Rural Development

Title

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In Europe, the development of rural areas in terms of their economic, social and environmental assets is very important. However the challenges facing rural areas including the biodiversity are multiple and the diversity does not make it easy for policy makers to come up with effective measures. And still, all the elements for effective policy making for rural areas are present in the so-called **second Pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy**

- (CAP).

This second Pillar is dealing with Rural Development through a programmatic approach where Member States or regions can pick and choose measures that need to contribute to common objectives. Although it is clear to many stakeholders that this type of policy making is much more intelligent and effective, there is still only around 24% of the CAP budget (in the 2007-2013 programming period) allocated to rural development measures. Within this Pillar, only a tiny proportion of the entire CAP budget is dedicated to Agri-environment schemes.

Agri-environment schemes are the most promising part of the CAP, which benefit wildlife, the environment and the rural economy. The schemes support farmers who adopt higher environmental standards that result in public benefits, such as wildlife and clean water. However, insufficient funding in rural development measures, in particular Agri-environment schemes, means that the influence these measures have on farming decisions is dwarfed by the impact of Pillar 1 measures which are giving direct income support to farmers.

Furthermore, even rural development measures are often used to support environmentally destructive practices, for example:

- Funding unsustainable drainage and irrigation expansion, and inappropriate afforestation;
- Using agri-environment money to pay for practices that have no clear environmental benefit, or for practices that would be followed anyway;
- Less Favoured Area payments (the new Areas of Natural Constraints payments) that go to all farmers in designated areas, regardless as to whether they practise environmentally friendly farming.

Rural Development 2007-2013

A BirdLife study reviewed the potential effects on biodiversity of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Programmes (RDP) across the European Union. The study confirmed that, being based on solid principles of good policy-making, Rural Development policy has considerable potential to tackle the biodiversity challenge. On the other hand, although major improvements have been made in comparison with the previous programming period, the potential of Rural Development to achieve its objectives for biodiversity is still severely undermined by poorly designed schemes and insufficient allocation of resources, specifically to targeted biodiversity schemes.

Rural Development 2014-2020

- During this round of CAP reform (2014-2020), BirdLife Europe has worked hard towards making the environmental measures of pillar 2 more effective (the so called raising of the environmental baseline) and to get more money flowing into dedicated environmental measures. Although the final outcome can only be judged at the end of the next programming period and is based partially on the national implementation, the basic regulations are not promising.

  It is now clear that more money (in percentage) was lost from Pillar 2 than from Pillar 1 and several Member States will have the possibility to move even more money (so called reverse modulation) from targeted environmental measures to blunt income support. On top of that it is not sure that it will be financially attractive for Member States to move money towards targeted environmental schemes.

  Although the framework legislation does not seem too positive, there is still a lot to be won and lost on the ground. That is why the BirdLife Partnership is working with governments, farmers and other rural stakeholders to get the best out of this reform for nature and people.

- ## Agriculture section

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Publications

Briefings and Position Papers

Past events

- New rural development plans and the environment: The Hidden Truth (February 2016)
- Joint declaration of BirdLife EU Partners on Rural Development (June 2012)
- Rural development: A critical opportunity for people and biodiversity (November 2013)

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