Frequently Asked Questions

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**Rural Development funding**

**1. How can I apply for EU Rural Development funding?**

Dedicated Rural Development funding is provided by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). The EAFRD is administered by Managing Authorities at national and regional levels through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

This means that EAFRD funding is allocated through calls for applications at national and regional levels. The exception is funding allocated under LEADER, which is often managed at local level by Local Action Groups (LAGs).

EAFRD funding is not allocated to beneficiaries directly by the European Commission (with the exception of Technical Assistance contracts) or the ENRD Contact Point.

The timing of calls for application and the processes for awarding funding differ between countries and regions – and for different types of rural development projects. The best way to find out more about how you might be able to access funding is via the Managing Authority of the RDP in the country or region where you live or your National Rural Network (NRN).

Beyond the EAFRD, there are several European Funds [1] that can be used to support projects that may take place in or benefit rural areas/stakeholders.

Some of the most relevant include:

- The [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF) which aims to correct imbalances between the regions of the EU;
- The [LIFE Programme](#) supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects;
- The [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) which invests in Europe’s human capital to help people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens;
- The [European Maritime and Fisheries Fund](#) (EMFF) which helps fishermen in the transition to sustainable fishing and supports coastal communities in diversifying their economies.
2. What are Financial Instruments for agriculture and rural development?

Financial Instruments (FIs) are risk-bearing mechanisms – loans, microcredits, guarantees, equity – that support access to finance. Co-funded by the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), Financial Instruments are an efficient way to invest in the growth and development of people and businesses across the EU.

FIs can be combined with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to support investments in the agriculture and forestry sectors, as well as in the rural economy. Specifically, the finance can be used to support the investment priorities outlined in national and regional Rural Development Programmes.

Financial Instruments under the EAFRD are available to all potential recipients who are undertaking financially viable investment projects.

Find out more about Financial Instruments on the online advisory platform fi-compass.

3. Can I obtain rural development funding through the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)?

The ENRD does not allocate financial support. The ENRD acts as a hub for connecting rural development stakeholders and serves as a platform for the sharing of ideas and experiences on how Rural Development policy is working in practice on national and regional levels. For more information on the ENRD, see Questions 8 and 9.

Rural development funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) is available through calls for applications at national and regional levels under the appropriate Rural Development Programmes. For more information on EAFRD support see Question 1.

Rural Development policy

4. What is EU Rural Development policy?

European Union Member States have sought to respond to the challenges and opportunities facing Europe’s rural areas by developing an EU Rural Development policy, which aims to “contribute to the development of a Union agricultural sector that is more territorially and environmentally balanced, climate-friendly and resilient and competitive and innovative. It shall also contribute to the development of rural territories.”

Rural Development policy forms the ‘second pillar’ of the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - complementing the system of direct payments to farmers and measures to manage agricultural markets (which form Pillar One of the CAP).

EU Rural Development policy sets six main priorities:

1. fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry, and rural areas;

2. enhancing farm viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture in all regions and promoting innovative farm technologies and the sustainable management of forests;
(3) promoting food chain organisation, including processing and marketing of agricultural products, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture;

(4) restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry;

(5) promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors;

(6) promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

5. How is EU Rural Development policy implemented?

EU Rural Development policy is implemented through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) across the EU. These define the priority actions and budget allocation for their specific geographic area.

In this way, European policy is designed to support Member States’ own rural development actions carried out at national, regional and local levels.

“One of the great strengths of our Rural Development concept is that we have core priorities, but it is up to each Member State or region to design a programme which suits its challenges and opportunities.” Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

The current programming period of EU Rural Development policy runs from 2014 to 2020. There are 118 RDPs in the 28 Member States for this period, with 20 single national programmes and eight Member States opting to have two or more (regional) programmes.

Each RDP receives a budget allocation from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to complement the national and/or regional financing in supporting projects and investments contributing to the achievement of EU Rural Development policy objectives in that territory.

6. What is the Cork 2.0 Declaration?

The ‘Cork 2.0 Declaration 2016: A Better Life in Rural Areas’ was the result of a major European rural development stakeholder conference that took place in Cork, Ireland in September 2016. The Declaration provides a renewed vision for Rural Development policy and action in Europe.

The Declaration makes strong recommendations on the kind of policies needed to unleash rural potential and aims to provide input and direction for ongoing debates around the future of Rural Development policy in Europe.

The Declaration sets out ten major policy orientations that should guide “an innovative, integrated and inclusive rural and agricultural policy in the European Union”. These cover aspects related to economy, society, environment, innovation, governance, delivery and performance.

The Declaration is called Cork 2.0 because it is seen as a renewal of the original Cork Declaration that was signed in 1996 and which laid the foundations of EU Rural Development policy. The Cork 2.0 Declaration takes full account of the new challenges and opportunities that have emerged in rural Europe since the original Declaration.

For more information on the Conference and the resulting Declaration, including the full text of the
7. What is the budget allocated to EU Rural Development policy 2014-2020?

Total public funding for Rural Development policy in the EU for the period 2014-2020 amounts to €161.2 billion.

This is comprised of:

- € 99.6 billion under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD);
- € 50.9 billion of national and regional public co-financing;
- € 10.7 billion of voluntary national additional finance.

This total funding is distributed to support actions and projects across the EU through the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs).

8. What is a Rural Development Programme (RDP)?

A Rural Development Programme (RDP) is a policy tool and funding mechanism used by Member States for implementing EU Rural Development policy in a specified territory. Each RDP defines the priority actions and budget allocation for a specific geographic area.

An RDP territory can cover an entire country or a specific region. There are 118 RDPs operating in the EU in the 2014-2020 period. Twenty Member States have one national programme, whilst eight Member States have opted to have two or more (regional) programmes:

- Belgium – 2
- Finland - 2
- France – 30
- Germany – 15
- Italy – 23
- Portugal – 3
- Spain – 19
- UK – 4

Every RDP has a budget from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which is used to help the RDP Managing Authority to fund actions associated with its identified priorities.

9. What is a Rural Development Programme Managing Authority?

The implementation of every Rural Development Programme (RDP) is assured by a public sector organisation acting as the RDP Managing Authority. A Managing Authority is normally a national or regional government body with responsibility for the economic, social and environmental aspects of agriculture and rural development.

Managing Authorities are responsible for:

- Preparing the content of the RDP. This process involves consultation and partnership with economic, social and environmental organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors that operate in the RDP territory.
- Chairing a ‘Monitoring Committee’ of partner stakeholders which oversees the implementation
Managing Authorities are often referred to by the abbreviation ‘MA’.

Find contact details [13] for each the RDP Managing Authority.

10. What are ‘Areas facing Natural Constraints’ (ANCs)?

Measure 13 of the Rural Development Programmes [14] provides for compensation payments “to areas facing natural or other specific constraints” – often referred to by the acronym ‘ANCs’. This Measure aims to support active farmers in three different types of ANC: 1. mountain areas; 2. other areas facing significant natural constraints; and 3. other areas affected by specific constraints.

For details on how ANCs are designated in EU Member States and a range of other technical questions on the use of this RDP Measure, see the FAQs on Areas facing natural or other Specific Constraints [15].

Rural Development networking

11. What is a National Rural Network?

A National Rural Network (NRN) is an organisation set up by an EU Member State government to support networking amongst rural development stakeholders in their country. Their creation is a requirement of the EU Rural Development Regulation.

Networking by the NRN aims to:

(a) increase the involvement of stakeholders in the implementation of rural development;

(b) improve the quality of implementation of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs);

(c) inform the broader public and potential beneficiaries on Rural Development policy and funding opportunities;

(d) foster innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry and rural areas.

NRNs are a vehicle for networking and information exchange, playing an important role in communicating Rural Development policy and sharing good practice. They provide a valuable link between national administrations and organisations on the ground, including LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs).

NRNs are funded from Member State budgets as well as from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). NRN structures and methods of operation can differ between countries.
All NRNs are animated by Network Support Units (NSUs) to facilitate and enable stakeholders to come together and exchange. Most Network Support Units are housed within the RDP Managing Authority, but work to engage the full range of stakeholders.

Most Member States have one NRN covering the entire country. However, in Belgium there is a Flemish Rural Network and a Walloon Rural Network and in the UK there are separate networks for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. France has several regional networks in addition to the NRN.

See details of NRN profiles [16].

12. What is the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)?

The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) acts as a hub for connecting rural Europe and serves as a platform for the sharing of ideas and experiences on how RDPs are working in practice, plus how they can be improved in all Member States.

ENRD work to fulfil this role includes:

- Knowledge development to inform rural development thinking (expert analysis of RDPs, identification of good practice etc.);
- Events, including Seminars, Workshops and Thematic Group meetings to support networking, exchange and learning between EU rural development stakeholders;
- Communication outputs to disseminate views, opinion and knowledge (website, networking magazine, thematic publications, newsletter etc.).

The ENRD was established in 2008 by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. In the current programming period 2014-2020, the ENRD has four key objectives:

1. increase the involvement of stakeholders in rural development;
2. improve the quality of Rural Development Programmes;
3. better inform on the benefits of Rural Development policy;
4. support the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

The main stakeholders of the ENRD include National Rural Networks (NRNs), RDP Managing Authorities and Paying Agencies, Local Action Groups (LAGs); European stakeholder organisations; agricultural advisory services and other interested rural development stakeholders and organisations.

The work of the ENRD is facilitated by two Support Units: the ENRD Contact Point and the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural Development.

13. What is the role of the ENRD Contact Point?

The ENRD Contact Point (CP) supports the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission in running the ENRD and provides a focal point for ENRD activities.
Based in Brussels, a core permanent team of staff is complemented by a larger group of experts, offering knowledge and facilitation in a wide range of rural development fields. In particular, the ENRD CP provides support for networking and cooperation, thematic analysis, events and communications of the ENRD.

For more information, contact the ENRD CP.

14. What is LEADER/CLLD?

LEADER is a local development method which has been used for 20 years to engage local actors in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas. Its core principles include ‘partnership’, ‘bottom-up’ ‘territorial development’, ‘innovation’ and ‘cooperation’.

LEADER Local Action Groups (LAGs) are formal partnerships of local stakeholders bringing together public, private and civil society organisations. The size of LAG territories can vary from an area covering a population as low as around 5 000 people to as high as around 150 000 inhabitants.

Each LAG agrees a Local Development Strategy (LDS) which must be approved by the Managing Authority. The LDS contains a set of priority Rural Development objectives and actions for its area.

LAGs receive a budget from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to finance projects in their territory. The LEADER method ensures funding is only allocated to projects that fit the objectives of the LDS. This ensures a bottom-up approach from needs identification through to funding allocation.

In 2014-2020, the LEADER method is being implemented by around 2 600 LAGs, covering over 54% of the rural population in the EU and bringing together public, private and civil-society stakeholders in a particular area.

In the rural development context, LEADER is implemented under the national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), co-financed from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER method has been extended under the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) to three additional EU Funds:

- the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF);
- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); and
- the European Social Fund (ESF).

Although LEADER is obligatory only under the EAFRD, a single action can now be supported under two or more of the four EU Funds at the same time through the concept of multi-funded CLLD. Where this is applied, it enables LAGs to comprehensively integrate local needs and solutions and helps to reinforce the links between rural, urban and fisheries areas.

15. What are ‘LEADER cooperation’ projects and how can I participate in one?

LEADER cooperation involves a joint action between a LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) and
another local group funded under the European Rural Development (EAFRD [20]), Fisheries (EMFF [5]), Regional Development (ERDF [2]) or Social (ESF [21]) Funds.

Cooperation between local groups is seen as a way to broaden local perspectives and bring new knowledge into participating areas. As well as inter-territorial cooperation (within an EU Member State), transnational cooperation projects are also eligible for financial support. It is even possible to involve partners from outside the EU.

All of the national and regional Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) have to include support for LEADER cooperation. However, individual LAGs are not obliged to support cooperation activities as part of their Local Development Strategy (LDS).

When used, LEADER cooperation support can be made available to cover both the preparatory actions and the activities of the cooperation project.

Find specific guidance, analysis and factsheets on ‘LEADER Cooperation’ here [23].

If you are a local group looking for a cooperation partner in your country or another EU Member State, browse through the ENRD collection of cooperation offers [24] providing details of proposed projects.

If you wish to make a cooperation offer and have it disseminated via the ENRD website, fill in the template available here [24] and send it to contact@enrd.eu [25].

16. What is the European network of Broadband Competence Offices?

Beginning in November 2015, EU Member States have started setting up Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs) [26] – points of contact and information on broadband-related issues, including legal, technical and financial aspects. The BCOs aim to create and disseminate knowledge to national and regional actors on broadband investment opportunities, and to exchange good practices [27] in rolling-out of high-speed broadband internet, notably into rural areas.

These offices form the European network of BCOs, falling within the framework of the Broadband Europe [28] initiative. The main aim of the European network is to inform and advise citizens and businesses, and provide technical support to representatives of local and regional authorities on ways to invest effectively in broadband – whenever possible in combination with Financial Instruments [10].

The European Commission officially launched [29] the European network of BCOs on 20 November 2017.

17. What is the Broadband Competence Offices Support Facility?

The Broadband Competence Offices Support Facility (BCO-SF) [30] was set up by the European Commission in January 2017 to animate and facilitate exchanges between the members of the European network of BCOs [26] (see question above).

The main objectives of the Support Facility are to:

- Support and strengthen the existing BCOs and promote the creation of new ones;
- Create and disseminate knowledge, including exchange of best practices;
- Identify potential multipliers, involved in the implementation of broadband plans in Europe.