



Working collectively to support and promote
community work as a means of addressing
poverty, social exclusion and inequality and
advancing human rights

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EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL CO-OPERATION

PEACE PLUS PROGRAMME 2021-2027

CWI Submission

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PEACE PLUS

Community Work Ireland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the public consultation process for the PEACE PLUS programme 2021-2027, which we do having consulted with CWI members.

CWI is seeking and would welcome the opportunity to be represented on the Peace Steering Group and the proposed Quality and Impact subgroup.

Introduction

Established in 1981¹ Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes and supports community work/community development as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, and promoting human rights. CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 700 individuals and organisations that support community work/community development and work in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. For nearly 40 years, Community Work Ireland has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of marginalised communities seeking to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Community Work Ireland is an all-island organisation and we have worked on an all-island basis in relation to, for example, the development of the *All Ireland Standards for Community Work*, hosting and convening the All Ireland Body for Community Work Education and Training (AIEB) and the production of the *Journal of Community Work* on an all-island basis. The Donegal Community Workers' Co-operative was funded under a former PEACE Programme and their work was supported by the CWC National Office.

¹ As the Community Worker's Co-operative

CWI welcomes the ambition as outlined for the PEACE PLUS Programme, to contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and stable society throughout the island of Ireland and leave a lasting legacy of human rights, inclusion, social justice and equality. The programme will achieve this by funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation and contribute to cross border social, economic and territorial development.

Drawing on the experience of our members working with former PEACE programmes, CWI would like to make the following observations.

Observations

The PEACE PLUS discussion document highlights the twin challenges that both Brexit and COVID-19, have had, and are likely to continue to have in relation to the disproportionate impacts on communities already marginalised by poverty, inequality and social exclusion. COVID-19 highlighted many weaknesses in social and economic infrastructure and exacerbated a range of social issues that existed prior to the onset of the pandemic. However, the pandemic also revealed the possibility of interventions that had previously not been thought possible to protect marginalised individuals, families and communities made even more vulnerable by COVID. Cross-sectoral relationships with the community sector and the voluntary sector were built and were critical to the response to the pandemic in both the north and the south.

Building on the potential to further develop innovative and new ways of working, PEACE PLUS should not be about returning to 'normal'. Rather it should facilitate an opportunity to be transformative, imagining a more equal and sustainable society where rights and diversity are respected. In order to do this, PEACE PLUS must prioritise support for grass-roots community development that, our members point out has been significantly diminished during the last two programmes.

PEACE PLUS should be seen as an opportunity to embed all-island co-operation and partnership, as opposed to focussing solely on the North and border counties.

PEACE Partnerships need to be regarded and regard themselves as more than performing an administrative, fund-allocating, exercise. Rather they should be facilitated to deeply reflect on how PEACE support can make real progress in the areas of anti-sectarianism and anti-discrimination based on evidence of needs in their catchment areas. Partnerships should be encouraged to include experts on pertinent issues such as racism, sectarianism and discrimination from both sides of the Border.

The Special EU Programmes Body should provide guidance to the PEACE Partnerships in the following areas:

- Community Development, based on the [All Ireland Standards for Community Work](#)
- Guiding values – CWI suggests using the values outlined in [Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland](#)
- Monitoring standards and streamlined processes, drawing on best practice from former PEACE programmes, such as online monitoring forms that capture qualitative as well as quantitative information.

Programme evaluation should be made an integral part of all funded projects, and guidance provided in self-evaluation or support provided for external evaluation to all grantees.

PEACE Partnerships should be subject to the [Public Sector Duty](#) in the south and the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) in Northern Ireland to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights of staff and service users. These duties should be extended to support recipients and all applications or call for tenders should require a demonstration of how projects will contribute to these ambitions.

Project applications should be required to demonstrate how they reflect and compliment national strategies and plans.

The level and type of bureaucracy needs to be addressed, particularly for smaller organisations, as does the fact that support recipient groups and organisations have to pay project associated costs upfront, with many receiving payments months after the project start. Many groups and organisations do not have the wherewithal for carry these overdrafts. This is causing a chilling effect and many organisations do not even consider the prospect of applying to PEACE.

Short pilot projects raise expectations that leave gaps when finished. Projects and initiatives need to be supported in a sustainable way that allows them to plan and implement projects strategically across the programme timeframe. Initiatives should be encouraged to develop exit strategies.

Supported projects need to be facilitated to network, to learn from each other and to identify common issues to be addressed. In this way, the impact of PEACE PLUS can become more than the sum of its parts.

Supported initiatives must be required to review and evaluate their projects in a meaningful way, the results from which should feed into policy in appropriate areas.