

Northern Ireland Women's European Platform welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Northern Ireland Civic Forum.

1. Reasons for Establishing a Northern Ireland Civic Forum

The Platform would endorse the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Civic Forum for a number of reasons:

- There is an obligation on government to do so as part of the Good Friday (Belfast Agreement)
- As a relatively new devolved legislature there are not effective processes in place to ensure effective engagement with civil society. Until this is the case a Forum would act as a 'safety net' between government and civil society
- A Civic Forum would make a significant contribution to enhancing participating democracy and engagement with citizens. A Northern Ireland Civic Forum would help achieve the intended outcomes of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Outreach and Engagement Strategy
- The establishment of a Forum presents an opportunity to capture expertise and thereby contribute to effective policy-making

2. Structure of a Northern Ireland Civic Forum

The Platform would recommend:

- Consultation with civil society re the process and structure of establishing the Forum
- A body which would harness expertise in a range of areas
- Membership based on a social partnership model

- Ensuring equality throughout the process and structures
- Sufficient resources

3. Structure and Process of a Northern Ireland Civic Forum

- The opportunity should be taken to explore other models and to develop a model of good practice relevant to Northern Ireland. Models which could be explored include the various social partnership models of governance operating in many EU countries. For example the National Economic and Social Forum in the Republic of Ireland.
- Another example to explore is at a European level the formation of the groupe des sages which are ad hoc groups set up to reflect on certain issues such as Treaties.

The Platform would also recommend: -

- civic society is content with the process
- equality is considered throughout the process of establishing the Civic Forum and implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – Women, Peace and Security