

## NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PLUS PROGRAMME

The purpose of the EU PEACE PLUS programme is to support peace and reconciliation and to promote social, economic and regional stability and cooperation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

### LEGAL BASIS

The legal basis for the fifth PEACE programme (PEACE PLUS) covering the 2021-2027 programming period is Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of 24 June 2021 and Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of 24 June 2021.

### BACKGROUND

The peace process in Northern Ireland has been receiving financial support from the EU since 1989, through both EU regional policy and EU contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (IFI).

In 1995, the first PEACE programme (1995-1999) was approved. In 1999, the European Council decided that the special programme should continue until 2004 under the name of PEACE II. The programme was subsequently extended until 2006. These two programmes were followed by PEACE III, covering the 2007-2013 programming period and PEACE IV, covering the 2014-2020 programming period.

In a referendum held on 23 June 2016, the majority of voters (51.9%) voted for the UK to leave the European Union. The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020. Northern Ireland has benefited significantly from EU funding and the UK's withdrawal raised concerns in the longer term for a range of sectors in Northern Ireland, as well as for the peace process and cross-border cooperation beyond 2020 (Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK that has a land border with a Member State: in practical terms, there is now an external EU border on the island of Ireland).

The PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes received extensive attention during the negotiations on the terms of the UK's withdrawal. A commitment to ensure their continuation until their conclusion in 2023 was included in the Withdrawal Agreement between the UK and the EU. In this context, Regulation (EU) 2019/491 of the European Parliament and of the Council was adopted on 25 March 2019 with the aim of allowing for the continuation of the territorial cooperation programmes PEACE IV (Ireland-United Kingdom) and United Kingdom-Ireland (Ireland-Northern Ireland-Scotland).

### OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

The PEACE PLUS programme is a new cross-border EU programme to strengthen peace, reconciliation and cross-border cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland. It combines the previous INTERREG and PEACE funding strands into a new programme for the 2021-2027 programming period.

The PEACE PLUS programme targets investment in six key thematic areas:

1. Building peaceful and thriving communities,
2. Delivering socio-economic regeneration and transformation,
3. Empowering and investing in our young people,
4. Healthy and inclusive communities,
5. Supporting a sustainable and better-connected future,
6. Building and embedding partnership and collaboration.

Within each thematic area, there are several investment areas that have a more specific focus or that target particular organisations such as local authorities or community groups. There are 22 investment areas in total.

## FINANCING

Between 1995 and 2020, there were four PEACE programmes, with a financial contribution of EUR 1.6 billion. While PEACE I (1995-1999) and PEACE II (2000-2006) received funding from all of the structural funds, PEACE III and PEACE IV (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) were funded solely by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

In the 2021-2027 period, the EU will finance the PEACE PLUS programme with EUR 235 million from the European Territorial Cooperation allocation of the ERDF. Along with the UK's financial contribution and additional national co-financing from Ireland and Northern Ireland, the PEACE PLUS programme will provide a total investment of EUR 1.1 billion.

## MANAGEMENT

The area eligible for inclusion in the PEACE PLUS programme consists of Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (the latter comprises counties Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal).

PEACE PLUS is managed in an integrated manner and the UK's contribution is integrated into the programme as external assigned revenue. The Special EU Programmes Body is a managing authority for the PEACE PLUS programme. It is one of six cross-border bodies set up under the Belfast Agreement.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The PEACE programmes have provided opportunities for participation and dialogue, and have brought decision-making and responsibility for community development closer to the people (i.e. they have applied a 'bottom-up' approach). They have funded a wide range of projects, including projects to support victims and survivors, young people, small and medium-sized enterprises, infrastructure and urban regeneration projects, and projects supporting immigrants and celebrating the ethnic diversity of society as a whole.

Importantly, these programmes are now seen as examples of peace-building policy to be shared throughout Europe and other regions.

## ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Parliament has always supported the EU's financial contributions to the PEACE programmes. Following the outcome of the UK referendum, Parliament, in its resolution of 5 April 2017 on negotiations with the United Kingdom, expressed concern about the consequences of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and highlighted the need to safeguard peace in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

In its resolution of 11 September 2018 on the impact of EU cohesion policy on Northern Ireland, Parliament made note of the Commission's proposal to continue the PEACE and Interreg programmes, as well as the UK position paper of April 2018 on the future of cohesion policy, in which the UK stated its willingness to explore a potential successor to PEACE IV with the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the EU. Parliament considered that EU support for territorial cooperation, especially regarding cross-border and cross-community projects, should be continued in view of the achievements of the special EU cohesion programmes for Northern Ireland, namely the PEACE and Interreg programmes, which are particularly important for the stability of the region.

Parliament, in its role as co-legislator on the cohesion package (in this context, on the Common Provisions Regulation and the Regulation on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal), strongly supported the continuation of the PEACE programmes in the 2021–2027 period.

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