

A Strategy for the International Fund for Ireland  
2021 - 2024

# Connecting Communities







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# Chairman's Introduction

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I am delighted as Chairman of the Board of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) to present our vision of how we will continue to support unique peace building efforts on the island of Ireland over the course of 2021 – 2024.



Over the lifetime of our last strategy, *Community Consolidation – Peace Consolidation 2016 – 2020*, the communities we work with made extraordinary strides towards a shared and reconciled society despite great uncertainty and political instability.

The absence of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland (NI) for over three years, concerns regarding Brexit and its potential impact on the border, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and an uncertain economic landscape have all combined to create unforeseen challenges for many communities still living with a sense of fragility.

As we look ahead to what we can achieve in the next four years, it is our belief that the Fund has a unique role to play in ensuring the connections painstakingly built up across borders and across communities are protected and nurtured. In the words of the late John Hume, a man who played a pivotal role in the creation of the International Fund for Ireland, “Let’s work together and build together, and as we do that, the real solution will begin... The real healing process will begin, and we will erode the distrust of the past.” It is this philosophy which underpins the strategy’s goal of strengthening connections. I am therefore pleased to state that the title of this strategy is *Connecting Communities*.

Since its inception in 1986, the Fund has consistently developed and implemented innovative programmes and initiatives aimed at tackling the most difficult issues of the time, with an overarching aim of building a sustainable peace and a truly reconciled and shared society. The same principles are apparent today as we launch this new strategy for the period 2021 – 2024. The new strategy

sets out our key priorities and objectives for the next four years. It presents our new framework of programmes which are designed to deliver these objectives, to support our vision and to ensure that the Fund’s work delivers value and remains relevant. It also lays out the funding needed to support these programmes.

We were particularly pleased to see both the UK and Irish governments make a public commitment to supporting the Fund in the New Decade New Approach agreement in January 2020. Such support will allow us to work in collaboration for the benefit of all communities in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties (SBC).

In developing this strategy, we carried out an extensive evaluation of our three core programmes, Peace Walls, Peace Impact and Personal Youth Development. While each of these programmes is delivering excellent results in changing attitudes, creating alternatives to conflict and offering new skills to young people at risk of paramilitary recruitment, the evaluation also highlighted the extent of the work still to be done.

We also looked to the ways in which society, at a local, regional and global level, has fundamentally changed over recent years. As we emerge from this global pandemic, there is a risk that existing divisions will be exacerbated by a major economic downturn. In addition to grappling with the aftermath of this pandemic, the island of Ireland must also contend with contentious post-conflict issues, the legacy of the past and the impact of Brexit.

It has been apparent for some time that whatever the outcome of Brexit negotiations, it will almost certainly entail some upheaval to these islands and its constituent relationships. While the Covid-19 pandemic is entirely





*IFI funded projects will continue to engage with communities through a wide range of activities.*

different in nature, the potential consequences are similar. We run the risk that without the availability of normal activity, important partnerships built up over time will atrophy and opportunities for creating new relationships will be lost. With this in mind, we are delighted to introduce a new programme, the Communities in Partnership Programme. This initiative will, alongside our existing programmes, help to embed lasting relationships on a cross-border basis by supporting co-operation on projects that have a meaningful benefit for local communities.

To deliver this strategy, we seek a commitment from governments to a four-year funding structure of £48m. This figure is based upon the Board's understanding of what is required for the strategy to have a meaningful impact, leverage support from other funders and deliver best value on the investment. We recognise that in the current context this may be challenging. However, sustainable progress in peace in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland has not been achieved, nor will it be, without long-term strategic planning and investment.

Whereas previous IFI strategies have outlined how we proposed to utilise funding already secured, this strategy outlines what the IFI recommends is needed to help tackle the difficult remaining barriers to a sustainable peace. This strategy looks to leverage the IFI's unique and extensive experience, its distinctive reputation and a proven capacity to deliver transformed communities.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union for their generous financial support and political encouragement over many years. It is our sincere hope that your support and encouragement will continue to be forthcoming. The international dimension has greatly facilitated the Fund's ability to transcend political disputes and tensions and achieve significant engagement with constituencies beyond the reach of government. This quality of the Fund has never been as evident as it is today. It is our hope that the Fund will continue to apply its unique experience and position to connect communities and deliver sustainable peace on the island of Ireland.

Now more than ever, it is vital that we continue to play our part in empowering communities to build a shared future.

**Mr Paddy Harte**  
Chairman

# Ministers' Endorsement

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We are pleased to welcome the new Strategy of the International Fund for Ireland, *Connecting Communities: 2021 - 2024*, and commend the IFI for its critical role in supporting communities in their journey towards a sustainable, lasting peace across the island of Ireland.



**Simon Coveney TD**  
Minister for Foreign  
Affairs and Trade

Since its establishment in 1986 by the British and Irish governments with the visionary and generous support of President Reagan, the US Administration and Congress led by Speaker Tip O'Neill, the IFI has made a vital contribution to the lives of thousands of individuals affected by violence, conflict and division.

As an organisation, it has continually adapted to the changing environment in which we live, politically, socially and economically. By providing impartial support and being willing to take calculated risks, the IFI is uniquely placed to deal with complex and fluid situations. There is undoubtedly a continued need for its support, especially in those marginalised communities which statutory bodies may find hard to reach.

The British and Irish Governments are keen to see this important work continue.

We recognise that considerable engagement is still needed to deliver sustainable change and that the IFI has provided an important foundation for this work. For this reason, we are pleased that both of our governments have committed to further support for the IFI in the *New Decade New Approach* agreement.

This new Strategy recognises the continued value of the current core programmes, acknowledging the need to provide support to communities and people over a sustained period of time that allows them to build their own confidence and capacity.

It is imperative that partnership and collaboration is a key focus for the new period of this strategy and beyond.

We commend the decision of the Board to launch the new '*Communities in Partnership*' Programme, further acknowledging the need to adapt support for communities based on their needs. This new initiative, which has come at a significant time following Brexit and in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, will focus on sustaining cross-border relationships. Building connections and providing practical benefit to those involved, this programme is intended to encourage innovation and resourcefulness in communities across the island.

In endorsing this Strategy, we hope that it will also have the support of the international community, whose commitment towards a peaceful island of Ireland has been invaluable and demonstrates to communities across Northern Ireland and the southern border counties that their future remains a priority.



**Brandon Lewis MP**  
Secretary of State  
for Northern Ireland

# The Role of the Fund

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**Our Vision:** *A peaceful and shared society of empowered and connected communities.*

**Our Mission:** *To work in collaboration with key partners to empower the most marginalised and alienated communities and to help them create sustainable peace in a shared future. Through our unique approach, we encourage community development and leadership, giving each generation the tools they need, to prosper and grow.*

Since it was established by the British and Irish governments in 1986, the International Fund For Ireland (IFI) has successfully developed and delivered a wide range of economic, peace building and reconciliation interventions in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties of Ireland. Thousands of individuals living in hundreds of communities affected by sectarian violence have benefited from the IFI's support.



The 2016 - 2020 Strategic Framework was specifically developed to deliver positive community transformation through peace building, reconciliation and capacity building with communities most impacted by the Troubles, particularly those that have not previously participated in such activities.

Evaluations by donors and independent assessors over many years have found that the IFI's interventions have successfully brought real and meaningful change. Its in-depth knowledge of the issues on the ground, long-standing relationships with community organisations and activists, and a reputation for neutrality and independence collectively give us a unique ability to support communities.

Sensitive and receptive to grassroots political opinion and other external challenges, the IFI has successfully and deliberately tailored its programmes to emerging, complex issues of concern.

Young people have been successfully diverted away from paramilitary/criminal recruitment towards employability through the Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP).

Sensitive engagement continued through the Peace Impact Programme (PIP) when stability and peace were threatened, for example when a volatile Loyalist protest camp was successfully removed between the Twaddell and Ardoyne areas in North Belfast through peaceful mediation and community engagement.

Difficult conversations have also enabled positive progress around the removal of physical barriers to peace. The IFI remains the only organisation that examines the attitudes and behaviour of those affected the most, living in the shadow of peace barriers. Attitudinal Peace Walls Surveys in 2017 and 2019 have given real insight into how communities require long-term support and regeneration before barriers can be removed with confidence.



Through the AMBIT Programme, the IFI will continue the annual transatlantic study visit that enables community leaders, along with key statutory agencies, to come together on a cross-border and cross-community basis to build long-term partnerships with similar projects based in the United States. Since its establishment, more than 160 participants have had the opportunity to explore a range of hard-hitting issues such as supporting young people at risk, empowering communities and establishing alternatives to mainstream provision. Alongside the continued US-focused programme, we will also explore the possibility of an additional study visit to regions in Europe.



The IFI has also worked to share its unique experience as a model of peace and reconciliation through the funding of the John Hume and Thomas P O'Neill Chair in Peace at Ulster University's International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE). Its Chair, Professor Brandon Hamber, continues to research and build upon a reputation for excellence in peace and conflict studies. Support for this initiative is particularly relevant to the IFI, which came about as a direct result of the efforts of John Hume and Tip O'Neill. The late John Hume was relentless in his quest for peace and reconciliation, advocating empathy, tolerance and non-violence. His involvement was key to ensuring the most marginalised communities would be part of a better and more reconciled society.

Over the last five years, the IFI has delivered tailored interventions in marginalised communities. Against a challenging backdrop of political uncertainty and deepening division, this role is more important than ever.

The IFI remains the leading organisation available and willing to go where others cannot to take the necessary risks for a lasting peace.

**Achievements in the 2016-2020 strategy include:**

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66.3% of PYDP participants have reported an increase in confidence and 49.7% participants have progressed to education, training or employment.
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The Intercomm project is in Carrickfergus, Co Antrim, a town severely affected by paramilitary feuds. This project successfully removed a mural that had been used to issue paramilitary threats in the centre of the town.
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The Peace Impact Programme has encouraged marginalised communities to take part in peace building activities for the first time.
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108 PIP projects completed by 59 groups have been awarded over £13.9m/€16.4m in funding since 2016.
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A ground breaking conflict mediation and resolution model has been delivered in Londonderry/Derry on a range of issues including parading and a contentious bonfire at the Bogside.
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Significant increase in community engagement programmes across all peace barriers areas. In some cases, cross-community contact had more than doubled in the lifetime of the programme.
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Significant engagement with communities in North Belfast around a notorious interface involving Loyalist parades. This work enabled the removal of a volatile protest camp that lasted more than 1,200 days and cost more than £20m in policing.
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Development and publication of the 2017 and 2019 Peace Walls Attitudinal Surveys to garner the views of residents living in close proximity to interfaces across all of the six funded peace barriers areas.
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PIP projects in the south have developed a number of cross-border relationships that will help sustain good relations during Brexit and beyond, for example, the Swanlinbar Project in Cavan with the ELY organisation, whose members include widows of former Police and Military personnel.



# Current Context and Challenges

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“ 21 years after the Good Friday Agreement, over 100 barriers remain as visible signs of community segregation coupled with multiple deprivation, preventing much needed progress for those most impacted by the conflict and who have benefited little from a Peace Dividend to date. ”

**Paddy Harte**  
*Chairman, International Fund for Ireland*

## Peace building in any context is a slow process.

Many would argue that the Peace Process is still in its infancy. Northern Ireland and the SBC suffered enormous violence and while a comparative peace exists at present, old divisions are never far from the surface. Tensions are readily brought to the forefront by events that one tradition or the other view as inappropriate or insensitive.

There have been any number of examples of such events over the last four years.

Most notably, the Brexit vote has unearthed past tensions with many from both traditions feeling as though their voices were not heard. While the economic impact on the UK and Ireland was widely discussed, often less addressed were the unique ways in which Northern Ireland and the SBC would be affected by a withdrawal. The issue of the border became, and in many ways still is, a sticking point in negotiations. Questions of cultural identity for border communities, in particular, became relevant and acute in ways they had not been for many years. Tensions have risen with many seeing a real or perceived diminution to their identity without their consent. Fractious debate over the potential constitutional implications gave rise to a sense of volatility that at times threatened to spill over into violence.



*Rioters attack the PSNI with petrol bombs in the Creggan Estate in Londonderry/ Derry.*





**Border Communities Against Brexit stage an anti-Brexit protest and customs post border crossing on the M1 at Carrickarnon near the Irish border between Newry and Dundalk.**

Indeed, the resurgence of violence by paramilitary actors culminated in two deeply disturbing incidents in Londonderry/Derry in 2019: the explosion of a car bomb in January and the tragic murder of journalist, Lyra McKee, in April. These events brought home to many the reality of the instability facing communities across Northern Ireland.

The situation was exacerbated by the lack of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland for over three years, leaving a political vacuum which paramilitary dissidents were eager to fill. While the restoration of a Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly was welcomed in early 2020, its absence meant that numerous controversial issues, such as legacy cases, welfare reform, removal of Peace Walls and paramilitarism were allowed to fester when action was urgently required.

More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has created an unanticipated and unprecedented global crisis. At a time when it is more important than ever that communities rally together to make progress on the many challenges facing NI and the SBC, that is made physically impossible by necessary public health restrictions. Fostering a sense of togetherness while this pandemic remains present will require considerable resourcefulness and innovation.

This 2021 - 2024 strategy proposes to intensify and build upon the impact existing programmes have made, working with a range of partners to support the most marginalised and alienated communities across Northern Ireland and the SBC.

The next phase of work for the IFI will be key in removing those remaining barriers to help create sustainable peace. Through its unique approach, it will encourage community development and leadership giving each generation the tools they need to prosper and grow.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ark.ac.uk/yjt/2018/Community\\_Relations/RELGALWY.html](https://www.ark.ac.uk/yjt/2018/Community_Relations/RELGALWY.html)

**Challenges remain including:**



78% believe that religion will always make a difference to the way people feel about each other in Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup>



93% of pupils in Northern Ireland still attend segregated schooling



Peace barriers have increased in number and size since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.



Polling has found that those in Northern Ireland identifying as neither Unionist nor Nationalist has fallen to its lowest figure in 15 years.



Brexit and its potential impact on the border has increased tensions across communities. The ongoing uncertainty continues to pose challenges for progress.



There are concerns that the economic fall-out from Covid-19 will have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable in society.

# Strategic Objectives 2021 - 2024

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This strategy aims to assist the British and Irish governments and the Northern Ireland Executive in their efforts to consolidate the Peace Process by continuing to tackle some of the most significant remaining challenges to a lasting peace.

Our key priorities remain developing and funding initiatives that tackle segregation and promote integration to build a lasting peace in Northern Ireland and the SBC.

## The strategic objectives are:

To promote reconciliation and integration between and within communities, particularly in interface and border areas.

To continue to engage communities and individuals, particularly young people, who have only recently or have not yet participated in peace building and community reconciliation activities.

To support the development of leaders who play a key role in stabilising communities and defusing potentially difficult issues around cultural identity and the future of relationships across these islands.

## These objectives are supported by continuing:

To build strategic alliances with other funders and governments to ensure interventions are complementary, sustainable and will shape policies that promote peace and reconciliation.

To ensure an appropriate focus on cross-border engagement and balanced support for all traditions and for both rural and urban environments.

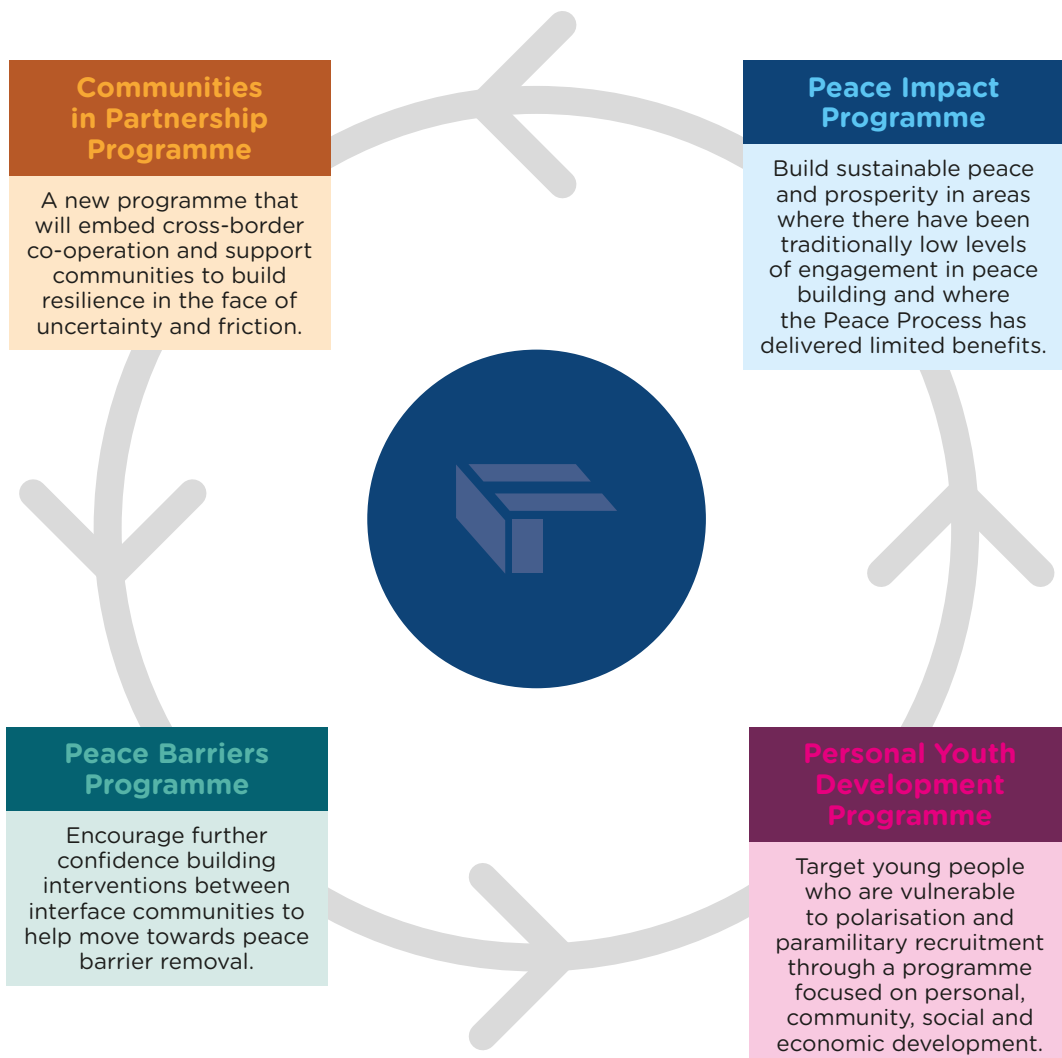
To extend IFI engagement with other peace builders on the island of Ireland and in other regions emerging from conflict as part of a wider effort to promote conflict resolution.



# Approach

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The work of the IFI in the period 2021 – 2024 will cluster around four key programmes: the new Communities in Partnership Programme, the Peace Impact Programme, the Personal Youth Development Programme and the Peace Barriers Programme.





## Communities in Partnership

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It has been clear for some time that Brexit is likely to have significant consequences for the island of Ireland. Borders are in danger of, once again, becoming a significant barrier, physically and psychologically, to harmonious relationships on these islands. The issues impacting border counties (north and south) are still evolving but it is likely they will represent significant challenges for governments.

*A derelict security building and a money exchange sign on the Republic of Ireland side of the border with Northern Ireland on the old Dublin Road outside Newry in Co. Down.*





A very different type of challenge that has now emerged is the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the consequences of which remain unclear at the time of writing but will undoubtedly have a serious impact on vulnerable communities in the coming years.

While very different in nature, what these challenges have in common is the risk of individuals and communities becoming isolated and alienated. The IFI must continue to further its mission of encouraging contact and dialogue across this island. Over the course of this strategy, the IFI will work to ensure that the bonds of friendship, neighbourliness and partnership built over the past number of years continue to flourish.

The IFI will strengthen these links by introducing a new community partnership programme that will embed cross-border co-operation. This will build resilience in the face of uncertainty and friction, and support the development of local leadership.

**Community innovation**

Under the new programme, we will invite applications for cross-border projects submitted jointly by organisations north and south.

In line with our strong belief that communities are best placed to design their own future, we will be encouraging groups to put forward initiatives that show innovation and creativity in addressing the challenges they face. We will encourage groups to design the project and its associated funding requirements in an inclusive and participatory way.

The IFI will support projects that can meet two criteria: that it builds genuine connections on a cross-border basis and that it provides meaningful benefit to the communities involved. Ideally these would be ideas that bring people together to serve their communities in imaginative ways such as:

Using culture and the arts to create a space for people to deepen their understanding of the past and set a path for their future

Creating projects that engage and empower young people from both sides of the border

Launching initiatives that strengthen civic engagement thereby empowering communities to face difficult conversations

Taking practical steps to improve people's social and material wellbeing

Facilitating contact and discussion between diverse groups working on peace and reconciliation across the island

Creating the conditions necessary for the development of social enterprise and innovation

We welcome innovation and creativity and look forward to working closely with groups, north and south.  
The IFI envisages that an investment of £4m will be required to deliver the objectives of this programme over the period of the strategy. This would allow the IFI to support approximately 30 distinct community projects.



## Peace Impact Programme

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The Peace Impact Programme was launched in 2013 and has had considerable success. Awarding over £20.3m/€24m to date to 207 distinct projects, its work has focussed in areas where peace building engagement has been low and in some cases non-existent.

*Bonfires are an annual part of Protestant celebrations in July in Northern Ireland but some have become contentious requiring sensitive mediation with communities who live nearby.*







Violence has no place in our society and the actions of those who terrorise their own community by bringing guns on to the streets must be condemned by all of us. Nothing justifies such attacks and they have no place in a Northern Ireland that is trying to move forward.



**Naomi Long**  
*NI Justice Minister, January 2020*

.....  
**2019 saw a 31% increase in paramilitary-style assaults, compared to the previous year. There were also 15 bombings in the same year.**<sup>2</sup>  
.....

.....  
**In 2019, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) announced it had dealt with more than 2,000 cases in the previous three-and-a-half years where people said they have been left homeless due to victimisation.**<sup>3</sup>  
.....

.....  
**75% of people surveyed said they felt they probably or definitely had no influence when it came to decisions made about what happens in Northern Ireland.**<sup>4</sup>  
.....

PIP is designed to deliver positive community transformation through sensitive interventions led by grassroots community organisations. Funded projects operate in areas that suffer from high levels of economic and social deprivation and where major challenges remain around paramilitaries exerting coercive control.

It increases engagement through a range of activities around cultural identity, education and skills development. This enables communities to build resilience and navigate their way through more challenging issues such as parades, paramilitary gatekeeping, flags and bonfires.

In 2019 alone, PIP projects were responsible for 3,174 activities including 1,841 cross-border/cross-community events.

Achievements from 2016 – 2020 include:

- Significant engagement with communities in North Belfast around a notorious interface involving Loyalist parades. The work led by Twaddell, Woodvale Residents Association enabled resolution to a volatile protest camp in Twaddell/Ardoyne area. It had lasted more than 1,200 days, costing the public purse more than £20m. The removal encouraged further dialogue and cross-community activities in the area.

- The Intercomm project is based in Carrickfergus, Co Antrim and the town is severely affected by paramilitary feuds. This project mediated with senior paramilitary figures in the town to remove a mural that had been used to issue public threats in a busy area.
- A ground-breaking conflict mediation and resolution model has been delivered by Creggan Enterprises in Londonderry/Derry on a range of issues – including parading and the bonfire at the Bogside.
- Significant cross-border and cross-community relationships were built up by PIP projects, e.g., the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton developed several cross-border initiatives with schools in Leitrim and Fermanagh including a youth drama programme that drew on the history and heritage of the local area.
- Alternative pathways opened up to marginalised young people who are vulnerable to paramilitary punishments or recruitment.

This strategy will see further growth for the PIP model with more interventions to help strengthen communities. In this phase of work, the IFI will take on an increased focus on community leadership, with a focus on the role of women in peace building thereby equipping communities with the tools needed to build resilience and navigate contentious issues.

**The IFI envisages that an investment of £20m will be required to deliver the objectives of this programme over the period of the strategy. We estimate that this level of funding would support approximately 140 distinct projects across Northern Ireland and the SBC.**

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51072058>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/exclusive-2000-households-forced-out-of-their-homes-paramilitaries-blamed-for-73-of-cases-37676384.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2019/Community\\_Relations/INFLNI.html](https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2019/Community_Relations/INFLNI.html)

## Peace Barriers Programme

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Since the launch of the Peace Walls Programme in 2012, the IFI has invested more than £6.9m/€8.1 in its work to enable groups to deliver interventions in their area. The programme focuses on helping interface communities bring about the conditions that allow for the removal of walls and other barriers.



*A remaining Peace Barrier on the Crumlin Road in North Belfast.*





**Transformation of an interface to a play park in North Belfast.**



**Bringing communities together and increasing engagement is a key part of the PBP.**

“ People have a fear of change. A fear of not knowing, because they have lived in an environment like this for so long. I hope in years to come you will see the walls being transformed into physical structures that create employment or maybe could be part of social housing. I think if anything is going to happen it will happen naturally. ”

**Imagine Project**

We have taken the decision to rename the programme the Peace Barriers Programme (PBP), to more accurately reflect the impediment such barriers pose to a shared and reconciled society. It is also a more correct description of the diverse range of structures that make up the collection of interface barriers, which range from fences to gates to walls.

The PBP delivery model will continue the unique approach taken to date: engaging directly with communities impacted by peace barriers, encouraging difficult conversations and helping them reach a position where they feel safe and ready to begin the dialogue necessary towards their removal. This is done through a range of confidence-building initiatives within and between communities on either side of the barrier.

**Peace barriers facts:**

Peace barriers were constructed by the British Army after intense periods of sectarian rioting in 1969. They were intended to be a temporary response but peace barriers are still prevalent in Northern Ireland today<sup>5</sup>

Nearly 70% of Troubles-related murders took place less than 500 yards from interface barriers and almost 85% of the killings occurred within 1,000 yards<sup>6</sup>

Interface areas have been hugely affected by the Troubles and typically feature high levels of social deprivation and a lack of inward investment<sup>7</sup>

Over 100 peace barriers remain mainly in Belfast with a smaller number in Londonderry/Derry, Lurgan and Portadown<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/glossary.htm#peaceline>

<sup>6</sup> Shirlow, P. and Murtagh, B. (2006) *Belfast- Segregation, violence and the city*

<sup>7</sup> Byrne, J Gormley-Heenan,C., Morrow,D., Rosato, M. and Cook, S. (2017) *Policy Brief: Analysing Baseline Data on Peace Walls (5): Exploring the Socio-economic, education and employment factors*

<sup>8</sup> *Belfast Interface Project (2017)- Interface Barriers, Peacelines and Defensive Architecture*



In recent years, the programme has had considerable success in terms of building community confidence and removing barriers at some of the most notorious interfaces across Northern Ireland. This includes:

**Removal of an eight foot "Peace Wall" at a volatile interface on Crumlin Road, North Belfast in 2016**

**Further reductions and removals of barriers in North and West Belfast (2017 and 2019)**

**Community agreement to have extended gate opening hours at several sites**

**Peace fence removal at Hillman Court/ Duncairn Gardens, North Belfast and introduction of Garden Boundary walls and a new mesh fence 2019/2020**

**Removal of a harsh fence structure and creation of a Children's Play Park/ Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) at Serpentine Road, North Belfast, 2019**

It is now more than 50 years since the first peace barrier was constructed, yet over 100 remain as visible symbols of community segregation across Northern Ireland.

In May 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive launched its Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy, part of which aims to remove all interface barriers by 2023. This highly ambitious target will not be met within the proposed timeframe.

Findings from the IFI's 2019 'Community Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey' indicate a steady increase in inter-community engagement on either side of the peace barriers, which is key to building the confidence necessary to consider future barrier removal or changes at interfaces.

The growing appetite for removal is encouraging but challenges remain around much-needed regeneration, employment opportunities, social housing and shared

community spaces. There has also been a significant rise in anti-social behaviour near peace barriers, which is having a negative impact on progress as some residents still view them as a form of security protection.

Regrettably, the IFI cannot undertake the physical removal of barriers nor fund economic and social regeneration in interface areas post-removal. This is the responsibility of the relevant Departments and statutory agencies.

We will continue to advocate for the introduction of the necessary support for progress to be made, notably appropriate aftercare packages for homeowners affected, and work with interface residents to build confidence at a pace that is comfortable to them. We are confident that with increased collaboration and appropriate statutory resources, much can be achieved for those impacted the most by peace barriers.

“Community cohesion requires much more than the removal of structural barriers. Relationships shattered by conflict require re-building. Our initiatives take a simple approach to this complex issue, using shared projects as a baseline to build new ties and relationships across the whole Black Mountain Community.”

**BMSS Project**

The IFI envisages that an investment of £6.5m will be required to deliver the objectives of this programme over the period of the strategy. This funding would allow for the support of approximately eight interface areas.



## Personal Youth Development Programme

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Disillusionment with the perceived benefits of peace and lack of opportunity for young people in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and the SBC are too often driving them towards unlawful and/or violent activity. The result is that many come under the influence of paramilitary organisations that are still actively recruiting and exerting considerable control over fractured communities.



*A celebration event at the Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast for participants who took part and completed a project funded through the PYDP Programme.*



The PYDP was launched in 2016 to support these young people by connecting them to personalised routes to learning, skills and employment opportunities. It aims to help the most at risk young people in society improve their confidence and personal resilience, develop a better understanding of culture and identity, and develop practical skills that improve their employment prospects.

PYDP is unlike any other youth initiative currently being delivered in Northern Ireland and the SBCs. Its uniqueness stems from the way in which each project develops a highly personalised work plan tailored to the individual's needs and has positive community relations as a core element.

The Programme typically targets the most at risk young people who face barriers to participation in mainstream education or training, enabling them to take ownership of their own personal development.

It adapts and adjusts to their needs by providing personal guidance and encouragement throughout the process. Each project has a strong focus on good relations to

ensure the participant develops an understanding of their own heritage and that of other communities on this island. Those involved also receive training and opportunities to enter the world of work.

It engages 16-25 year olds who are vulnerable to polarisation and come from complex backgrounds including those who:

- left education with no or low qualifications or who have left the education system early;
- are vulnerable to paramilitary recruitment;
- have been involved or are currently involved in substance abuse;
- are affected by homelessness;
- come from a difficult family background or community with a negative view of their future;
- been in, or close to, the criminal justice system;
- suffer from poor mental health issues; and
- mistrust statutory institutions.

**The IFI has invested over £12.9m/€15.2 in this programme and the following has been achieved:**

**Over 1,888 have/are participating in the programme**

**1,044 people have completed PYDP programme completely**

**3,278 accreditations have been achieved**

**High participation levels (80%) due to flexible nature of the programme**

**528 have progressed onto education and training**

Young people today face a range of complex and challenging issues. The next phase of PYDP will continue to identify marginalised youths who could benefit from this uniquely tailored programme that helps them to make decisions that improve their lives and their communities.

**The IFI envisages that an investment of £17m will be required to deliver the objectives of this programme over the period of the strategy, which would allow for the support of approximately 120 youth development projects.**



# Conclusion

Despite the overall benefits and successes of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, the reality remains that the implementation of the Agreement will take generations to deliver its ambition for peace and reconciliation.

Additionally, many fear that the absence of an Executive and Assembly in Northern Ireland for three years undermined support for the Agreement alongside public confidence in political processes.

Much of the changes of attitude over the past 30 years have been in the context of the UK and Ireland both being in the European Union. Brexit, regardless of its final shape, will have a major impact on these developments. It will be necessary to work with communities north and south to help maintain connections, build relationships and reduce any possibility of an increase in violence. We now face the additional risk that the Covid-19 pandemic will create further fragmentation of relationships across these islands.

The IFI has ambitious plans to tackle the key barriers to finally achieving peace and reconciliation. Having funded some of the most important and challenging work over the past 30 years, the IFI is uniquely trusted to work with both sides of the community, including those grassroots groups who have not yet bought into the Peace Process.

We are now seeking a commitment of the appropriate level of funds from our international partners to ensure the success of these ambitious plans and enable peace and reconciliation to be finally achieved on the island of Ireland.

The IFI envisages that, in order to deliver the basic objectives of this strategy, the following investment would be required:

Programme	2021-2024 Strategy £'000's	2021-2024 Strategy €'000's
Peace Impact Programme	£20,000	€23,624
Communities in Partnership Programme	£4,000	€4,739
Peace Barriers Programme	£6,500	€7,680
Personal Youth Development Programme	£17,000	€20,080
AMBIT Programme	£500	€590
<b>Total Programme Budget</b>	<b>£48,000</b>	<b>€56,713</b>

The continued support of our international donors is greatly valued by the IFI.

We were particularly pleased to see both the UK and Irish governments make a public commitment to supporting the IFI in the *New Decade New Approach* agreement in January 2020. Such support will allow us to work in collaboration for the benefit of all communities in Northern Ireland and the SBC.

It is our hope that the IFI can continue to apply its unique experience to building peace and trust and that this strategy will be a central part of that process.

\* The Sterling/Euro conversion rate at 1 January 2020 is applied throughout this report.





# Notes

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The Fund delivers peace and reconciliation work across the six counties of Northern Ireland and the six southern border counties as illustrated in the map.





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