Community Work Ireland

FAR RIGHT OBSERVATORY

A Guide to Understanding and Responding to the Far-Right

A resource to support community workers, community work organisations and groups concerned to promote social inclusion and human rights to respond to far-right actors and actions.

Far-Right Ireland

About Us

Far-Right Observatory

The mission of the Far-Right Observatory is to challenge the politics of hate and fear by increasing public knowledge, building community resilience and civil society cooperation and action against far-right organising.

Contact niamh@fro.ie
Twitter @FRO_Ire
Web https://farrightobservatory.medium.com/

Community Work Ireland

Community Work Ireland (CWI) is a national organisation that promotes and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion, and inequality; promoting, protecting and advancing human rights and ultimately achieving social change that will contribute to the creation of a just, sustainable and equal society.

Contact info@cwi.ie
Web www.cwi.ie
Twitter @CommWorkIreland

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

CWI work is supported by the Scheme to Support National Organisations funded by the government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development

pobal
government supporting communities

A Guide to Understanding and Responding to the Far-Right

A resource to support community workers, community work organisations and groups concerned with promoting social inclusion and human rights to respond to far-right actors and activity.

Introduction

Far-right ideologies are shared across borders and activity inspired by far-right values are increasingly seen as a transnational threat. While the atrocities committed in other jurisdictions have not been seen in this country, since 2018, the far-right have been increasingly organising and attempting to build a narrative of discrimination, racism, inequality, homophobia, and transphobia in Ireland. The focus of their attention has primarily been on building opposition to asylum seekers and refugees, organising homophobic and transphobic mobilisations, anti-repeal pickets outside hospitals and, since 2020, COVID conspiracy theories. Their activities and mobilisations take place online and offline. The impact of their activities can be profound on people and communities at the receiving end of their action.

In Ireland, there has been a particular focus on the targeting of asylum seekers and refugees and on encouraging people to join reactionary campaigns or ad hoc groups against Direct Provision centres. Whilst some join in the knowledge that they are supporting the anti-immigrant racism that motivates such protests, many are unaware of this motivation and are deceived by far-right tactics and misuse of information.

There is an urgent need to better understand how this ideology manifests in action and how to challenge it when it does. It is important that those of us who care about human rights and inclusion are prepared and take a stand to disrupt far-right activity that is actively working against an inclusive and just society. The aim of this guide is to increase knowledge and support community workers and civil society organisations to challenge far-right organising in our communities. The guide is informed by the work of the Far-Right Observatory and of Community Work Ireland and by the issues, concerns and experiences of our members.

Understanding the Far-Right

While the extreme levels of far-right motivated violence seen in many parts of the world have not yet been seen in Ireland, the dramatic rise of far-right ideology and organising internationally poses the potential of direct threats to targeted communities within Irish society. It also poses challenges for all of us committed to human rights and equality to understand and build responses to far-right activity in our communities.

The far-right is a term often used to describe extreme, nationalistic viewpoints, including fascism and oppressive ideologies. These ideologies sand values are shared by groups active all over the world. Far-right groups range from explicitly neo-fascist groups, racist and anti-migrant groups, homophobic and transphobic groups, misogynist groups, nativist groups and fundamentalist religious groups.

The first step to challenging the far-right is to understand the approaches and tactics that they use. Far-right activity tends to be opportunistic, focusing on events at a particular time, in a particular place. It is important to understand what might trigger activity, such as the announcement of a Direct Provision centre, an election or referendum, and to be alert to respond. Being alert to the role of media and how it can be manipulated is also important.

The far-right seeks to build their base by aggravating feelings of disaffection, resentment, and alienation from decision-making processes particularly in communities with experience of long-term poverty, inequality and marginalisation. During COVID, their focus was on agitating frustration about restrictions, lockdowns and compulsory mask wearing, and on misinformation about the vaccination programme.

They will often manipulate narratives such as using the equality-focused '*end inhumane direct provision'* slogan to object to new direct provision centres for reasons that are racially rather than equality motivated.

Symbolism is important in their rhetoric. Images often include the national flag, and their narrative is filled with references to nationalism, patriotism, and narrow definitions of 'Irishness', used to polarise and to 'other' communities, creating a sense of 'them and us'.

A key approach of far-right actors is to identify local allies that can provide cover for their plans and activities. Such allies have included:

- People who are local followers of or subscribers to far-right influencers. This includes people susceptible to, or believers in, conspiracy theories, those with racist attitudes and/or supporters of hate organisations;
- People with something to gain from aligning with outside agitators particularly in opposing Direct Provision centres or refugee supports;
- Local elected representatives or those seeking to increase public profile for elections and who want to assess public opinion. In the past these have included independent politicians and members of some political parties;
- Local business people who are concerned about impacts on business or benefits to competitors.

Other tactics employed by far-right activists include:

- Spreading rumours and allegations about refugees, suggesting that there will be an increased risk of theft or sexual violence to deliberately create fear and panic amongst the community that stifles any sense of solidarity with refugees.
- Distributing disinformation leaflets and online propaganda.
- Posing as 'just concerned for the community', concealing prior involvement in similar campaigns in other parts of the country.
- Manipulating the media and misusing equality motivated concerns about, for example, direct provision.
- Once initial rumours and fears are stoked, frequently by outside actors, there is generally a rapid call for public meetings. Typically, such gatherings include calls for an immediate vote to reject proposed plans, undermining any opportunity for considered, compassionate, public conversation.

Look Out For

- *Unfounded specific and **nonspecific references to sexual predators in new communities and the potential for sexual violence being perpetrated by new communities**, often by people with no previous track record of speaking out against sexual violence.*
- ***Remarks that criminalise people fleeing war**, including the use of the term 'men of fighting age' used by far-right activists to delegitimize adult male refugees and asylum seekers.*
- ***References to 'fake' asylum seekers or refugees**, intimating that the reasons people seek asylum are not legitimate. This is most often used in reference to people of colour.*
- ***Setting up community social media pages/groups** that pretend to be locally organised but are really being run by outsiders.*

Challenging the Far-Right

Learn and understand tactics and messaging - the first step in challenging the far-right is to learn and understand tactics and messaging of far-right activists such as those outlined above.

Raise awareness - within your community, organisations or networks, including sports clubs and associations, businesses, churches, schools, youth groups and community groups, about the tactics and real agenda of far-right actors. This can be done through meetings, online training, which can be supported by the Far-Right Observatory (FRO), provision of information, resources etc.

Take a stand - it is critical that community workers, community work organisations and groups concerned with inclusion and human rights take a stand and challenge far-right action. Encourage your organisation or network to develop a formal position/policy naming and opposing the far-right.

Work with the targeted communities - identify and support key leaders who may be willing to publicly call out far-right actors and activity. Build community leadership to ensure that community voices are to the fore in challenging and creating an alternative narrative.

Political influence - hold meetings with local councillors, and TDs to discuss concerns and gain commitments from them to stand against the hate, division and disinformation being spread by far-right actors and share this resource with them.

Use the media - identify local media allies to challenge the far-right and present an alternative narrative. Local media can be particularly useful as it many in local communities get their news.

Respond to disinformation - through the provision of clear and accurate information and the promotion of community messages of inclusion, equality, and integration.

Support - communities and individuals, such as asylum seekers, that are being targeted. Provide immediate support to anyone you witness directly receiving negative far-right attention. Ensure your response is emphatic to the victim(s) and firm with the perpetrator(s).

Report - any far-right activity or suspected activity (leaflets, protests, online communications) to the Far-Right Observatory **niamh@fro.ie.**

Keep in touch - with the Far-Right Observatory for training, support, and resources.

Join Community Work Ireland for opportunities for networking and sharing experiences and ideas for challenging the far-right **www.cwi.ie.**

Take Notes

If you witness an incident, take notes:

- Was the activity online or in person?
- Did the perpetrator identify themselves?
- How many people were involved in the incident?
- Were people involved from the locality?
- Was the incident recorded by them or by you or another ally?
- What questions or talking points did they use?
- Who were they addressing or targeting? Eg residents, premises management etc
- Was there any sense of intimidation and anger?
- What was the impact or effect on the community or individual being targeted?

Asylum Seekers, Direct Provision and Refugee Centres

Direct Provision and refugee centres are a particular target for far-right activity. There have been a number of reports of far-right actors visiting accommodation centres, generally with the objective of recording to create online content. Typically, they have come across as calm and confident in their right to be there. However, in some cases they have reportedly been aggressive and have caused upset to residents and staff.

If you are a member of the asylum-seeking or refugee community, or a community group working with asylum seekers and refugees:

- Remember **you do not have to engage** or to respond to questions from the public or from people who claim to be activists or journalists. Some questions asked include 'where are you from?' or 'how did you get here'?
- **Stay calm and avoid getting into conversation.** Questions are sometimes asked to provoke an emotional response e.g. 'why did you leave your country?' or 'why did you not stay and fight?'.
- If you feel intimidated or unsafe **contact the management of the premises and your local Garda station.**
- If such an incident occurs, **please contact other Direct Provision or refugee centres in your area to make them aware**. If they don't have a copy of this briefing, please send it on to them.

If you are the manager of a Direct Provision centre:

- Be aware that these incidents can occur and **develop an appropriate response protocol**. This may include:

- Circulating photographs of known perpetrators internally.
- Refusing admittance and temporarily closing the doors.
- Refusing to answer their questions.
- Requesting that the perpetrator leave the premises.
- Ensuring that staff are made aware and alerted to the possibility of recurrence.
- Contacting the Gardaí.

If you wish to receive further information about who the leading far-right actors in Ireland are, please contact niamh@fro.ie