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SCHOOL OF  
PSYCHOLOGY

Client : Special EU Programmes Body – SEUPB



Special EU Programmes Body  
Comhlacht na gClár Speisialta AE  
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## **IMPACT EVALUATION OF PEACE IV, OBJECTIVE 2.1 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 14 – 24**

Phase II Mid-Term Evaluation Report

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## **Executive Summary**

Throughout the Northern Ireland peace process, funding from the European Union has sought to support and address economic and social development in Northern Ireland and the border counties in the Republic of Ireland. The current PEACE IV Programme focuses on a narrow range of activities to ensure that funding brings about significant change in four key areas: Shared Education, Children and Young People, Shared Spaces and Services, and Building Positive Relations. Specific Objective 2.1, Children and Young People, prioritises those young people aged between 14-24 years who are most disadvantaged / excluded / marginalised, and who have deep social, emotional, and good relations needs. Many of these young people are at risk of becoming engaged in antisocial, violent, or dissident activity, are disengaged from the peace process, and are not in formal education, training, or employment.

The evaluation team from the Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations at Queen's University, Belfast was contracted to complete the impact evaluation for Specific Objective 2.1. To do so, the evaluation team is conducting a mixed methods approach with multiple levels of analysis. This strategy enables identification of particular aspects of the implementation approach that may influence both project delivery and associated outcome indicators. The following is a summary of the major findings from Phase II midterm report.

### **Main Findings**

#### **Youth Participant Surveys**

At the time data analysis began for the Phase II mid-term report, demographic information had been collected from 2,484 participants (2,218 responses to the Time 1 Core Version and 266 Time 1 Illustrated and Arabic versions of the survey), providing detailed background information about participants from all 11 funded projects.

#### ***Demographic Breakdown***

Overall, there was a fairly even distribution of gender, with 50.1% reporting they were male, 48.7% were female, and 1.2% other. The age range was from 13-26 years; the majority between 14-17 years old (72.5%) and the minority between 18-24 years old (25.5%). The self-reported community backgrounds for the young people were skewed towards the Catholic community (50.7%), with only around one-quarter of participants reporting that they were from the Protestant community (23.8%). An additional, one-quarter of young people reported that

they were from neither the Catholic nor the Protestant community (12.1%), from both backgrounds/mixed (6.8%) or that they were unsure which community they were from (6.6%). In terms of jurisdiction, the majority of young people reported they were from Northern Ireland (78.5%) with a minority reporting that they were from the Republic of Ireland (21.5%).

The ethnic background of the young people was predominately white (87.9%), with approximately one in eight (12.1%) participants indicating that they were from a minority ethnic community (including Irish Travellers). In terms of disability, a small group indicated that they had a disability (13.9%), while 5.7% were unsure. Of note, the percentage of young people who reported they were from a minority ethnic group or had a disability is substantially higher than those found in the 2011 NI Census (1.8% minority ethnic population; 2.7% 15-19 year olds and 3.1% 20 to 24 year olds reporting a disability). In addition, 14.1% of the participants (one in seven) indicated that they were a carer for someone they lived with who was sick or elderly or who had a disability.

Participants were asked to provide the first half of their home postcode or the name of the town, village or townland where they lived. This data was used to create a Google Map to demonstrate the coverage of enrolment in the Programme. Young people's home locations were congregated in urban settings with high populations. The map suggests, however, that there are potentially gaps in coverage in the Glens area of Antrim and in parts of Monaghan, Louth and Leitrim in the Republic of Ireland.

### ***Distance Travelled***

To explore distance travelled, surveys were matched across three time points using a unique evaluation ID code. The new matching strategy has resulted in a significantly higher number of matched surveys across the time points than was the case during Phase I of the evaluation. Given the improved retention rate for the Core version of the survey, with a robust sample of 365 matched surveys from Time 1, 2 and 3, the evaluation team were able to adopt a 'repeated measures' approach to the analysis, which enables the analysis of changes in mean scores over three or more points in time. In other words, this analysis measures the distance travelled in the core outcome areas for 365 young people from the beginning, to the mid-point, to the end of their involvement with PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1.

### ***Good Relations***

Overall, there is clear evidence of positive distance travelled in terms of the Good Relations outcome, indicating that young people had enhanced their capacity to form positive and effective relationships with young people from a different background than themselves;

including those from the other community, a different jurisdiction, and from other ethnic backgrounds. This included an increase in understanding of and respect for diversity; an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions of others; a stronger understanding of their own identity; and an increased respect for others of different community and cultural backgrounds; abilities and orientations. All measurement scales for these indicators showed significant change. Further, for the measurement scales which reflect a positive predisposition to others from a different community/cultural background, young people showed significant distance travelled on 17 of the 20 scales.

### ***Personal Development***

For Personal Development, all 8 outcome indicators and their associated measurement scales showed significant change. This means that as a result of participation in PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 projects, young people reported an increase in self-awareness and understanding; confidence and agency; planning and problem solving; positive relationships; working effectively with others; leadership; resilience and determination; and relevant knowledge and skills for supporting their own health and well-being.

### ***Citizenship***

Finally, for Citizenship, change was evident across 5 of the 6 indicators. Specifically, clear change was found for engagement with useful services and volunteering in communities of place. For participation in community structures, initiatives and democratic processes, 2 of the 3 measurement scales showed significant positive change. For positive community relations 2 of the 4 measurement scales showed positive change. There was no significant change, however, for positive family relations.

These findings indicate that 86% of the measurement scales (42 out of 49) showed statistically significant positive change over the three time points; with all but one outcome indicator (positive family relations) showing positive progression in some form. Further, the majority of these effects were significant regardless of the duration of the project, and, while there may have been a 'dampening effect' over the COVID-19 lockdown, the positive effects still held up. That is undeniable evidence of the positive impact the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 projects are having.

### **Youth Worker Focus Groups**

Two series of focus groups, 8 in total, were conducted with 42 project staff from the summer of 2019 to the summer of 2020 in various locations across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The participants represented 10 of the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 projects,

and included youth workers, monitoring officers, and project coordinators / managers. The focus of the 2019 focus groups explored successes and challenges implementing as the projects began Phase II, the connection between core project activities and achievement of outcomes, external influences that have helped or hindered project impact, and recommendations for future support and programme design. The 2020 focus groups discussed the particular challenges that were presented by the COVID-19 lockdown and the factors that promoted programme success. A thematic analysis of the data was conducted, with each of the key themes and sub-themes that emerged summarised below.

### ***Evolution of practice from Phase I to Phase II (Mid-term)***

Changes to the delivery of the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 programme at a project level were discussed in two ways: changes to how partnerships worked together and intra-organisational changes. Staff reported that by the second year of the programme, there was a sense that projects had '*settled in*', and many of the initial teething problems of forming new projects (sometimes with new partners) had been smoothed out. As a result, the partners were able to avail of each other's networks and resources in a way that improved the experience for young people on the Programme. Further, a number of staff reported that some of the key (positive) changes that had occurred were related to their own organisations and how they had handled the demands of the programme. For instance, this included being more at ease with administrative duties, understanding the needs of their target group of young people, the development of resources and toolkits, and creating more adaptable and flexible work environments.

### ***Fundamental challenges***

A second theme to emerge were a small selection of fundamental challenges that have continued from Phase I of the programme. This included challenges around recruitment, retention, and engagement with young people. These discussions centred on the challenges associated with the perceived concentration of PEACEIV projects overall (not just those related to Specific Objective 2.1) in particular geographical areas and the fact that young people who had previously completed PEACEIV projects (Specific Objective 2.1 and/or other objectives) were ineligible to enrol in subsequent projects. This led to a sense that they were '*running out of young people*'; especially those from a Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist background and those with more complex needs for whom long-term contact was too challenging of an investment. Further challenges related to the daily running of projects, such as: differing partner expectations; recruitment of staff; delays in knowing whether or not a young person was eligible to complete the project; and the length of the core version of the evaluation survey.

### ***Factors promoting impact***

A third theme that was evident were the multiple factors highlighted by project staff viewed as crucial to promote and embed positive changes in the Personal Development, Good Relations, Citizenship outcomes areas of PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1. The most prominent of these factors was the person-centred, positive relationships built between project staff and young people. This was viewed as fundamental and necessary in the first few months to build a rapport between the two and to establish trust for, what may be, difficult and challenging conversations in the future. Relationship building was supported through one-to-one mentoring in which young people were provided space *'to talk about issues that wouldn't normally be talked about'*. Additional factors were associated with the overall design of the project including the importance of structured time for the young people and the value of group work, especially groups where young people were exposed to a diverse view of backgrounds, ideologies, and cultures.

Additional factors were discussed that seemed to act as amplification mechanisms. For example, during Phase I of the programme youth workers reported that it was a challenge to make the Good Relations element of the Programme seem relevant and engaging to young people. During the first half of Phase II, a number of youth workers found innovative ways to connect Good Relations work to real life experiences, such as current affairs and politics, microaggressions, and other behavioural consequences of sectarianism. Other factors served to embed progress, such as residentials, outdoor work, and celebratory events. Residentials were viewed as the *'cement'* that gave time and space to link the work together, thereby promoting success in all three outcome areas of the programme. The same was true for outdoor activities which included more cooperative, goal-based group tasks that were particularly effective in helping to break down intergroup barriers between young people. The more informal nature and opportunities for one-to-one mentoring for both residentials and outdoor work was viewed as an especially powerful mix of strategies that helped to further the relationship between young people and staff.

When completing projects, staff emphasised the importance of celebratory events to showcase the progress of the young people. These events served to build confidence in the young people and, for some, had a positive impact on their wider family unit. Lastly, some youth workers reported that to sustain the progress that young people had made at the end of the programme it was critical to begin the process of transitioning onwards quite early.

### ***The Design of Peacebuilding Programmes***

Youth workers felt that the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 Programme was particularly unique to others due to the target group, the bespoke nature of the projects, and the varying activities and designs employed to effect change. These aspects were viewed as both positives and negatives. Based upon their experiences, youth workers had several recommendations in relation to the overall structure of future peacebuilding programmes. This included the development of programmes which may be more 'tailor made' to the young person's capacity for commitment and specific suite of needs. This may include projects which have a higher degree of family involvement; those which offer a longer or shorter time commitment; and those with differing styles of engagement or focus areas.

More fundamentally, youth workers felt that, moving forward, greater consideration needs to be given to the way the outcomes are defined and the required ratio of young people. A high level of frustration was evident about the target balance of 40/40/20 (Catholic/Protestant/Other). A larger number of young people are claiming the 'Other' identity, and their motivations for doing so can vary substantially. For some, saying they are 'Other' is a statement of removal from the perceived inefficacy of the political process, for others it was a more passive action, and for yet others it was a chance to disassociate with labels that they feel no longer define them and associate them with a sectarian stance and not a marker of civic pluralism. They felt the current target balance was not effective in capturing this growing group of young people.

### ***COVID-19***

The focus groups conducted in July 2020 with programme staff revealed the extent of the huge efforts and commitment that had gone into making a swift and creative move to an online delivery for participants in the advent of the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. In all respects of the Programme, staff were doing what they could, often to the point of exhaustion, to engage young people and create positive impact, even though much of the Programme impact has previously been attributed to factors that involve face-to-face experiences. Young people's levels of engagement with online activities were reported as varied for different reasons, but by quickly developing their expertise and using multiple methodologies, this filtered into a mainly positive experience for many young people, despite them missing certain key experiences (residential and celebration events). Youth workers believed that online delivery would likely form part of their delivery for the foreseeable future. As such, there is a need for further clarity about best practice for online delivery in relation to the different outcome areas, as well as expectations from SEUPB about verification of activities and online contact hours.

## **The Role of YouthPact**

To date, during Phase II, YouthPact has run training events and group work sessions with staff across all 11 projects. This has included specific training sessions, cluster groups/reflective practice hubs, Co-Ordinators meetings, Partnership Development sessions, and OCN Certificate in Youth Work Practice courses. Topics and themes covered within the sessions have been both reactive to the expressed needs of the groups and presented by YouthPact teams to anticipate themes for the projects in terms of delivery approach and programme content.

Focus groups with programme staff involved some discussion of the influence of the Quality and Impact Body on the work carried out by the projects. As has been the case since the beginning of PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1, staff were overwhelmingly positive in their praise of the YouthPact team and their work. YouthPact was positioned as integral to overcoming some of the significant challenges faced in Phase I. There is evidence to suggest that the project coordinator meetings and partnership development sessions have supported the positive partnership development we now find in the first half of Phase II.

Further, the bespoke resources, toolkits, and training events which have been developed for project staff raise the knowledge base and skill set of the key workers who are trying to deliver programme content and improve the lives of young people. This was critical during the lockdown as youth workers faced considerable challenges moving face-to-face activity to an online format.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations Moving Forward**

Across the wide body of data collected through surveys and focus groups with young people and youth workers, as well as in-depth conversations with the Quality and Impact Body, there is clear evidence that the PEACEIV Specific Objective 2.1 Programme is positively impacting the lives of young people participating in the projects. There is substantial positive distance travelled across each of the three outcome indicators and the projects themselves report that they feel they are moving from strength to strength. Lessons have been learned from Phase I and adjustments and adaptations have successful been made. The projects have faced considerable challenges and difficulties in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown; however, we can confidently say they have risen to the challenge. There are areas of concern as we move into the final stages of the programme, but we feel that with appropriate training and resources, we will continue to see progress.