



Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for Northern Ireland

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Northern Ireland was formally adopted by the European Commission on 25 August 2015 and last modified on 23 May 2023, outlining Northern Ireland's priorities for using the € 625.4 million of public money that is available for the 7-year period 2014-2020 (€ 228.4 million from the EU budget and € 179.5 million of national co-funding, plus € 217.5 million of additional national funding top-ups).

The RDP for Northern Ireland focuses mainly on preserving and enhancing ecosystems, local development in rural areas and increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector. Farmers will receive support to put 6.14% of the Northern Irish farmland under contract to preserve biodiversity and 1 800 hectares of forests will be planted to mitigate climate change. Almost 20% of Northern Irish farms will benefit from investment support to restructure and modernise their businesses. In addition, 3% of farms will receive support to develop short supply chains, local markets and carry out promotional activities. Knowledge and innovation support is also given a lot of attention and the programme will create almost 25 000 places on training courses for farmers and other rural businesses. The RDP will also support local development via LEADER Local Action Groups throughout the province and improve access to basic services for 12 percent of the rural population.

Support for Rural Development is the 2nd Pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, providing Member States with an envelope of EU funding to manage nationally or regionally under multi-annual, co-funded programmes. In total, 118 programmes are foreseen in all 28 Member States¹. The RD Regulation for the period 2014-2020 addresses six economic, environmental and social priorities, and programmes contain clear targets setting out what is to be achieved. Moreover, in order to coordinate actions better and maximise synergies with the other European Structural & Investment Funds (ESIF), a Partnership Agreement has been agreed with each Member State highlighting its broad strategy for EU-funded structural investment.

In the United Kingdom rural development is implemented through four separate regional RDPs (for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). The management of Rural Development is a devolved area of policy in the United Kingdom. There is neither a national framework for the UK, nor a national rural network programme

This document provides a brief overview of how the challenges and opportunities Northern Ireland is facing are addressed by the RDP. In the annex, a table indicates the priorities and focus areas each with their specific targets, and their allocated budgets.

¹ The UK left the Union on 31st January 2020; in accordance with the Withdrawal Agreement support under Rural Development continues to apply in the UK during the 2014-2020 programming period.

1. SITUATION AND KEY CHALLENGES

Northern Ireland covers an area of 14 130 km², of which 46.4% is rural. Of the total area, forest land covers less than 8% and agricultural land 69% of the Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA), 82% is permanent grassland and meadows and 88% of farms in Northern Ireland are dairy, sheep and beef. Agri-food business is an important sector and accounts for more than 6% of employment and improving supply chains and enhancing growth and sustainability of this sector is therefore a priority.

Concerning greenhouse gas emissions, agriculture accounts for the biggest share in Northern Ireland with around 28% due to its dominant livestock sector. Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded areas in Europe. Only 7.4% of the area is under tree cover, compared to 13% of the UK as a whole. Therefore, Northern Ireland has a limited capacity for carbon sequestration, and mitigating climate change is a key challenge.

Intensification of farming and habitat fragmentation has led to a decline in biodiversity. Approximately half of designated NATURA 2000 sites in Northern Ireland are not in favourable condition and 94% lack a management plan and therefore require appropriate remedial action in order to preserve biodiversity.

A growing number of people (35%) live in rural areas, however not all rural areas enjoy the same access to basic services. Rural areas are particularly dependent on the tourism industry. There is a need to ensure that rural areas have the infrastructure and support required to maximise their potential to attract tourism revenue, which in turn will contribute towards reducing poverty and improving sustainability.

2. HOW THE NORTHERN IRELAND'S RDP WILL ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

In addressing these challenges, Northern Ireland's RDP will fund action under all six Rural Development priorities – with a particular emphasis on restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, as well as competitiveness of agri sector and sustainable forestry. The focus of each priority is explained briefly below.

Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

Under this priority the Northern Irish RDP aims at supporting 67 cooperation projects, for example in the framework of the European Innovation Partnership as well as stimulating the development of supply chain partnerships in the agri-food sector. Almost 25 000 training places will be made available to enhance knowledge transfer in the fields of environmental awareness, innovative technologies and research to encourage practical implementation on farms and in forests.

Competitiveness of agri sector and sustainable forestry

Almost 20% of Northern Irish farms will benefit from investment support for restructuring and modernising their businesses.

Food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture

3% of agricultural holdings will receive support to set up short supply chains, develop local markets and launch promotion activities.

Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry

Northern Ireland aims at bringing 6.14% of agricultural land under contract to preserve biodiversity, 2.05% to improve water management and 1.02% to improve soil management. Measures to support agro-forestry and afforestation will also aim at bringing a small part of Northern Ireland's forestland under management contracts. In addition, the afforestation on agricultural land and non-agricultural land will encourage the creation of new native woodland, which will contribute to biodiversity, carbon sequestration, improving air, soil and water quality and improved public amenity value.

Resource efficiency and climate

This priority aims at supporting climate change mitigation in Northern Ireland. Almost 2% of agricultural and forestland will contribute to carbon sequestration and conservation by establishing new woodlands. Integrating this support with measures such as agri-environment-climate and basic services and village renewal will encourage landowners to establish new woodland based on landscape considerations, with the associated economic, environmental and social benefits.

Social inclusion and local development in rural areas

Every rural dweller in Northern Ireland is expected to be covered by a local development strategy while roughly 12% of the rural population will benefit from improved services and infrastructure. LEADER aims at creating 700 new jobs.

The four ***biggest RDP measures*** in budgetary terms (public expenditure) are:

- € 104.3 million allocated for M04: Productive and non-productive investments
- € 87.1 million allocated for M10: Agri-Environment Climate
- € 74.7 million allocated for M13: Areas facing natural or other specific constraints
- € 81.5 million allocated for M19: LEADER

Annex: Indicative public support for the RDP Northern Ireland

| Target | | Measure | Indicative public support | % |
|--|----------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| P1: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas | | | 0.00 | |
| P2: Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and the sustainable management of forests | | | 249,818,474.00 | 37.10% |
| 2A Farm performance | | Total: 2A | 249,818,474.00 | 37.10% |
| T4: percentage of agricultural holdings with RDP support for investments in restructuring or modernisation (focus area 2A) | 19.18 | M01 Knowledge | 14,761,078.00 | 2.19% |
| Total investment € (public + private) | 585,532,380.00 | M04 Physical Investment | 234,212,952.00 | 34.78% |
| Nr of holdings supported for investment in agricultural holdings (4.1) | 4,500.00 | M16 Cooperation | 844,444.00 | 0.13% |
| P3: Promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture | | | 32,019,295.00 | 4.75% |
| 3A Competitiveness of producers | | Total: 3A | 32,019,295.00 | 4.75% |
| T6: percentage of agricultural holdings receiving support for participating in quality schemes, local markets and short supply circuits, and producer groups/organisations (focus area 3A) | 3.07 | M04 Physical Investment | 29,867,802.00 | 4.44% |
| PSTI3A: % of Agri-Food enterprises supported | 25.00 | M16 Cooperation | 2,151,493.00 | 0.32% |
| Total investment € (public + private) | 74,579,862.50 | | | |
| Nr of agricultural holdings participating in cooperation/local promotion among supply chain actors (16.4) | 720.00 | | | |
| P4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry | | | 265,995,535.00 | 39.50% |
| 4A Biodiversity, HNV and landscapes | | Total: P4 | 265,995,535.00 | 39.50% |
| T8: percentage of forest/other wooded area under management contracts supporting biodiversity (focus area 4A) | 0.69 | M01 Knowledge | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| T9: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts supporting biodiversity and/or landscapes (focus area 4A) | 6.14 | M04 Physical Investment | 56,299,256.00 | 8.36% |
| 4B Water management | | M07 Basic services | 1,392,158.00 | 0.21% |
| T10: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts to improve water management (focus area 4B) | 2.05 | M08 Forest | 4,180,883.00 | 0.62% |
| T11: percentage of forestry land under management contracts to improve water management (focus area 4B) | 0.03 | M10 Agri-environment-climate | 115,459,909.00 | 17.14% |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| 4C Soil management | | M11 Organic Farming | 767,800.00 | 0.11% |
| T12: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts to improve soil management and/or prevent soil erosion (focus area 4C) | 1.02 | M13 Areas with natural constraints | 84,384,054.00 | 12.53% |
| T13: percentage of forestry land under management contracts to improve soil management and/or prevent soil erosion (focus area 4C) | 0.03 | M16 Cooperation | 3,511,475.00 | 0.52% |
| P5: Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors | | | 17,306,873.00 | 2.57% |
| 5E Carbon conservation / sequestration | | Total: 5E | 17,306,873.00 | 2.57% |
| T19: percentage of agricultural and forest land under management contracts contributing to carbon sequestration and conservation (focus area 5E) | 1.87 | M08 Forest | 17,306,873.00 | 2.57% |
| Area (ha) to be afforested (establishment - 8.1) | 1,800.00 | M16 Cooperation | 0.00 | 0.00% |
| P6: Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas | | | 93,810,948.00 | 13.93% |
| 6B Local development | | Total: 6B | 93,810,948.00 | 13.93% |
| T21: percentage of rural population covered by local development strategies (focus area 6B) | 100.00 | M07 Basic services | 11,186,796.00 | 1.66% |
| T22: percentage of rural population benefiting from improved services/infrastructures (focus area 6B) | 11.54 | M19 LEADER and CLLD | 82,624,152.00 | 12.27% |
| T23: Jobs created in supported projects (Leader) (focus area 6B) | 700.00 | | | |
| Population benefiting from improved services/infrastructures (7.1; 7.2; 7.4; 7.5.;7.6; 7.7) | 130,000.00 | | | |
| Population covered by LAG | 1,126,586.00 | | | |
| Number of LAGs selected | 10.00 | | | |
| M20 TA | | | 14,503,180.19 | 2.15% |
| | | | 14,503,180.19 | 2.15% |
| Total public expenditure | | | 673,454,305.19 | 100.00% |

- No financial allocation shown for Priority 1 as the expenditure is distributed across other focus areas.
- Expenditure under Priority 4 is programmed for the priority as a whole, not for individual focus areas.