

A rural development programme for Sweden

The Rural Development Programme is a tool for developing Sweden's rural areas. The programme contains support and compensation to achieve the objectives of the programme. Some of these target agricultural sectors in particular, although several types of support can be applied for by anyone living and working in rural areas.

The Rural Development Programme (RDP) is an EU Structural and Investment (ESI) Fund programme. The overall objectives of the programme are to:

- foster the competitiveness of agriculture;
- ensure sustainable management of natural resources and climate change measures; and
- achieve a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities.

The total budget for the Rural Development Programme for the 2014–2020 programme period is approximately 4.3 billion euro. The major share comes via the central government budget (EU funds and State financing). A small portion comes from other public sources of financing, mainly from municipalities.

The ESI Funds and the Partnership Agreement

Ahead of the 2014–2020 programme period, as part of

achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Parliament and the Council have decided on a common regulatory framework for the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. The funds' joint name is the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds).

Coordination between the funds is based on the Partnership Agreement. Its purpose is to bring about more effective implementation of the programmes and a better outcome of the measures. All measures are to contribute to the EU 2020 strategy for smart and sustainable growth for everyone. The Partnership Agreement outlines Sweden's priorities for the ESI Funds and lays the foundation for better coordination between the four funds. Overlap between the funds is also avoided through the Partnership Agreement.

The Rural Development Programme structure
The measures in the Rural Development Programme are structured in accordance with requirements in the EU regulatory framework based on six priorities, with two or more focus areas for each priority. The six priorities are linked to the EU 2020 objectives and are described in Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Article 5:

1. knowledge transfer and innovation;
2. agricultural competitiveness;
3. food chain organisation and risk management, including animal welfare;
4. environment;
5. climate;
6. social inclusion and economic development in rural areas.

The programme budget is distributed among these priorities. Priority 1 is horizontal and has no resources of its own. Innovation and knowledge transfer are

to be promoted in all parts of the programme. The objectives of priority 1 are therefore to be achieved by means of measures within the other priorities.

Programme content

The emphasis of the Rural Development Programme lies on compensation for agri-environmental commitments. As farmers and others interested in managing our environment sustainably take part in the programme's environmental measures, conditions are created for sustainable food production and open landscapes. This is important for biodiversity among other things.

The Rural Development Programme also includes measures to make it easier to live and conduct various kinds of business activities in rural areas. Vibrant rural areas require good conditions for living and enterprise. The programme is therefore undertaking a major investment in broadband outside the metropolitan areas which supplement the investments being carried out in the Regional Fund. Residents and entrepreneurs in rural areas must have good access to basic services, such as convenience stores and fuel stations. Convenience stores are particularly important as they often also provide a number of other services. Therefore, specific funds are set aside to increase access to local services. Initiatives to develop tourism in rural areas may also be carried out through the programme.

Another important part of the programme is the possibility to support both agricultural and other companies in rural areas.

The Rural Development Programme budget is allocated as follows	
Priority	Share of the budget in percentage
2	8,3
3	4,4
4	61,0
5	1,8
6	20,8
TA-funds*	3,6

* Technical Assistance is money that is used for the implementation of the programme, such as costs for evaluation, operation of the national rural network, the monitoring committee for the program and support management.

Business development can be carried out through support to investments. For instance, this can include modernisation and structural transformation that would not otherwise have been possible and that helps improve farmers' competitiveness. Investment support can also contribute to more sustainable agriculture, for instance by replacing older, more energy-intensive equipment with more modern and energy-efficient machines. There are also funds for investments in facilities for the production of renewable energy.

In the new programme, compensation for animal welfare will be expanded to include cows, pigs and sheep. There are also measures to strengthen Swedish small-scale food production and culinary culture. A special initiative is being carried out with regard to innovations for sustainable and competitive agriculture in the framework of the European Innovation Partnership (EIP). The EIP is to promote cooperation between researchers and entrepreneurs and contribute to new knowledge more quickly being put to good use as business ideas and innovations in businesses in rural areas.

The Rural Development Programme will continue to include funds for community-led local development (CLLD) through the LEADER approach. In the new programme period, work will be carried out with support from four funds:

- the European Fund for Rural Development;
 - the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;
 - the European Regional Development Fund; and
 - the European Social Fund.
- This is the first time community-led local development will be carried out with joint financing from several funds. Throughout Sweden, local development areas have formed and drawn up local development strategies. Based on these, the areas themselves are to decide how their allocated funds can best be used to achieve the goals in the strategies.

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