

RDP analysis: Support to environment & climate change

M10.1

Agri-environment-climate commitments

In 2015, the Contact Point of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD CP) carried out a broad analysis of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). The following text forms part of a series of summaries outlining the information gathered on specific Measures (M) and sub-Measures. The summaries aim to provide an overview of the common trends and main differences in the programming decisions taken across the range of RDPs. If you believe that any of the information presented does not accurately reflect the content of one of the RDPs, please communicate your concerns to info@enrd.eu.

Where specific RDPs are referenced in the analysis, they are indicated with the official EU country codes (e.g. EE for Estonia). In the case of regional RDPs, the name of the region is given after the country code (e.g. IT-Lazio).

1. Regulatory background¹

As laid down in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 Article 28, Measure 10 (M10), “**aims to preserve and promote the necessary changes to agricultural practices that make a positive contribution to the environment and climate.**” Its inclusion in Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) is compulsory at national and/or regional level.

Agri-environment-climate (AEC) payments are granted to farmers and land-managers who, **on a voluntary base**, commit their farming activities to one or more specific agri-environment-climate practices. Support under M10.1 shall “*cover only those **commitments going beyond the relevant mandatory standards**²..., the relevant criteria and minimum activities³..., and relevant minimum requirements for fertiliser and plant protection products use as well as other relevant mandatory requirements established by national law.*”

According to the regulation payments shall be granted annually, for a period of five-to-seven years, and consist of a compensation, “*for all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitments made.*” Payments can also cover transaction costs of up to 20% of the premium paid. In cases where the beneficiaries consist of a group of farmers and/or land-owners the payment of transaction costs can go up to 30% of the premium paid. Annex II of the regulation, provides maximum amounts per ha and livestock unit for use by the Managing Authorities (MAs) to calculate the AEC payments.

In order to minimise the misuse of AEC payments the regulation also establishes that Member States (MS) shall ensure that beneficiaries of M10.1, “*are provided with the knowledge and information required to implement ... -AEC - ...operations.*”

¹ Art. 28 (EU)Reg. 1305/2013

² Chapter I of Title VI of Regulation (EU) No 1306/2013

³ Points (c)(ii) and (c)(iii) of Article 4(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013

In order to improve further the use of the AEC sub-Measure, in the programming period 2014-2020 emphasis is put on the extent to which, “*specific needs linked with specific conditions at regional or sub-regional level are taken into account and concretely addressed through adequately designed combinations of measures.*”⁴ As a result, the RDPs contain⁵:

- "basic" measures containing relatively simple requirements which could be met by large numbers of farmers in many areas such as maintenance of grassland (they are therefore sometimes referred to as "broad and shallow");
- "targeted" measures which are more closely tailored to particular areas or objectives and therefore often have more restricted uptake, such as maintenance of a wetland habitat for particular plant species.

With the introduction of the greening measures under Pillar 1 of the Common Agriculture Policy, the Commission recommended the use of AEC operations to address more targeted, specific and locally-relevant environmental outcomes.

2. Programming M10.1 in regional RDPs

As explained in section 1, M10.1 is mandatory and therefore **it is included in all RDPs**.

The three MS having a **national framework: DE, ES and FR** set out the design of the operations that are relevant at a national level, leaving the regional MAs the freedom to further programme the sub-Measure in their regional RDPs.

In **Spain**, the national framework presents a set of prescriptions supporting the **harmonisation of M10.1 implementation across the regions**. It provides a list of eligible beneficiaries and costs, as well as a set of eligibility conditions, which can be observed in the regional RDPs.

The most coordinated approach is found in **France**, where the national framework sets out a **menu of operations, eligibility and selection criteria**, from which the regions must select those most relevant to their territories. The regions are given flexibility on which operations to programme and also on the designation of zones in which the operations will be implemented. The regional RDPs furthermore provide a justification on how the choice of operations and zones selected respond to local needs. This approach provided the French Ministry of Agriculture with the opportunity to promote specific agro-ecology principles through to the design of M10.1 operations.

In **Germany**, although the national framework includes a description of the M10.1 operations, most of the regions drafted their own operations with exception of DE-Hessen, DE-Mecklenburg Vorpommern, DE-Saarland and DE-Thuringen.

In **Italy**, although there is no national framework, national guidelines enshrined in law⁶ establish the principle of ‘integrated agriculture practices’ (see page 6), subsequently adopted in most regions either as an individual operation (e.g. in IT-Liguria) or as a principle underpinning more specific operations (e.g. IT-Campania, IT-Puglia).

By contrast, the regions in the **United Kingdom and Belgium** have implemented very different AEC schemes, with different names and operations, although the principles of having a scheme (or scheme-like approach for BE) with differing targeting/commitment levels are reflected in both MS, in their respective designs.

⁴ Art. 8(1)(c)(iv) Reg. 1305/2013

⁵ EU Commission, November 2014, Guidance document: “Co-operation” Measure - Art. 35 of Reg.1305/2013

⁶ Law 4/2011 and related Ministerial Decree

3. Scope of the programmed RDP activities

3.1 Main objectives

An overview of M10.1 objectives shows that most RDPs have broad issues in common (the following table provide an overview of the thematic objectives). Where specific objectives have been identified, the three thematic objectives most frequently mentioned are: **biodiversity, water and soil, corresponding to the Focus Areas of Priority 4.**

Table 1 - Most common 10.1 objectives and number of RDP counts

Described objectives	No of RDPs
Biodiversity	70
Landscape	67
Water	64
Soil	51
Climate change	34
GHG emissions	11
Resource efficiency	9
Carbon sequestration	8

Biodiversity

The most frequently mentioned category for M10.1 in the RDPs relates to the **preservation of biodiversity**. The analysis shows that overall biodiversity conservation forms a key rationale for action around the EU (such as eastern MS, e.g. BG, EE, LT, HU, PL; western and northern MS, e.g. FR, DE, UK, FI, BE; southern MS, e.g. IT, ES, CY), both for smaller and larger MS. This encompasses sub-objectives such as addressing the deterioration of habitats/species and achieving ecosystem resilience.

Examples include:

- In CY, the pursuit of general environmental conservation is said to be necessary to address problems caused by livestock activities.
- In FR-Réunion, biodiversity conservation will focus on the fight against invasive alien species.
- In BG the measure is used to maintain, restore and manage areas of High Nature Value grassland.
- In ES-Valencia, the preservation of wetlands as important biodiversity habitats in the region are highlighted.
- In FR-Nord-Pas de Calais, ecological continuity is one of the key objectives in relation to biodiversity.

- In UK-Scotland, the measure is targeted at conservation priority species (Chough, Corncrake, Hen Harrier) and habitats (degraded raised bog, blanket bog, heaths, dunes, Machair), as well as predator control options to protect nesting birds.
- Genetic heritage and the protection of rare breeds and species is found mostly in newer MS (e.g. in BG, CY, RO and PL), but is also indicated in BE and FR.

Natural resources

The second most-mentioned category of objectives for M10.1 in the RDPs involves the **preservation of natural resources**, identified as a key objective in all MS.

Related objectives identified in the RDPs are:

- Prevention of **soil erosion** and **better soil management** (e.g. BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, RO, HU, FR, PL, SI, UK),
- **Water quality** (e.g. CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HU and PL, SI, UK as well as in many other RDPs), specifically achieved in many cases though the reduction of **fertiliser and pesticide use** (e.g. CY, DE and PL).

Landscape

The **preservation of landscapes** is identified as an important rationale in many MS including:

- newer MS (e.g. EE, CZ, RO, HU);
- Member States where continued intensification of production is seen as threatening traditional landscapes, (e.g. ES, DE, BE, PT, IT, FR); as well as
- others such as SE, having a landscape approach to its RDP strategy.

Interesting programming examples include:

- in many Spanish regions (e.g. Castilla y Leon, Murcia, Navarra, etc) the loss of unique landscapes and associated biodiversity is cited as a rationale to support permanent crops (e.g. olives, vineyards, almond trees, chestnuts or fig trees);
- in the southern regions of France (e.g. Corsica and Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur), support is provided to counter the risk of fire which is threatening landscapes in these areas;
- in Portugal, support is provided to adopt or maintain extensive grazing practices in agro-forestry-pastoral systems which are threatened by intensification; and
- in BG, ES, IT and DE, the preservation of landscapes is associated with conservation of grassland and High Nature Value farming systems.

Climate change

Climate change is relatively often cited as a general objective for M10 (34 RDPs), but far fewer appear to specify the precise climate-related objectives they aim to achieve and how. This objective may also be addressed through a focus on other environmental issues such as **soil, water and biodiversity** as actions in these areas can also **contribute to climate change mitigation** (even if indirectly).

Mitigation and adaptation of the agricultural sector to climate change is explicitly put forward as an objective in CZ, DE, DK, ES, IT and LT.

Environmental services Explicit references to **environmental services delivered by the agriculture sector**, are included in a range of RDPs (e.g. ES, FR, IT, LT, RO, SE, SK and DE).

In Spain, at least four regions refer to M10.1 providing support for environmental services to society, notably ES-Madrid.

In FR-Ile de France indicates that there is public demand for local and sustainable products to which the RDP/M10 aims to respond.

FR-Bourgogne aims to improve the positive environmental externalities of mixed livestock-crop farming.

SE and DE target the protection of the natural and cultural heritage associated with agriculture.

EU/national strategies & legislation As with all RDP measures, M10.1 support must address national, regional or local needs and priorities. As such, many linkages were found with related **EU/national strategies and legislation**.

In particular, almost all RDPs (e.g. ES, FR, HR, HU, DK, FI, IT, LU, MT, SK, UK, BG, CY, DE, etc.) made reference the existing **Natura 2000 network** and its priorities, when designing M10.1 operations to protect biodiversity. In many cases, the location of a beneficiary in a Natura 2000 site is included as a **selection criterion** (see section 5).

A few RDPs (e.g. DE-Thuringen, EE) also refer to the overarching **EU Biodiversity Strategy** or to its regional equivalent (e.g. DE-Nordrhein Westfalen, UK-England, FI).

The second most common legislation referred to either in the rationale or the specific operations is the **Water Framework Directive (WFD)**, especially in MS/regions where water quality is a concern and in MS aiming to protect and improve the status of surface and ground water via M10.1 (e.g. AT, DE-Nordrhein Westfalen, DE-Sachsen, DE-Thuringen, DK, FI-Mainland, PL, PT-Acores, SE, SI, UK, FR-Aquitaine, and FR-Auvergne).

In the Baltic countries (e.g. SE, LT), M10.1 is intended to contribute to the objectives of the **Baltic Sea Strategy** by achieving **good water quality** through the management of the use of phosphorus and nitrogen and more generally through strengthening sustainable agricultural practices.

More local plans or programmes are also specified as setting out requirements or objectives with which M10.1 should be coherent, such as the, “voluntary nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (NPK) farm balance,” or the national action plan for pesticides reduction in Germany and the soil commitments made in the natural environment white paper (stating that all soils will be managed sustainably by 2030) in UK-England.

3.2 Examples of types of operations

Where it is possible to identify a clear strategy, the following types of operations have been used to address the objectives identified above.

Integrated agricultural practices

In Italy, as in the previous programming period, M10.1 will be implemented through '**integrated agricultural practices**' or forms of '**integrated production**'. The integrated production approach implies the adoption of a number of specific practices in relation to: soil management, crop rotation, soil analyses in relation to fertilizer use, sustainable irrigation methods and the use of integrated plant protection methods to control weeds and pests (reducing the use of chemical inputs).

Operations by habitats

In UK-England, the way the **operations are organised is by habitat**, with operations grouped under the following headings: arable; boundaries, trees and orchards; coastal operations; grassland; historic environment and landscape; lowland heathland; soil and water; uplands; wetlands; woodland and scrub; supplements and educational access operations; and options exclusive to organic land.

The Netherlands takes a similar approach, focusing on: meadow/wetland birds, arable land fauna, flora and landscapes.

Operations by objective or landscape type

In the French national framework, the operations are classified according either to the **type of objective** sought or to the **landscape type**, as follows: improving land cover, maintaining/improving grassland condition, maintaining/improving topographic elements, improving specific habitats' status, preventing landscape abandonment, improving irrigation systems and wetlands, reducing the use of chemical agricultural inputs. The French national framework also programmed three additional types of operations requiring a more holistic approach on grassland, arable or mixed farms.

3.3 General approach

RDPs have taken different approaches in terms of how M10.1 operations are presented and made available to the beneficiaries. Two main approaches emerge from the analysis: the **scheme approach** and the **individual operations approach**.

Schemes

Some RDPs (e.g. UK-England, UK-Wales, UK-Scotland, UK-Northern Ireland, EE, IE LT) have opted for a **scheme approach**. This implies that the beneficiaries can choose from a wide range of individual operations, each operation consisting of a series of management commitments.

The schemes are respectively called the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) in Northern Ireland, the Agri-Environment Climate scheme in Scotland, 'Glastir' in Wales, Countryside Stewardship in England, the Environmentally Friendly Management scheme in Estonia and the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) in Ireland.

In several RDPs, beneficiaries can apply to a scheme by choosing options with different **levels of ambition**. The use of different levels provides beneficiaries with some **flexibility in terms of the level of commitments they want to engage with**. In

most cases (e.g. UK-England, UK-Wales, IE, BE, LU) it is noted that the beneficiaries' eligibility or selection criteria become more discerning as the scheme level increases, often resulting in a targeting of priority areas (for more see the eligibility criteria under section 5).

In UK and EE, the scheme approach uses two levels: a shallow 'low' tier to address widespread environmental issues and a 'higher' tier scheme, which includes more demanding operations.

In Ireland, there are three scheme levels.

In some of the countries with a scheme approach (e.g. IE, EE and in UK-England), beneficiaries who have entered the scheme can complement the basic level commitments with **additional options** (i.e. individual complementary operations).

In UK-England, the additional options (supplements and educational access options) are only available to higher tier scheme subscribers.

In Estonia, these additional measures relate to water protection, farmland bird conservation or the creation of bee foraging areas.

It is noted that RDPs taking a scheme approach often include a large number of operations⁷.

Individual operations

All other MS appear to offer operations singly: eligible beneficiaries may opt for any of the operations that are available to them.

Among RDPs programming M10.1 operations in this way, some distinguish between **different levels of ambition of commitments**.

In BE (both Wallonia and Flanders) and LU, M10.1 operations are divided in two levels/types of operations: a group of broad and shallow operations, relevant and available across the territory; and a group of more targeted operations only available to a subset of the beneficiaries (often defined on the basis of their location so as to target areas of interest/concern).

Similarly in AT, there is a national common base of operations open to all on which more locally specific operations are added by regional authorities (examples include preventive water protection Measures, and the specific configuration of the conservation measure).

The availability of **additional options** is also found in RDPs taking an 'individual operation' approach and these tend to be associated with a higher payment rate.

For example, in Slovenia, the pest control management operation in orchards has two mandatory requirements (use of traps and organic fertilisers) with additional options to use pest confusion methods, mechanical weed control and/or plant grass between tree rows.

Mix

In France, M10.1 operations include a **mix of individual operations and a few** (newly introduced) **operations that act as schemes in practice** ("system operations") as they engage beneficiaries to agree to a package of commitments. The grassland 'system' operations in FR apply different payment rates depending on the identified risk of abandonment/conversion of grassland. If the risk of conversion is high, the applicable payment per ha is also higher.

⁷ see section 'No of M10.1 operations' in page 8.

No of M10.1 operations

The number of AEC operations varies greatly between RDPs. Those using the scheme approach, tend to programme a very high number of operations, describing precise commitments. This is particularly the case in: UK-Scotland with 40 operations, UK-Northern Ireland with 71 operations, and UK-Wales with 152 operations. In France, RDPs have on average about 50-to-70 AECM operations and the national framework presents a total of 72 operations.

RDPs using the individual operations approach tend to offer a lower number of operations, which are more generally defined than in the case of the RDPs using the scheme approach (e.g. the IT regions with an average of 5 operations, MT with 6 operations).

3.4 Other interesting approaches

A number of innovative approaches are being programmed in the RDPs.

Bottom-up

In France, efforts to mix the top down and bottom up approach have been introduced in this programming period. While AEC operations are designed and selected by the authorities, a project for their implementation at local level must be initiated by a local “operator”. The local operator in consultation with other actors submits its **agri-environment-climate project (‘PAEC’)** in response to annual regional calls for projects. The proposal must be designed in partnership with local stakeholders (municipalities, NGOs, business, etc.), it must specify the local environmental challenges it seeks to address, the zones within the PAEC area that are targeted for each challenge, and the operations selected. The PAECs are then selected in line with the objectives of the RDPs. Apart from a few exceptions⁸, AEC agreements in France are not available outside the framework of a PAEC. Farmers located in an area where a PAEC is active are eligible for AEC operations that are relevant to the targeted environmental challenges. The PAEC structure (i.e. presence of a local operator whose role includes animation/communication activities to farmers) aims to incentivise farmers in eligible areas to apply for AEC operations.

Landscape

Some MS such as UK-England, MT and SE, explicitly **target landscape scale action for M10.1**. In UK-England, this is to ensure better connected habitat restoration and expansion. In MT, the landscape/collective approach originates from the high number of very small farms and the need for area-wide coordinated uptake across whole valleys or other landscapes to ensure positive biodiversity and resource protection outcomes. In SE, the landscape approach has been used since the introduction of the scheme in previous programming periods and is seen as a means to develop landscapes as a resource for recreation, development and growth, housing and natural and cultural heritage as well as enabling a broad range of farmers to access the funding.

⁸ Operations that are relevant on the whole territory such as beekeeping or protection of threatened species.

Collective approaches

Collective approaches are found in a number of RDPs.

In the NL, from 2016, an innovative approach to AECM delivery has been put in place whereby AEC agreements are made available exclusively to groups of farmers/land managers or cooperatives.

In most other MS however, collective approaches are used to achieve action over multiple holdings, but the contractual agreements are still with the individual farmer. These approaches also tend to apply only to some of the planned operations (and not to all operations like in the NL case).

For instance, in France one operation is open only to groups of beneficiaries and can be implemented only on an area greater than a single holding.

Similarly, in IT-Marche, two of the four operations require collective agreements. These two operations target water protection and the creation of buffer strips on at least 10% of farmed land (biodiversity protection, prevention of water pollution and soil erosion) and are open only to groups of farmers, producers' associations, municipalities, protected and Natura 2000 areas' managers associated in a collective agreement.

In UK-Wales, collective approaches are encouraged by providing support for transaction costs to large-scale AEC projects requiring the creation of co-operatives and in UK-England a facilitation fund is available to support the development of multi-farmer applications.

EU & national funds

In Germany, support for AEC operations in some regions is based on a **mix of EU and national funds** with different levels of focus⁹. For instance, in DE-Hessen, M10.1 is made only of one operation, 'Crop diversification in arable farming' while more targeted measures are available but funded outside the RDP to meet Priority 4 needs. Whether or not this is encompassed in a scheme-like approach is unclear in most regions (Länder), although it seems to be the case in DE-Rheinland Pfalz (and possibly in DE-Scheleswig Holstein too) where the programme 'EULLa' (development of the environment, agriculture and landscape), is composed of 15 EAFRD funded operations likely to be combined with other nationally funded activities, encouraging beneficiaries to introduce or maintain environmentally friendly practices and to take an active role in environmental protection and nature conservation.

⁹ M10 is used mainly to fund more broad and shallow measures on agricultural land, while Länder are also provided with a separate pot of funding (outside the CAP) to fund more focussed biodiversity management, http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/app_templates/enrd_assets/pdf/successful_implementation_of_RDPs/seminar-s-report/WorkshopReport_2.pdf (Jan 2014)

3.5 Improvements from previous period

In some RDPs (e.g. BG, RO, PL), the operations are said to be the **continuation of those implemented under the programming period 2007-2013**. In most such cases, RDPs state that AEC measures were improved. For example:

- In AT, the changes introduced aim to achieve a better acceptance and result-orientation of the operations.
- In EE changes introduced tackle new specific environmental issues notably soil protection, water protection and environmental issues in the horticulture sector.
- In the Netherlands, the AECM is increased geographical and species targeting as a means of improving the outcomes for biodiversity conservation, in a response to disappointing evaluation findings from the previous programming period.
- In DE, the recommendations made from the previous period led to an improvement in the soil operations available, in particular, for example to protect areas exposed to over fertilisation and erosion and on wetlands/moors (DE-Brandenburg Berlin) or the reduction of fertiliser use on arable land and the protection of peatland from extensive use (DE-Bavaria).
- In PL, new solutions were introduced and include, “stronger elements of targeting support to specific, geographically diverse needs and environmental pressures,” through extending the scope of the requirements to fund new operations, an increased level of ambition following the greening of direct payments and the inclusion of the climate as an objective. The new programme also takes stock of experience to improve efficiency and reduce the error rate.
- In IT-Molise, M10.1 operations take account of the lessons learnt, such as issues with the coordination of implementation controls and errors in the data submitted by farmers, poor respect of provisions across the whole farm area, etc. The region is providing more technical assistance to applicants to ensure these mistakes are avoided.
- In FR, a number of regions highlight an overall increase in the M10 budget compared to the previous period, e.g. a significant increase in financial allocation and a higher support rate in Aquitaine (75% compared to 50% during the last period), increased by 160% compared to 2007-2013 in FR-Basse-Normandie (to increase attractiveness of operations), an overall EAFRD envelope increase from €31.7 million in 2007-2013 to €79.7 million for 2014-2020 in FR-Centre region, an increase of 74% EAFRD or €64 million in FR-Rhone-Alpes; and a 28% increase in the M10 budget in FR-Pays de la Loire, etc.

4. Contribution to Focus Areas and linkages with other Measures

Contribution to FAs M10.1 has been programmed mainly under Priority 4 (P4) - Ecosystems management (biodiversity, water and soils) and to a minor extent under Priority 5 (P5) - Resource efficiency & climate, in line with the thematic objectives identified in section 3.

Table 2 - M10.1 contribution to Priorities and Focus Areas

Described objectives	FA
Biodiversity	FA 4A – Biodiversity restoration, preservation and enhancement
Water	FA 4B – Water management
Soil	FA 4C – Soil management
Resource efficiency	P5 - Resource efficiency and climate
Climate change	P5 - Resource efficiency and climate
GHG emissions	FA 5D – Greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions
Carbon sequestration	FA 5A – Carbon conservation and sequestration

Link to M01 and M02

In the majority of the cases, M10.1 is implemented together with **M02 – Advisory services**. M02 is generally used to increase beneficiaries' knowledge and understanding about the objectives of the AEC operations to which they commit and to know what actions are required for their successful implementation. The use of M02 together with M10.1 is compulsory in LU, IE, DE (e.g. DE-Rheinland Pfalz), ES-Andalucia, UK-Northern Ireland, SK and SI.

More specifically:

- in DE-Nordrhein Westfalen: it is mandatory for one operation on catch crops, which is eligible only in WFD sensitive areas;
- in ES-Madrid it is compulsory for two operations on steppe birdlife conservation in Natura 2000 sites and, sustainable use of grasslands in specific areas in the Natura 2000 network;
- in France, the training will become mandatory in 2016 and payments under M10.1 will be granted only if the training certificate is provided;
- in FR-Guyane, for the operation on carbon sequestration increase in grassland through the cultivation of leguminous vegetables, specific training is required to introduce beneficiaries to the required management practices for grasslands and grazing fields; and
- in IT-Umbria, training is mandatory and from the second year of commitment beneficiaries have to update their competences, with at least 20 hours of training.

In several RDPs, M02 is mentioned as a complementary measure and it is unclear to what extent its use is compulsory (e.g. DE-Baden Wurttemberg on the basis of

nature protection advice from land management associations, SE, PT and GR).

In Wallonia (BE), beneficiaries joining the higher level 'intensity of commitments' scheme must prove sufficient farming experience to be eligible for support.

In PT, the enrolment of farmers in a training course made available under M2 is a positive criterion for the selection of AEC projects/operations.

Mentioned in a much lower number of RDPs, **M1 - Knowledge transfer** is used in MT, UK-Northern Ireland, FR-Nord-Pas-de-Calais and GR.

Integrated approaches

Although not on a compulsory basis, many RDPs (e.g. BG, DE-Rheinland Pfalz, ES-Madrid, ES-Cataluña, ES-La Rioja, MT, SE, SK) indicate having implemented an 'integrated delivery approach' based on using other RDP measures to support M10 operations. These tend to be:

- M1 – Knowledge transfer and information actions;
- M2 - Advisory services;
- M12 - Natura 2000 and WFD;
- M4 – Investments in physical assets and more in specific M4.4 - Non-productive investments; and
- M11 - Organic farming.

Link to M04

M4 – Investments in physical assets is explicitly mentioned as a complementary measure to M10.1 in MT and in FR-Nord-Pas-de-Calais. **M04.4 - support for non-productive investments** more specifically is used in IE, UK-Northern Ireland and UK-Wales. M04.4 is also mandatory in one of the operations in IT-Sicilia aiming to support the establishment of fields with indigenous fruit varieties, and is part of the eligibility criteria for access to M10.1.

Link to M07

Some AEC operations in France, Ireland and Spain (e.g. ES-Cataluña) require the beneficiaries to undertake a preliminary 'diagnosis' of the farm level situation to ensure that the operation applied for is suitable and if so that it is correctly implemented. For example, for the fertiliser management operation in ES-Cataluña, farmers must carry out prior soil analysis, funded under **M07 - basic services and village renewal in rural areas**. In Ireland, beneficiaries to M10.1 operations must use qualified advisors and submit a nutrient management plan, among other requirements, again funded using M07. In some French regions (e.g. Midi-Pyrénées, Alsace), the process of putting together an AEC proposal can entail a 'territorial' assessment of the environmental situation, which is facilitated through M07. The animation costs of the AEC agreement may also be covered by M07.

5. Eligibility criteria and selection process

5.1 Beneficiaries and project duration

Beneficiaries The majority of RDPs¹⁰ (covering 14 MS) target **‘farmers’, ‘registered farmers’ or ‘active farmers’¹¹ and groups of ‘active farmers’**.

Some 18 RDPs¹² at least (covering 7 MS) adopted **farmers and ‘land managers’** as targets.

These general rules are often adapted depending on the specificity of some operations:

- In UK-England, non-agricultural land managers located in Natura 2000 sites are eligible to help these sites achieve favourable ecological condition.
- Beekeepers are authorised to apply for relevant operations in several RDPs.
- In DE-Bavaria, for habitat protection measures, other land management groups including hunting associations are eligible.

Duration In the majority of the RDPs in the chosen duration of commitments is indicated as a **period of five years** (e.g. CY, SE, GR, DK, PT-Acores, DE-Schleswig-Holstein, IT (13 regions), FR (7 regions), ES (7 regions)).

Five RDPs were identified which apply a commitment period of five years, **extendable to seven years** (e.g. IT-Friulia Venezia Giulia, IT-Molise, BG, LU, PT-Mainland, FR-Martinique, BE-Wallonia).

¹⁰ e.g. AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE-Bayern, DE-Hessen, DE-Niedersach Bremen, DE-Nordrhein Wesfalen, DE-Scheleswig Holstein, DE-Thuringen, ES-Aragon, ES-Andalucia, ES-Castilla y Leon, ES-Estremadura, ES-Canarias, ES-La Rioja, GR, HR, HU, IE, IT (not all regions), SE, SI.

¹¹ Active farmers’ definition according to Article 4 Para. 1 a) of Regulation (EU) No. 1307/2013

¹² e.g. DE-Brandenburg Berlin, DE-Nordrhein Westfalen, DE-Rheinland Pfalz, DE-Saarland, FR-Martinique, FR-Guyane, IT-Calabria, IT-Friuli Venezia Giulia, IT-Lazio, IT-Lombardia and other IT regions, NL, PL, UK-Northern Ireland, UK-Wales, UK-Scotland, UK-England and MT.

5.2 Targeting of the AEC operations

RDPs have used different ways to narrow the field of action of the operations, in other word, to 'target' them.

According to a preliminary overview of different approaches taken, 28 RDPs in 4 MS can be identified as having adopted a highly targeted approach (explicitly excluding some areas), some 37 RDPs in 10 MS have adopted a variety of indirect targeting approaches through the use of selection/eligibility criteria, while 34 RDPs in 9 MS have opted exclusively/mostly to operate basic measures across the whole territory.

The following four targeting approaches can be identified:

Operation design

1. Targeting in the **description of the operation**.

In some cases, the **scope of AEC operation** was strongly focussed, e.g. targeting a specific species' habitat. By definition in these cases there also tend to be narrow selection criteria, e.g. if an operation aims at improving the sustainable management of olive groves, then only areas planted with olive trees are 'eligible' (e.g. IT Puglia and Sardinia). Similarly, DE-Bavaria has implemented a payment for the conversion of arable land to grassland along water bodies and in other sensitive zones, which, by definition is only relevant to arable land which borders such sensitive zones.

In other examples, the RDPs restrict the **areas covered by the operations** de facto excluding all potential beneficiaries not located in these areas. This type of targeting approach was implemented at different scales, ranging from the protection of specific species/habitats (e.g. ES-La Rioja, SK) to wider areas of traditional mountain pastures or High Nature Value grassland (e.g. BG).

Eligibility criteria

2. Targeting through the use of **eligibility criteria** - in the majority of the RDPs, **target priority areas** were defined.

For instance, in IT-Calabria, an operation aiming at converting arable land into grassland is only eligible to cereal crop land located in target soil areas as defined by the soil map of the Calabria region. Similar examples are found in DE-Brandenburg Berlin, IT-Umbria, LV, SE, where the eligible areas also reflect a targeting-like process.

In other RDPs, eligibility criteria are based on **area type classification defined in existing legislation**.

For example, in Estonia, SE and DE-Niedersachsen/Bremen, water-related operations, such as catch crops payments for water quality purposes, are only available to beneficiaries located in nitrate sensitive areas as defined by the Water Framework Directive or focused in priority areas identified in the River Basin Management Plans (e.g. SI, PL). Biodiversity operations, instead, often require the beneficiaries to be located in Natura 2000 sites and be targeted in national Prioritised Action Frameworks.

Selection criteria

3. Targeting using **selection criteria**.

This appears to be a common tool used in RDPs, which enables some additional tailoring of the Measure to national/regional needs. The most common selection criteria concern favouring beneficiaries located in Natura 2000 sites or nitrate vulnerable zones as defined by the WFD.

The use of such limitations however is not consistent in all RDPs. Some RDPs set **that selection criteria apply systematically to all AEC applications for funding** (e.g. ES, MT, IT, PT, UK). For example:

In MT, selection criteria are used to prioritise applications that are endorsed by a local area landscape manager (implementing their landscape approach), Natura 2000 areas and groups of farmers as they have the potential to multiply the environmental and climate benefits and deliver environmental public goods.

It is also the case in some regions in Italy such as in Emilia Romagna and Calabria. In IT-Molise the selection criteria “give priority to zones where the operation will have most impact in view of the needs to be addressed”. In this sense, selection criteria are very close to spatial targeting.

In PT, the enrolment in a training course using M02 gives priority in the selection process, together with for example, being located in the National Action Programme to Combat Desertification.

In other RDPs **selection criteria apply only when funds become insufficient to support all AEC applications** (e.g. FR, CY, GR, IT- Umbria, IT-Sicilia, IT-Friuli Venezia Giulia, IT-Lazio).

Targeting of specific zones

4. Targeting to a **geographically pre-defined area of the MS/Region**.

In this case, the MAs designate specific geographical areas for each operation on the basis of the needs/SWOT analysis and on the base of specific studies. This is the most targeted approach because it identifies the geographical borders of the areas eligible and excludes others. This approach was observed in IE, UK-Wales, UK-Scotland and FR.

In Ireland, the implementation of the Green Low Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) requires the prior identification of ‘priority environmental assets’ throughout the country.

A similar approach is found in UK-Wales where a set of priority area target maps are used in the higher level scheme.

In UK-Scotland, a target area is also identified for each AEC operation and the applicant’s holding must be within target area. In Scotland and Wales, the AECM targeting is combined with selection criteria that consider the impact of the operation on the environment.

A targeted approach is also found, albeit to different degrees, in all 27 French RDPs, for most of the operations. Outside the identified target areas – which are defined by local operators when setting up their AEC project (PAEC) – most of M10.1 operations are not available to potential beneficiaries. In the construction of the targeted zones, the French regions pre-identify priority action zones characterised by specific environmental and climate challenges, e.g. water quality or biodiversity. This provides guidance for the AEC project applicants and ensures that applications are in line with the regional RDP strategy.

Mixed approaches

In some RDPs a **mixed approach to targeting** has been found (e.g. in UK, BE and others where the level of targeting increases depending on the nature of the commitments). This implies that the sub-Measure is not very targeted for the operations with lower levels of commitment intensity but is better targeted in the operations with more ambitious commitments levels.

Targeting was found to take other forms too. For instance:

- targeting **specific beneficiaries**, e.g. in the NL, operations are only open to groups of farmers who are members of predefined cooperatives; and
- targeting **specific agriculture products**, e.g. in ES-Pais Vasco and ES-Navarra support is provided for the maintenance and conservation of old vineyards and olive trees on the rationale that they are 'basic' elements of the traditional Mediterranean landscape, a source of genetic resources and that they are part of a sustainable agricultural system.

Table 3 - Targeting approaches in the RDPs 2014-2020

	RDPs	MS	
Low level of targeting or no targeting	34	Covering 13 MS but a predominant characteristic in 10 MS	AT, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, FI, HR, LT, SI
Narrow operation design, use of selection/eligibility criteria	42	Covering 13 MS but a predominant characteristic in 11 MS	ES, GR, HU, IT, LV, MT, PT, RO, SE, SK, LU
Highly targeted approach	29	5 MS	EE, FR, IE, NL, UK
A mix	4	3 MS but a predominant characteristic in 2 MS	BE, PL
Total	109	28 MS	

6. Financial aspects

As introduced in section 1, payment rates are calculated to cover or all or part of the additional costs and income foregone resulting from the commitments made. Where justified for operations concerning environmental conservation, support can be provided on a flat-rate basis or as a one-off payment per unit for ceasing commercial activities on particular areas – these payments must also be calculated on the basis of additional costs incurred and income foregone.

The regulation provides precise indications on the maximum payment rates permissible for different types of land. Generally, **RDPs set payment rates that fit within the limits set by the regulation.**

In some RDPs, however, **operations were found exceeding the payment ceiling:** according to the regulation this is possible if duly justified.

- In FR-Guadeloupe, for example, payments for the sustainable management of banana production exceed the payment ceiling. This is justified by the fact that this operation foresees a complete rethinking of the banana plantation management with no use of herbicides or pesticides, thereby requiring substantial investment from the beneficiaries in terms of labour and technical knowledge. A second operation exceeding the ceiling, aims at limiting the propagation of Psylla, a pest, and is justified by the threat posed by the disease.
- Some similar examples were found in FR-Martinique as well.
- In Sweden, an operation for maintaining pastures and hayfields also exceed the EU ceiling. These are among the most endangered and the most valuable habitats in the agricultural landscape of the country, but are said to be often marginal land with high cost of maintenance, a combination which justifies a slightly higher payment than what is defined by the regulation.

No support can be granted under M10 for commitments that are covered under the **organic farming measure (M11).**

Member States must ensure that **double funding** with Pillar 1 greening measures is avoided. This means that the payment rates provided under the AECM must take into account only the additional costs and/or income foregone linked to management requirements which go beyond the obligatory practices identified under the three greening measures (crop diversification, maintenance of permanent grassland and Ecological Focus Areas).

In addition, **specific rules exist for the calculation of payments for certain equivalent practices** - 'winter soil cover' and 'catch crops' for crop diversification, and 'production on arable land with no use of fertiliser (mineral fertiliser and manure) and/or plant protection products, and not irrigated, not sown with the same crop two years in a row and on a fixed place' for Ecological Focus Areas.

Where these equivalent practices are offered under M10.1, the usual payment rate calculated based on the normal rules of income foregone and additional costs must be reduced by one third of the average greening payment per hectare in the Member State or region concerned or by one third of the greening payment per hectare of the individual farmer in specific circumstances.