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# AKIDWA'S NEWSLETTER

## COVID 19 : Adjusting to the new normal



### WORD FROM SALOME MBUGUA,

Head of Operations & Strategy

2020 started with many challenges, the outbreak of Covid 19 which as you all know led to the lockdown and created fear and anxiety to people not just in Ireland but globally. Then there was the senseless killing of George Floyd which took place on 25th May 2020 which is Africa liberation day.

This killing triggered anger and anguish relating to long time struggles of Africans and people of African descent who continue to be affected by racism, in its many forms. Nevertheless, AkiDwA has kept up with the momentum following up with members through social media, phone call and by organising online conferences. Please keep in touch with us by following AkiDwA our social media, phone calls or visiting us into our office.

### How has AkiDwA's team coped with the pandemic situation?

At the height of the pandemic and especially during the lockdown period, at least 90% of employees across Ireland worked from home. This was to control the spread of the viral infection and hence restrictions dictated so. This effectively means that since March the way people were used to work changed drastically. This has led us to discover that working from home has its own opportunities as well as challenges.

Our professional approach was to provide more flexibility and to help each other to find a new balance. We always kept daily interactions with work colleagues by regular meetings and debriefing online, calling each other to air their experiences and coping mechanisms. We also always kept talking with other frontline workers which is essential to find out how others were going about doing their work from home, away from the office and familiar work environments. Hence there was a lot to learn from each other.

When it comes to AkiDwA, the issue of mental health is huge. This is because we deal with people undergoing vulnerabilities which keep on varying and Covid 19 and lockdown only exacerbated these feelings of vulnerability. In the context of AkiDwA's challenges during the lockdown, mental health, and well-being during the lockdown were factors which manifested themselves in all of the organisation's work. To cope with the stress and fears which manifested during this time, talking to others helped as well as going for walks, all forms of meditation and prayers were also useful. Another strategy was making long distance calls to friends and family, just to find out how they were fairing.

We also had to keep abreast with what was happening in the national and international level. This offered a vantage point for us to learn how other people were coping and working while at the same time adjusting to the new normal.



## Dismantling Racism, Time to Take Action is now

At the midst of the outbreak of Covid 19 the outrageous killing of George Floyd brought anger and frustration to individuals and groups who have been experiencing or working on Racism over the years. AkiDwA organised for an online three on twitter globally. There were conference on 30th June, prior to the great presentations on the day and the conference the organisation had wor- event was a huge success. AkiDwA is ked on a press statement in response to currently exploring the possibility of estab- George Floyd killing which took place blishing strategic alliances with other or- on 25th May (Africa Liberation Day). ganisations in order to combat racism. The objective of the conference was to provide a platform where experts, policy makers, allies, indigenous and migrant community can articulate actions that can contribute to combatting racism in Ireland.



368 people registered to participate and by connecting to AkiDwA Facebook and YouTube live online the conference reached over 442 people, the AkiDwA twitter handle was trea- ding and was number

[Click to play video](#)

## AkiDwA Conference Women Stand Up to Covid 19

Migrant women has been poorly affected by the lockdown due to Covid 19 pandemic especially women living in direct provision centres, while the organisation continue to check on the women and share information on Covid 19 through online social media, the organisation held an online zoom conference on 12th May to engage and support members due to ongoing anxiety and

[Click to play video](#)



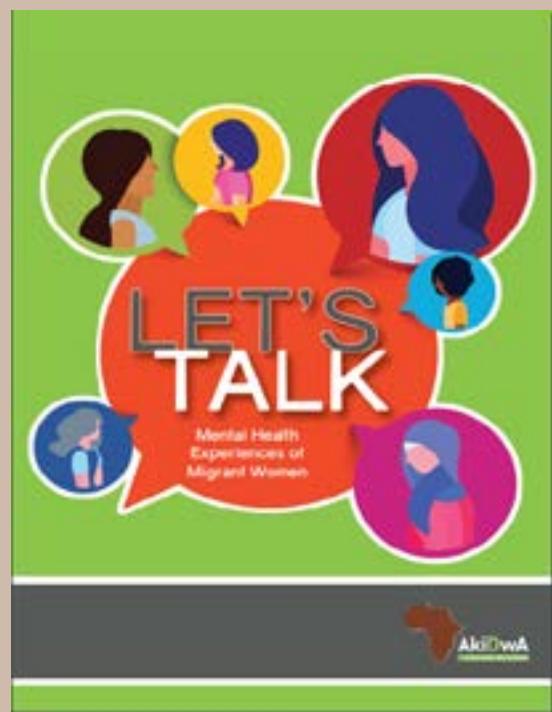
challenges brought by Covid 19. 121 participants, mainly AkiDwA members from all over Ireland participated in the conference. Discussion focused on mental health, family support and access to reproductive health, it was also an opportunity for the members to share their strategies on coping mechanism. Cork migrant centre highlighted about their innovative project with women

who are currently living in Direct Provision of making face masks as their way of giving back to the society.

## **Migrant women and mental health – launch of Let's Talk**

In 2019 AkiDwA undertook research on migrant women's mental health. The research was conducted between July and October 2019 and captured the lived experiences of women under the Refugee Resettlement programme and women living in Direct Provision. The research revealed that many migrant women struggle with the loss of agency and autonomy that comes with the asylum system here in Ireland. The research found that migrant women experienced significant stressors that have serious implications for their mental health and psychological well-being. It found personal distress was experienced on a daily basis and was inseparable from social, political, and institutional processes. Findings show that women's lives were characterised by stressors related to mainly three factors - practical challenges faced daily by migrant women, powerlessness and lack of agency and grief and loss. Migrant women face many stresses in their home countries, on their journeys to Ireland, and in their daily life on arrival.

The report was launched on 30th January 2020 at the IHREC.





## Launch of AkiDwA manifesto on FGM and work so far

On 6th February Zero tolerance day on FGM AkiDwA launched the FGM manifesto. The event took place at Buswell hotel and was attended by a good number of people among them politician, AkiDwA's Community Health Ambassadors (CHA'S) and representatives from religious and faith community. The Manifesto targeted politician contesting for TDs seats in advance of the national election and was calling for a commitment to address FGM. AkiDwA with the national steering committee called for a comprehensive

government led National Action Plan (NAP), implementing a comprehensive plan, allocating funding, supporting civil society working on the issue and calling for political commitment to end female genital mutilation and protect those at risk, especially children. The organisation continues to advance work on FGM and currently we are undertaking evaluation and review on FGM work in Ireland. The review work will look at the last 5 years.



## First Fortnight

On 10th January and as part of the First Fortnight Mental Health Arts Festival 2020 – AkiDwA collaborated with the Dublin North, East Recovery College, Cairde, DCU, Pavee Point and Silver Thread where they held a full day of activities with a title “Journeys - What I Know Now” focusing on transcultural healing, creativity, understanding and integration of well-being. AkiDwA work on FGM, reproductive health and mental health were featured in the discussions as well.

Also featured was as an exhibition on FGM which was feted as the most popular in DCU not just on the day of the event but a week before and after – FGM was the most talked about subject in the campus.





## CERD Submission to the UN

On 2nd and 3rd December 2019 Ireland appeared before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD). AkiDwA prepared a report which was submitted to the UN committee in Geneva in November 2019 and on 2nd and 3rd December. Ashimeda Okonkwo- AkiDwA chair attended the hearing in Geneva. Our report highlighted the day to day lived experiences of migrant women of racism and more so the systemic racism embedded in all aspects of the Irish society.



## Women in Peace mediation and Negotiations

In November 2019, AkiDwA joined UCD at the grassroots level, project working to establish Irish Consortium for the Promotion of Women in Peace Mediation and Negotiations. One of the objectives of the project is to recognise diversity in women with expertise in mediation and negotiations, particularly

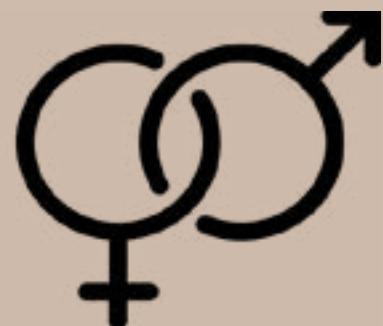
that are now living on the island of Ireland, it's a short project working towards the establishment of a more permanent Irish consortium on the promotion of women in peace mediation.





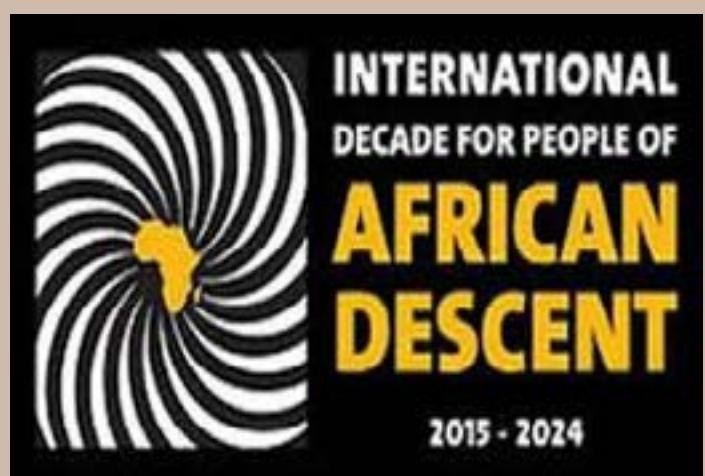
## Submission to the Citizen Assembly on Gender Equality

AkiDwA Submission argued gender equality cannot be truly addressed without listening to the perspectives of women with varying life experiences. The organisation submitted some key gendered experiences of the members from our outreach work and research undertaken recently for consideration of the Citizen's Assembly including Gender Based Violence, Employment and Childcare, and the experience of women in Direct Provision.



## International Decade for People of African Descent

AkiDwA has a seat in the steering committee working with the African community and Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) to implement the International Decade for People of African Descent, the decade focuses on three themes- Recognition, Justice and Development. The organisation also hosts funding on behalf of IDPA-DI committee which currently employs a project officer to deliver activities.



## Women together for a better world project

To progress our work on women peace and security AkiDwA will be delivering a new project Women together for a better world project. The project will create a platform where indigenous and migrant women will come together and dialogue on global justice issues, sharing their personal experiences and understanding of how global issues are also local issues



and how peace and development impacts their day-to-day lives.

The focus is on 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, there are 17 Sustainable Development Goals and Goal Number 5- Gender Equality will be the main focus for AkiDwA project.

## Mobilisation of migrant on civic and political participation

AkiDwA is working on a new proposal to advance work on civic and democratic engagement of migrants, our project Initiating Dialogue about Engagement Authority and Leadership (IDEAL was very successful and participants worked with the facilitator to design a follow up project. In the new project AkiDwA will run a mobilisation and awareness raising project where migrant women will be encouraged to register to vote and also to consider running for elections especially at local level.

The projects will also put emphasis on the importance of migrant women engaging at various levels of decision making.





## It takes a village to raise a child project

As a follow up to a call made by AkiDwA in 2013 in relation to number of children taken into state care, the report was indicating that African families are 20 times more likely to end up in the child care courts. The organisation will run a project It takes a village to raise a child, funded by UN Geneva. AkiDwA will run workshops with women,



hold high-level round table discussion with policy makers and produce a book. The project will run from September 2020 to July 2021.

## Research on Trafficking of women

As part of AkiDwA's work on SGBV under the migrant women health, the organization is currently undertaking research on trafficking of women. AkiDwA believes that trafficking of women is a form of gender-based violence and the organisation is committed to work with others to address this issue.

The general objective of the research is to contribute to the understanding on trafficking of women in particular from the African continent to Europe for the purposes of sexual exploitation and through key recommendation address the problem from a holistic approach.

## Domestic violence project

AkiDwA has undertaken a new Domestic violence project which will see the organisation advance work on this area and also research on migrant women who have become homeless due the current housing crisis





## Aspire - Research project

AkiDwA, Maynooth University and Irish Traveler movement will be undertaking a research project Assessing Supports for the Political Inclusion of Racial and Ethnic Minority, Women in Ireland (ASPIRE) on civic and political engagement. In the 2019 local elections, women made up 29% of all candidates and 24% of those were elected., the research will map supports for and experiences of REMW in local political processes (candidacy for local political office) and

develop with NGOs, stakeholders and academics a research consortium informed by international expertise to theorise Racial and Ethnic Minority Women political engagement/candidacy and design a future research programme on ERMW, women's access to local politics in Ireland and beyond.

## AkiDwA 2019 General Assembly

AkiDwA AGM was held on 7th December 2019. There was a good participation by members from different counties including, County Clare, Offaly, Laois, Limerick, Cork, Meath, Tralee, Dublin, Longford, Sligo. In addition to AGM business, two presentations and discussions were held; this was on mental health- AkiDwA Lets Talk project and

outcome of evaluation of AkiDwA work on sexual reproductive health was also shared.





## Community Health Ambassador training

In December 2019 15 community health ambassadors received training and support. The two days residential training focused on equipping CHA on presenting on FGM and practically demonstrating and providing tools for delivery of training or awareness raising to various groups within the Irish society.

**Would you like to train as a health ambassador and work with people in your community?**



## Up coming Event

### Migrant Information Day

The event is hosted by AkiDwA in collaboration with IOM. On the day there will various organisations and group sharing valuable information on job, entrepreneurship, education, health, migration, gender issues and many more.



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