



# SPECIAL EUROPEAN UNION PROGRAMMES BODY

Impact Evaluation of the PEACE IV (2014-2020) Programme - Specific Objectives 2, 3 and 4 – Executive Summary

June 2024 (based on October 2022 data)





**Note: the data presented in this report was collected in October 2022.**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

RSM UK Consulting LLP (RSM) was commissioned by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) to carry out an evaluation of the impact of activities associated with Specific Objectives (SOs) 2, 3 and 4 of the PEACE IV 2014 – 2020 programme.

The PEACE IV Programme is a €270 million, EU-funded programme, which has been designed to support peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland (NI) and the border counties of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo). It is the fourth successive PEACE programme facilitated by SEUPB.

The PEACE IV Programme began in 2014 and ran until 2020, with an end date for spend of 2023. The programme is financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) of the European Union, with contributions from the NI and Irish governments.

## Programme Performance

At a programme level, the following was reported as of October 2022<sup>1</sup>:

- a total of 56 of the 81 Peace IV projects falling under the scope of this evaluation have completed their activity. This includes:
  - 13 Children and Young People Action 2.2 projects.
  - 10 Shared Spaces and Services Action 3.2 projects.
  - 14 Building Positive Relations Action 4.1 projects.
  - 19 Building Positive Relations Action 4.2 projects.
- SEUPB considers the programme to be on target to meet European Commission performance framework thresholds by the end of the programme; and,
- there remains a risk that delivery of some Shared Spaces projects (Action 3.1) will not complete before the programme end date (December 2023).

## Evaluation Approach

The evaluation has reported on programme impacts in 2019, 2021 and 2022 - a period of recent history that has endured significant levels of economic and social disruption and uncertainty, not least as a result of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This document represents the final of the three impact evaluation reports.

The evaluation process has centred around the development of project case studies, which have been used to support an assessment of outcomes and impact. Whilst this approach allows for an assessment of impact at a project and beneficiary level, the relatively small sample of projects profiled (i.e., 10 in total) means that the identified outcomes and impacts are not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Source: SEUPB Tripartite Implementation Report, October 2022

representative of those generated by the relevant SOs or the PEACE IV Programme as a whole, and therefore, they should be considered as being **illustrative only**.

Each of the three impact reports contain six case studies, four of which are longitudinal (i.e., initially developed in 2019 and then updated in 2021 and 2022) and two are 'snapshots' of progress and impact of selected projects at a given point in time. This report contains the following case studies:

### **Longitudinal case studies**

- Belfast City Council (BCC): Connecting Open Spaces (Action 3.2).
- Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (CCGBC): Building Positive Relations (Action 4.1).
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council (NMDDC): Beyond Tolerance (Action 3.2).
- Victims and Survivors Service (VSS): Provision of Services (Action 3.3).

### **Snapshot case studies**

- Bloody Sunday Trust (BST): The Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding Project (Action 4.2).
- Monaghan County Council (MCC): Peace Centre (Action 3.1).

A full list of case studies reviewed through the 2019 and 2021 reports is provided in Table 2.1.

## **Key Conclusions**

Whilst programme level monitoring data (as captured by the NI Life and Times and Young Life and Times surveys) suggests that progress against a number of the PEACE IV result indicators has proved to be challenging (refer to Section 3.5), the case studies profiled within this and the previous case study reports highlight that at a project level, positive impacts have been achieved.

### **Building Positive Relations**

Within this report and the previous impact reports, four Building Positive Relations projects have been reviewed, namely: the CCGBC project; BST's Derry Model; Irish Football Association's (IFA) Sport Uniting Communities project; and the Housing Association's Integration Project. All four projects highlight the formation of interpersonal relationships between participants from different communities and political identities i.e. relationships that might not have developed without the existence of the PEACE IV funded activity, indicating that there may be a strong positive legacy / sustainability of the projects.

The projects also suggest the emergence of positive attitudinal change between protestant, unionist and loyalist (PUL) and catholic, nationalist and republican (CNR) participants, increased understanding of differences and improved community cohesion. In particular, the results of baseline and post-participation survey data from the CCGBC project suggests positive change across a number of the projects workstreams.

Additionally, the CCGBC project has had an impact on bringing about an increased understanding and tolerance towards BME community member and the BST project enhanced cross-border cooperation and aided in understanding the legacy of the past through their workshops with non-local British veterans. The IFA Sport Uniting Communities project identified positive impacts resulting from their Game of Three Halves programme whereby the young people participating reported a significant improvement in positive attitudes towards other communities.

Whilst most workstream activities performed well in relation to their output targets (or were progressing well towards them at the time of review), a noticeable exception was the CCGBC Key Institutions workstream. The reason given for this underperformance in output was the deeply rooted negative attitudes towards the Council and/or Government organisations in general. This indicates that there are still significant challenges relating to attitudes towards government/ public sector institutions within some communities.

#### **Contribution to the Achievement of the Objective**

Where attitudinal and behavioural change data is available, there is evidence of a positive direction of travel. For example, the CCGBC programme saw a 4-5 percentage point increase in the proportion of participants who felt relations between Protestants and Catholics had improved (in last five years) and would continue to improve (in five years' time). Similar positive trends are shown in the Housing Association Integration project and Sport Uniting Communities.

#### **Impact of the Programme as a Catalyst for Lasting Change in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation**

Programme leads highlight the significance of informal relationships and friendships developed between participants from different community backgrounds. Across the four programmes reviewed, there was a focus on the commonality between participants, be that in a shared history and heritage, shared housing and community, or shared interests.

#### **The contribution of the programme to EU 2020 objectives and the horizontal principles of equality and sustainable development**

There are examples from all projects of participants engaging in activities that would, at times in the past, not seem possible. A specific target of this SO was to build relations between people from the PUL and CNR communities and also with BME communities, which aligns with the equality objectives of the horizontal principles.

### **Shared Spaces and Services**

Through this report and the previous impact reports, three Shared Spaces and Services projects have been reviewed, namely: the BCC project; the NMDDC Beyond Tolerance project; and MCC's Peace Campus.

The delivery of capital development projects has been challenging in the context of wider external factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and, for some, Brexit. Global supply chain shortages and material price increases have added cost and delays to projects i.e. at the time of writing, only certain elements of the NMDDC Beyond Tolerance project and the BCC Forth Meadow Greenway were complete and the Monaghan Peace Campus was not completed or operational.

Although, programme based activity has been delayed in some cases as a result of delays in capital development, beneficiary surveys suggest that the programmed activity in the NMDDC Beyond Tolerance project has contributed to changing attitudes. Anecdotal evidence from case studies also highlight that shared outdoor space is enabling individuals to cross traditional divides:

- the Forth Meadow Greenway (BCC's Connecting Open Spaces project) is bringing individuals to parts of Belfast that they had never visited before, despite it being on their doorstep, by creating a shared space that all communities can access and use; and
- the Ballykinlar History Hut Capital project (NMDDC Beyond Tolerance project) is enabling young people to engage in local history unencumbered by political narrative, by providing stories of commonality at the site as part of an educational offering.

#### **Contribution to the Achievement of the Objective**

There is strong evidence that the projects have, through direct engagement with communities, directly addressed a lack of cross-community engagement and that they have facilitated attitudinal change, or in the case of MCC, are showing progress towards attitudinal change. The projects have offered an opportunity to make those first steps, for people to set foot in places they previously would not have ventured and for beginning the process of breaking down pre-conceptions of space as belonging to one community or another.

#### **Impact of the Programme as a Catalyst for Lasting Change in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation**

The NMDDC Beyond Tolerance project has been able to achieve a considerable positive impact in promoting shared spaces and being a catalyst for engagement and interactions cross-community. The quantitative impacts associated with the BCC Connecting Open Spaces project is less encouraging, however, qualitative evidence provided by stakeholders identifies that positive local impacts have been produced.

#### **The contribution of the programme to EU 2020 objectives and the horizontal principles of equality and sustainable development**

The activity delivered has been inclusive to all backgrounds and has sought to facilitate direct engagement between communities. Capital developments have been designed with sustainable principles in mind (e.g., the greenway providing an alternative transport option).

### **Children and Young People**

Within this report and the previous impact reports, two Children and Young People projects have been reviewed, namely: the Sligo County Council Children and Young People project and the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Children and Young People project. The resulting case studies were snapshots, undertaken at a point in time as both projects were progressing.

At the time of evaluation (2019), the Sligo County Council project was progressing well, with one of the five programmes completed and the other four underway. In 2020, when the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council project was reviewed, the project had enabled children and young people to interact, socialise and play sport on a cross-community basis. However, as no baseline data was available, it was not possible to assess the achievement of level of improvement.

### **Contribution to the Achievement of the Objective**

The projects reviewed for the Children and Young People SO produced significant numbers of participants, with close to 1,000 young people engaging in Fermanagh and Omagh, and, just a year into the project, 216 participants engaging with the Sligo County Council project (i.e. 97% of the target number of participants). This shows a significant interest from participants in engaging with those from other backgrounds and suggests a positive, sustainable output from the projects.

### **Impact of the Programme as a Catalyst for Lasting Change in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation**

Surveys by the Fermanagh and Omagh project identified that close to 60% of young people participating in a project survey reported that they felt relationships had improved between Protestants and Catholics, and that they would continue to improve. However, it should be noted that a baseline comparator was not available.

### **The contribution of the programme to EU 2020 objectives and the horizontal principles of equality and sustainable development**

Stakeholder feedback identifies that the funded projects and activities have all encouraged young people to take part in activities on a cross-community basis, develop soft skills and build respect for diversity.

## **Victims and Survivors**

Work delivered by the 'Provision of Services for Victims and Survivors' project, led by VSS and supported by WAVE and the Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVS), focuses on providing health and wellbeing, research, training and advocacy support services for the victims and survivors of the troubles. While the project has not fully delivered its target output, it has been able to achieve a considerable positive impact in legacy and cross border care for victims and survivors. The following outcomes have been achieved:

- firstly, through the project's direct engagement with victims and survivors, it addresses the legacy of the troubles by providing paths towards healing.
- secondly, it reinforces this work by engaging in intergenerational work ensuring that the legacy of the Troubles is addressed from a holistic, multi-generational perspective.
- thirdly, while it is not directly engaging in cross-border work, by commissioning a needs analysis for the border region it recognises and highlights the fact that the provision of services for victims and survivors is an issue that stretches beyond Northern Ireland.

Despite the project having faced significant challenges (e.g. the recruitment of advocacy staff and the delay in creating the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) institutions), it has delivered meaningful work in relation to legacy and, to a lesser extent, cross-border cooperation. The programme team expect to achieve their targeted outputs by programme completion in the Health and Wellbeing Casework Network and Workforce Training work packages.

### **Contribution to the Achievement of the Objective**

This longitudinal assessment of the VSS project has identified strong evidence that the activity delivered by VSS has contributed significantly to the achievement of Specific Objective 3. This is reinforced by the positive impacts recorded through the Work and Social Adjustment Scale



(WSAS) scoring which identified that the majority of the beneficiaries (i.e. ranging from 62% - 80%) reported that they had experienced an improvement in relation to social isolation, physical activity, literacy and numeracy and volunteering.

### **Impact of the Programme as a Catalyst for Lasting Change in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation**

The activity undertaken to address the legacy of the past, including through the inter-generational research, will contribute directly to promoting peace and reconciliation.

### **The contribution of the programme to EU 2020 objectives and the horizontal principles of equality and sustainable development**

The activity delivered has been inclusive to all backgrounds, including targeting cross-border needs through three research projects.

## **Overarching Monitoring Issues Identified**

The following issues have been identified across the evaluation period:

- **lack of clarity or absence of project targets:** in some instances, the value or units of measurement for output indicator targets were not clear. In addition, some of the case studies did not have identified targets for their result indicators, limiting the ability to assess impact.
- **baseline data** was often not available for result indicators. This was due to baseline surveys not being conducted at the outset of some activities. This resulted in challenges with attributing impact and measuring change in impact.
- it was reported that project partners focused largely on reporting **output indicators** rather than result indicators. This was due to the European Commission requiring regular output indicator updates, but there being no requirement for regular result indicator updates.

Under the framework for monitoring and evaluation set out by the Commission for the 2014-2022 programming period, which applied to PEACE IV Programme, output indicators were monitored at the project level whereas the result indicators at the programme level only. As a result, there was a gap in measuring the individual impact of projects. Some projects tried to fill this gap by collecting result data on an ad hoc basis, however, this has led to challenges in measuring the impact of individual projects.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been developed and refined through the various evaluation reports:

- **data collection:** it is recommended that in order to ease the collection and reporting of impact data:
  - future projects should consider the use of **digital survey methods** (i.e., for pre- and post-participation surveys) to assess changes in attitude and perception. This is likely to improve response rate and reduce risk of non-completion due to external factors (e.g., Covid-19, non-attendance at penultimate session).

- project data collection / monitoring and evaluation plans should be **practical and deliverable**. In some cases, data collection plans have been over-ambitious and not adhered to.
- projects should plan to collect **baseline data** prior to commencing delivery.
- it is recommended that in relation to **programme indicators**:
  - consideration should be given to asking projects to provide regular updates on **result indicator** progress. There has been a focus by projects on reporting against output indicators, and impact, as assessed by result indicators, has not been consistently recorded as the Commission did not require this data to be collected at a project level.
  - consideration should be given to the refinement of **output indicators** as the metrics applied are sometimes not easily understood by the projects.
- with regard **local authority Shared Spaces projects**:
  - **capital projects** are beginning to deliver impact as the projects conclude, however, the projects are reporting difficulties in measuring impact. Consideration should be given to how capital related impacts are captured in future programmes. For example, it is recommended that, based on project feedback, that the result indicator pertaining to **neighbourhood neutrality** is rethought, as this may be a sensitive term for beneficiaries.
- in relation to projects that have a **large quantity of stakeholders**:
  - having many stakeholders often leads to delays and overspending, which in turn delays the delivery of the project and its intended impacts, as was the case with the Connecting Open Spaces project. The complexities associated with managing large numbers of stakeholders should be adequately reflected in project scheduling and budgeting and an adjustment for optimism bias should be applied. This will help manage expectations among stakeholders and may lead to better project outcomes.
- the impact of the **Covid-19 pandemic**:
  - the Covid 19 pandemic was an issue for a number of projects, however, it impacted capital development projects acutely, as it created supply side issues and labour shortages. It also led to some issues of delivering in-person services due to social distancing and lockdown restrictions. Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic could not have been foreseen or accounted for, it highlights the need for effective risk management and agile project management to ensure that projects can quickly adjust.

