

Improving the quality of life in rural areas

Introduction:

One of the objectives of rural development policy, as laid out in the Community strategic guidelines for the programming period 2007-2013, is to improve the quality of life in rural areas and encourage diversification of the rural economy.

In this respect a significant part of the resources devoted by Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) to contribute to the overarching priority of ensuring that rural areas maintain their attractiveness as a place in which to live and work.



Identifying the needs

Europe's rural areas according to the OECD urban-rural typology*, account for 91% of EU territory. Furthermore, 24% of EU's population lives in predominantly rural areas and 35% in significantly rural regions. The European rural areas are extremely diverse, ranging from remote rural areas suffering from de-population and decline, to peri-urban areas under increasing pressure from urban centres.

In rural areas, per capita income is around a third less compared to non rural areas, employment rates for women are lower, the service sector is less developed, higher education levels are generally lower, and a smaller percentage of households has access to broadband internet. Lack of opportunities, communication and training infrastructure are a particular problem for remote rural areas and especially for women and young people.

In order to address these imbalances, rural development policy offers a range of possibilities to support improved basic services for the economy, village renewal and development, conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage.

The interventions at "a glance"

The improvement of the living conditions and welfare and the increase of the attractiveness of rural areas is supported the scheme for improved basic services for the economy and rural population. Support covers the setting up of basic services, including for cultural and leisure activities, concerning a village or group of villages, and related small-scale infrastructure (leisure, sport and cultural activities, child care facilities, transport services and telecommunication services etc.).

Village renewal and development is supported for reversing the negative trends of economic and social decline and de-population seen in many parts of the European countryside. This can for example include local road works, renovation of buildings, environmental upgrading (including upgrading parks and roadsides).

In order to improve the quality of life and increase the attractiveness of rural areas, support is provided for conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage. Supported actions concern both the natural and cultural heritage. Support to natural heritage can include the drawing up of protection and management plans relating to Natura 2000 sites and other places of high nature value, environmental awareness actions, investments associated with maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the natural heritage and the development of high nature value sites. Actions supporting cultural heritage include studies and investments associated with maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the cultural heritage such as the cultural features of the village or the rural landscape.

Relevant RDP measures

- ❖ Measure 321 – Basic services for the economy and rural population
- ❖ Measure 322 – Village renewal and development
- ❖ Measure 323 – Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage
- ❖ Measure 331 (Contributing indirectly) – Training and information measure for economic actors operating in the fields covered by axis 3
- ❖ Axis 4 – Implementing local development strategies (LEADER)

* http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Urban-rural_typology

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Support is provided for training and information for the economic actors operating in the fields covered by axis 3 of the rural development policy. The supported training activities include training in ICT skills, training and coaching of starters of a micro-business in a rural area, training young people in traditional rural skills to tap into demand for tourism, recreation, environmental services and quality products, management training for farmers diversifying into non-agricultural activities etc. This scheme aims to provide training in adapted and new skills for the economic actors in the rural areas which is necessary to facilitate the improvement of the services for the population of rural areas.

The contribution of LEADER axis to the improvement of services in rural areas

The LEADER approach (Axis 4) also contributes to better service provision in rural areas. Leader encourages those living in rural territories to explore new ways to become or to remain competitive, to make the most of their assets and to overcome the challenges they may face, such as an ageing population, poor levels of service provision, or a lack of employment opportunities. In this way, Leader contributes towards improving the quality of life in rural areas both for farm families and the wider rural population. It uses a holistic approach to address rural problems. It recognises, for example, that being competitive in the production of food, having an attractive environment and creating job opportunities for the local population are mutually supportive aspects of rural life, requiring specific skills, appropriate technologies and services that need to be tackled as a coherent package and with tailored policy measures.

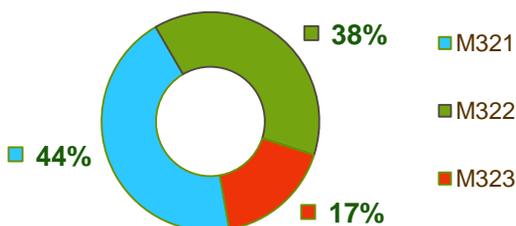
Target groups

These interventions are generally targeted at the rural population and businesses. The main target areas include villages or group of villages in rural areas. Particularly measure 323 concerns Natura 2000 sites and other places of high nature value.

Rural services measures: number of measures activated in the 88 RDPs



Breakdown per measure of the programmed total public expenditure for 2007-2013 supporting improving services for the population of rural areas (EU 27)



Selection of measures in the Member States

According to their needs and priorities, as identified in their National Strategy Plans, Member States have decided to implement combinations of the previously described interventions to support the improvement of services for the population of rural areas.

As shown in the figure on the left, almost half -41- of RDPs have applied all three directly contributing measures. 42 of the RDPs have activated one or two of these measures each. Finally 5 RDPs did not activate any of the aforementioned measures.

Financial support

Services for the population areas are supported by a budget (programmed total public expenditure for 2007-2013 for the three directly contributing measures) of €11.7 billion of which €8.2 billion is the contribution of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This allocation accounts for almost 8% of the total public expenditure - or €151.5 billion - for rural development for the 2007-2013 period at the EU27 level.

The accompanying figure provides a breakdown of the programmed total public expenditure for this objective per measure at the level of EU27.

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Financial implementation progress

By 2013, €7.8 billion - or 66% of the programmed €11.7 billion - had been dispersed in the Member States supporting services for the population areas. These measures have been implemented at various rates. 60% of measure 321 programmed budget has been used, while measures 322 and 323 had disbursed respectively 75% and 63% of their programmed budgets.

Physical outputs (2007 - 2012)

Through the 'basic services for the economy and rural population measure' (measure 321) various actions have been supported in the fields of ICT initiatives, mobility, cultural and social infrastructure, environmental infrastructure, training, childcare and other services. More than 43,500 actions have been supported (and reported) up to 2012, of which 22,000 actions concerned environmental infrastructure (51% in terms of the number of supported actions). Supported actions for cultural and social infrastructure amounted to 27% and interventions to improve mobility accounted for 7%.

The measure 322 "village renewal and development" supported interventions in almost 33,900 villages across the EU27 member states.

The measure 323 "conservation and upgrading of rural heritage" concerned mostly Natura 2000 sites (covered by some 54,100 actions with a total volume of investments of €1 billion), and cultural heritage investments through almost 7,800 actions with the total volume of investments being equal to €560 million.

Pembrokeshire Coastal Buses Powered by Vegetable Oil in the United Kingdom

(RDP Measure 321)

EAFRD support was used so that recycled vegetable oil coming from catering establishments is turned into a source of fuel for Pembrokeshire's coastal buses. The transport service along the Coast Path National Trail is offered with a new fleet that operates in a sustainable way.

With EAFRD support the Pembrokeshire County Council purchased six brand new buses, which were subsequently modified to run on vegetable oil collected from schools and catering establishments across the country.

Key achievements of the project are that oil is recycled locally within the county therefore fuel is produced in a sustainable way locally, limiting the dependence on imported oil; and that the bus service, is now offered at a reduced costs and made more accessible to the wider population.

The EAFRD contribution to this project was almost €710,000.



Training camp "Bändkämp 2010" for young musicians in Estonia

(RDP Measure: 322)

The aim of this project was to create the opportunity for young people to meet each other and participate in creative activities through music; and also to encourage them to participate in the life of their community and learn more about their local identity.

A four-day music training camp was organised and the young people at the camp had the opportunity to play instruments and improve their skills under the supervision and guidance of professional musicians. As a result of the project the camp and festival became a regular and popular event for young musicians in the county. The project also motivated some of the young musicians in the county. The project also motivated some of the young people to become more active in their community (voluntary workers and helpers).

The total cost of the investment accounted for €10,700 of which €7,700 was the EAFRD contribution.

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Environmental and Rural Education and Awareness Centre (CESAR) in Portugal

(RDP measure 321)

Co-financing from EAFRD Measure 321 supported the restoration and revitalisation of a unique and traditional building into a modern environmental education centre in the municipality into the 'Centro de Educação e Sensibilização Ambiental e Rural' (CESAR). The project funding focused upon adaptation of the building to new functions with the creation of facilities for exhibitions, reception of visitors and meetings. The project increased the number of young people that are aware of and active in local environmental issues and contributed to improving the quality of the municipality's built environment. The degradation of the rural heritage of the municipality was reversed by the development and increase of the municipality's visibility, and the local population's awareness of the importance of their local heritage.

The total cost of the project was €103,000 of which €53,000 was the EAFRD contribution.

Supporting profitable environmental entrepreneurship in Finland

(RDP measure 323)

Nature and landscape management is increasingly regarded as an important issue. Given the growing demand for this type of service, ProAgria a leading agricultural expert organisation in Finland, wanted to strengthen cooperation in this field.

ProAgria initiated the project that handled a total of 18 landscape management sites located on land owned by municipalities and power grid companies. The authorities identified local entrepreneurs to take over the management of these sites. The entrepreneurs were responsible for the restoration of fields and meadows, which had been neglected until then.

As a result of the project, nature and landscape management was promoted and improved through cooperation between local entrepreneurs, municipalities and private companies. The total cost of the project was €140,000.



Source of the data:

- Programmed expenditures 2007-2013: RDP budget allocation following Health Check revision (December 2013)
- Expenditures 2007-2013: DG AGRI
- Output indicators: monitoring tables submitted by Managing Authorities along with the 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Annual Progress Reports. Data referring to programming years 2007 to 2012. Only commitments made from year 2007 onwards are considered.
- Output targets 2007-2013: DG AGRI
- Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013) http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/leg/index_en.htm
- Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/index_en.htm
- ENRD Projects Database http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/projects/en/projects_home.cfm