



EUS1504

Peace and Reconciliation

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**Community Initiative for
Peace and Reconciliation
in Northern Ireland and the six
border counties of Ireland**

The European Commission is demonstrating its support for the rapidly evolving peace process in Northern Ireland by establishing a new Community Initiative to benefit the people and economies of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland. The aim is to help to consolidate the cessation of the conflict by providing local economic and social actors, in particular, with the resources to translate political developments into a lasting peace and to facilitate the on-going progress towards reconciliation.

The Community Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation is currently being finalised; the speed with which this is being done underlines the commitment at all levels in the European Union to further the positive developments being witnessed in Northern Ireland.

This fact sheet gives practical information on:

- the priority fields of action eligible for support
- how key operators can become involved
- how actions being supported will fit in with other Community measures
- the institutional procedure for the finalisation of the initiative.

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Background

Twenty five years of violent conflict in Northern Ireland have produced serious social and economic problems making it one of the European Union's worst unemployment black spots whose economy has been failing to demonstrate the positive economic growth witnessed in most of the other Objective 1 regions. However, the European Union seeks to encourage the impetus towards resolving the conflict, not only for the region itself but because durable peace and prosperity in Northern Ireland will be beneficial to the Community as a whole.

In response to the development of the peace process during 1994, the European Council of Essen (December 1994) approved a proposal for a multi-annual Community Initiative for the benefit of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland, setting aside a sum of ECU 300 million for an initial period from 1995-1997. The guidelines for the Initiative followed in February 1995 and were firmly based on the recommendations of a specially constituted Northern Ireland Task Force that conducted a broad-based consultation with both governments, with extensive input also coming from local authorities, business, trade unions voluntary groups and NGOs.

The final approval of the Operational Programme, which is the last step before individual projects are funded, will take place after the formal adoption of the guidelines. The approval of the programme is expected by July 1995 (see inset on page 4). Nevertheless, in order to get project work operational as early as possible the Member States are already preparing their proposals in advance of the approval of the guidelines.

As the Programme will not be a list of individual projects but rather a framework for the evaluation of submissions, the early preparation of the Programme does not mean in any way that it is too late for individual projects to bid for support.

The Priorities

Within Peace and Reconciliation five priority areas of action are identified under the central objective of reconciliation:

- Urban and rural regeneration
- Employment
- Cross-border development
- Social inclusion
- Productive investment and industrial development

Project proposals must address these areas of concern to attract support. However, given the nature of the problems that are being addressed by this special Initiative, it is expected that the theme of social inclusion will be given particular prominence.

• Urban and rural regeneration

The promotion of wide-ranging local development and of social and economic regeneration will cover the improvement of the social and physical environment in the worst-affected urban areas, towns, villages and rural areas. Such actions might include: landscaping and clearing of derelict sites; community development and the provision of facilities for small businesses; rural infrastructures; and the development of social and cultural activities, in particular where these are the result of local partnerships implementing integrated local development plans.

Measures could also include: training and capacity building for regeneration; investments to remedy the physical problems of the 15 peace lines; pedestrianisation and the provision of parks and playgrounds; and support for the modernisation of small businesses both in urban and rural areas.

• Employment

The boosting of economic growth and employment and support for the expected increased demand in sectors such as tourism (including agri-tourism) will be covered. It will also support the redirection of redundant skills as well as reinforce efforts for the long-term unemployed and the young, and provide for greater participation of women in the labour force.

Social inclusion - a unique feature

The new opportunity for peace in Northern Ireland calls for an appropriate response from the European Union resulting in the creation of this new Initiative specifically for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. Actions under Social Inclusion, which is one of the five priority areas, will have a key role to play in furthering understanding and tolerance, building solidarity, and bringing the different communities together.

The theme of social inclusion forms a priority area in its own right and will make a significant contribution to the overall objective of reconciliation. Actions under the four other priorities will however also contribute towards the overall aim of reconciliation and the inclusion of marginalised or disadvantaged groups.

The complex exclusion problems being faced in Northern Ireland require flexible and integrated actions combining both social and economic measures. Thus, as much of the expertise in combating exclusion lies outside the public domain, the full involvement of non-governmental bodies and local and community groups (including youth services and women's groups) becomes a vital condition for the success of the Initiative.

Under the Social Inclusion priority five main measures have been identified:

- developing both grassroots capacities and cross-community partnerships promoting reconciliation
- promoting the full inclusion of children and young people
- improving the accessibility and quality of services for vulnerable groups and people at a disadvantage
- direct action to promote the full inclusion of vulnerable groups and people at a disadvantage
- developing innovative model actions for reconciliation

actions could include: the anticipation of labour market trends and skill and qualification needs; the improvement of training, guidance and counselling services; management training and the strengthening of innovation and RTD (especially in SMEs); local employment initiatives, especially those which tap new sources of employment in the environment and care services; the setting up of specialised placement centres; training and the improvement of entrepreneurial skills, especially for young people and women.

• Cross-border development

Projects that seek to exploit the opportunities for increased cross-border development will be encouraged. These may cover: enhanced trade; economic and agricultural cooperation (between Local Authorities, health boards, businesses and SMEs, education and training providers, health establishments, voluntary organisations etc.); and the upgrading of infrastructures. Assistance could be given to companies to establish joint ventures, and to undertake joint marketing and R&D on a cross-border basis. More specifically this could include: establishing energy links; reinstating closed cross-border roads and bridges; and joint animal health, food and forestry projects.

• Social Inclusion

Pathways to reconciliation are to be encouraged through grassroots, cross-community and, where appropriate, cross-border co-operation especially in deprived areas. In addition, support will be offered for action addressing the difficulties faced by vulnerable and other disadvantaged groups such as victims, children, young people, and those previously caught up with violence including prisoners and ex-prisoners. Local capacity building and partnerships designed and managed on a cross-community basis are to be encouraged, especially in the fields of culture and the arts, leisure, sport, the environment, care, informal education and equal opportunities. Examples of actions include: support for the study of problems and opportunities at neighbourhood and cross-community level; the development of capacities and skills of local

neighbourhoods in community development; the provision of integrated nursery places and assistance for children in the most disadvantaged areas; schemes to improve pupil performance in basic skills; the building of home/school/community/business links; remedial support; training of trainers; social advice and information.

• Productive investment and industrial development

The Initiative aims to enhance existing facilities to promote productive investment, industrial development and services, particularly the development of SMEs. In recognition of the benefits of closer cooperation between SMEs and larger companies as a motor for growth, specific measures to improve the linkage of firms and SMEs and to promote local supplier networks will be supported. The Initiative will also support marketing efforts in SMEs, development strategies to strengthen RTD, access to Seed and Venture Capital Funds; and interest subsidies through the EIB.

Community funding

The Structural Fund contribution to the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative will come from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund - Guidance section (EAGGF) - meaning that infrastructure and equipment, as well as 'soft' project costs such as human resource development can be met. The maximum Community contribution towards an individual project will be 75% of total cost, with the remainder being met by public and/or private matching funds.

An indicative target has been set of up to 80% of funding being made available to Northern Ireland and not less than 20% in the border counties of Ireland. Reflecting the importance that is attached to cross-border initiatives, at least 15% of the overall amount should be devoted to activities which are carried out in a cross-border context.

Complementarity

The Peace and Reconciliation Initiative responds to needs arising from the peace process. Beyond this Northern Ireland is a significant beneficiary of Community support - principally through the Structural Funds. A six year programme lasting until 1999 is now in operation which will make a further ECU 1.2 billion available through the Single Programming Document.

Further Structural Fund assistance in Northern Ireland is foreseen through the Community Initiatives that target specific development needs: INTERREG for cross border cooperation (ECU 61.9 million); URBAN for regenerating neglected city areas, benefiting Londonderry and Belfast (ECU 16.950 million); SME for small and medium sized enterprises (ECU 6.2 million); EMPLOYMENT for the development of human resources (ECU 11.425 million); LEADER for rural development (ECU 11.3 million); PESCA for reconverting areas dependent on the fishing industry (ECU 1.7 million); and ADAPT for adapting to changes in the labour market (ECU 3.1 million). The figures for KONVER to reconvert areas dependent on the defence industry are yet to be announced.

Likewise, Ireland is set to receive ECU 5.62 billion from the Community Support Framework for the programming period 1994-1999. In addition ECU 384.4 million will be made available through the Community Initiatives, whilst the Cohesion Fund and other Community mechanisms will make further investment possible.

The total available budget for the Initiative until the end of 1997 is ECU 300 million, with further financing for the following two years being subject to review.

Global grants

Within the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative particular use will be made of the global grant mechanism - a form of assistance that entrusts Community funds to an intermediary organisation that has the expertise to assure the kind of project work required in a particular area. Global grants have proved particularly well-suited to local development encouraging greater autonomy in project management, broader-based cooperation and more effective use of local resources.

The intermediaries chosen for global grants will have to be representative of the major target groups of the programme and will also need to demonstrate the administrative capacity to be accountable for the grants allocated to them.

Technical assistance

Whilst local groups and social actors may have the necessary contacts and know-how to propose and launch successful projects that respond to real needs, they may also lack some of the administrative or technical expertise that would be required. For this reason the Commission is placing extra emphasis on the provision of technical assistance. This could be in the areas of presenting and preparing the administrative aspects of a project for selection, financial management, the provision of consultancy and expert

services, seminars and conferences that further the aims of the initiative and the possible establishment of a coordination mechanism to assist in the development of the community and voluntary sector. The aim of this is to ensure grass roots participation in the initiative.

Finding out more

The Peace and Reconciliation Initiative is seeking a broad base of local participation from local groups, the voluntary sector and NGOs as well as social and economic partners. Interested parties are therefore encouraged to request more information to find out where their own areas of activity and expertise could be integrated into the funding framework. Even if the Operational Programme is already being prepared it is not too late to propose new ideas. Bear in mind that assistance is specifically provided to accommodate projects that do not normally receive Community support. Technical assistance may also be available.

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Finalising the Initiative

The Operational Programme will be drawn up on the basis of guidelines to be adopted by the Commission. The Commission approved draft guidelines on 14 February 1995 which were subsequently submitted to the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Management Committee for Community Initiatives for their opinions. The European Parliament gave its backing to these guidelines at a Plenary Session on 5 April. The process of consulting the other bodies is expected to be completed and the final guidelines published in the Official Journal, by early May.

The Member States would normally be required to submit their Operational Programme within four months of the publication of the guidelines but as it is sought to adopt the programme as quickly as possible, this required period has been reduced to two months. Indeed, both Member States are already engaging in wide-ranging consultation with interested parties to prepare the Programme for submission immediately after the adoption of the guidelines. Once the Operational Programme is adopted, scheduled for the end of July, the approval of individual measures and projects for funding will begin.



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