



THE HIDDEN TRUTH – Slovakia

Environmental impact of new Rural Development Programmes – 2014-2020

One of the overarching aims of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform was to make it deliver more for the environment. This factsheet therefore analyses the quality of public spending. It looks at what hides behind the official numbers and what Slovak Rural Development spending means for the environment, specifically for biodiversity.

STATE OF PLAY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:

Both the intensification of agriculture in lowlands, accompanied by the loss of landscape elements and the abandonment of farming in mountains, are drivers of biodiversity loss in Slovakia.

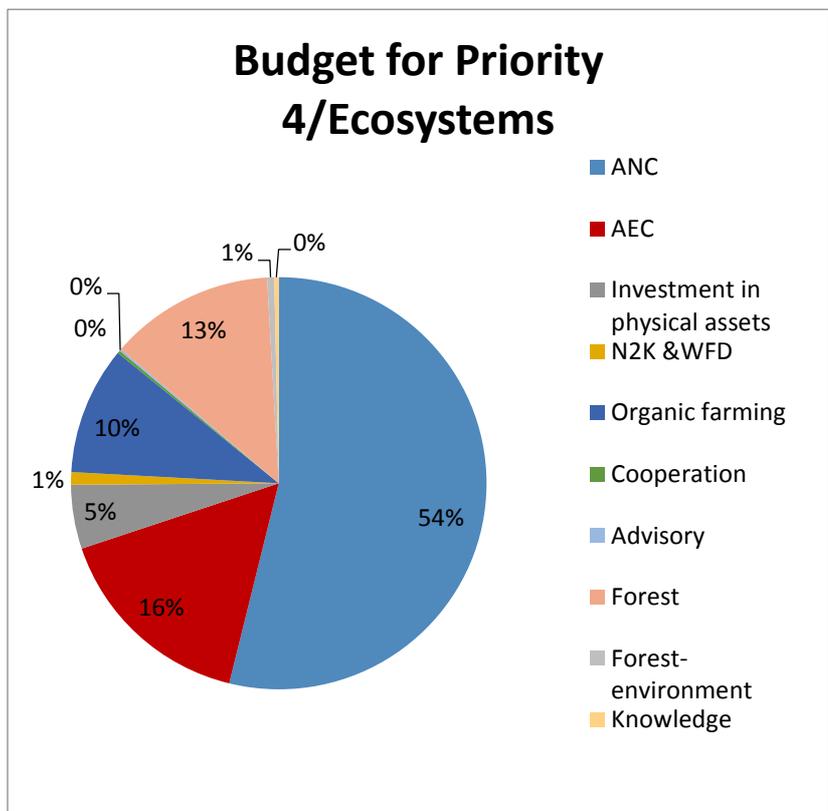
Of the total Slovak utilized agricultural areas (UAA), 28% is grassland. According to a 2013 assessment, 68% of grassland habitats protected under European legislation are in unfavourable status¹.

FARMLAND BIRD INDEX:

The Farmland bird index has decreased by 10% between 2005 and 2012. Some species that have been part of Slovak farmland for centuries have disappeared, such as European Roller and Black-tailed godwit, or are barely surviving, such as Great bustard. We are also seeing reductions in the populations of once very common species, such as Grey partridge or Skylark.

Priority 4: RURAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET FOR 'ECOSYSTEMS': theory and practice

The implementation of EU Rural Development (RD) programmes should fulfil a number of set objectives and priorities.



While 43% of the Slovak RD money has been allocated to measures that *should* directly benefit biodiversity, water and soil², the reality is that not all measures for which this money has been earmarked have high environmental value. These measures may, at best, benefit nature indirectly, such as payments for farming in Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC), but they are not tied to concrete environmental targets or conditions.

In Slovakia the largest share of money under this objective (53%) will go to ANC farmers (that farm 65% of farmland in Slovakia). Although this scheme is intended to address land abandonment, inadequate targeting does not prevent intensification and subsidising farmers realising environmentally harmful practices³.

The benefits of the RDP's "environmental" budget can be hampered by some investments, such as hydromeliorations.

Despite some safeguards included in the RDP, there is a big concern that these

¹ <http://www.sopsr.sk/natura/rep-2007/index.html>

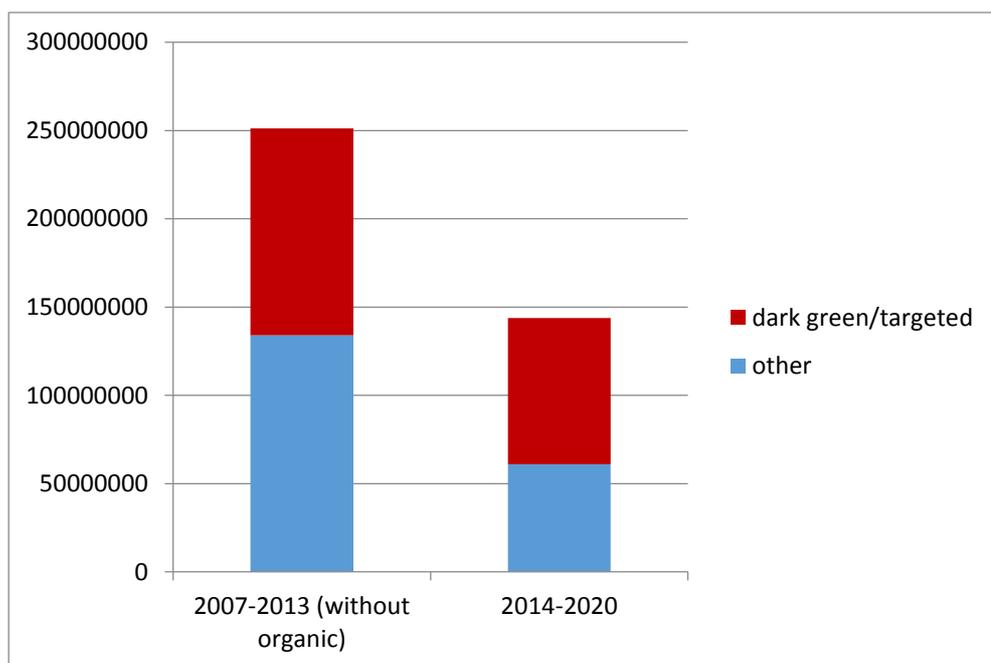
² Priority 4, as foreseen by the Rural Development Regulation, Art. 5

³ See SEA report (page 100) <https://www.enviroportal.sk/eia/dokument/213280>



investments can have a negative impact on the water regime of some wetland habitats and riparian vegetation.

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SPENDING: past vs. future



In Slovakia 143.7 million Euros (7% of RD money) will be spent on Agri-Environment measures (AEC) – this is a 43% cut compared to the previous spending period, despite the fact that Member States were required to maintain AEC funding levels⁴.

Despite the AEC budget being far from adequate, more than half of it will be spent on measures targeted directly at specific species, habitats or biodiversity problems, i.e. that are 'dark green' and are really tackling the issues at stake. However, 45.2 million Euros (31% of AEC budget) has been earmarked for 'integrated production' – a scheme with low standards and inadequate

monitoring of its environmental delivery.

FARM BIODIVERSITY CONTRACTS INSUFFICIENT TO REACH EU BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

The EU's Biodiversity Strategy clearly states that by 2020 the area of farmland covered by biodiversity-related measures must be maximised in order to achieve a measurable improvement of species dependent on, or affected by, agriculture. The Slovak government claims that 21% of its farmland will be covered under contracts for biodiversity protection, but measures under the new RDP which could be genuinely beneficial for biodiversity (targeted schemes and Natura 2000 payments) are only applicable to 8% of farmland. These measures include schemes for the protection of natural and semi-natural grasslands, schemes aiming for the protection of species, such as the European ground squirrel and the Great bustard, and a new scheme aiming to help pollinators and birds on arable land – multifunctional buffer strips. A scheme for the protection of grassland birds, which was part of 2007-2013 RDP, has been left out in this period, leaving populations of species such as Corncrake or Redshank without necessary protection from farming.

⁴ Rural Development Regulation, Recital 22.



INADEQUATE ACTION ON NATURA 2000

All of the identified 'dark green' measures address, in some way, some of the needs of the Natura 2000 network in Slovakia as required by the Rural Development Regulation⁵. Although 16% of the UAA is designated as Natura 2000, only 8% of UAA is under genuine biodiversity contracts, which leaves a large proportion of Natura 2000 areas without necessary measures. This is particularly true for the sites designated for the protection of birds.

Natura 2000 payments are of limited use as a tool in Slovakia due to delays in the adoption of the management plans for Natura 2000 sites. They will be applied only to 2665ha of grasslands.

Overall, our assessment is that **the RDP does not adequately target the needs of species and habitats of the Natura 2000 network.**

What do we mean by 'dark green' agri-environment measures:

The European Court of Auditors, in its special report from 2011* looking at effectiveness of agri-environment, recommended that agri-environment schemes should be more precisely targeted and that there should be a higher rate of EU contribution for sub-measures with a higher environmental potential. In our analysis we have looked at what proportion of agri-environment budget has been allocated to targeted, as we call them 'dark green', schemes for biodiversity. As EAFRD and Rural Development plans do not recognise such a category, we have worked with regional and national experts to assess measures, using the following principles: The scheme has been considered 'dark green' if it is targeted at specific species (group of species), habitats or a specific biodiversity problem (pollinator strips).

* **ECA Special report no 7/2011:** Is agri-environment support well designed and managed?

EUROPE NEEDS:

1. To ensure that a well-designed greening and reinforced cross compliance represent a firm baseline for Pillar 2 environmental measures. This could help free up money for more efficient and targeted measures that benefit the environment and biodiversity.

These baselines should be properly set and checked so as to create an equal level playing field for all farmers in Europe – special attention is needed on issues such as integrated pest management, water and soil. The Commission should urgently start to work on including the Water Framework Directive and Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive directly into cross compliance so that the uncertainty around what is the baseline and what is not, is removed.

2. To ensure that the CAP is designed in a way which helps reach the EU Biodiversity Strategy goals by 2020. So far evidence shows that the agriculture target is the most problematic.

In Pillar 2 this can only be done through proper funding of the Natura 2000 Network and the Priority 'Habitats and species' as defined in the Birds and Habitats Directives.

3. To have a genuine system for tracking environmental spending. Only measures with clear environmental objectives and delivery can be included. Areas of Natural Constraints (ANCs) must not be counted as environmentally-beneficial

⁵ Rural Development Regulation, Art. 8



measures as there are no environmental obligations or management requirements attached to the payments. *At best, ANC has an indirect positive effect for biodiversity and the environment. However, in the worst case they are just income support which is pushing damaging intensification. The purpose of the ANC payments – to fight against abandonment or compensate farmers to work in more difficult areas – remains difficult to justify when compared to the direct income support of the first pillar. At best it is proof of the duality of the CAP where Pillar 1 is a driver for large and intensified farms and Pillar 2 a way to counter this drive. This duality should be ended and a targeted instrument should be devised which supports extensive farming systems that provide high environmental value but are not economically viable.*

4. To ensure proper monitoring of the Rural Development schemes' delivery.
It is not possible to know if investments in rural development are really delivering benefits for biodiversity without this evaluation.

Conclusion: Europe needs to take a proper look at the whole of its agricultural policy and how it is working together or against environmental commitments and priorities. Even if Rural Development can be a large part of the answer and has the potential to play a positive role in many parts of Europe, the figures unfortunately show adjustments are necessary for this policy to truly deliver towards its objectives. It is now clear that this reformed CAP still has a long way to go before it can be called green.

SLOVAKIA NEEDS:

1. To invest more resources into targeted schemes supporting wildlife on agricultural land, including in Natura 2000 areas.
2. A system to monitor the effectiveness of the agri-environment schemes for the period 2014-2020 in order to improve the design of the schemes in the future.
3. An effective setup of targeted and regional advisory systems supporting farmers in implementation of measures requiring nature-friendly management.

SOURCES

EC factsheet on 201-2020 Rural development programme for Slovakia: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files/sk/factsheet_en.pdf

The data in this factsheet is based on the first version of the Rural Development Programme in Slovakia

CONTACT

BirdLife Europe
Trees Robijns
Phone: +32 (0) 2 238 50 91
Email: Trees.Robijns@birdlife.org

European Environmental Bureau
Faustine Bas-Defossez
Phone: +32 (0) 2 790 88 14
Email: Faustine.Bas-Defossez@eeb.org

SOS/BirdLife Slovakia
Tatiana Nemcova
Phone: +421 (0) 944 209 893
Email: Nemcova@vtaky.sk

CEPTA - Centre for Sustainable Alternatives
Daniel Lešínský
Phone: +421 (0) 905 581 076
Email: Lesinsky@changenet.sk