



**The Commission for
Victims & Survivors**

**Commission for Victims and Survivors response
to the consultation on the preparation of the
PEACE PLUS Programme – European Territorial
Cooperation 2021-2027**

February 2020

Introduction

1. The Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland (the Commission) was established in June 2008 under the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (2008).
2. The Commission is a Non-Departmental Public Body of the Executive Office. The principal aim of the Commission is to promote awareness of the interests of victims and survivors of the Conflict. It has a number of statutory duties that include:
 - Promoting an awareness of matters relating to the interests of victims and survivors and of the need to safeguard those interests;
 - Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice affecting the interests of victims and survivors;
 - Keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of services provided for the victims and survivors by bodies or persons;
 - Advising the Secretary of State, the Executive Committee of the Assembly and any Body or person providing services for victims and survivors on matters concerning the interests of victims and survivors;
 - Ensuring that the views of victims and survivors are sought concerning the exercise of the Commission's functions; and
 - Making arrangements for a forum for consultation and discussion with victims and survivors.¹
3. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation on preparing the PEACE Plus Programme. The Commission is currently a partner implementing an important research element of a wider PEACE IV funded programme supporting victims and survivors of the Conflict. In this role, the Commission fully appreciates the significant contribution of the PEACE Programme to improving the wellbeing of many victims and their families through Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.
4. Ongoing work to prepare a new cross-border PEACE programme for the period 2021-2027 with another substantial budget is highly significant and timely in the context of current PEACE IV funded activity allied to the wider strategic and political environment affecting the wellbeing of victims and survivors and wider society in this region.

¹ The functions of the Commission relate to those set out in the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 as amended by the Commission for Victims and Survivors Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

5. This includes current work by The Executive Office (TEO) to develop a new Strategy for Victims and Survivors that will inform the future design, delivery and funding of services and support for many individuals and families whose lives continue to be negatively affected by the legacy of the Troubles. Furthermore, the development of a new Strategy is being conducted against the backdrop of the implementation of a number of significant measures contained within the 2014 Stormont House Agreement. These include the introduction of a new Victims Payments Scheme (VPS) for individuals severely and permanently physically and psychologically injured by their conflict related experience. Also, current efforts are being led by the Department of Health and The Executive Office working with the Commission, the Victims and Survivors Service and funded victims and survivor's organisation to establish a new Regional Trauma Network (RTN). The RTN will be a new specialist psychological trauma service that will operate in partnership between trauma – focussed psychological therapists based in the health and social care system and community-based organisations.

Background

6. The Commission acknowledges the significant long-term contribution of successive PEACE Programmes in supporting the needs of victims and survivors of the Troubles/Conflict. The PEACE PLUS programme represents another important opportunity to build on the considerable work delivered through the PEACE IV - Shared Spaces and Services - Victims and Survivors programme. The overall aim of the £13.4 million programme led by the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) is to 'improve the health and wellbeing of victims and survivors'.² It is also focusses on targeting hard to reach and marginalised individuals and communities still affected by the legacy of the Troubles.
7. Two integral parts of the programme have been the creation of a Health and Wellbeing Caseworker Network and Advocacy Support Network. Supported by five Health and Wellbeing Case Managers, the role of the Health and Wellbeing Caseworker Network is to assess, coordinate, implement and effectively deliver the VSS Health and Wellbeing Programme. Meanwhile, the purpose of the Advocacy Support Network is to facilitate access to high quality, practical support for individuals and families engaging in historical investigation and information recovery processes including conflict-related legacy inquests and police investigations.
8. As a strategic partner within the PEACE IV funded Victims and Survivors Programme, the Commission is currently managing a 3-year research

² Information accessed electronically from the website of the Victims and Survivors Service at: <https://bit.ly/3cn5QG8>

programme conducting three studies in the areas of psychological trauma services, advocacy support services and the trans-generational impact of the conflict's legacy on children and young people. The rationale for the Victims and Survivors Research Programme is about progressing the three interrelated areas contained in the Strategy for Victims and Survivors. These are the development of high quality services delivering measurable improvements in the wellbeing of victims and their families, dealing with the 'past' in the areas of historical investigation and information recovery and building for a better future. The research programme is also responding to the external socio-political environment including the outworking of the different measures contained in the Stormont House Agreement, paramilitarism and the implications of the UK's exit from the European Union.

9. As part of the ongoing work to progress the development of a new Strategy for Victims and Survivors, the Commission will be engaged in a PEACE IV funded project to review the needs of victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and throughout the Republic of Ireland with a focus on the Border Region. In recognition of the current PEACE IV funding of Health and Wellbeing Caseworkers supporting victims and survivors (mainly focussed in the north and south of England) this project will also conduct a targeted review of victims and survivors needs in those localities. The 12-month research project will provide informed commentary and analysis about the current provision of statutory and non-statutory based support and services in place to address the needs of individuals and families whose lives continue to be affected by their experiences of the Conflict. Findings and recommendations that emerge from the project will inform considerations by strategic partners in the north and the south in the development of the new PEACE PLUS Programme.

Policy Objective 4 – ‘A more social Europe’

‘Increasing access to quality health care’

10. The Commission welcomes a number of the key themes that underpin Policy Objective 4 - 'A More Social Europe'. In particular, the Commission strongly supports the continued focus of the PEACE programme on targeting hard to reach and marginalised individuals and families within our society. Further, it is important that the PEACE Plus Programme will renew its focus on increasing access to quality health care that in itself can represent an important measure to reach out and reduce marginalisation while improving health and wellbeing within communities.
11. Facilitating access to quality healthcare including evidence-based psychological trauma-related support and clinical interventions is critical to addressing the continuing mental health impact of the Troubles. The

September 2017 Omnibus survey revealed that 26% of the population in Northern Ireland stated that they or a family member continued to be affected by a conflict-related incident. Of this figure, 6% stated that they had been psychologically affected and 3% had been physically injured by a conflict-related incident.³

12. At the population level, the 2011 Troubled Consequences Report revealed that an estimated 8.8% of the Northern Ireland population had met the criteria for PTSD at some point in their life while 5.1% met the criteria in the previous 12 months. The report concluded that approximately 18,000 individuals met the criteria for 12-month PTSD that was associated with exposure to conflict-related events.⁴ This reaffirms findings from previous population-based research studies that while a significant proportion of the local population have had a conflict-related experience, most individuals did not develop an adverse mental health difficulty. Conversely, a significant minority of those who have been exposed to conflict-related trauma have subsequently developed a mental health disorder and/or sustained a conflict-related physical injury.
13. Funding from the PEACE IV Victims and Survivors Programme have introduced a number of significant additional elements to the VSS Health and Wellbeing Programme including the establishment of the Health and Wellbeing Case Manager and Caseworker Network. The establishment of the Caseworker Network implemented across the victims and survivors community in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland has integrated a personalised approach to addressing the needs of individuals and their families in recent years.
14. The Case Manager and Caseworker Network is also performing an important role in the delivery of the new Regional Trauma Network (RTN). The Commission has been a long-standing advocate of establishing a specialist regional psychological trauma therapy service that addresses the enduring and often complex range of mental health needs of victims and their families. A central element of this new service is the partnership working between experienced psychological therapists based within both the health and social care trusts and funded community-based organisations. The five Health and Wellbeing Case Managers based within the Victims and Survivors Service working closely with colleagues across each of the Trusts is an integral part of the RTN. They will directly refer individuals into the RTN while also working with community-based Caseworkers and other practitioners ensuring service users access a range of other supportive trauma-related services.

³ NISRA (2018) *Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey* (October/November 2017) - Commission for Victims and Survivors Module.

⁴ Bunting, B *et al* (2011) *Troubled Consequences: A report on the mental health impact of the civil conflict in Northern Ireland*, CVSNI.

15. In designing the new PEACE Plus Programme, strong consideration should be given to the critical role of the Health and Wellbeing Case Manager and Case Worker network funded under the PEACE IV Programme. These currently funded positions are instrumental in improving the health and wellbeing of victims and their families across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. Further, as part of their important roles Health and Wellbeing Case Managers are supporting access to a range of tailored support and services including an important gateway where required into the new Regional Trauma Network, a key measure contained in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement.

'Actions on community and social cohesion'

16. The Commission supports the renewed focus under Policy Objective 4 on 'actions on community and social cohesion' and the broader objective of the PEACE Plus Programme to continue to promote peace and reconciliation. An important conclusion contained in the 2015 Towards a Better Future report produced by Ulster University on behalf of the Commission was that the mental health legacy of the Troubles/Conflict cannot be effectively addressed in isolation. Rather, a long-term strategic plan is required that includes comprehensively recognising and tackling outstanding legacy issues. Allied to the need to ensure timely and effective access to individualised trauma-related treatments and support is the imperative of addressing issues including ongoing paramilitarism, sectarianism, segregation and the need to deal with our troubled past. This strategic plan should focus on lessening the potential transmission of sectarian prejudice and parental conflict-related traumatic experiences while collectively working towards reducing the negative influence of social, economic and political environmental issues linked to the past.

17. Substantive work continues on a daily basis, including through many PEACE IV-funded projects to tackle the negative impact of these complex and enduring legacy issues on individuals, families and communities throughout Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. Unfortunately, there remains significant work still to be progressed in the areas of historical investigation and information recovery, ongoing paramilitary activity and the community-wide attitudinal and behavioural change required to reduce sectarianism. A 2018 report entitled 'Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: a Review' concluded,

21 years after the Good Friday Agreement, latent sectarianism persists in Northern Ireland, despite strenuous and continuing efforts on the part of government, voluntary organisations and others to deal with its many manifestations. Although often triggered by events, it

*can erupt at any time, produce dire and adverse consequences, and hinder the steady growth of reconciliation.*⁵

18. Consultation feedback received by the Commission during the mid-term review of the Strategy for Victims and Survivors highlighted a concern that if and when new legacy agencies and processes contained in the Stormont House Agreement are established 'significant challenges will emerge'.⁶ This would include the capacity of existing PEACE IV-funded Advocacy and Health and Wellbeing service providers to meet demand where increasing numbers of individuals and families engage with legacy inquests or interface with new legacy agencies including the proposed Historical Investigations Unit and the Independent Commission for Information Retrieval. A significant level of resource and professional development has been invested through the PEACE IV Programme to establish the Health and Wellbeing Case Manager Network. In the transition between the closure of the PEACE IV Programme and opening of the new PEACE Plus Programme it is vitally important that there is continuity in funding ongoing work of caseworkers to support victims and survivors.
19. The New Decade, New Approach document produced by the British and Irish Governments in January 2020 contains a commitment to publish and introduce legislation in the UK Parliament to implement the Stormont House Agreement to address legacy issues within 100 days.⁷ It needs to be acknowledged that if legacy mechanisms are agreed and progressed, there will be an inevitable increase in demand for support services in the years ahead. In this context and the development of the new PEACE Plus Programme, it is imperative that discussions among key stakeholders are held to ensure funding is continued to provide Advocacy and Health Wellbeing Caseworker support to victims and their families.

PEACE IV Research Programme

20. The PEACE IV funded Victims and Survivors Research Programme is conducting three comprehensive studies that are developing our understanding of the enduring impact of the Conflict's legacy on victims and survivors in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. The programme that is due to complete in December 2020 will yield significant findings and

⁵ Morrow, D *et al.* (2018) *Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review*, December: 4.

⁶ CVSNI (2017) *Victims and Survivors Mid-Term Review Report – Final Summary Report*, March: 15.

⁷ Information accessed electronically at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf

recommendations in the areas of psychological trauma services, advocacy support services linked to historical investigation and information recovery. It will also provide informed commentary and recommendations relating to the continuing trans-generational impact of the conflict's legacy including on children and young people. Each of the research reports will provide a rich source of information that can assist the development of the new PEACE Plus Programme. The Commission would welcome the opportunity to apply for further research funding under the new PEACE Plus Programme.

Conclusion

21. The Commission has welcomed the opportunity to respond to this important consultation on the preparation of the new PEACE Plus Programme that will operate from next year through to 2027. In designing and preparing the new programme the Commission strongly advocates for the continuation of funding activities that have been instrumental in improving the wellbeing of victims and survivors of the Troubles. The Commission supports the continued focus of the Peace Plus Programme on supporting the provision of quality health care and broader activities that will promote social and community cohesion. In building a better and shared future for victims and survivors and wider society in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland it is important that there is broader understanding of the trans-generational impact of conflict-related trauma on our population. Equally, part of this broader understanding needs to include the mutual recognition of supporting measures to improve the wellbeing of victims and their families and addressing conflict-legacy issues with the collective ambition of working towards a more peaceful and reconciled society. As the PEACE IV Research Programme progresses in the months ahead including the implementation of the Needs Review Project the Commission looks forward to engaging and informing the development of the new PEACE Plus Programme.