



Written Feedback to House of Lords Northern Ireland Sub-Committee

Request - Parliamentary Scrutiny of PEACE PLUS Finance Agreement

April 2023

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the scrutiny of the PEACEPLUS Finance Agreement.

The Special EU Programmes Body is one of six cross-border bodies set up under Strand 2 of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The body has the statutory responsibility of the management of the PEACEPLUS Programme and will oversee its implementation during the programme period. We have followed the development of the Financing Agreement between the UK Government and the European Commission closely over recent months and are delighted to see that the parliamentary scrutiny process has now commenced.

The detail of the Financing Agreement provides the framework for the smooth implementation of the Programme, and we are fully supportive of the Financing Agreement. We will work closely with our colleagues in the UK Government, the European Commission, the Government of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure the Agreement is operationalised through the delivery of the Programme commencing in 2023.

PEACEPLUS is a European Union funding programme and has been designed to support Peace and Prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, building upon the work of the previous PEACE and INTERREG Programmes. The design of the Programme reflects the importance of peace-building activity, but also the importance of actions that will contribute positively to the economy, building prosperity and adjusting to the new environment and challenges we face.

The Programme will continue to take the opportunities and address the needs, arising from the peace process to boost economic growth and stimulate social and economic regeneration and secondly, to promote social inclusion, particularly for those at the margins of economic and social life. The Programme will help to address long standing social and economic challenges which



have, and continue to, impact on communities, particularly those in rural border areas as well as ongoing challenges that exist in urban settings. The Programme has been developed within the wider political, economic, social and environmental context, including an extensive consultation process.

The PEACEPLUS Programme will focus on, and support those communities and organisations best placed to deliver real and lasting impacts across the region and critically within communities and groups that have been most affected by the legacy of the troubles/conflict, and best placed to implement actions and initiatives to address societal and community challenges. Communities will be encouraged to take pride in and promote understanding of their culture, customs and heritage through initiatives funded by the Programme.

The PEACEPLUS Programme will provide opportunities for our young people to improve their life chances, skills, education, confidence building, creative and sporting activities, encouraging social entrepreneurship. The Programme will also focus on enhancing community leadership and ensuring that a new generation of leaders are appropriately skilled to deal with the challenges of sustaining peace and good relations.

The Programme will also invest in the economy, providing support for SMEs, research, and innovation in specific areas of need. Support for the skills programmes, life-long learning and diversification will be available. Investment through the Programme in the social economy projects also has the potential to make a significant contribution to the economy and community within the region and therefore, support will be offered to provide an ecosystem to underpin and grow this sector.

There will be a renewed focus on rural and border communities, initiatives which will support regeneration and reimagining of rural areas which have been most affected from a lack of investment for decades and suffer in relation to geographic isolation and a lack of opportunity and access to services.

The legacy of this Programme will be a contribution to sustaining a peaceful and shared society, something which the Programmes have contributed to since 1995.

Annex 1 of this paper outlines in further detail the key themes and investment areas of the Programme, each of which has been jointly designed in consultation with the relevant policy Departments in Northern Ireland and Ireland and are aligned to both Government priorities.



In advance of the Programme being launched, the SEUPB has put in Place a programme of pre-application support to facilitate the development of applications. There has been a huge amount of interest from potential applicants, and a total of 15 workshops, across a range of the Programmes Investment Areas, have been held with over 1500 people attending in person, and many others viewing the workshops online. This is an early indication of the need for the Programme funding, and the extent of the general interest for those planning to avail of the opportunities presented in PEACEPLUS.

Finally, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this written submission indicating our support for the financing agreement. I look forward to its successful progression through the parliamentary scrutiny process, and if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Gina McIntyre
Chief Executive



Annex 1 – PEACEPLUS Programme in Summary

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is responsible for managing PEACEPLUS and have developed 6 key themes of the Programme. These are:



Further information can be found on the themes and investment areas on the SEUPB website – www.seupb.eu/peaceplus.



1. The PEACEPLUS Themes

A total of €1.14bn has been allocated across the themes and investment areas outlined above, and a short summary of each of the six themes has been outlined below.

Theme 1: Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities

Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland are experiencing a period of relative post conflict stability. Often, peace building is thought of in a negative sense, i.e. the absence of fighting or violence, rather than the positive aspects of peace, which are the presence of relationships, institutions and other factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive in a post-conflict transformational society. Peace and reconciliation are essential for ongoing socio-economic development and prosperity. As such, actions to improve community and social cohesion are a priority for the governments of both jurisdictions.

Continued and considered investment in proven pathways to reconciliation is required to build peaceful and thriving communities. Such investments should result in a legacy of change, achieved through physical and social improvements, which facilitate increased social inclusion and improved cross community and cross border relations. Everyone in the Programme area has the potential to contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous society. Therefore, individual Investment Areas have been designed to optimise engagement and participation across all ages, communities and sectors and thus, ensure the maximum contribution to peace and reconciliation in the Programme area. A small grants programme has been built into this thematic area which will see funding reach smaller organisations and groups to deliver good relations impacts in and between communities.

Theme 2: Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation

Peace and prosperity are synonymous with one and other, and peace is a necessary precondition for sustained economic growth. In turn, the prosperity arising from a stable and rising economy, can help foster and embed peace. Conflict and peace, both shape and are shaped by the economy. As such, economic development in post conflict regions must take account of this and, where possible, be designed to strengthen peace and reconciliation. The Programme area experiences low levels of entrepreneurship and innovation generally. This situation contributes to a high ratio of low to high paid jobs and comparatively higher levels of unemployment. There is an opportunity to encourage SMEs to achieve scaling through clustering and facilitate innovation, in a



manner which will garner performance in an ever changing and competitive marketplace, while increasing competitiveness, productivity and export levels. A more innovative culture is being fostered across the Programme area. There is an opportunity to build upon this positive cultural shift and invest in high level research and innovation initiatives. This will facilitate commercially driven partnerships involving the Programme area's best researchers and companies of all scales, in a manner which will contribute to significant economic growth. The creation of Smart Towns and Villages will build upon a proven social innovation led approach, to maximise the potential of Information Communications Technology (ICT) to deliver improved social and economic outcomes across the Programme area, particularly in rural areas.

Theme 3: Empowering and Investing in Our Young People

Investing in our young people is essential to ensure the long-term peace and prosperity of the Programme area. Whilst the current generation of young people has not experienced direct conflict to the extent their parents and grandparents did, they live with the legacy of the conflict. This situation impacts upon many areas of their lives. Many have grown up in predominately single identity areas and attended single identity schools. Combined, these factors have resulted in limited, if any opportunity to develop relationships with those from different community, cultural and political backgrounds. This has often engendered feelings of fear and mistrust in our young people. A considerable number have grown up in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, which have experienced under investment as a direct result of the conflict. In many cases, this situation has contributed to lower levels of educational attainment and an inability to participate in the diverse labour market, which would improve their individual life circumstances, while enhancing peace and reconciliation. Building on existing experience and expertise in the Integrated Education Sector, will enable peace and reconciliation work to be effectively progressed across pre-school, primary, post primary and youth settings, and on a cross border basis.

The Programme will build on the current models of mental health support which provide accessible, age appropriate, early prevention and recovery activities and are delivered on a cross community and cross border basis. This will result in an increased number of resilient young people with the level of capacity required to be in control of their own lives and make a positive contribution within their communities.



Theme 4: Healthy and Inclusive Communities

The provision of adequate levels of inclusive health and social care provision, within economic constraints, is a challenge for all governments. Research has shown that social, economic and environmental factors can influence an individual's health outcomes. Health inequalities can therefore arise when the aforementioned factors result in unequal health outcomes for different social groups. COVID-19 has provided a spotlight on the negative impact of health inequalities.

Considerable developments have been made in the provision of collaborative cross border health care provision in recent years, much of it funded by the INTERREG Programme. The PEACEPLUS Programme will build and expand upon this work within other areas, which are suitable for cross community and cross border collaboration. Our rural communities have significant strengths but also face considerable challenges, which can result in inequalities, including access to healthcare provision. The PEACEPLUS Programme presents an opportunity to develop a strengths-based model, which will enable and empower rural communities to reach their full potential. Investment will contribute to the creation of thriving rural communities, delivering significant social, economic and environmental benefits. It is also important that victims and survivors of the Conflict continue to be acknowledged and supported. The PEACE Programmes have previously invested in programmes which have provided an evidence base for the most appropriate interventions and support. The PEACEPLUS Programme will build upon the provision of health and wellbeing supports and resilience-based capacity building programmes.

Theme 5: Supporting a Sustainable and Better-Connected Future

Our natural environment is one of our most important assets and its enhancement and protection is critical to the future economic and social development. A clean, green and accessible environment makes a major contribution to people having long, healthy and active lives, as well as creating a place where people want to live, visit and invest. Strategic cross border investment will enhance and protect our environment, while strengthening the economy in the Programme area and beyond.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on earth and is crucial to human life. Healthy ecosystems produce vital services, including fresh water, food and fuel sources as well as carbon storage and flood alleviation to help combat climate change. It also provides strong links to human health and wellbeing. Threats to biodiversity include loss of habitats, nutrient enrichment and invasive alien species, which all reduce the resilience of our nature rendering it more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, so must be addressed. Good air quality is essential for the natural environment and



biodiversity in particular, which given the transboundary nature of air pollution, can be more effectively managed on a cross border basis.

The marine area comprises all marine waters including: seabed, sub soil, sea loughs and tidal rivers. The marine environment is an important economic asset to the Programme area and considered a growth sector. In addition to economic benefits, the marine and coastal environment provide important societal benefits through ecosystem services. These include: waste assimilation, coastal defence, carbon absorption, recreational, heritage, fisheries and aquaculture.

Water is a resource which is vital for all life forms. Catchments and their water resources are a key environmental and economic asset within the Programme area and deliver significant benefits to society through ecosystem services. These include drinking water, wastewater assimilation, angling, tourism and culture / heritage amenities. The main pressures upon the cross-border water environment are related to excess nutrients and runoff. Investment in nature-based solutions is fundamental to sustainable catchment management, including facilities for wastewater and drinking water treatment.

Cross border collaboration to progress the replacement of fossil fuels by indigenous renewable energy in the heat sector will render the economies of Ireland and Northern Ireland less dependent on imports. This will enhance the security of energy supply, in line with EU, Irish and UK policies. This will also make a significant contribution to the achievement of local, national and EU CO2 emission reduction targets.

Transport is essential for our economic and social development. It is a crucial economic driver as it connects businesses with markets and facilitates employee mobility. From a social perspective, transport provides access to education, health, and leisure services. Therefore, it is essential to invest in transport infrastructure and connectivity. From a peace and reconciliation perspective, investment in transport is important to build upon current levels of cross border mobility in a sustainable manner. Hence, building connections and facilitating sustainable cross border mobility, is a key component of peace and reconciliation on this Island.

Community awareness and education is essential to ensure that everyone can play their part in protecting our environment. Community and citizen participation initiatives and education and awareness training programmes will therefore be a feature of activity across this Theme.



Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration

Whilst the INTERREG and PEACE Programmes have made a significant contribution within the Programme area to cementing cross border collaboration, challenges persist, some of which have arisen in the last number of years. Most of the remaining obstacles arise from diverging national legislations on either side of the border (incompatible administrative processes, or simply lack of common territorial planning).

In 2016, the European Commission identified legal and administrative obstacles for the Northern Ireland-Ireland border (UK-IE). Some of the sectors in which the obstacles exist are: industry and trade (exportation of goods, cross border commercial services, e-commerce, cross border economic advice services and commuter flows); labour market education (mobility of trainees, students and teachers, and access to tertiary education); social security system (access to social insurance system); and access to health care services and medical treatment. Although work has been undertaken in these sectors since that time to minimise obstacles, there will be further initiatives required.

2. Small Grants Programmes

An important part of the PEACEPLUS Programme will be the small grants programmes which will deliver grants of up to €100k to smaller community organisations and groups. The grants will be provided under themes 1 and 6 of the programme and will focus on activities which deliver good relations outcomes and also projects under theme 6 which bring communities and groups together on a cross border basis. The application and implementation process for projects will be delivered in a streamlined manner reflecting the lower amounts of grants when compared to other investment areas of the programme. This will facilitate many smaller groups without the necessary capacity to avail of the opportunities presented within PEACEPLUS.