

The PEACE PLUS Programme (2021-2027)- Business Sector

PEACE PLUS is a €1bn investment in the economic, social and environmental development of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland (the Programme area). It is managed by the Special EU Programme Body (SEUPB) and combines the successful cross border PEACE and INTERREG Programmes to support peace, stability and prosperity. This will be achieved by funding activities that promote peace and reconciliation across six themes, which encompass 21 individual investment areas as follows:



Successful applications will aim to deliver outcomes that help sustain stability and prosperity while meeting the qualifying criteria for each theme and contributing to peace and reconciliation.

PEACE PLUS can facilitate the involvement of partners outside the Programme area (Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Ireland), where this will address challenges and opportunities, which transcend geographical borders; and in the case of the Business Sector, contribute to commercial advantage and increased competitiveness.

How PEACE PLUS will benefit the Business Sector.

Theme 2: Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation has an indicative budget of €143m to invest in cross border economic development across four thematic areas so that individual businesses from large to micro enterprises will:

- (i) Become more competitive through transition to the circular economy and digitisation;
- (ii) Engage in commercially focused research development and innovation;
- (iii) Work with local training providers to address existing and emerging skills requirements;
- (iv) Maximise their digital capacity to increase productivity and profitability and create more opportunities for rural based economic development.

PEACE PLUS is offering additional investment to meet these competitive and productivity challenges where the outcomes include: innovative cross border partnerships, tackling operational constraints, providing additional work opportunities and further strengthening inter community relationships.

How can businesses communicate their needs and opportunities and get involved?

The PEACE PLUS Public Consultation started on March 10th and will end on May 12th. Its purpose is to provide citizens and other stakeholders, with an opportunity to share their views on the content and administrative arrangements of the proposed PEACE PLUS Programme.

Now is an opportune time for businesses to communicate what they believe to be the economic needs and opportunities in the Programme area to trade associations, enterprise agencies, chambers of commerce, training organisations and education institutions.

This will inform the development of related projects which can be supported by PEACE PLUS.

Theme 2: Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation

Peace and prosperity are intrinsically linked and investment in economic development is required to further embed peace and reconciliation across the Programme and functional areas.

Theme 2 of PEACE PLUS provides investment to support and encourage enterprise and entrepreneurialism, particularly amongst SMEs and in areas with significant growth and export potential as follows.

<p>2.1 SME Development and Transition (€20m)</p>	<p>This investment area will support SMEs to become more productive and competitive in a post Brexit, post COVID-19 economic landscape by: operating at scale through cross border collaboration; engaging in commercially led innovation and increased digitisation; and effectively transitioning to engage in the low carbon, circular economy.</p>
<p>2.2 Innovation Challenge Fund (€58m)</p>	<p>This investment area will support commercially focused SME research, development and innovation between local businesses and education institutions, within key sectors in the Programme area to: improve productivity, increase exports and help create sustainable employment including in: Life & Health Sciences; Renewable / Bio Energy; Advanced Manufacturing; Agri-food; Cyber Security; and Artificial Intelligence.</p>
<p>2.3 Regional Skills Development Programme (€35m)</p>	<p>This investment area will support area-based approaches, designed to address evidenced skills gaps by enabling SMEs to work in partnership with education and training organisations to provide skilling and upskilling opportunities in sectors with existing and emerging skills requirements.</p>
<p>2.4 Smart Towns and Villages (€30m)</p>	<p>This investment area will utilise a social innovation led approach to maximise the potential of Information Communications Technology (ICT) to deliver improved social and economic outcomes in target areas; particularly those of a rural nature by improving access for enterprises including SMEs to localised economic development facilities designed to enable remote working.</p>

Additional Opportunities for Businesses to Engage in PEACE PLUS

<h4>Theme 1: Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities</h4>	
<p>1.1 Co-designed Local Community PEACE Action Plans (€90m)</p>	<p>This investment area will see the creation of Local PEACE PLUS Partnerships across all parts of the Programme area, which will develop Co-designed Peace Action Plans co-designed with the local community, and supported by the SEUPB. This structure will enable and empower council led local community partnerships, to self-determine and deliver priority projects on a cross community basis providing opportunities to realise economic regeneration and development projects, and for local businesses to get involved.</p>

Theme 3: Empowering and Investing in Our Young People	
3.2 PEACE PLUS Youth Programme (€45m)	This investment area will build the capacity of marginalised and disadvantaged young people within the Programme area, while enhancing their confidence, citizenship and employability. Supported projects will develop the capacity of our young people to participate within the labour market in a manner which addresses key skills shortages and assists SMEs to expand operations and keep pace with economic opportunities.
Theme 4: Healthy and Inclusive Communities	
4.2 Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion (€50m)	This investment area will incorporate a strengths-based approach to contribute to healthy and thriving rural communities including by supporting the diversification of rural SMEs, with a particular focus upon the Agricultural Sector.
Theme 5: Building a Sustainable and Better Connected Future	
5.5 Geothermal Energy Demonstration Programme (€20m)	To accelerate the deployment of energy based technologies that support climate action this investment will incorporate SME focused geothermal energy saving demonstration initiatives and supporting measures designed to increase operational efficiency.
5.6 Enhanced Sustainable Travel Connectivity (€165m)	To accelerate further improvements in cross border connectivity this investment will make a significant contribution to enhancing the rail network between key urban centres along the economic corridor between Belfast and Dublin. It will provide the SME base with increased access to business development opportunities and the labour market.
Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration	
6.1 Strategic Planning and Engagement (€27m)	This investment will incorporate activities designed to develop solutions to address current obstacles to cross border collaboration in key areas including from a Business /SME perspective, such as to research future cross border labour market opportunities and related skills mapping.