



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

on

**THE SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR PEACE AND
RECONCILIATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE BORDER
COUNTIES OF IRELAND (1995-1999)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reason for this Communication

In a widely welcomed move, the European Union supported in 1995 the emerging peace process in Northern Ireland through the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. This five year Programme was endowed with financial resources for a three year period. Further funding was made subject to a review based on a Commission report: this Communication constitutes that report. It supports a Commission proposal in the Preliminary Draft Budget for 1998 that a further amount of 100 MECU be allocated to the Programme, as well as its intention to propose a further allocation for 1999.

1.2 Origin of the Programme

In Autumn 1994, shortly after the cessation of violence in Northern Ireland, a special Commission Task Force was created to "look into further ways of giving practical assistance" in the light of a promising new situation in the region. The three Northern Ireland members of the European Parliament, Dr. I. Paisley, Mr. J. Hume, and Mr. J. Nicholson were directly involved with this initiative from the outset. One key conclusion of the Task Force was that "the European Union has a clear interest and vital role to play in maintaining the momentum for peace and reconciliation, not only for the benefit of the region most affected, but also for the wider benefit of the European Union as a whole".

Following the report of this Task Force, the European Council, in Essen in December 1994, decided that it was opportune to establish a Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. The Programme (1995-1999) was prepared jointly by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland and approved by the Commission on 28 July 1995. Assistance from the Structural Funds and the FIFG of 300 MECU was provided for the period 1995-1997. The Commission Decision specified that up to 80% of the funding was for activities in Northern Ireland, not less than 20% for activities in the Border Counties, and that a minimum of 15% should be devoted to activities carried out in a cross-border context.

1.3 Additional Funding

The Commission believes that the Programme is being implemented as intended and that it is making a significant contribution to sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation, particularly in the light of progress at the level of political negotiations and of a much-improved security situation. It therefore proposed in the Preliminary Draft Budget for 1998 that the Programme be given an additional allocation of 100 MECU for 1998. It now proposes that the amount of 100 MECU for 1998 should come from Structural Funds resources which have not yet been allocated to Member States. It intends to propose that the amount to be provided for 1999 should be drawn from other programmes supported by the Structural Funds and exhibiting lasting underspends. It should be underlined that uncertainty about further funding causes great concern on the ground and risks undoing many of the positive effects of the Programme. Any interruption of funding would reduce significantly the effectiveness of many actions, in particular through the loss of staff as contracts become shorter or uncertain, and through beneficiaries only beginning to develop and act on worthwhile ideas when funds dry up.

2. OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

2.1 Objectives

An extensive consultation process preceded the preparation of the Programme and influenced the definition of its strategic aim and objectives. The Programme states that the overwhelming need to maintain the momentum for peace forms the rationale underpinning the Programme and it underlines the need to tackle socio-economic difficulties as part of this process.

The strategic aim is therefore defined as follows: "to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border cooperation and extending social inclusion."

Two strategic objectives give a more precise focus to the action to be undertaken:

- to promote the social inclusion of those who are at the margins of social and economic life;
- to exploit the opportunities and to address the needs arising from the peace process in order to boost economic growth and advance social and economic regeneration.

It is made clear that action will concentrate principally on those areas and sections of the population most adversely affected by the violence and suffering most acute deprivation.

2.2 Priorities

The allocation of funding to the sub-programmes reflects the basic objectives and in particular the importance of social inclusion, which is both a specific priority and a value which is relevant to all other priorities.

TABLE 1

MECU

SUB-PROGRAMME	Amount of Total Funding	% of Total
Employment	55.375	13,4
Urban & Rural Regeneration	69.008	16,7
Cross-border Development	66.633	16,2
Social Inclusion	93.938	22,8
Investment/ Industrial Development	59.855	14,5
Partnerships (N.Ireland only)	58.940	14,3
Technical Assistance	8.621	2,1
	412.370	100,0

3. PROGRESS OF THE PEACE PROGRAMME

3.1 Administrative Implementation of the Programme

The Programme is an imaginative response to the needs of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties and the means of delivering the Programme are equally innovative. There are two principal ways in which this has been achieved, through (a) decentralised delivery mechanisms and decision-making and (b) ongoing and formalised consultation.

(a) Relatively decentralised implementation is one of the principal features of the Programme: close to 60% of the total assistance is administered by bodies other than Government. There are three main channels.

The first channel is composed of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and similar bodies, being either Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFB) or Sectoral Partners, which are together responsible for about 40% of aid. There are five IFBs operating solely in Northern Ireland and two in the Border Counties, together with an eighth which operates on a cross-border basis. IFBs are independent organisations, with experience of working closely with groups to be targeted under this Programme. Four Sectoral Partners in Northern Ireland are similar but, in relation to the operation of this Programme, they have different and somewhat more direct links to government departments or agencies.

The second channel is area-based, i.e. 26 District Partnerships in Northern Ireland and six County Council-led Task Forces in the Border Counties, which are composed of representatives of local interests and which are responsible for some 17% of funding.

Government departments and agencies constitute the third channel, handling about 43% of funding, intended to support mainly economic development and infrastructure.

This level of decentralisation should be contrasted, for example, with the Northern Ireland Single Programme, which is the framework for the more centralised delivery of mainstream Structural Funding, where decision-making is largely confined to government departments and agencies.

(b) Ongoing consultation is another important feature of the Programme. The extensive consultation process which occurred at the preparatory stage has been prolonged by the creation of a Consultative Forum, composed of representatives of a very wide range of interests in the eligible areas. It has direct input to the Monitoring Committee through its Co-Chairmen, who are members of the Committee. The Forum has proved to be an arena in which information and opinions on all aspects of the Programme are expressed and conveyed to the Monitoring Committee.

3.2 Applications, Approvals and Expenditure

Many of the implementing bodies had to be set up specially or were not familiar with the administration of Structural Funds, and in addition, appropriate arrangements had to be made for coordination between the various bodies as well as for adequate administrative and accounting procedures. All the necessary arrangements are now well in place and are functioning effectively. They will be improved in certain respects as a result of the Mid-Term Review.

The Programme has generated a very high level of applications in the eligible areas, which is a clear measure of people's awareness of the Programme, and that it is responding to

their needs. In the Border Counties, 1 400 applications have been received, of which over 950 have been selected. The total number of applications in Northern Ireland is close to 14 000, of which over 7 000 have been approved. The rate of increase in applications and approvals in Northern Ireland is shown by comparing the figures for 1996 and for the first half of 1997:

TABLE 2

Northern Ireland	Applications	Approvals
1996	7 193	3 001
1997/1st Half	6 467	4 226

It is expected that the high level of applications will continue, if additional funding is provided, as over 45% of the number of grants approved in 1996 was composed of small grants intended to support basic capacity-building, training and project development. A high proportion of the small grants will be followed by applications for full project grants: this indicates that much worthwhile work is only just beginning, and that further funding will be needed to maximise its value, and carry it through. A number of measures are already over-committed, partly due to exchange rate movements. By end 1997 the resources currently available will have been allocated to project promoters and it is clear that further funding will be required to meet existing and future demand and thereby to realise the Programme's full potential to respond effectively to needs and opportunities on the ground.

Total expenditure (national and Community spending) under the Programme to end 1996 amounted to 29 MECU. The forecast for 1997 in the current financial plan approved by the Monitoring Committee is 202 MECU. 1997 will be the first full year in which approved projects under all sub-programmes will be implemented and a substantial acceleration of expenditure will occur as a result. Expenditure of 182 MECU on projects approved in 1995-1997 will occur in 1998-1999.

3.3 Structural Funds' Commitments and Payments

The other basic measure of the progress of the Programme is the level of Structural Funds' commitments and payments.

Actual and forecast commitments and payments by the Structural Funds, at 9 October 1997, were as follows:

EC COMMITMENTS AND PAYMENTS

TABLE 3

MECU

COMMITMENTS	Total	ERDF	ESF	EAGGF	FIFG
Cumulative to 9.10.1997	123.47	67.13	46.28	9.40	0.66
Yet to be made in 1997	109.75	61.87	40.75	6.79	0.34
Total to end 1997	233.22	128.99	87.04	16.19	1.00
1998-1999	68.52	19.54	42.31	6.23	0.45
TOTAL	301.74	148.53	129.34	22.41	1.45

PAYMENTS	Total	ERDF	ESF	EAGGF	FIFG
Cumulative to 9.10.1997	97.85	53.70	36.41	7.41	0.33
Yet to be made in 1997	67.99	34.97	32.53	0.00	0.49
Total to end 1997	165.84	88.68	68.93	7.41	0.82
Post 1997	135.90	59.86	60.41	15.00	0.63
TOTAL	301.74	148.53	129.34	22.41	1.45

While all the national and European resources currently available will be fully allocated by the implementing bodies in the period 1995-1997, they will not be fully spent, with the result that the full amount of Structural Funds' aid of 300 MECU will not be fully committed or paid by the Commission until later in the Programme period.

3.4 Additionality

A further concern in the implementation of the Programme has been that it is properly additional. This has been expressed by the Consultative Forum and by many other interested parties. The Commission is attentive to this concern.

The Programme states that "expenditure under the Programme will be fully additional to expenditure which is due to take place in the eligible areas under the Single Programming Document (SPD) for Northern Ireland, the Community Support Framework (CSF) for Ireland and the Community Initiative programmes." Annual returns of expenditure by the UK authorities to the Commission have demonstrated compliance with the additionality requirement. For the Border Counties the Department of Finance, in cooperation with the sectoral Departments, has provided the baseline data in relation to which additionality has been demonstrated. The Commission, in cooperation with the Department of Finance and

the Border Regional Authority, will continue to monitor that the additionality requirement is complied with.

3.5 Effects of the Programme

The overall effect of the Programme is clear and important. It tilts activity in favour of social and political commitment rather than violence. It gives crucial moral and financial support to those searching for common ground and practical ways of working together to use that common ground to build a better society. It is for these reasons that continuing support is so vital: the overwhelming majority of the people of the region want peace, and this Programme is helping them achieve it.

This support for progress towards peace works in the following ways.

It is inclusive

Targeting people who have been marginalised reduces alienation, and with it the support and potential for violence.

Since ideas for actions come substantially from the people themselves, rather than being offered to them, a sense of ownership can develop. Grass-roots, bottom-up involvement gives everyone more of a stake in trying to move forwards rather than back.

In addition, the policy of involving people "on the ground" as much as possible in the whole process of management and implementation has meant that substantial responsibility is also transferred. The level of decision-making is brought closer to people previously left out.

It encourages consensus instead of confrontation:

Inclusion and involvement encourage new approaches to decision-making and resolution of differences. Consensus building is necessary to achieve objectives. Alliances across differences are crucial in resolving practical problems. Confrontation is generally counter-productive. In a region where opportunities to work together have been too few, the Peace Programme has provided important structures and incentives which have encouraged co-operation. This has been most notably demonstrated in the case of the District Partnerships. The result has been that people can see directly the value of a stable society, and the value of using argument and debate to tackle differences, rather than other more destructive paths.

It provides a European dimension.

European involvement helps to remould the situation by providing support for action in a new and independent framework which is perceived to be non-partisan and neutral. It encourages and provides opportunities for attitudes and activities which are characteristic of the Union's own evolution - social inclusion, partnership and dialogue, finding common interests and working together with a common purpose. In particular, two significant developments have occurred. The Programme has greatly expanded the role of civil society, by its inclusiveness and by giving non-governmental bodies the opportunity to be active agents of change and development. In addition, the District Partnerships constitute a working model of local cooperation, which involves political representatives across the spectrum who put aside their differences on other matters for the sake of their communities. The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action summarises the

approach as follows: "The European Community is about building trust, cooperation and partnership between former enemies. The Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation is a micro version of that central theme. It is the most "European" thing the European Union has done in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. It is the most specific demonstration of the core values of the Union expressed at any regional level within the Union".

4. MID-TERM REVIEW

4.1 Progress Examined in the Mid-Term Review

The preceding sections have summarised progress made to date in the execution of the Programme. Progress is now being examined in the formal and obligatory Mid-Term Review, which is one of the principal responsibilities of the Monitoring Committee, requiring it to review progress and to make any necessary adjustments. In doing so, the Committee has the assistance of the **Consultative Forum**, which reported on the implementation, the impact and the rationale and future of the Programme. In addition, consultants were engaged to carry out a **Mid-Term Evaluation**: their report has been presented and discussed at two special meetings of the Committee. At a special meeting to be held later this year, the Monitoring Committee is expected to take decisions to complete the Mid-Term Review.

The **Consultative Forum's** consultation of applicants, beneficiaries and other interests revealed that, while there were issues to be addressed in relation to coordination and cohesion, the Programme was broadly welcomed and felt to have the potential to make a real impact. In particular, the strengthening of local democracy and decision-making was viewed as the most obvious and successful impact on peace and reconciliation to date. Finally, the Forum pointed out that the Programme, despite its innovation and targeted intent, cannot substitute for a meaningful political process and that its impact would be greatly enhanced if such a process were taking place.

The **Mid-Term Evaluation** (which examined the operation of the Programme to end-1996) noted the large volume of applications; pointed out that, as a result of the Programme's complexity, special nature and degree of decentralisation, the implementation mechanisms took some time to establish; and its overall conclusion with respect to operational effectiveness was that the delivery mechanisms had been effective in making progress towards the utilisation of the funds. The consultants surveyed applicants and found that on average 69% regarded the funding bodies as having performed adequately or very adequately. While the peace process searched for new and more productive ways forward, 88% considered that the need for this Programme was now greater than when it was launched. Even in the absence of a stable peace, the need to pursue reconciliation efforts was widely accepted and 76% of applicants claimed that their projects would have a direct impact on reconciliation. The report shows that in Northern Ireland funds are effectively channelled to the most disadvantaged areas and also that both communities are being treated equitably. The impacts at this stage are primarily process benefits: e.g. the Programme's procedures and practices are intended to be inclusive and participatory and thus to promote social inclusion. In particular District Partnerships are cross-community multi-sectoral bodies which facilitate cooperation and consensus. No proposals are made for changes in the measures or for shifts of resources within the Programme. The report refers to the presence of a substantial "pipeline" of applications: certain sub-programmes were already over-subscribed at the end of 1996. Finally, the

consultants make several recommendations designed to improve monitoring, coordination and complementarity.

4.2 The Commission Approach to the Mid-Term Review

In its approach to the Mid-Term Review and the second phase of the Programme, the Commission will be guided more particularly by the following considerations.

The Commission believes that the strategic aim of the Programme - to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation - remains valid. Experience has shown that funding bodies and project promoters require additional guidance on the link between a particular project and strengthening peace and reconciliation. Project promoters and funding bodies should be able to give a clear answer to the question "how does my project/the activities we support sustain and strengthen peace and/or promote reconciliation?"

While the basic structure of seven Sub-Programmes will remain unchanged, the Mid-Term Review provides an opportunity to examine the measures within the Sub-Programmes, with a view to continuing those which correspond best to the aims of the Programme, taking into account both the substance of the actions supported and the procedures and processes which characterise the various measures. If necessary, certain measures will be deleted or merged and new measures will be added. The allocation of resources for the second phase of the Programme will be guided by the outcome of this review.

In reviewing the performance of the three channels for the distribution of assistance (Government Departments and agencies, Intermediary Funding Bodies, area-based bodies such as District Partnerships and County Council-led Task Forces), attention will be paid both to the effectiveness of their operations and the extent to which their methods have been open and inclusive. In addition, a clearer definition is required of the roles and responsibilities of sectoral implementing bodies, such as Departments and IFBs, and territorial bodies, such as District Partnerships and Task Forces, in order to avoid any duplication and to ensure coordination and cooperation. Finally, the requirements and procedures relating to applications should be re-examined with a view to simplifying and shortening them wherever possible.

In their evaluation report, the consultants made several recommendations designed to improve monitoring and evaluation as well as co-ordination and complementarity. The Commission expects that these recommendations will be examined and implemented and, in particular, that the "comprehensive database of all projects assisted under this initiative will be established and made available to the public", as specified in the Programme document.

The Commission acknowledges the special contribution to the Mid-Term Review which has been made by Northern Ireland's members of the European Parliament, Dr. I. Paisley, Mr. J. Hume and Mr. J. Nicholson, who have published a report which contains a careful review of experience to date together with constructive proposals for the second phase of the Programme.

5. CONTINUATION OF THE PROGRAMME

5.1 The Political Context

The political context in which the Programme is being implemented has much improved in recent months. At ground level, decisions taken by the Orange Order concerning the routes of several parades in summer 1997 greatly reduced the amount of conflict. The IRA decision to renew its ceasefire, added to the existing ceasefire by loyalist paramilitaries, transforms the situation and permits all attention and efforts to focus on reaching a political settlement. Energetic efforts are being made by political parties in Northern Ireland, aided and encouraged by both the British Government and the Irish Government, to reach a comprehensive political settlement. Substantive political negotiations have started, with a view to reaching an agreement by May 1998. This would be put to the people north and south of the border in two referenda, offering a historic accord to all the people living on the island of Ireland.

5.2 The Need for the Programme

While there are signs of hope in the political situation, it is clear that profound changes in attitudes and practices are required to sustain peace and to provide a solid foundation for a political settlement. The contribution made by the Programme is becoming ever more substantial.

Some examples of projects which have been assisted are contained in Annex 1, to illustrate the range and impact of activities supported by the Programme. They demonstrate what have become the hallmarks of the Programme, including: a transparent, inclusive style of decision-making about policy and activity; an insistence on local and bottom-up input, thereby fostering a sense of ownership; highlighting the importance of partnerships, and of striving for consensus; empowering new levels of society, through decentralisation and involvement; concentrating on practical advances rather than questions of principle; using all the above to bring a new approach to the search for peace and reconciliation.

This contribution made by the Programme should not be underestimated. It has transformed the way many people "do business", resulting in new and better ways of relating to each other.

5.3 Why European Union Support Must Continue

The fact that this Programme is supported by the European Union is of central significance.

The people who want to build a peaceful and cooperative society need support. European support and solidarity through the Peace Programme is an absolutely crucial element of that support. Europe's success in overcoming its divisions over the last 50 years is an important example. Moreover, European support is perceived as neutral and independent - money without colour - and it therefore reaches people who would otherwise remain outside.

It has been said that the art of the Schuman Plan was "to extract a policy from a need" - to create powerful positive energy from potentially destructive ingredients. The European framework and resources are liberating positive and creative forces in Northern Ireland

and the Border Counties, thereby preparing a better future for all the people in those regions.

The Commission believes that telling the story of the Programme is in itself one of the outputs of the Programme. This Programme is a European success story: it is using EU funding to bring substantially closer the resolution of a long and bloody conflict, and its contribution is well-recognised. Nor is the contribution just one-way: it is the intention of many of those involved that they will actively assist the exchange of experience between this Programme and EU-supported activities elsewhere, so that experience gained in a programme which is exceptional, by reason of its focus on combating social exclusion and its very decentralised implementation system, may be available to other regions.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the high level of applications, the capacity of the implementing bodies to distribute funding effectively and above all the potential contribution of this Programme to sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties (and elsewhere, through the transfer of experience) justify the continuation of EU support at its present level in 1998 and further support in 1999.

ANNEX 1

Examples of Activities

Some examples of projects which have been assisted may illustrate the range and impact of activities supported by the Programme.

Enterprise and Employment

Worktrain Ballymena is providing vocational education and training in a particularly disadvantaged area, where the unemployment rate is over 18%. The project aims to guarantee that those who complete a training course will be trained to standards which assure an interview with Sainsburys stores for any appropriate vacancy. Local people are very proud that this employment initiative is sited in their housing estate. A paramilitary mural design on the building was voluntarily removed by those who had placed it there.

The Nerve Centre in Londonderry offers a multi-media production training course for the young and long-term unemployed. The objective is to provide access for disadvantaged people to the new employment opportunities created by the technology of interactive media, through a full-time course lasting 18 months.

Magherafelt Women's Group secured project funding for a well researched, innovative, project proposal which targets twenty-four women drawn from both sections of the community in Rural South Derry. This community business initiative, based on the manufacture and restoration of furniture, aims to form a strong co-operative business structure with significant export potential. An integral component of this process will be the opportunity for the women to tackle community relations issues directly and to reflect on how these issues affect their daily lives and how they might impinge on their future business activities.

The Interest Rate Subsidy Scheme offered a subsidy calculated at 4% per annum on qualifying loans over a five-year period. Eligible proposals far exceeded the funds available. In Northern Ireland, which received over 80% of the available funds, over 60% of approved projects relate to firms employing fewer than 50 people, are located in deprived areas and/or contribute to competitiveness, innovation and export growth. The potential job creation in Northern Ireland amounts to 7700: almost 75% of these new jobs will be in deprived areas.

Social Inclusion

WAVE is an organisation which offers care and support to anyone bereaved or traumatised by violence, irrespective of their religious, cultural or political beliefs. It promotes respect for life and an understanding of difference that is seen as enhancing rather than threatening. It affirms and acknowledges that there are ways of resolving difference other than through the use of violence and continually seeks creative ways of working through issues that have the potential to divide.

An Crann/The Tree facilitates peace-building at local level through a range of community-based arts initiatives, which record personal experiences of sectarian conflict.

A Development Trust in an urban area is providing high-quality training, incorporating work experience in youth and community work, to a small number of ex-prisoners. The

participants are adequately supported to ensure that they make the most of the opportunity. The experience gained in this pilot project will guide the design of actions for much larger numbers of current and future ex-prisoners.

A wide range of activities and organisations for women has been supported, including local groups such as Women on Rural Development (Armagh) and the Waterside Women's Group (Londonderry); Women's News - a publishing group which was helped to develop its project and to employ an outreach worker to make links with women's groups; and cross-border projects such as those organised by the Federation of Women's Institutes and the Irish Countrywomen's Association.

Parents and Kids Together aims to encourage relationships between children and parents from both traditions in Lurgan. Work with children in the 5-10 age group is going beyond mere contact in order to help them grow up with a better understanding of the society in which they live. Parents are actively involved in promoting understanding and reconciliation, thus changing attitudes of whole families in all areas of the town.

An initiative taken by one of the IFBs, the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust, is particularly interesting. NIVT retained the Mediation Network to bring together participants in different projects if conflict and disorder arose in the summer months, in order to maintain inter-community relations and to provide a counterweight to the forces of disorder.

Cross-Border

Support for cross-border projects includes the reconstruction of the Aghalane Bridge and its approach roads, which will facilitate trade, tourism and social contact. It also includes a variety of business and cultural links and cooperation between public bodies.

Mulmuf is a small, privately-owned exhaust manufacturing company in Co. Sligo, which is a supplier to F.G. Wilson in Larne, a firm which plans to double its turnover as a result of a joint venture agreement with the Caterpillar Corporation. Grant-aid enabled Mulmuf to invest rapidly to expand its production and, as a result, to take on additional workers.

An innovative cross-community and cross-border project involving six schools has been supported. The project aims to involve children in a variety of joint activities; to introduce children and communities to other European children and cultures; and to use the latest information technology in doing so.

Border Counties

In the Border Counties, FM Cleaning Systems provides a specialised contract cleaning service to the domestic, commercial and industrial sectors. It was started in 1994 by a disabled person and it now employs 17 persons. The company has received grant-aid which will enable it to expand its business by becoming sole distributor for environmentally-friendly cleaning systems. Because of his own experiences as a disabled person seeking work, the firm's proprietor is committed to providing employment for the long-term unemployed.

County Leitrim is the most socially and economically disadvantaged county in the Republic. The Co. Leitrim Partnership has been assisted to undertake several actions, including child-care provision, promoting the involvement of women in development and

the creation of a multi-functional Development and Education Centre, which will be of particular help to early school-leavers and to adult education.

Assistance was given to a group which undertook to establish the number and the needs of ex-prisoners who were not associated with the principal paramilitary organisations. The group intends to provide personal and practical support through a service which will be open to all former prisoners.

Activities such as these do not appear in newspaper headlines or on television screens but they illustrate the capacity of the Programme to generate a huge range of activities which contribute to economic and social development or to dealing with the results of conflict.

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