



## Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme of Flanders (Belgium)

The Flemish Rural Development Programme (RDP) was formally adopted by the European Commission on 13 February 2015. A last modification of the RDP was adopted on 22 August 2018. The RDP outlines Flanders' priorities for using € 925 million of public funding that is available for the period 2014-2020 (€ 384 million from the EU budget plus € 288 million of national co-funding, plus € 253 million of additional national top-ups).

With increased sustainability of agriculture as its main objective, the RDP will support around half the region's farms to restructure and modernise.

Better management of natural resources and more climate-friendly farming practices represent the second major focus of the programme. It will support 3 000 farm investment projects related to **environment/climate friendly and resource efficient farming**, around **6 000 investments** aiming at a better **energy efficiency** and **5 000 investment projects aiming at reducing GHG emissions**.

For several years, the number of farms in Flanders has been decreasing. To address this issue, the programme will support 1 400 young farmers. A novelty for Flanders in its rural development programme is the all-weather insurance scheme that targets 5% of farms. Further measures aim to boost innovation, provide training opportunities and enhance the vitality of rural areas and strengthen their relationship with cities.

Support under [Rural Development](#) (RD) is the 2nd Pillar of the [Common Agricultural Policy](#). It provides Member States with an envelope of EU funding to manage, at either national or regional level, multi-annual, co-funded programmes. In total, 118 programmes are foreseen in all 28 Member States. The new [RD Regulation](#) for the 2014-2020 period addresses six economic, environmental and social priorities. Programmes contain clear targets setting out what is to be achieved. To better coordinate actions 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 faced by Flanders are addressed by the RDP. In the annex, a table indicates the priorities and focus areas with their respective targets and budget. In Belgium, rural development policy is implemented through two programmes, one for Flanders and one for Wallonia.

## **1. SITUATION AND KEY CHALLENGES**

Flanders is the northern region of Belgium. It covers an area of 13 521 km<sup>2</sup> and counts approximately 6.35 million inhabitants. The region has a very high population density (475 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>) which is more than four times the average density of the European Union.

Only 7% of the area is rural and 2.5% of the population lives in the rural area. The Flemish countryside is highly urbanised. It has a very fragmented landscape with strong links between countryside and cities. From the geographical, functional and cultural points of view, rural and urban areas are increasingly interlinked.

Agricultural land comprises 6 000 km<sup>2</sup> out of which 70% is arable. Forests cover a mere 1 850 km<sup>2</sup>.

The total gross value added of the Flemish region is €182 billion of which the primary sector accounts for less than 1%. Consolidating the position of farmers in the food production chain and decreasing the negative effects of price volatility in the sector are therefore key challenges.

Farming in Flanders is large-scale and intensive, with high yields per hectare. This is inevitably linked to higher consumption of fertilisers and plant protection products and negative effects on soil and water quality and loss of biodiversity. Especially high concentrations of nitrates in groundwater and surface water remain a challenge.

The average age of farmers is more than 50 years (only 5% of farmers are younger than 35 years). Few farmers have a successor. Young farmers suffer from a lack of funds when starting up and therefore need some support.

It remains a challenge for Flanders to stimulate innovation in order to maintain its competitive position in agriculture. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure the transfer of knowledge so that innovations, developed by entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector, can be widely adopted by farmers and put into practice.

## **2. HOW THE FLEMISH RDP WILL ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES**

In addressing these challenges, the Flemish RDP will fund action under five Rural Development Priorities with the main priority being Priority 2: Enhancing farm viability and competitiveness.

The programme is built around four themes: young farmers, innovation and training, improving sustainability of agriculture (both environmental and economic), quality and vitality of the countryside.

Firstly, the RDP aims at ensuring the future of farming through support for young farmers.

Flanders will also invest in innovation and education with a future-oriented approach for tackling individual, business-focused and general societal challenges.

The RDP also focusses on increasing the resilience and sustainability of the agricultural sector in all its aspects. On the one hand, there is the ecological aspect where special attention is given to biodiversity, water quality, Natura 2000, erosion-reduction and environmental and climate-friendly farming practices. On the other hand, the economical aspect will be supported with attention given to the producers' position in the agri-food chain, crisis-resilience of the sector and development of risk management.

The RDP will strengthen the quality and vitality of rural areas. The decrease in the number of farming, a trend which has been accompanied by an increase in the size of farms, will be tackled. Other challenges which will be addressed include the diversification of the rural economy, the promotion of rural tourism and the viability of part-time agriculture. Actions related to societal challenges, such as poverty within rural communities, will also be implemented.

The cross-cutting priority "Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas" will help the agricultural sector and rural businesses to incorporate the results of research and innovation into their production systems.

The focus of each priority is explained briefly below.

### Competitiveness of agriculture and innovative farm technologies

The RDP will enhance the viability and competitiveness of farms, while ensuring their environmental sustainability. The programme intends to target more than half of all farmers (about 13 000 farms) to stimulate, in particular, innovative and sustainable investments. A specific measure is dedicated to young farmers to help them get started (1 400 farms). Support is also foreseen for the development of small farms. Another important element is innovation which will be facilitated by information and knowledge-sharing activities.

### Food chain organisation and risk management

Setting-up producer organisations should improve the position of producers in the agri-food chain, targeting 1 200 farms or almost 5% of all farms.

In addition, the programme foresees support for the risk management through all-weather insurance schemes, targeting 5% of all farmers (about 1 300 farmers).

### Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems

Almost 85% of the allocated amount under this priority will be used for area-based payments to cover the cost adopting environment/climate friendly land management practices. This will stimulate biodiversity, improve water and soil management, through agri-environmental measures targeting 8% of Flanders' agricultural land, and encourage more organic farming.

Almost 3 000 environment/climate friendly and resource efficient farm investments are envisaged. There will also be support for training and advice in environmental and climate matters.

There are 1 700 investment projects foreseen to improve the resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems.

### Resource efficiency and climate

The programme foresees investments, either for energy efficiency, emission reduction or carbon sequestration, on farms and in rural areas. Transfer of knowledge and training, cooperation actions and agri-environmental measures such as fertiliser reduction will also be supported. Around 6 000 investment projects will improve energy efficiency and 5 000 investment projects will reduce GHG emissions. The programme will support the forestry sector and aims at afforesting 1 400 ha of land.

### Social inclusion and local development

Through a balanced territorial rural development policy, Flanders will address a variety of social issues that have arisen in its rural areas. Social inclusion and local development will be supported through the bottom-up approach of LEADER. An estimated 15 Local Action Groups will draw up and execute Local Development Strategies. The approach will cover roughly 30 % of the rural population, creating around 80 jobs and improving living conditions.

Additionally, 98 investment projects related to basic services, such as small-scale infrastructure, recreational facilities and natural heritage, will support local development.

The five ***biggest RDP measures*** in budgetary terms are:

- €504 million allocated for Measure 4: Investments in physical assets
- €200 million allocated for Measure 10: Agri-Environment Climate
- €60 million allocated for Measure 6: Farm and business development
- €34 million allocated for Measure 7: Basic services and village renewal
- €34 million allocated for Measure 19: Leader/CLLD

## Annex 1: Indicative public support for the Flemish Rural Development Programme

Target	Measure	€ Total public	%
<b>Priority1: Knowledge transfer and innovation<sup>1</sup></b>			
1A: Fostering innovation, coop, knowledge base <u>10.8 %</u> RDP expenditure	01 knowledge		
	02 advisory services		
	16 cooperation		
1B: Strengthening links (with research etc.) <u>109</u> cooperation operations	16 cooperation		
1C: Training <u>981 850 training participants</u>	01 knowledge		
<b>Priority 2: Competitiveness</b>		<b>385 996 517</b>	<b>41.75%</b>
2A: Farm performance <u>52 %</u> farms with RDP support	01 knowledge	14 419 789	1.56%
	04 investments	292 351 633	31.62%
	06 farm and business development	1 400 000	0.15%
	16 cooperation	655 721	0.07%
2B: New farmers <u>5.6 %</u> farms with support for young farmers	01 knowledge	8 990 556	0.97%
	02 advisory services	9 848 567	1.07%
	06 farm and business development	58 330 251	6.31%
<b>Priority 3: Food chain organisation</b>		<b>15 642 949</b>	<b>1.69%</b>
3A: Competitiveness of producers <u>4.8 %</u> of farms supported	04 investments	8 500 000	0.92
	09 producer groups / organisations	2 000 000	0.22
3B: Risk management <u>5.1 %</u> of farms supported	17 risk management	5 142 949	0.56
<b>Priority 4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>223 472 238</b>	<b>24.17%</b>

<sup>1</sup> No financial allocation shown for Priority 1 as the expenditure is distributed across other focus areas.

<sup>2</sup> Expenditure under Priority 4 is programmed for the priority as a whole, not for individual focus areas

4A: Biodiversity	01 knowledge	6 195 958	0.67%
<u>2 %</u> utilised agricultural area under contract	02 advisory services	11 605 437	1.26%
<u>0.6 %</u> utilised forest/other wooded area under contract	04 investments	4 600 000	0.50%
4B: Water management	07 basic services	12 770 000	1.38%
<u>4.7 %</u> utilised agricultural areas under contract	08 forest	5 466 924	0.59%
4C: Soil erosion and management	10 AEC	172 252 450	18.63%
<u>1.4 %</u> utilised agricultural areas under contract	11 organic farming	10 104 321	1.09%
	16 cooperation	477 148	0.05%
<b>Priority 5: Resource efficiency and climate</b>		<b>235 510 445</b>	<b>25.47%</b>
5B: Energy efficiency	01 knowledge	1 617 176	0.17%
<u>€218 million</u> investment	04 investments	67 075 943	7.26%
	16 cooperation	417 623	0.05%
5D: Reducing GHG and NH <sub>3</sub>	04 investments	131 332 713	14.21%
<u>6.33 %</u> livestock units concerned in utilised agricultural areas under contract	10 AEC	26 966 990	2.92%
<u>1.70 %</u> utilised agricultural areas under contract			
5E Carbon conservation / sequestration	08 forest	8 100 000	0.88%
<u>0.13 %</u> utilised agricultural areas under contract			
<b>Priority 6: Social inclusion and local development</b>		<b>55 491 928</b>	<b>6.00%</b>
6B Local development	07 basic services	13 912 388	1.50%
<u>71.7 %</u> rural population in local development strategy	16 cooperation	8 000 000	0.87%
<u>15.1 %</u> rural population with improved services / infrastructures	19 LEADER and CLLD	33 579 540	3.63%
<u>80 jobs</u> created (LEADER)			
<b>Technical Assistance</b>		<b>8 400 000</b>	<b>0.91%</b>
<b>Total public expenditure €</b>		<b>924 514 077</b>	<b>100%</b>