



## **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 15 December 2017, outlining Northern Ireland's priorities for using the € 646.3 million of public money that is available for the 7-year period 2014-2020 (€ 228.4 million from the EU budget and € 200.4 million of national co-funding, plus € 217.5 million in 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 12% of the Northern Irish farmland under contract to preserve biodiversity and 600 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, 10% of farms and 25% of agri-food businesses 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 30 000 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 States. 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.

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. SITUATION AND KEY CHALLENGES**

Northern Ireland covers an area of 14 130 km<sup>2</sup>, 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. Northern Ireland's unemployment rate is 7.4% (2012) and lies above the UK average.

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 49 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 30 000 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

Almost 10% of agricultural holdings and 25% of agri-food businesses 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 12% of agricultural land under contract to preserve biodiversity, 8% to improve water management and 4% to improve soil management. Measures to support agro-forestry and afforestation will also aim at bringing a small part of Northern Ireland's forest land under management contracts.

### Resource efficiency and climate

This priority aims at supporting climate change mitigation in Northern Ireland. Almost 2% of agricultural and forest land 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 (total public funding) are:

- € 282,2 million allocated to investment in physical assets
- € 128,5 million allocated to Agri-environment-climate measures
- € 72,8 million allocated to support for areas facing natural constraints
- € 63,9 million allocated to support for LEADER local development

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

Target	Measure	€ Total public	%
<b>Priority 1: Knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas<sup>1</sup></b>			
1A: Fostering innovation, cooperation, knowledge base 5.44 % of RDP expenditure	01 knowledge		
	02 advisory		
	16 cooperation		
1B: Strengthening links (with research etc.) 59 cooperation projects	16 cooperation		
1C: Training 29 500 participants trained	01 knowledge		
<b>Priority 2: Farm viability, competitiveness and sustainable forest management</b>		<b>256 294 215</b>	
2A: Economic performance, restructuring & modernisation 19.18 % of holdings with RDP support	01 knowledge	28 455 285	4.65
	04 investments	226 276 148	36.94
	08 forest	433 604	0.07
	16 cooperation	1 129 178	0.18
<b>Priority 3: Food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management</b>		<b>30 426 654</b>	
3A: Improving competitiveness of primary producers 8.53 % of agricultural holdings receiving support for participating in quality schemes, local markets and short supply circuits, and producer groups/organisations 25 % of Agri-food enterprises supported	04 investments	27 788 894	4.54
	16 cooperation	2 637 760	0.43
<b>Priority 4: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems in agriculture and forestry<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>242 407 561</b>	
4A Biodiversity 12.18 % of agricultural land under contracts 0.69 % of forest/other wooded area under contracts	01 knowledge	903 342	0.15
	02 advisory	1 084 011	0.18
	04 investments	28 130 081	4.59
4B Water management 8.08 % of agricultural land under contracts 0.03 % of forestry land under contracts	07 basic services	903 342	0.15
	08 forest	6 466 486	1.06
	10 AEC	128 48 372	20.97
4C Soil erosion and management 3.99 % of agricultural land under contracts 0.03 % of forestry land under contracts	11 organic farming	2 721 951	0.44
	13 ANC	72 814 634	11.89
	16 cooperation	903 342	0.15

<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

<b>Priority 5: Resource efficiency and shift to low carbon and climate resilience economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors</b>		<b>10 536 224</b>	
5E Carbon conservation and sequestration	02 advisory	45 167	0.01
1.74 % of agricultural and forest land under management contracts contributing to carbon sequestration or conservation	08 forests	10 491 057	1.71
<b>Priority 6: Social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas</b>		<b>72 899 728</b>	
6B Fostering local development			
100 % rural population under local development strategies	07 basic services	9 033 424	1.47
11.54 % rural population with improved services/infrastructure			
700 jobs created (via LEADER)	19 LEADER and CLLD	63 866 304	10.43
<b>Technical Assistance</b>		<b>33 767 132</b>	<b>5.22</b>
<b>Total public expenditure €</b>		<b>646 331 514</b>	<b>100</b>