



Factsheet on 2014-2022 Rural Development Programme for Ireland

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Ireland was formally adopted by the European Commission on 26 May 2015, and last modified on 22 January 2024. This document outlines Ireland's priorities for using € 5.6 billion of public money that is available for the 9-year period 2014-2022 (€ 3.1 billion from the EU budget, including € 608 000 transferred from the envelope for CAP direct payments, and € 2.3 billion of national co-funding plus € 756 million of additional national funding top-ups).

A central priority of the Irish RDP is restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry. Three quarters of the funds is allocated to this priority, targeting over 1 million hectares of agricultural area. More specifically, for each of the three focus areas, around 20% of agricultural land will be put under contract, contributing to increased biodiversity, better water management and preventing soil erosion. In addition, around 10% of the Irish agricultural holdings will be restructured and modernised. Another 5% of holdings will benefit from support specifically targeted at young farmers. Around 211 600 training places will be created for farmers to increase their knowledge and skills. LEADER support is expected to create over 3 000 jobs in rural areas.

Support for Rural Development is the second Pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, providing Member States with an envelope of EU funding to manage nationally or regionally multi-annual, co-funded programmes. In total, 118 programmes are foreseen in all 28 Member States¹. The RD Regulation for the current period addresses six economic, environmental and social priorities, and programmes contain clear targets setting out what is to be achieved. It also puts emphasis on networking activities at EU and national level. 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.

This document provides a brief overview of how the challenges and opportunities 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 budget.

1. SITUATION AND KEY CHALLENGES

Ireland covers an area of 69 798 km², of which around 99 % is rural. Of the total area, agricultural land covers 71.6 % and forestland 11.5 %. Of the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA), 80 % is permanent grassland. Ireland has the highest birth rate and the lowest old-age dependency ratio in the EU. The unemployment rate is 6.2% (2021).

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.

The majority of agricultural grassland habitats are not achieving favourable conservation status. This is a key area to tackle with the RDP support.

As Ireland's total GHG emissions per capita are among the highest in the EU, and of the total GHG emissions agriculture accounts for the biggest share with 40.2% (2019), taking decisive actions against climate change is an important challenge for the country.

Less than 7% of the Irish farmers are under the age of 35 – a special effort is needed in terms of generational renewal.

2. HOW THE IRISH RDP WILL ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

In addressing these challenges, Ireland's RDP funds action under all the six Rural Development priorities – with a particular emphasis on restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry as well as resource efficiency and climate.

The focus of each priority is explained briefly below.

Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

Under this priority, the RDP aims to support knowledge transfer and information actions, advisory services, and co-operation. Around 211 600 training places are available for farmers to increase their knowledge and skills. In total 1 760 co-operation projects are envisaged, mainly encouraging farm partnerships and establishing EIP Operational Groups.

Competitiveness of agri sector and sustainable forestry

Around 10% of the Irish agricultural holdings will be restructured and modernised. Another 5% of holdings will benefit from support specifically targeted at young farmers. Although start-up support for young farmers is not included, prioritising investments by young farmers, providing them with a higher support rate, and facilitating their access to farmland, for example via co-operation with other farmers, is central to the RDP strategy.

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

The focus of this priority lies on animal welfare, with 24% of holdings supported to improve their livestock's living conditions. In addition, 26 600 farmers will participate in Knowledge Transfer Groups. These are interactive groups where farmers share best practice and improve their knowledge on a range of issues tailored to their individual farms.

Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry

This main priority of the RDP is being addressed directly or indirectly by all the programmed RDP measures. Particularly important in this context are well-targeted and prioritised agri-environment-climate schemes, areas with natural constraints (ANC) with special focus on the Irish islands, and support to around 75 000 ha of organic farming. All three focus areas, namely biodiversity, water management and soil erosion, are almost equally important, since Ireland is aiming to cover some 20% of the Irish agricultural land under each of them.

Resource efficiency and climate

This priority is targeted by improving the energy efficiency of the Irish farming sector, with a total of € 104 million investment forecast, as well as encouraging and supporting climate-friendly agricultural practices on over 11% of the agricultural land. Furthermore, there is a targeted intervention to reduce livestock emissions and emissions intensity of production.

Social inclusion and local development in rural areas

LEADER support is expected to create 3 100 jobs in rural areas. Over three quarters of the rural population will be covered by local development strategies.

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

- € 2.05 billion allocated to Agri-environment-climate (M10)
- € 1.87 billion allocated to payments to areas facing natural or other specific constraints (M13)
- € 562 million allocated to Investments in physical assets (M04)
- € 320 million allocated to Support for LEADER local development (M19)

Annex 1: Indicative public support for the Rural Development Programme in Ireland

Target	Measure	€ Total public	%
P1: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas		0.00	
1A Innovation, cooperation, knowledge		0.00	
T1: percentage of expenditure under Articles 14, 15 and 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 in relation to the total expenditure for the RDP (focus area 1A)	3.97	M01 Knowledge 0.00	
		M02 Advisory services 0.00	
		M16 Cooperation 0.00	
1B Research & innovation		0.00	
T2: Total number of cooperation operations supported under the cooperation measure (Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013) (groups, networks/clusters, pilot projects...) (focus area 1B)	1,760.00	M16 Cooperation 0.00	
1C Lifelong learning and vocational training		0.00	
T3: Total number of participants trained under Article 14 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 (focus area 1C)	211,600.00	M01 Knowledge 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		421,388,866.00	7.52%
2A Farm performance		Total: 2A	155,738,147.00
			2.78%
T4: percentage of agricultural holdings with RDP support for investments in restructuring or modernisation (focus area 2A)	10.01	M01 Knowledge 15,056,952.00	0.27%
		M02 Advisory services 91,038.00	0.00%
		M04 Physical Investment 140,000,000.00	2.50%
		M16 Cooperation 590,157.00	0.01%
2B New farmers		Total: 2B	265,650,719.00
			4.74%
T5: percentage of agricultural holdings with RDP supported business development plan/investments for young farmers (focus area 2B)	5.00	M04 Physical Investment 263,290,089.00	4.70%
		M16 Cooperation 2,360,630.00	0.04%

P3: Promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture			154,033,610.00	2.75%
3A Competitiveness of producers		Total: 3A	106,156,641.00	1.90%
PSTI FA3A: Percentage of agricultural holdings supported under the animal welfare measure	24.00	M02 Advisory services	20,000.00	0.00%
		M14 Animal welfare	105,947,962.00	1.89%
		M16 Cooperation	188,679.00	0.00%
3B Risk management		Total: 3B	47,876,969.00	0.85%
PSTI FA3B: Number of Participants in Knowledge Transfer Groups (focus area 3B)	26,600.00	M01 Knowledge	15,056,952.00	0.27%
		M02 Advisory services	14,006,536.00	0.25%
		M04 Physical Investment	16,000,000.00	0.29%
		M16 Cooperation	2,813,481.00	0.05%
P4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry			4,047,451,384.00	72.28%
4A Biodiversity, HNV and landscapes		Total: P4	4,047,451,384.00	72.28%
T9: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts supporting biodiversity and/or landscapes (focus area 4A)	23.01	M01 Knowledge	33,822,897.00	0.60%
4B Water management		M02 Advisory services	250,000.00	0.00%
T10: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts to improve water management (focus area 4B)	23.10	M04 Physical Investment	123,900,000.00	2.21%
4C Soil management		M07 Basic services	10,885,377.00	0.19%
T12: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts to improve soil management and/or prevent soil erosion (focus area 4C)	20.26	M10 Agri-environment-climate	1,589,506,952.00	28.38%
		M11 Organic Farming	121,890,981.00	2.18%
		M12 NAT 2000 & WFD	44,726,870.00	0.80%
		M13 Areas with natural constraints	2,043,117,476.00	36.48%
		M16 Cooperation	79,350,831.00	1.42%

P5: Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors			590,273,106.00	10.54%	
5A Water efficiency					
PSTI FA5A: Number of Locally Led Environmental and Climate Projects Operational Groups	0.00				
5B Energy efficiency			Total: 5B	41,600,000.00	0.74%
T15: Total investment for energy efficiency (€) (focus area 5B)	103,644,935.00	M04 Physical Investment	41,600,000.00	0.74%	
5C Renewable energy					
PSTI FA5C: Number of Locally Led Environmental and Climate Projects Operational Groups	0.00				
5D Reducing GHG and NH3			Total: 5D	460,778,606.00	8.23%
T17: percentage of LU concerned by investments in live-stock management in view of reducing GHG and/or ammonia emissions (focus area 5D)	3.83	M01 Knowledge	25,685,741.00	0.46%	
T18: percentage of agricultural land under management contracts targeting reduction of GHG and/or ammonia emissions (focus area 5D)	10.99	M02 Advisory services	158,962.00	0.00%	
		M04 Physical Investment	74,200,000.00	1.32%	
		M10 Agri-environment-climate	357,313,765.00	6.38%	
		M16 Cooperation	3,420,138.00	0.06%	
5E Carbon conservation/sequestration			Total: 5E	87,894,500.00	1.57%
T19: percentage of agricultural and forest land under management contracts contributing to carbon sequestration and conservation (focus area 5E)	0.49	M10 Agri-environment-climate	87,894,500.00	1.57%	
		M16 Cooperation	0.00	0.00%	
P6: Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas			320,000,000.00	5.71%	
6B Local development			Total: 6B	320,000,000.00	5.71%
T21: percentage of rural population covered by local development strategies (focus area 6B)	82.02	M19 LEADER and CLLD	320,000,000.00	5.71%	
T23: Jobs created in supported projects (Leader) (focus area 6B)	3,100.00				
M20 TA			59,211,897.68	1.06%	
M113 Early retirement			7,670,000.00	0.14%	
Total public expenditure			5,600,028,863.68	100.00%	