

THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROGRAMME FOR BUILDING SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

A REGION IN TRANSITION

Under the 1994-99 round of Structural Funds support, Northern Ireland had been accorded the status of an Objective 1 Region which recognises it as a region whose development was lagging behind others in the European Community and warranted support from all 4 Structural Funds viz:-

ERDF:	European Regional Development Fund
ESF:	European Social Fund
EAGGF:	European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund
FIFG:	Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance

For the current round of funding (2000-2006) Northern Ireland exceeded the qualifying criterion having a per capita GDP greater than 75% of the community average. However Northern Ireland was able to avail of newly introduced transitional arrangements that provided former Objective 1 regions access to the 4 Structural Funds but on a declining basis so that it did not experience the adverse effect of the abrupt ending. (The Highlands and Islands Region of Scotland is similarly affected.) Under these arrangements Northern Ireland secured euro 890.5m for the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity (a Transitional Objective 1 Programme). This is complemented by funding for a second PEACE Programme.

Development of the Programme

An independent ex-ante evaluation was carried out to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Northern Ireland as a region and its sources of potential growth and development. This work provided the basis for the extensive consultation which led to the development of a Structural Funds Plan setting out proposals for

the Northern Ireland Community Support Framework (CSF), the Northern Ireland Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity and PEACE II Programmes. The two Programmes aim to operate in an integrated and complementary fashion while maintaining the distinctiveness of each. The Northern Ireland Programme for , Building Sustainable Prosperity addresses the wider developmental issues facing Northern Ireland and represents the convergence of the Programme for Government and the strategic objectives of the European Union in the application of Structural Funds.

Structure of the Programme

The Programme is divided into 5 Priorities which explain the strategic context for the actions proposed in the Priority and how it develops the relevant CSF Priority. They are as follows:-

- Priority 1: Economic Growth and Competitiveness
- Priority 2: Employment
- Priority 3: Urban and Social Revitalisation
- Priority 4: Agriculture, Rural Development, Forestry and Fisheries
- Priority 5: The Environment

Each Priority is divided into Measures which set out the specific issues to be addressed and the outcome intended to be secured. An indication of the funding associated with each Measure is included in the text.

A range of targets and indicators is included for each Priority which will allow for the structured monitoring of the impact of the actions undertaken.

Priorities

Priority 1: Economic Growth and Competitiveness

The overall aim of Priority 1 is derived from the CSF Priorities of Economic Growth and Research and Balanced Regional on one hand and on Urban and Rural Development in relation to regional infrastructure. Its overall objective is “to produce a fast-growing, competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy where there are plentiful opportunities and a population equipped to grasp them”. The EU contribution to Priority 1 amounts to 352 meuros and it is divided into 2 Sub-priorities, as follows:-

Sub-priority 1 (a) – Supporting Business Competitiveness

Under this Sub-priority, the Measures are designed to meet the objective of securing a competitive economy through:-

- promoting competitiveness, enterprise, innovation and creativity;
- making Northern Ireland more attractive for inward investment; and
- increasing Northern Ireland’s attractiveness to visitors.

The Measures in this Sub-priority are:-

	Financial Weighting (Meuros)
Measure 1: Business Support	116
Measure 2: Research and Technology, Transfer and Technology Development	50
Measure 3: Tourism	43
Measure 4: Local Economic Development	40
Measure 5: Information Society	12

Sub-priority 1 (b) - Creating the Conditions for Regional Competitiveness

If the objectives of improved regional competitiveness and greater employment growth are to be achieved, appropriate framework conditions and an environment conducive to entrepreneurial activity must be promoted in the region. This means that in order to maximise output and employment, enterprises must have available a full range of indirect supports in sectors such as physical infrastructure and telecommunications.

While Northern Ireland has good physical infrastructure in certain fields, for example, ports and airports, in recent years deficiencies in the roads, public transport, energy, telecommunications and water and sewerage infrastructure have become apparent. Action is therefore required to create the necessary infrastructure that will support competitiveness.

The Measures included in this Sub-priority are:-

	Financial Weighting (Meuros)
Measure 6: Roads and Transport	61
Measure 7: Telecoms	25
Measure 8: Energy	5

Priority 2: Employment

This Priority acts as the umbrella for all actions funded from the European Social Fund and addresses specific labour market needs of those in education who are about to enter the labour market, those who are unemployed and those who are in employment. In doing so it implements the European Employment Strategy in

Northern Ireland. It also addresses a number of identified labour market weaknesses.

The Measures under this Priority are as follows:-

	Financial Weighting (Meuros)
Measure 1: Education and Skills Development	91
Measure 2: Tackling the Flows into Long-term Unemployment	8
Measure 3: Promoting a Labour Market Open To All	71
Measure 4: Improving Opportunities for Lifelong Learning	36
Measure 5: Education and Training ICT and Infrastructure Support	61
Measure 6: Developing Entrepreneurship	7
Measure 7: Human Resource Development in Companies	47
Measure 8: The Enhancement of Women	<u>20</u>
	<u>341</u>

Priority 3: Urban and Social Revitalisation

The ex-ante evaluation showed the need for action for urban and social revitalisation by reference to the effect of the Troubles, including the impact on the physical, social and economic conditions of cities, towns and villages across Northern Ireland.

While previous investment in Northern Ireland's cities, towns and villages produced a more satisfactory urban environment, there remain many areas of towns and cities which offer little reward for private investment and which are unlikely to provide a stimulus for development. In those areas the processes of urban regeneration and community development can together make an impact on disadvantage and on community divisions.

The most disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas are not likely to participate in economic progress unless attention is paid to their specific needs by overcoming problems of access. There is a need to provide those

communities with community infrastructure and targeted actions to address their specific problems.

The Priority addresses the issues and is implemented by 4 Measures:-

	Meuro
Measure 1: Urban Revitalisation	31
Measure 2: Advice and Information Services	2
Measure 3: Community Sustainability	9
Measure 4: Investing in Early Learning	<u>8</u>
	<u>50</u>

Priority 4: Agriculture, Rural Development Forestry and Fisheries

This Priority addresses the issues affecting rural areas. It extends beyond those engaged in the agri-food industry, the strengthening of the economy and social infrastructure of rural areas with a particular emphasis on disadvantage. It recognises the responsibility to conserve and enhance the rural environment through the promotion of environmentally responsible management of agri-food, fishing and forestry activities.

Its focus is on the development of a sustainable and diverse rural economy through action on three fronts:-

- assisting the industry to become more efficient and effective while maintaining the region's largely extensive, environmentally-friendly farming image;
- developing the capacity of the industry and the wider rural population to take advantage of opportunities provided through new technologies, new markets and the potential afforded by a return to a secure and peaceful society; and

- tackling the significant socio-economic differentials that exist between Northern Ireland's disadvantaged rural areas/groups and the overall community in the region by diversifying the rural economy to provide alternative sources of employment and income for rural people, both on- and off farm.

In relation to the fishing industry, Measures are directed towards:-

- continuing attention to balancing the scale of fishing effort against available stocks;
- upgrading, securing and enhancing the infrastructure needed to underpin the needs of the catching and processing sectors;
- a clear focus on quality at every stage of the industry;
- Support for collective actions in all sectors.

The indicative funding allocation for these Measures are as follows:-

Measure	EAGGF/FIFG Allocation (meuro)
Training	6.3
Improving Processing & Marketing of Agricultural Products	40.8
Forestry	0.5
Article 33	30.4
Setting up farm relief and farm management services	
Marketing of Quality Agriculture Products	
Basic Services for the rural economy and population	
Renovation and Development of villages and protection and conservation of the rural heritage	
Diversification of Agricultural Activities and activities close to agriculture to provide multiple activities or alternative incomes	
Development and improvement of infrastructure connected with the development of agriculture	
Protection of the environment in connection with agriculture, forestry and landscape conservation as well as the improvement of animal welfare	
Financial Engineering	
Fisheries Measures	29

TOTAL	107
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Priority 5: The Environment

This Priority recognises that Northern Ireland's natural and built environment is a valuable asset that must be protected and managed in a positive way for the benefit of the whole community. While many indicators of environmental quality are improving, there remain areas and aspects in which the quality and management of the environment in the Region falls below acceptable levels.

This Priority takes action to:-

- correct existing environmental problems;
- understand and manage the growing pressures on the environment; and
- develop a proper awareness and understanding of the environment.

This will be implemented by means of a single Measure, divided into several activities, funded from ERDF. The Measure will seek to support:-

- actions to achieve the highest standards of water and air quality and make Northern Ireland widely known for an outstandingly clean environment;
- the conservation and appreciation of the natural biodiversity;
- the character, quality and enjoyment of the landscape; and
- the conservation and appreciation of the built and cultural heritage.

The funding associated with this Measure amounts to **37.7** meuros.

Technical Assistance

A further 3 meuros have been identified to resource the management and implementation of the Programme. It provides for the monitoring and evaluation of the Programmes, for publicity and for the costs associated with the Programme Monitoring Committee and half of the costs of the CSF Monitoring Committee, the balance being contributed from the PEACE Programme.

Information

Detailed information on the Programme can be obtained from the European Structural Funds Website www.nics.gov.uk/eu. If you have any difficulties in accessing the text, help can be sought from any of the following sources:-

Department of Finance and Personnel, European Division, 028-90523963

Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, Gabrielle Doherty, 02890238645

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), 02890329373

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID), 02890239619

Programming of Economic Growth and Competitiveness



