**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 9 December 2022. 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 States\(^1\). 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 km\(^2\), 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).

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\(^1\) 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 of 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 in order 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:

- € 2.04 billion allocated to Payments to areas facing natural constraints
- € 2.04 billion allocated to Agri-environment-climate
- € 659 million allocated to Investments in physical assets
- € 320 million allocated to Support for LEADER local development

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 1: Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas²</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>€ Total public</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A: Fostering innovation, cooperation, knowledge base 3.82% of RDP expenditure</td>
<td>01 knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>02 advisory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B: Strengthening links (with research etc.) 1 760 cooperation projects</td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C: Training 211 600 participants trained</td>
<td>01 knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority 2: Farm viability, competitiveness and sustainable forest management</td>
<td>421 422 828</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A: Economic performance, restructuring &amp; modernisation 10.01% of holdings with RDP support</td>
<td>01 knowledge</td>
<td>15 056 952</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>02 advisory</td>
<td>125 000</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>04 investments</td>
<td>140 000 000</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td>737 697</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² No financial allocation shown for Priority 1 as the expenditure is distributed across other focus areas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems in agriculture and forestry&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>4 037 949 190</th>
<th>72.08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4A: Biodiversity</td>
<td>01 knowledge</td>
<td>33 821 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.99% of agricultural land under contracts</td>
<td>02 advisory</td>
<td>250 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 investments</td>
<td>123 900 000</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4B: Water management</td>
<td>07 basic services</td>
<td>10 616 983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.07% of agricultural land under contracts</td>
<td>10 AEC</td>
<td>1 589 506 952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 organic farming</td>
<td>100 127 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 Natura</td>
<td>44 726 870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 ANC</td>
<td>2 043 117 476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C: Soil erosion and management</td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td>91 882 537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.24% of agricultural land under contracts</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 5: Resource efficiency and shift to low carbon and climate resilience economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors</th>
<th>590 690 384</th>
<th>10.54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5A: Water efficiency</td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 locally-led environmental and climate project operational group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5B: Energy efficiency</td>
<td>04 investments</td>
<td>41 600 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>€ 104 million total investment for energy efficiency</td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5C: Renewable energy</td>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 locally-led environmental and climate project operational group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5D: Reducing GHG and NH3</td>
<td>01 knowledge</td>
<td>25 685 741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.83% of LU (Live-stock Unit) concerned by investments in live-stock management in view of reducing GHG (Green House Gas) and/or ammonia emissions</td>
<td>02 advisory</td>
<td>125 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.19% of agricultural land under management contracts targeting reduction of GHG and/or ammonia emissions</td>
<td>04 investments</td>
<td>74 200 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 AEC</td>
<td>357 539 385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 cooperation</td>
<td>3 420 138</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<sup>3</sup> Expenditure under Priority 4 is programmed for the priority as a whole, not for individual focus areas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority 6: Social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas</th>
<th>320 000 000</th>
<th>5.71</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6B: Fostering local development</td>
<td>320 000 000</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.02% rural population under local development strategies</td>
<td>19 LEADER and CLLD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 100 jobs created (via LEADER)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measure 113 (transitional expenditure)</td>
<td>7 670 000</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
<td>76 894 515</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total public expenditure €</td>
<td>5 602 305 044</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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