Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)
COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions for the
European Union’s
PEACE IV &
INTERREG VA Programmes
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<td>FAQ Guidance Document (V1) created and issued to all projects via email, uploaded to the SEUPB website and shared via social media channels.</td>
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Coronavirus (COVID-19) – PEACE IV & INTERREG VA Programmes

The COVID-19 crisis creates significant challenges for us all. The following FAQ Guidance Document has been developed for all projects funded under the European Union’s PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes.

Our overarching intention is to continue to deliver business in what is now the new normal. To help with this, we are providing as much flexibility and support as possible during this unprecedented time. We would actively encourage you to try and continue to deliver project activity, within the resources available to you. We are committed to working pragmatically with you to ensure stability in the short-term and support the long-term recovery process that will be critical when this crisis has ended.

Our staff are pro-actively assisting PEACE IV and INTERREG VA funded projects to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, on a case-by-case basis. The projects we support are across an extremely diverse range of sectors and areas including: health and social care, environmental protection, business development, sustainable transport, shared education, support for vulnerable children and young people, a number of capital build projects and a wide-range of other peace and reconciliation initiatives. It is therefore vital that each project receives tailored guidance and support to help it to continue, within the principles of the respective Programme, and in so doing ensure they remain viable and eligible for funding support from the Programmes.

It is important to acknowledge that we must also operate within the EU framework and regulatory guidance, which is applicable to all EU Programmes across Europe. We must ensure that we take decisions that are within the parameters of those regulations. While the Commission has afforded some flexibilities, which we really appreciate, this has not extended to increasing Programme funding allocation or to extending overall Programme timeframes. The funding source for these Programmes include three partners, the EU, the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, as well as the Scottish Government, in the case of INTERREG VA.
Frequently Asked Questions

The following FAQs include all of the information that we have made available to date and provides responses to some specific questions raised by projects. It must be noted that certain queries and requests, are not in the remit of the SEUPB as the Managing Authority for the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes, to take decisions. Where future clarity is available we will update and re-issue this FAQ Guidance Document.

1. Is it possible to extend the timeframe for delivery of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes beyond 2023 (based on 2020 + N+3)?

The programming period, including the end date, is set by the European Commission and contained within the regulations for all EU-funded Programmes across Europe. It is not within the remit of the SEUPB to change that deadline.

The SEUPB is however, continuously monitoring the regulatory flexibilities that are being approved at Commission level. To date the position is that there will be no extension to the current programming period end date. This position may alter in the future, however, the current directive is that the current programming period will remain.

2. Is it possible to increase the funding allocation for projects that will incur unforeseen costs due to the crisis?

The funding within the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes is fully committed. Any opportunity for projects to increase the funding within their current Letter of Offer in the midst of this health and economic emergency, is severely limited.

The SEUPB has been dealing with requests from projects on a case-by-case basis, as many projects require a very different and specific approach, advice and support. Examples of this activity are detailed below. (We would, as in previous communications, encourage you to speak to your case officer in the first instance).
- Adaptations to remote implementation so that work can continue where it is reasonable to do so.
- Variations to project activity to respond to the COVID-19 crisis directly have been agreed on a case-by-case basis.
- Requests for future changes to Letters of Offer timelines, targets and funding amounts. Where possible, we are focused on supporting projects to continue implementation within the principles of the EU Programmes. Formal changes to Letters of Offer are not guaranteed and may require approval by PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Steering Committee.
- Requests for flexibility around output achievement. This is under review at a thematic level, and at a project level, in order to continue to support implementation and the declaration of outputs by projects during this period.
- There are also examples of those projects who are informing us that activity cannot continue, and those that wish to access furlough schemes in order to protect funding for future delivery, when there are less uncertainties.

3. What is the impact on expenditure?

Projects should contact their case officer to discuss any specific concerns or queries. It is not possible to provide advice in this note to encapsulate every eventuality that may occur regarding expenditure, however we have set out some general principles relating to impact on expenditure below.

Should events or meetings have to be cancelled or postponed, or if partners/stakeholders could not attend for the reasons mentioned above, or other justified medical conditions. It is recommended that projects:

- Consider with partners involved whether to carry out the meeting by other means, such as video-conference, in order to minimize the impact on the work-plan.
- Seek reimbursement (e.g. for venue, catering, travel tickets, etc.) in line with contractual terms.
- For any costs that have been incurred and cannot be recovered via the supplier or other means (e.g. insurance, credit card provider, etc.) this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the SEUPB Financial Control Unit, who can provide guidance in the first instance.
4. What happens when a project cannot deliver on Targets and Outputs?

In the event that your project has been impacted due to attendance and engagement, the project should look at mitigation measures and alternative means to meet the deliverables and outputs (within the context of current government guidance on COVID-19). Should you require a modification in your project in order to do so, please discuss this directly with your JS Case Officer, for advice and guidance. It is important that we discuss these matters on a case-by-case basis to offer the most suitable advice.

We are aware that some projects may wish to consider the furlough scheme or similar Government interventions, if there is no possibility of implementing projects in support of delivering/achieving their stated outputs. We cannot offer advice to you directly about any of those schemes, however, we would still urge you to contact us to discuss your decision.

5. What emergency payments have been put in place to support projects?

We appreciate that obtaining the appropriate paperwork in support of claims may not be possible at this time. Therefore where projects continue to operate and deliver project activity, payments will be made for up to 80% of the grant element of claims submitted for reporting periods with end dates of:

- 31 December 2019
- 31 January 2020
- 29 February 2020

No supporting paperwork with regard to these claims is required at this time. These payments will take into account the existing advance repayment schedules, including making adjustments to the schedule if necessary to ensure the project receives an adequate payment.

However, please note that verification of the claim will take place at a later date. At which time the balance of the claim will be paid.
In addition, payments of up to 80% of the grant element of claim values will also be applied, as required, in respect of claims due to be submitted on 28 April 2020, 28 May 2020 and 28 June 2020; which should only contain items that can be readily verified in future. Supplementary claims may also be submitted in the future, in respect of expenditure omitted from the original quarterly claim.

It should be noted that the narrative element of the partner progress reports will not be required in support of claims that are submitted under these emergency arrangements. Partner progress reports can be submitted as supplementary reports before the consolidated report is submitted subsequently by the Lead Partner in line with normal procedures. These arrangements will be kept under review and may be modified at any time, or extended if required.

6. Is it possible to relax programme rules regarding the Simplified Cost options adopted by some of the projects, for example reimbursement of expenditure in relation to units /outputs delivered?

The operation of the Simplified Cost Options within projects is governed by EU regulation, however there are some flexibilities afforded in relation to possible adjustments in the prevailing circumstances. In order to avail of those flexibilities, we will require the details of each request on a case-by-case basis, to assess what amendments are possible. This could include an extension to the project timetable, or a reassessment of the method of intervention and associated costs.

Please share this FAQ Guidance Document with your project partners. Where future information and advice is available the document will be updated and re-issued.

Thank you.