness to the much larger number of women who simply flee across the border. Brexit holds the potential to threaten this formal and informal process.

Moreover, women in NI enjoy recourse to EU courts, and EU citizens in the UK have recourse to public funds, which means they can access public-funded services like Women's Aid refuges and Floating Support. Of the 710 women who stayed in refuge in 2016-17, 167 identified as Black or Minority Ethnic. Many of these women were able to access refuge support due to their status as EU citizens. (Women's Aid Federation NI, 2017) If Brexit results in EU citizens being denied recourse to public funds, this could mean women who are EU citizens being denied access to life-saving resource. This is a clear example of a situation where we can only question if assurances of reciprocal citizen rights made in the public eye will be enough for the current situation and rights to prevail post-Brexit.

### **Health Risks?**

Primarily, domestic and sexual violence are a public health issue. The medical support needs are huge, from emergency treatment for physical injuries to mental health care to deal with the psychological impact of abuse. Given that a quarter of all murders in Northern Ireland had a domestic motivation in 2016-17 (PSNI 2017), health interventions are a vital means of intervening in abusive situations at the earliest possible stage and avoiding escalation of abuse to the point of serious injury or death. Again, Brexit has the potential to threaten access to vital services. A Northern Irish woman's closest Accident and Emergency may be across the border. Under the EU Health Directive, women in NI can access this support with ease, Brexit is a huge threat to this. (European Commission, 2017).

### **Scenario:**

What follows is an illustration, it is not an anonymised case study. However, sadly, this type of story is not out of the realms of possibility. It reinforces the need for Brexit not to impact access to vital services for women on either side of the border.

*Mary was 19 and studying in Belfast when she met her boyfriend Harry. After graduation the lovebirds were married and moved to Tyrone where Harry's family were well known in the farming community. Harry was keen to follow in his father's footsteps. Things started well, and having Harry's family close by was a blessing, even though she missed her own family in Lisburn. However, the honeymoon period slowed to a gradual halt. Harry became increasingly controlling, and Mary found that she couldn't do anything right. The atmosphere in the house became tense. Mary had never learned to drive as Harry had said lessons were too expensive, and now Mary found that she was trapped on the farm most days as no buses ran in the area. Harry had always been a bit jealous, but now Mary couldn't even speak to friends or family without causing a fight. She wasn't even allowed her own mobile phone and had to ask Harry's permission to use his. Mary's access to their now joint*

*bank account was limited, and she had to justify every penny she spent. One evening, during an argument, Harry grabbed Mary by the throat and threw her against a wall. Mary was terrified but felt she had nowhere to turn as all her friends were Harry's too, and Harry was so well-liked and respected in the community. Mary tried to stick things out, doing everything she could to make Harry happy, but no matter what she did he would always find a way to get angry and violent. One particular night, Harry attacked Mary until she briefly lost consciousness. At that point Mary knew she had to leave or she would end up dead. Early the next morning Mary left the farm and walked to the nearest village, which was 30 minutes away and across the border. A taxi driver spotted her and her visible injuries and offered to take her to the nearest hospital which was also south of the border. Mary was treated for her injuries, and the Gardai were contacted. As Mary was from Northern Ireland, the Garda got in touch with the PSNI who then handled her case. Mary applied to the court in Northern Ireland for an emergency non-molestation order. Thanks to the European Protection Order, the non-molestation order applied on both sides of the border to ensure Mary's protection and safety.*

## **6. National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland (NUS-USI) - Opportunity, Exchange and Culture**

**Who constitutes your target audience in society/ who do you serve?**

Further and higher education students' unions are our members and we serve the students unions and their students.

**Does your membership/ organisation benefit from EU**

**membership? If so, could you give an idea of in what manner, both directly or indirectly? (e.g. Funding, rights, organisationally, access to networks, mobility, workforce, communication, alignment of aims)**

NUS-USI's membership benefits from EU membership through the rights it provides and through the opportunities it affords students. Students can avail of the Erasmus+ international exchange programme. Our membership and the education institutions also benefit from having EU research funding programmes like Horizon 2020, which boost the



finances of education institutions significantly. Also, freedom of movement has ensured that students can study on a cross-border and cross-EU basis and this is extremely positive for student in border areas as well as others who travel across the border and around the EU for study in FE and HE. These students bring significant economic and cultural benefits to Northern Ireland and the chance for students to study elsewhere is also an integral positive part of their educational and career development.

**How will potential change to current practices affect your work? Is Brexit likely to undermine your work?**

NUS-USI an organisation that exists within a trilateral agreement between the student movement in the rest of the UK, NUS, the student movement in Ireland, USI and NUS-USI. NUS-USI was created in 1972 as part of a cross-border agreement between NUS and USI, long before the cross-border arrangements enshrined within the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Cross-border and UK-Ireland student mobility and co-operation is a central element of the work that we do, and Brexit could cause very significant problems around student mobility. Given the instability with devolution here, this could have an impact on our ability to attract EU and international students.

**Would you benefit from a period of transition? How/ Why?**

If the UK leaves the EU, a period of transition may be positive to our members and students, to ensure that certainty can be provided for students and others to help ensure that any challenges regarding educational opportunities and the economy can be mitigated and addressed as effectively as possible. It is crucial that a transition period helps to maintain a soft border which does not disrupt the daily lives of students and people crossing it.



**What do you see as your best and worst post-Brexit scenario?**

The absolute best-case scenario of leaving the EU would be only a small amount of additional economic damage, because so much damage has already been caused to aspects like the cost of living by the uncertainty of Brexit. That would require essentially no change to the current border arrangements and having the UK remain a part of the customs union,

single market, Erasmus+ programme, Horizon 2020 research programme and other key EU initiatives and programmes.

The worst case scenario is a hard border, the loss of many jobs and apprenticeships in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, wage deflation, the loss of cross-border students and opportunities, the loss of EU students, the loss of the opportunities of Erasmus+, the loss of Horizon 2020 research funding and research partnerships, potentially significant damage to good relations in Northern Ireland and across the UK, negative relations between the UK and EU countries on trade, security and other important matters. This worst-case scenario would also involve Northern Ireland losing Peace, regional development and common agriculture policy funding, as well as significant pressure being placed upon political relations at Stormont because of Brexit instability.

**What outcome/s would you favour from the Brexit negotiations? (Inside/outside Customs/Union Single Market; retained access to programmes, networks & funding (which?), future applicability of EU legislation/rights (which?))**

Potentially the best outcome would be a full reversal of article 50; however, in the likely absence of that we would wish to see the UK staying inside the customs union and single market, retaining access to all research funding programmes and to Erasmus+, as well as upholding all citizens' rights.

**Concluding thoughts:**

Conclusions on work around Brexit are notoriously difficult to come by, as the Brexit debate has far from reached its conclusion. Phase one of talks are just approaching some sort of acceptable resolution after the overnight diplomacy of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2017. The discourse around Brexit is still being written, with almost hourly updates, insights and reflections on the process.

However, in view of this piece's engagement with a range of those within the VCSE sector it is abundantly clear that there is much work around Brexit still to be done. Disentangling the UK and Northern Ireland from nearly fifty years of European integration is a tall order by any estimation.

The phrase 'a perfect storm' has cropped up in numerous conversations, occasions and on a variety of platforms to describe Brexit, particularly in the context of NI. In some ways this is a throwaway term, yet it is highly reflective of the current political atmosphere of tension and frustration in NI.

The idea of a 'democratic deficit' resonates in Northern Ireland at present. The UK's decision to leave the EU can be misleading. NI voted to remain part of the EU in 2016 by a majority of 55.8%, a fact perhaps somewhat overlooked. This disappointment for many people in NI has been compounded by the domestic political context. The political landscape is far from one-dimensional.

As a result, it is unsurprising that uncertainty has emerged as a common denominator throughout this piece of work. Brexit has induced and is likely to continue to create extensive disorientation in NI and beyond. The need to quell Brexit fears in Northern Ireland is essential. This should be done not via a rhetoric but through finding sound and agreeable solutions. Clarity breeds an atmosphere of peace and stability; this is a top priority for NICVA and Northern Ireland as a whole in the face of Brexit.

What has been yielded from this work is that Brexit is an economic, political, technical and legal problem, but that at its core it is a societal dilemma.

Discussion with Disability Action highlighted the role the EU has played as a catalyst for advancement in rights and protections of those with disabilities in NI. The EU has served as an important think tank and platform for implementation. Post-Brexit, the UK must endeavour to keep pace with positive steps of development stemming from the EU.

Discussion with the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) has illustrated the risk that Brexit is to twenty years of sustained peacebuilding efforts. Interfaces embody the impact physical and cultural division can have on communities.

A survey of how Brexit is likely to impact the lives of children and young people through CLC serves to remind us of the magnitude of the UK's decision to leave the EU. Brexit is cross-generational, it is likely to impact children's lives in the present, whether that be in schooling, healthcare provision, access to family or questions of residency. Yet, any Brexit settlement reached will be binding and as such will have long-term ramifications. It is not an overstatement to express that decisions made in the coming months will doubtless shape the future of NI.

The testament of Women's Aid Federation NI provided further evidence of this potential damage. Access to vital services should not be a casualty of Brexit. Freedom of movement and the provision of care and protection on an all island basis, if not beyond, is vital. It is key that Brexit will not serve to heighten any sense of isolation for many already vulnerable women and children.