

Making a Difference

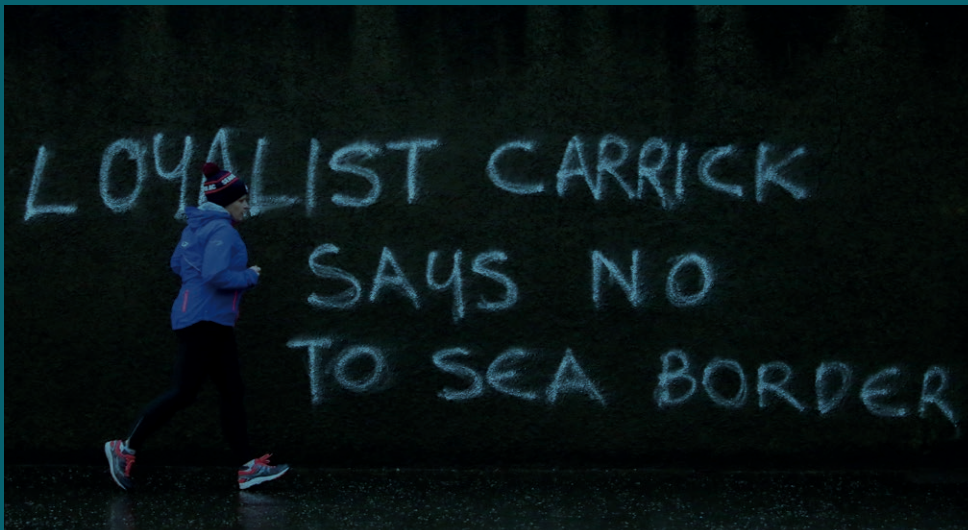


March 2021

INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

Challenges

Since the return of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland (NI) just over a year ago, a range of challenges have made progress extremely difficult, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the future of the border and its impact on communities dominating the agenda. Northern Ireland is facing one of the most difficult periods in recent times with the impact of Brexit, the NI Protocol and the Irish Sea Trade Border raising tensions. In 2021, Northern Ireland will mark the Centenary of its foundation. There are also other contentious anniversaries, such as the Hunger Strikes, and Internment as well as 'traditional' culture, identity, flags, and bonfires issues all creating a perfect storm which may potentially spill on to the streets.



The prospect of a border poll (referendum on Irish reunification) has divided local communities.



An uncertain social and economic landscape adds to the obstacles that we face moving into 2021 and beyond. It is vital that we can deal with these challenges in a proactive and sensitive way, acknowledging the progress that has been made with the acceptance that there is much work still to be done.

Growing discontent amongst many communities on the future of the border and how it impacts the wider constitutional position of NI has put significant pressure on relationships and partners across NI and the southern border counties (SBC). Alongside this, recent concerns and anxieties have heightened around the NI Protocol and what it means for communities and local businesses. We have seen many within the Loyalist community voice their discontent at what the protocol means for their future. 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.

We are approaching a period of important milestones in NI which if not handled correctly can create a further platform for violence, for example the upcoming 40th anniversary of the 1981 hunger strike. How this, and many other notable events is marked across NI can define community relations.

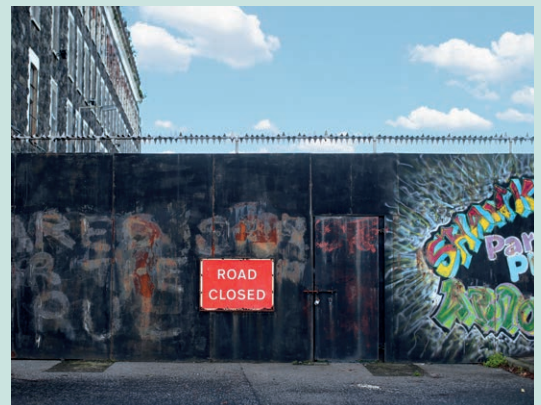
This year also marks the Centenary of Northern Ireland, which, if we are to protect the relationships across the island need to be managed with sensitivity and respect. Alongside these commemorations, the NI Census is due to be conducted which will inevitably trigger a range of discussions and debates on the future of Northern Ireland and subsequent calls for a border poll. These questions around the long-term future of NI will inevitably increase tensions across local communities and feed into the vulnerability people feel around their own culture, place, and identity, particularly in relation to Loyalism. With threats of violence becoming a regular occurrence due to these tensions it is vital we can bring communities together before violence becomes the new norm.

Over the last twelve months we have seen many communities come together to help and protect the most vulnerable against a pandemic that has deeply affected people's lives across communities. Our Peace Impact Programme (PIP), Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) and Peace Barriers Programme (PBP) have continued to make a real difference – adapting their support to what was needed during extraordinary circumstances with the aim of protecting peace and reconciliation at its very core.

While evaluating the impact of our current programmes we identified the need to introduce a platform for further cross-border engagement and support during what will be an uncertain time post Brexit. Our new Communities in Partnership Programme will further embed cross-border cooperation, building resilience in the face of uncertainty and friction and support the development of local leadership. Never has this programme been more relevant and needed given ongoing issues with Brexit, the protocol and the precarious position Northern Ireland and Ireland find themselves in due to issues with the European Union and the associated distribution of the Covid vaccine.

Since 2016 the Fund has committed almost £33.7m / €39.7m to these three key programmes, progressing some of the most difficult and sensitive reconciliation work across NI and the SBC. With significant challenges ahead, this is an important juncture for the Fund and the communities we support. This is not a time for complacency, it is a time to ask difficult questions, support, invest and challenge to find workable long-term solutions for communities who are on the verge of reverting backwards.

We would not be able to provide the support we do without the ongoing commitment of our international donors.



Political uncertainty



CALLS FOR A BORDER POLL – 51 % support it within the next five years¹



NO FUNDING to support NI's economic recovery from the pandemic²



SIGNIFICANT LACK OF UNITY in the NI Executive's response to Covid-19 alongside a lack of consistency in their responses to controversial events such as Republican and Loyalist paramilitary funerals



Polling has found that those in Northern Ireland **IDENTIFYING AS NEITHER UNIONIST NOR NATIONALIST** has fallen to its lowest figure in 15 years³



ONGOING STALEMATE between the NI Executive and Westminster on responsibility of compensation scheme for victims of The Troubles



There are **208 BORDER CROSS POINTS BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND AND IRELAND**

Brexit



POSES A REAL RISK to North / South relations



LOYALIST DISCONTENT with Brexit and NI protocol growing within communities in NI



UNRESOLVED ISSUES relating to the NI Protocol could threaten the long-term relationships between the UK and EU



Initial border disruption has resulted in **EXTENSIVE LOGISTICAL ISSUES** for businesses in NI



Surge in **ANTI-BORDER GRAFFITI** across towns all over NI⁴



MI5 investigating **INCREASED SECURITY THREATS** from dissident Republicans in border areas including Fermanagh⁵

¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/northern-irish-back-border-poll-within-five-years-6ndbkz80s>

² <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/no-cash-to-fund-northern-irelands-economic-recovery-says-finance-minister-murphy-39983719.html>

³ https://www.ark.ac.uk/yit/2018/Community_Relations/REL GALWY.html

⁴ According to Loyalist Communities Council (LCC)

⁵ <https://www.impartialreporter.com/news/18879824.mi5-investigating-dissident-activity-fermanagh-border/>

Social and Economic



NI had the lowest employment rate and the **HIGHEST ECONOMIC INACTIVITY RATE** of all the UK regions⁶



Marginalised communities still experience high levels of social and economic **DEPRIVATION**



COVID-19 WILL HAVE A LONG-TERM IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S mental health, wellbeing, and development⁷



The highest number of **PROPOSED REDUNDANCIES IN NI** since records began (11,000) was recorded in 2020⁸



78% believe that **RELIGION WILL ALWAYS MAKE A DIFFERENCE** to the way people feel about each other in Northern Ireland⁹



93% of pupils in Northern Ireland still **ATTEND SEGREGATED SCHOOLING**



In the first half of 2020, **102 SUICIDE DEATHS WERE RECORDED** in Northern Ireland¹⁰



ONE IN TEN 11-19-YEAR OLDS in NI have used drugs¹¹



Northern Ireland has the **WORLD'S HIGHEST RECORDED RATE OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)**¹²

Violence



MI5 categorises the threat from **NORTHERN IRELAND-RELATED TERRORISM** as severe



There are still **THOUSANDS OF SIGNED-UP ('SWORN') MEMBERS** of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland¹³



7,996 DRUG OFFENCES in 2020 in Northern Ireland

55



In 2020, there were **55 PARAMILITARY STYLE ATTACKS** in Northern Ireland¹⁴ which included 13 shootings and 27 assaults¹⁵



558 CASES OF INTIMIDATION between 2017-2018¹⁶



1,103 WEAPON OFFENCES between January 2020 - December 2020¹⁷

⁶ <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/labour-market-and-social-welfare/labour-force-survey#toc-2>, Labour Force Survey, Published 26th January 2021.

⁷ Your Voice Survey with PlayBoard and Ulster University <https://www.playboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Our-Voices-Matter-Summary-Report-PlayBoard-NI-Nov-2020.pdf>

⁸ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) 2020

⁹ https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/2018/Community_Relations/RELGLAWY.htm

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-54436324#:~:text='Suicide%20narrative',figures%20for%202015%20to%202018.>

¹¹ <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/social-care-and-children/youth-wellbeing-prevalence-survey-2020/>

¹² The Economic Impact of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Northern Ireland', 2011 <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/news/2011/december/ni-has-worlds-highest-rate-of-post-traumatic-stress-disorder>

¹³ https://www.ircommission.org/sites/irc/files/media-files/IRC%20Third%20Report_0.pdf Independent Reporting Commission, Third Report November 2020.

¹⁴ https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/2020/december/crime-bulletin-dec-_20.pdf

¹⁵ https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/2020/december/crime-bulletin-dec-_20.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Working-With-Us/Corporate-data/Housing-statistics>

¹⁷ https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/2020/december/crime-bulletin-dec-_20.pdf

Communities in Partnership

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. Alongside this, the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly have a serious impact on vulnerable communities in the coming years.

The IFI will work with cross-border communities who have lived and operated under a significant level of distrust of their neighbours.

A key aim of this programme is the vital need to encourage cross-border co-operation between these communities, aimed at building resilience in the face of uncertainty and friction, supporting the development of local leadership.



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.



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

“ People may revert back to hard-line views around Brexit and borders, but communities here have been impacted by trauma and conflict too much for the good work to stop. As we move past the current health crisis, our work will concentrate on maintaining, strengthening and growing relationships both locally and with other projects across the border too. ”

Seamus Corr, BMSSP, Belfast

“ Cross-border relations have been affected by circumstances beyond our control. ”

Claire Gavigan
YESS Project, Co Sligo

Peace Impact Programme (PIP)

The Peace Impact Programme (PIP) delivers positive community transformation through sensitive interventions to promote reconciliation and integration between and within communities. Funded projects operate in areas that suffer from high levels of economic and social deprivation with communities who have limited experience in peace and reconciliation activity.





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.

**62**

projects funded
between 2016
and 2020

**113**

grants to date
totalling £15.26m
/ €17.85m

**£12m /
€14.04m**

funding allocated
in Northern Ireland

**£3.26m
/ €3.81m**

funding allocated
in SBC's

7981

core and general
events and activities

**2506**

accreditations and
qualifications received

**“**

One of the first events that brought people together was in the grounds of a Church of Ireland in Crossmaglen, South Armagh. Families from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds sat beside one another. I remember it clearly, in attendance were two fathers – an ex-IRA prisoner and a father who was involved at a high level with the Royal Black Institution, which was set up to promote the Christian Reformed faith – this would never have happened before.

”

Dundalk Youth Services, Co. Louth

“

We provide solutions to conflicts in the community; feuds, trying to alleviate fears and tensions around punishment beatings, threats to get out of the country and so on. There is usually never a perfect resolution but if it saves people being hurt it's still better than what would happen.

”

Ulidia Training, Co. Antrim

Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP)

Disillusionment with the perceived benefits of peace and lack of opportunity for young people in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland and the southern border counties 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.



The Personal Youth Development Programme (PYDP) was launched in late 2015 and aims to help at risk young people build and develop life skills that foster good relations, build confidence and resilience, and make them more employable.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PYDP PROJECTS

PYDP engages 16-25 year olds that are vulnerable to polarisation and face barriers to participation in mainstream provision. It is designed to engage young people who may have:



Left education with no or low qualifications or who left the education system early



Been or currently are involved in substance abuse



Become affected by homelessness



Come from a difficult family background



Been in, or close to, the criminal justice system



Suffered from poor health including mental health issues



Mistrust of statutory institutions



Not participated in civic society in a positive manner



Come from communities with a negative view of their future



Before, I was in a dangerous frame of mind and suffered from depression, ADHD and other long-term health issues. Since joining, my confidence and self-esteem has greatly improved. Thanks to the project and the help of my mentors I have gained a certificate in Acrylic nail application and design, Level 2 in Equality and Diversity, Level 1 in Substance Misuse and a Level 3 in First aid. More recently I have opened my own craft businesses on Facebook which I hope to grow in the next year.

Strabane AYE Participant, Co.Tyrone



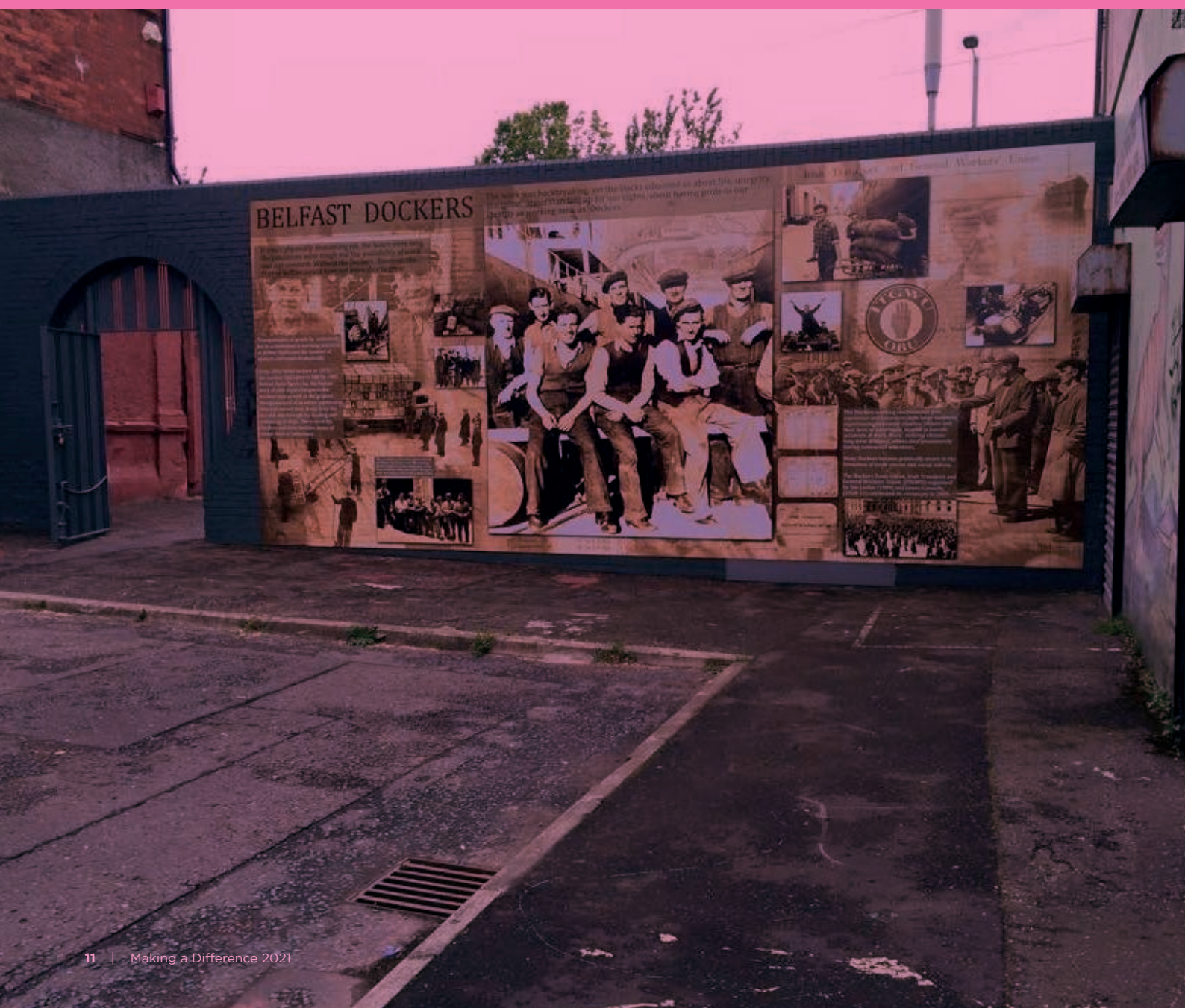
I ended up getting messed up on tablets when I was 17, progressing to heroin when I was just 19 years old. I didn't care about anyone not even myself and ended up pregnant. I've stopped taking drugs with counselling, family support and Footsteps. I am now in my first year of college. I truly believe I was given a second chance for me and most importantly for my beautiful son.

Connect Family Resource Centre's 'Footsteps' Project, Participant, Co Louth



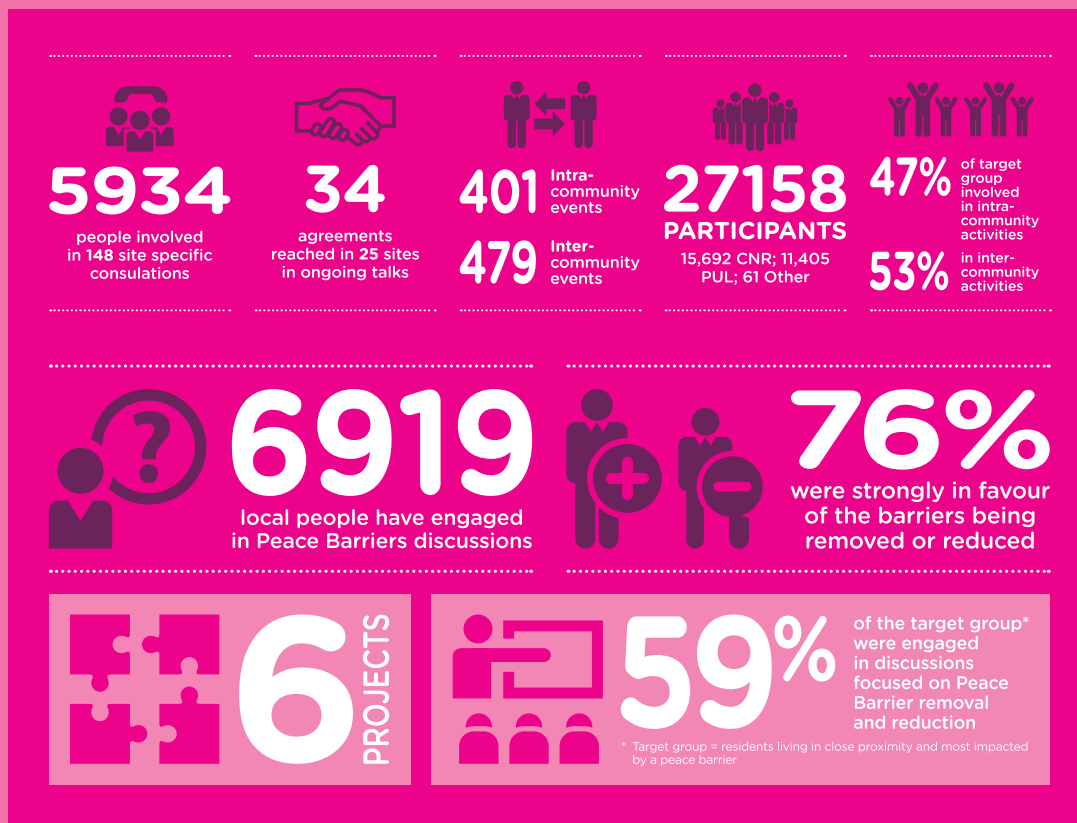
Peace Barriers Programme (PBP)

Peace Barriers are the most visual remaining symbols of division with over 100 remaining in Northern Ireland today. It is over 50 years since the first Peace Barrier was constructed. 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.





Launched in January 2012, the Programme focuses on helping interface communities to bring about the conditions that can allow for the removal of Peace Barriers. Facilitating direct engagement 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.



“Problems require attention and anything negative often has an impact in people’s attitudes to Peace Walls. We are keen to sustain these relationships, see how they continue to develop and then ultimately look at how this can encourage more positive dialogue around barrier removal. Looking ahead long-term, if we are running out of walls, then we know it has been a success.”

TASCIT, North Belfast

“A Peace Wall is more than the physical structure. It is a psychological barrier in people’s minds, so it takes time to break that down. It’s slow work, but we always have hope and you can see positive attitudinal change taking place as a result of our work.”

Greater Whitewell Community Surgery,
North Belfast

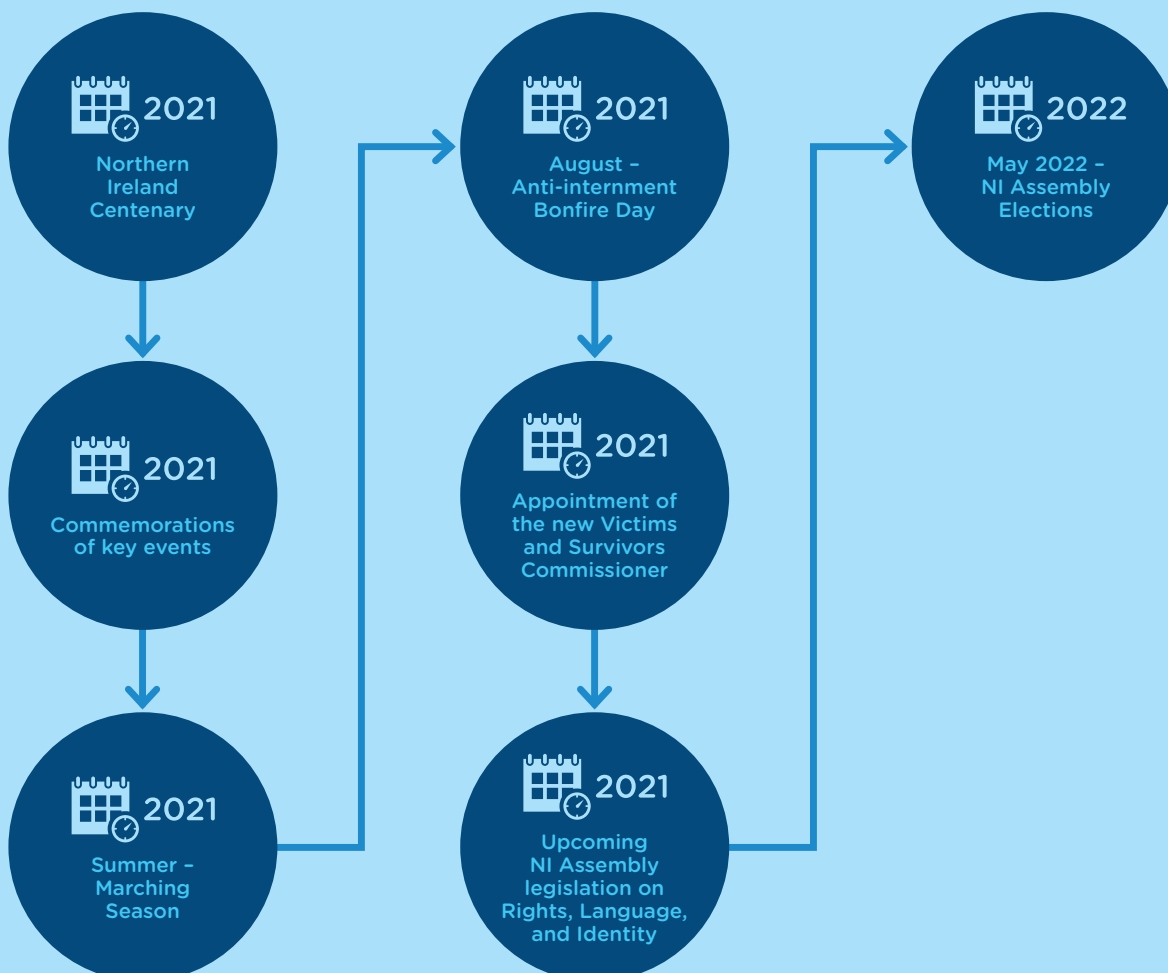
Looking Ahead

As we look ahead as an organisation, we understand that the long-term impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic has yet to be fully realised. Communities will need to continue their efforts supporting the most vulnerable and it could take years for life to return to a sense of normality.

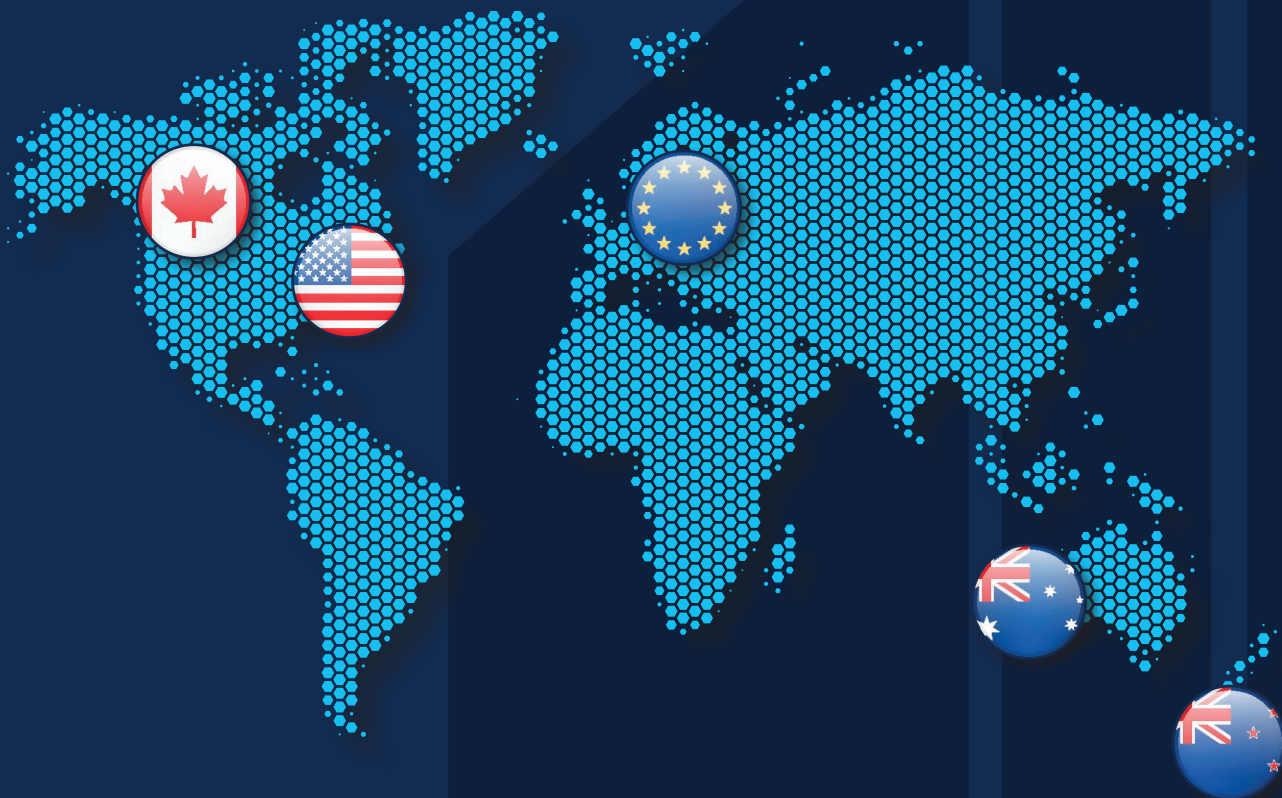
This is coupled with a number key milestones that lie ahead in the next two years. These events, for many, will trigger strong debates and emotions to identity, culture, and ongoing legacy issues to name a few. The Fund is the only organisation equipped to provide the sensitive work that is required to help navigate communities through these difficult times. Now is the time to ensure that we do not regress to a troubled past. The Fund is committed to delivering a lasting peace, offering hope for future generations and it is vital that our work continues.



*North Leitrim Glens Development Company
Across the Lines' Project.*



The International Fund for Ireland was established as an independent international organisation by the British and Irish governments in 1986. With contributions from the United States of America, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the total resources committed by the Fund to date amount to £749m and €937m.



THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FUND ARE:

- To promote economic and social advance; and
- To encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Unionists and Nationalists throughout Ireland.



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