



Factsheet on 2014-2022 Rural Development Programme for Sicily

March 2025

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Sicily was formally adopted by the European Commission on 24 November 2015, outlining Sicily's priorities for using the € 2.9 billion of public money that is available for the 7-year period 2014-2020 + 2021 and 2022 (€ 1.8 billion from the EU budget and other additional financial resources of national co-funding). The programming period has been extended for 2-years, to 31 December 2022 (payments allowed until 31 December 2025) and included two annual EAFRD allocations as well as the EU financed recovery instrument (EURI).

Sicily's RDP is putting particular emphasis on actions related to restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems as well as on actions related to improving the competitiveness of the farm and forestry sectors and to promoting social inclusion and economic development in rural areas. Organic farming is considered very important as a total of almost 63 000 hectares will receive support to convert to organic farming and another 252 000 ha to maintain organic production. About 31% of the agricultural land is expected to come under management contracts supporting better water management, nearly 33% of the agricultural land will be under contracts to improve soil management and 30% of the agricultural land will come under management contracts supporting biodiversity. To improve the competitiveness of farmers, 1 900 farms will receive support for investments in restructuring and modernisation and 1 625 young farmers will be granted business start-up aid. Moreover, particular emphasis is put on innovation when selecting the supported operations and 2.23% of RDP public expenditure is earmarked by actions that foster innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base. In this framework Sicily will implement the European Innovation Partnership to help deliver innovative solutions to the farm sector. Finally, Sicily's RDP will contribute to social inclusion and economic development in rural areas with over 92% of the rural population covered by local development strategies. Furthermore, the RDP will support the beneficiaries most affected by the consequences of the COVID 19 health crisis, with a dedicated measure.

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 States (The UK left the European Union on 31 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 new [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.

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

- **Situation and key challenges**

In Italy, rural development is implemented through 22 separate RDPs – one at national level and 21 regional RDPs (including "less developed", "transition" and "more developed" regions). In addition, the National Rural Network Programme provides the funding for the networking of rural development actors in Italy.

Sicily is an insular region of southern Italy, classified as a less developed region. It covers a total area of 25 711 km² of which agricultural land covers 68.5% and forestry about 15%. Some 97% of the total area is classified as rural, while 60% of the total Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) is currently classified as Less Favoured Area. Sicily has about 5 million inhabitants – with a high rate of elderly population (19.3%) – of which only 3.4% live in rural areas, while 50.1% live in areas classified as neither fully rural nor urban. The unemployment rate is 21% (2013) but it goes up to almost 54% among the youngsters (age between 15 and 24 years).

The region is facing structural changes: total Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA) and number of active agricultural holdings are decreasing as compared to early 2000. Today there are 219 680 farm holdings (13.6% of the total amount in Italy) with an average size of 6.3 hectares. However, more than half of the agricultural holdings have a size of less than 2 hectares; moreover 92.2% of farms are run by individuals or by families, with a only limited number (although increasing) of additional employees and the level of professional education in agriculture remains low. More than 45% of farmers are over 60 years of age and 12% are managed by farmers under 40. Finally the sector remains affected by an overall lack of infrastructure and services throughout the territory, which has a negative influence on the economic development of the land as well as the quality of life of rural population.

Due to the favourable conditions of climate and soil, the most important agricultural productions of the region are: table grapes, pistachios, hazel nuts, almonds, citrus fruit, peaches, olives, olive oil, wine and cereals. The presence on numerous quality products (PDO/PGI and organic) is a significant point of strength in the regional agricultural sector.

Sicily is characterised by an outstanding naturalistic heritage: the surface covered by protected high value natural areas (parks, reserves, Natura 2000 sites) is 502 618 hectares. In addition to 223 SCI, 30 ZPS and 2 wetlands of international interest, Sicily has 238 sites part of the Natura 2000 network, covering 24.8% of the total surface area, 56.4% of the total forest area (512,121 ha) and 18.6% of the UAA (. To date 55 Natura 2000 Management Plan for the conservation of biodiversity are in place, in compliance with the Habitat Directive 92/43/EEC. The main environmental challenges to be tackled concern pollution, plant diseases, landslides and soil erosion.

How Sicily's RDP will address these challenges

In addressing the challenges, Sicily's RDP will fund operations under all six Rural Development priorities, – with a particular emphasis on “Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems” as well as on “Improving the competitiveness of the farm and forestry sectors” and on “Promoting social inclusion and economic development in rural areas”. The focus of each priority is explained briefly below.

Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas

Knowledge transfer will address the training, coaching, information and advisory needs of the agricultural, food and forestry sectors as well other land holders and SMEs in rural areas, in particular related to sustainable agricultural and forestry practices, regulatory issues, innovation and technology, quality products and diversification. 2 856 places will be made available in training courses. An important element is innovation: 138 projects will be supported to strengthen the link between agriculture, food and forestry sectors and research and innovation.

Competitiveness of agri sector and sustainable forestry

The RDP will support the start-up of 1 625 young farmers and provide investment support and modernisation aid to some 1 900 farms, with a specific emphasis on innovation as a means to increase competitiveness. The sustainability of agricultural production is taken into account also by promoting a reduction of energy consumption and an efficient use of renewable energy sources.

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

Under this priority, Sicily will support the promotion of quality products and the participation of farmers to quality schemes: the RDP is expected to support the participation of 375 farms in quality schemes. The RDP will also support the development and strengthening of supply chains, including short supply chains and local markets, in order to enlarge the market of the regional products and ensure a higher added value to the farmer's production resulting in a higher income for the farmer. Cooperation and food chain projects will also be supported for this purpose.

Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry

Under this priority, Sicily will focus on environment-friendly farm investments and management procedures: 31% of agricultural land will be under contracts to improve water management. The problem of erosion will be tackled by placing almost 31% of the agricultural land under management contracts combating soil erosion. Moreover over 31% of agricultural and forestry land will be under management contracts supporting biodiversity. About 33% of the allocated EAFRD amount will be used for area-based payments to farmers for using environment/climate-friendly land management practices, including organic farming and support to areas facing natural constraints. Above 300 000 hectares of farmland will receive support to either convert or maintain organic farming.

Resource efficiency and climate

Sicily will pursue carbon conservation and sequestration mainly by supporting environmentally and climate friendly practices, and related knowledge transfer and innovation actions; 0.20% of total regional agricultural and forest land will be under management contracts contributing to carbon sequestration and conservation.

Social inclusion and local development in rural areas

RDP Sicily pays particular attention to social inclusion and economic development in rural areas (almost 10% of the resources have been allocated to this priority), which are promoted by supporting the creation of SMEs as well as farm and business development, creating more than 1 000 new jobs. The RDP also includes support to technological and ITC activities and services. The RDP will also support the provision of basic services and village renewal in rural areas, also involving welfare and social care services. Moreover, Local Development Strategies will be implemented through 23 LEADER Local Action Groups and will cover over 90 % of the rural population. Thanks to the operations programmed under this priority, 495 additional jobs will be created and 2.2% of rural population will benefit from the provision of new or improved services.

The 4 **biggest RDP measures** in budgetary terms (total public funding) are:

- € 895 million allocated to measure 4 (Investments in physical assets)
- € 639 million allocated to measure 11 (Organic)
- € 374 million allocated to measure 10 (Agri-environment-climate)
- € 189 million allocated to measure 6 (Farm / business development)

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

Target	Measure	€ Total public	%
Priority1: Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas			
1A: Fostering innovation, cooperation, knowledge base 2.23% of RDP expenditure	01 knowledge		
	02 advisory		
	16 cooperation		
1B: Strengthening links (with research etc.) 138 cooperation projects	16 cooperation		
1C: Training 2 856 participants trained	01 knowledge		
Priority 2: Farm viability, competitiveness and sustainable forest management		889 011 040	30.62
2A: Economic performance, restructuring & modernisation 0.90 % of holdings with RDP support	01 knowledge	1 661 954	0.06
	02 advisory	525 000	0.02
	04 investments	512 073 591	17.64
	06 farm / business development	65 500 000	2.26
	08 forest	200 000	0.01
	M21 COVID-19 crisis	3 545 834	0,12
	M23 Natural disasters	35 000 000	1.21
2B: Generational renewal 0.74 % of holdings with RDP supported business development plan/investments for young farmers	01 knowledge	1 518 882	0.05
	02 advisory	825 000	0.03
	04 investments	165 500 000	5.70
	06 farm / business development	102 661 157	3.54
Priority 3: Food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management		308 881 408	10.64
3A: Improving competitiveness of primary producers 0.20 % of agricultural holdings receiving support for participating in quality schemes, local markets and short supply circuits, and producer groups/organisations 2.67% of agri-food holdings supported	01 knowledge	338 078	0.01
	02 advisory	515 000	0.02
	03 quality schemes	19 358 000	0.67
	04 investments	145 383 480	5.01
	06 farm / business development	3 446 473	0.12
	14 Animal welfare	15 200 000	0,52
	16 cooperation	47 858 461	1.65

3B: Farm risk prevention and management 0.05% of farms participating in risk management schemes	01 knowledge	41 930	0.00
	02 advisory	80 000	0.00
	05 restoring agric. potential	76 659 306	2.64

Priority 4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems in agriculture and forestry		1 428 539 605	49.20
4A Biodiversity 30.80 % of agricultural land under contracts	01 knowledge	508 879	0.02
	02 advisory	1 100 000	0.04
0.09 % of forest/other wooded area under contracts	04 investments	51 500 000	1.77
	08 forest	99 938 450	3.43
4B Water management 30.58 % of agricultural land under contracts	10 AEC	368 862 000	12.70
	11 organic farming	639 148 294	22.01
4C Soil erosion and management 32.28 % of agricultural land under contracts	12 NAT 2000 and WFD	80 200 000	2.76
	13 ANC	184 481 981	6.35
	15 forest-environment	1 500 000	0.05
	16 Cooperation	1 300 000	0.04
Priority 5: Resource efficiency and shift to low carbon and climate resilience economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors		28 054 704	0.97
5A Water efficiency	01 knowledge	23 868	0.00
	02 advisory	50 000	0.00
	04 Investments	21 000 000	0,72
5B Energy efficiency	01 knowledge	9 000	0.00
	02 advisory	25 000	0.00
5C Renewable energy	01 knowledge	15 640	0.00
	02 advisory	50 000	0.00
	16 Cooperation	857 923	0.03
5D Reducing GHG and NH3	01 knowledge	6 500	0.00
	02 advisory	50 000	0.00
5E Carbon conservation / sequestration 0.20% of agricultural and forest land under	01 knowledge	74 773	0.00
	02 advisory	50 000	0.00

contracts	10 AEC	842 000	0.20
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Priority 6: Social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas		227 346 457	7.83
6A Diversification, SMEs and job creation 695 Jobs created in supported projects	01 knowledge	286 089	0.01
	02 advisory	300 000	0.01
	M06 Farm / business development	17 658 121	0.61
	16 Cooperation	6 200 000	0.21
6B Fostering local development 91.14 % of rural population covered by local development strategies 2.19% of rural population benefiting from improved services/infrastructures 495 jobs created (via LEADER)	07 basic services	24 200 000	0.83
	19 LEADER and CLLD	156 204 951	5.38
6C Access to and quality of ICT 3.03 % of rural population benefiting from new or improved services/infrastructures (ICT)	01 knowledge	367 295	0.01
	02 advisory	230 000	0.01
	07 basic services	21 900 000	0.75
Technical Assistance		21 486 121	0.74
Total public expenditure €		2 903 319 335	100