



Action Plan

Ireland – Northern & Western Region



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly



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General information

Project:	AgroRES https://www.interregeurope.eu/agrores/
Partner organisation:	Atlantic Technological University, Sligo Campus (ATU Sligo) (Formerly the Institute of Technology, Sligo (IT Sligo))
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant):	Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)
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Policy context

- The Action Plan aims to impact:
- ☐ Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
 - ☐ European Territorial Cooperation programme
 - ☒ Other regional development policy instrument

Policy instruments addressed

Northern & Western Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032

The primary statutory purpose of the Strategy is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 - which links planning and investment through the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the ten-year National Development Plan (NDP) - including the economic and climate policies of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the region. The regional tier of governance in Ireland sits in the middle of the planning hierarchy and the development objectives of the RSES¹ will be implemented and amplified through the review by local authorities of all development plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), to ensure their consistency with the RSES. In addition, key state agencies and sectoral bodies

¹ <https://www.nwra.ie/pdfs/NWRA-RSES-2020-2032.pdf>



will review their strategies and investment plans in light of the adoption of the RSES, ensuring consistency with it.

The RSES notes that the region has a huge potential for growth in renewables to support the environmental goods and services sector and states that policies must encourage CO2 emissions reduction, increased renewable energy production and increased R&D focused on technological application to renewable energy. The specific related Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) include:

RPO 4.16 *The NWRA shall co-ordinate the identification of potential renewable energy sites of scale in collaboration with Local Authorities and other stakeholders within 3 years of the adoption of the RSES. The identification of such sites (which may extend to include energy storage solutions) will be based on numerous site selection criteria including environmental matters, and potential grid connections.*

RPO 4.17 *To position the region to avail of the emerging global market in renewable energy by:*

- *Stimulating the development and deployment of the most advantageous renewable energy systems Supporting research and innovation*
- *Encouraging skills development and transferability*
- *Raising awareness and public understanding of renewable energy and encourage market opportunities for the renewable energy industry to promote the development and growth of renewable energy businesses*
- *Encourage the development of the transmission and distribution grids to facilitate the development of renewable energy projects and the effective utilisation of the energy generated from renewable sources having regard to the future potential of the region over the lifetime of the Strategy and beyond.*

The RSES notes the higher proportion of employment in the Northwest in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries, and that 80% of the region's population lives in rural towns, villages and the countryside. As such the role of agriculture, and its inclusion in climate action, is noted as crucial to future development. The RSES also highlights the importance of the Agri-food sector to the region and its role in the development of the Bioeconomy & Circular Economy. In particular the RSES notes that the agri-food sector is entering into a period of radical transformation underpinned by smart farming practices, growth in global demand and consumer sophistication.

The RSES includes several policy objectives to support growth, innovation and resilience in this sector, including but not limited to the following:

RPO 4.24 *To support the growth of the region's agrifood industry, and its SME's. This includes the expansion of the sector where already established in rural areas, as well as in small towns, and villages, where expansion should be supported.*

RPO 4.26 *Support the further development of AgInnovation clusters in the Northern and Western Region - pushing convergence between farm, research, technology and commercialisation.*

The RSES notes the key role of Teagasc, in the Agri-food sector, as the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry. Teagasc deliver courses through their colleges and local centres, with higher-level courses also being delivered in partnership with third-level colleges. Demonstratable examples across the region include Ballyhaise Agricultural College, which is one of the

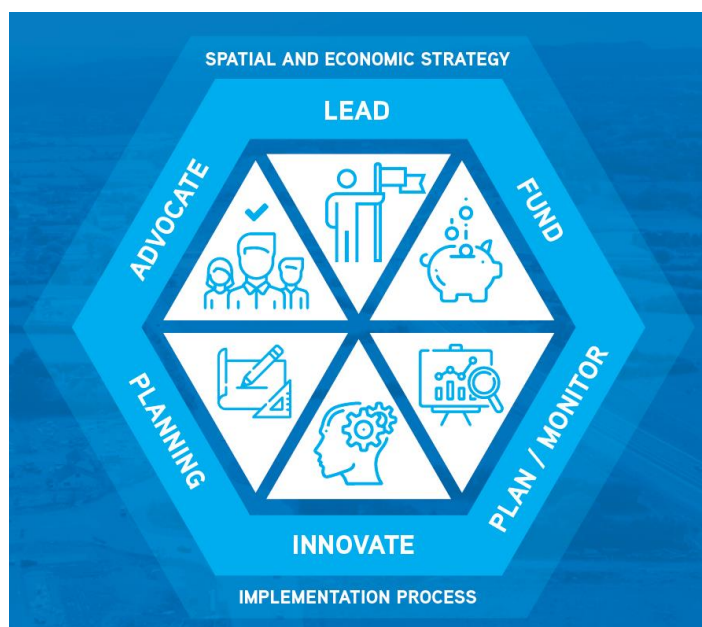


five Teagasc colleges nationally, and the Athenry campus which provides Research, Development and Innovation support to the sector. These centres are well placed to provide new levels of innovation to support employment growth.

IT Sligo are now amalgamating with our partners GMIT and LYIT as the new Technological University in the west and north-west – Atlantic Technological University (ATU). The new ATU is included in the RSES as the major 3rd level education & research collaborative initiative in the Northwest. The ATU campuses are well located throughout the region and will provide a valuable pathway for delivery of the Action Plan.

The RSES concludes with an Implementation Process, illustrated below, which highlights the required regional partnerships and community engagement:

“The ambition of this strategy requires alignment and coordination between central and local government, the private sector, institutions and nongovernment organisations and most importantly our communities. It shall require collaborative investments and actions by many parties to achieve the targets and actions outlined in the strategy.”



RSES Implementation Process

The RSES Implementation Plan includes significant monitoring requirements to facilitate “*continual improvement of policy interventions as a result of experience gained*”. The RSES also recognises the continually evolving national conditions and the need for the RSES to be a ‘living strategy’.



Action Plan

The Regional Self-Assessment showed that uptake of RE in the agricultural & rural sectors remains very low in our region. While better opportunities are emerging in Ireland due to improve support mechanisms, the significant weaknesses and threats include:

- Small farms with limited financial or technical capacity for investment
- Beef and sheep farming are not energy intensive – low potential for self-consumption
- Administrative burden of support schemes and regulatory requirements

In addition to this the research of Good Practices and knowledge exchange, both in Ireland and partner regions, shows that a common element in successful projects is the support of a trusted regional advisory service e.g., an Energy Agency.

The aim of the Action Plan is support increased uptake of renewable energy technologies in the agricultural and rural sectors, by addressing these key challenges. The proposed actions are:

- 1. Revision and amendment of the Northern & Western Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032 through the monitoring of RES projects in farming sector**
- 2. Establishment new Energy Agency service in the Northwest region to provide a broader long-term support for energy projects and initiatives**

Type of action: Change in the management of the policy instrument

According to the Programme manual, the proposed improvement of the PI is envisaged type 2, improved governance of the RSES:

- On action 1, with the revision and amendment of the policy instrument, through the monitoring of RES projects in farming sector thanks to the establishment of a technical advice service.
- On action 2, to support the creation of a new Energy Agency to provide independent advice on energy solutions to enterprises, homeowners and communities the region

So, the expected impact from both actions will be a type 2: improved governance of the policy instrument.



ACTION 1: Revision and amendment of the Northern & Western Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2020-2032 through the monitoring of RES projects in farming sector

Background

The Regional Self-Assessment identified a number of new and emerging opportunities which are highly relevant to the agricultural sector, including:

- **Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH):** Very high potential for uptake of bioenergy and heat pump systems in the pig, poultry and horticulture sectors.
- **Microgeneration Support Scheme (MSS):** Excess generation export for systems up to 50kW. Applicable to many sectors including pig, poultry, food production and dairy.
- **Small-Scale Generation (SSG):** Emerging policy of interest to all landowners.

The sharing and research of Good Practices and technical site visits throughout the AgroRES project have demonstrated the availability and replicability of Renewable Energy solutions for the Agri-sector in our region. A common factor in most successful projects is the guidance of a trusted local or regional agency, rather than reliance on the market. Many of the AgroRES partners have identified Good Practices on the provision of guidance to target sectors:

Good Practices for Guidance to Target Sectors:			
Good Practice	Partner (Country)	Key aspects for learning & knowledge transfer	Reference
<i>Power from Biomass – a project promoting renewable energy production</i>	Regional Council of North Karelia (Finland)	Addressing knowledge gaps directly with farms. Providing guides on specific technologies and implementation pathways.	Link
<i>The project "A nationwide system of advisory support for the public & housing sector and enterprises in the field of energy efficiency and RES"</i>	Lubelskie Voivodeship (Poland)	Independent advisory service to raise awareness and increase understanding of technologies for potential investors. Advisors in specific targeted fields, which is now a relevant approach for emerging and evolving supports in Ireland.	
<i>Prosumers guide – an educational platform for promoting the production and use of energy from RES sources</i>	Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Agency (Romania)	Guidance for Solar PV prosumers on technology, system size, implementation and tariff schemes.	Link

One of the most inspirational Good Practices for this Action Plan is the '***Power from Biomass – a project promoting renewable energy production***' shared by the Regional Council of North Karelia (Finland).



This Good Practice has informed the design of our Action Plan through several factors including:

- Delivery by a partnership of local regional actors including Pielinen Karelia Development Center Ltd (PIKES), the Finnish Forest Centre, Karelia University of Applied Sciences and Central Karelia Development Company KETI Ltd.
- Targeting the farming sector
- Provision of specific technology guidance and implementation paths
- Use of Good Practices (case studies) as training tools

Our Action Plan is design on these principles and also takes into account the challenges identified by the Good Practice owners, PIKES. We will guide our Action Plan with a Steering Group of regional trusted organisations. The delivery of the main outputs will include Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority), one of our key stakeholders in the AgroRES project. The Teagasc Advisory service is a well-established structure providing a wide range of practical, financial, technical and environmental training opportunities for farming and farm family members. ATU Sligo, working with the NWRA, will coordinate the Action Plan and provide technical input and design.

Activities

In order to amend the RSES, it is necessary to undertake the following activities:

1. Establishment of a new technical advisory service for financial, technical and administrative assessment for the implementation of RES in the Agri-sector

As previously noted, the Teagasc Advisory panels are a well-established structure providing a wide range of practical, financial, technical and environmental training opportunities for farming and farm family members. However, the current panels do not have a specific service for energy technologies. Therefor this new service is crucial to support farmers in making investment decisions on renewable energy technologies. The RSES Implementation Plan requires the support of regional stakeholders in to report on progress made in the Regional Policy Objectives. This new advisory service will provide the monitoring link between farmers and the NWRA for feedback on the uptake of renewable energy technologies.

Subtasks:

1.1. Compilation of relevant information/materials to be provided on the technical/administrative/financial assessment

ATU Sligo and Teagasc will design and develop guidance toolkits for the main current and emerging Renewable Energy pathways in the Agri-sector:

- Biomass heating systems and the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH)²
- Solar PV and the Microgeneration Support Scheme (MSS)³

² <https://www.seai.ie/business-and-public-sector/business-grants-and-supports/support-scheme-renewable-heat/>

³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b1f8e-micro-generation/>



- Solar PV and Battery systems for Dairy Farms

Subject to policy development in the timeframe of Phase 1, we may also include:

- Solar PV and small-wind and the Support Scheme for Small Scale Generation⁴

The guidance toolkits will address appropriate applications, estimating system sizes, regulatory aspects (planning, grid connection, licences), support scheme navigation. The toolkits will be aimed at farmers considering investments in order to help them assess market offerings.

1.2. Deployment of the technical advisory service

The new technical advisory service will be deployed through the existing Teagasc Farm Advisory panels using the guidance tools developed above. Advisors will be selected for the new service by invitation and guided in the use of the toolkits. This service will be deployed by direct liaison between the Advisor and the farmer through face-to-face meetings on farm sites and direct correspondence through phone calls and emails.

1.3. Monitoring of the implementation of new RES projects in the Agri-sector

A reporting template will be to the Advisors to record and report the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) back to ATU Sligo for delivery to NWRA, including:

- Number advisory services requests
- Number of applications to target supports e.g., SSRH, MSS
- Number of new renewable energy projects implemented
- Noted feedback from applicants experience

1.4. Periodic meetings with managing authorities to report results

ATU Sligo will meet with NWRA on a quarterly schedule during the Action Plan implementation to report on the KPIs and general feedback.

1.5. Elaboration of a proposal to amend the RSES based on results monitored

NWRA and ATU Sligo will analyse the KPIs and feedback each quarter to explore the potential to amend the RSES as part of its Implementation Process.

1.6. Submission of proposal and presentation to the NWRA

The role of the established RSES Oversight Committee is to:

- Assess issues that impact upon the effectiveness or performance of the strategy, and
- Evaluate the progress made across all Regional Policy Objectives

ATU Sligo will prepare a report at the end of the Action Plan to present the key findings during its implementation. The NWRA prepare a report every 2 years which monitors the progress of the RSES and provides an opportunity for amendment according to the findings.

1.7. Revision and amendment of the RSES

The RSES Oversight Committee will review and amend the RSES taking into account the results of the monitoring process through the advice services.

⁴ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b1fbe-micro-generation/#small-scale-generation>



Players involved

The primary organisations involved in this action, and their roles, are described below:

Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)

- Policy instrument owner and Managing Authority
- AgroRES Partner
- Action Plan Steering Group chair

Atlantic Technological University, Sligo (ATU Sligo)

- AgroRES Partner
- Technical input and design
- Action Plan monitoring and reporting

Teagasc

- AgroRES Stakeholder
- Action Plan Steering Group member
- Technical input
- Coordination of Farm Advisor panels

Timeframe

The timeframe for the Sub-Actions and Tasks is outlined below.

											PHASE 2													
Sub-Actions & Tasks				2022							2022					2023								
				M30	M31	M32	M33	M34	M35	M36	M37	M38	M39	M40	M41	M42	M43	M44	M45	M46	M47	M48		
				01	02	03	04	05	06	07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	01	02	03	04	05	06	07		
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1.5. Elaboration of a proposal to amend the RSES based on results monitored																								
1.6. Submission of proposal and presentation to the NWRA																								
1.7. Revision and amendment of the RSES																								

Costs

The main costs will be from creation of the guidance tools and coordination with the Farm Advisors. This will involve the following approximate time input:

- ATU Sligo: 8 days x 1 person = €3,200
- Teagasc: 3 days x 1 person = €2,250

This will be provided by the resources currently in ATU Sligo and Teagasc.



The deployment of the new energy related technical advisory service will be within the existing Farm Advisor panels. Therefore, no significant new costs are involved in this.

Funding sources

The costs noted above are related to existing staff costs, this will be provided by ATU Sligo and Teagasc.



ACTION 2: Establishment of a new Energy Agency service in the Northwest region to provide a broader long-term support for energy projects and initiatives

Background

Among the weaknesses and threats in the SWOT analysis, key challenges relate to the capacity of farmers to research and invest in renewable energy and the challenge of navigating support mechanisms. Similar challenges have been identified in other AgroRES partner assessments including:

AGENEX (Spain):

- Complicated administrative processes for grid-connected renewable energy systems
- Lack of information by the population regarding the energy services business

Regional Council of North Karelia (Finland):

- Failing to change the mindset in agriculture sector towards more positive in terms of RE investments

Agenzia Regionale per lo Sviluppo e l'Innovazione dell'Agricoltura del Lazio (Italy):

- The heaviness and complexity of bureaucratic practices

The research of projects both in Ireland and partner countries shows that many of the Good Practices identified in the AgroRES project have been facilitated by a local trusted and independent Energy Agency. There is no active Energy Agency in the Northern & Western Region. This has been identified by stakeholders as a crucial aspect to many climate action targets. The Energy Agencies active in other regions support energy projects by addressing the following:

- Providing trusted advice on appropriate technologies (and avoiding inappropriate installations)
- Being informed on regulatory requirements
- Providing administration support and guidance to navigate support schemes

Some of the best examples set by others include Tipperary Energy Agency (www.tippenergy.ie) and Extremadura Energy Agency (Agenex, <http://www.agenex.net/en/home>). Both of these agencies were first established as part of the **EU SAVE II Programme**.

An Energy Agency dedicated to the Northwest Region will significantly improve the potential for farms, businesses, communities and individuals to participate in the Clean Energy Transition, by providing trusted guidance on technical, regulatory and financial challenges.



Activities

In order to support the creation of a new Energy Agency for the region, the following activities will be carried out:

2. Produce a comprehensive business plan for a new Energy Agency

ATU Sligo have previously drafted a business plan for energy agencies of varying scale and role for parts to the region. As the policy landscape and global energy market have recently changed dramatically, the business plan must be reviewed and updated for a more targeted approach. Priming funding is likely to be required to provide the initial capacity for the Agency as an enabling phase to become self-sustaining. In the long term the aim for the Agency is to become a self-governing and regional leader, emulating the example set by others such as Tipperary Energy Agency and Extremadura Energy Agency.

Subtasks:

2.1. Identify best options for the Energy Agency structure and scale

Existing successful Energy Agency models are often autonomous, not-for-profit, companies with strong partnerships with Local Authorities. We will explore the best options for the region which may include multiple entities serving sub-regional areas such as counties. Strategic regional partnerships with Local Authorities and/or Development Agencies will also be identified.

2.2. Engage with the local supply chains and national funding bodies

Evidence shows that successful Energy Agencies do not thrive in isolation, but rather in strategic partnership or working agreements with local market actors and funding bodies. The energy services supply chain in the region is not absent, but is very fragmented and consists of organisations acting largely independently. However, there is a considerable cohort of actors to work with.

We will identify best routes to partnership between the Energy Agency and the local supply chain. This also will facilitate partnerships in the supply chain to provide a more complete energy project service, manage grant administration and coordination with businesses (including farmers). These routes may include partnerships, contract frameworks and energy suppliers.

In addition to this the national funding bodies such as SEAI are the primary leading agency on how supports for energy projects are deployed. We will examine the current and emerging supports in order to integrate these in the business plan.

2.3. Submission of proposal and presentation to the NWRA

ATU Sligo will prepare a report at the end of the Action Plan and present the business plan to the NWRA. The NWRA will review and make recommendations in RSES amendments, as deemed appropriate, to the relevant Local Authorities for inclusion in the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).

2.4. Establishment of the Regional Energy Agency

This will include the setting up of the legal structure of the Agency, including a Board of Directors from regional stakeholders and registration of the entity with the Company Registration Office. This new legal structure will be available to staff the agency and carry out business in the region.



Players involved

The primary organisations involved in this action, and their roles, are described below:

Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)

- Policy instrument owner and Managing Authority
- AgroRES Partner
- Action Plan Steering Group chair

Atlantic Technological University, Sligo (ATU Sligo)

- AgroRES Partner
- Business plan development
- Action Plan monitoring and reporting

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI)

- AgroRES Stakeholder
- Advice on national policy and supports

Timeframe

The timeframe for the Sub-Actions and Tasks is outlined below.

												PHASE 2													
Sub-Actions & Tasks	2022							2022					2023												
	M30	M31	M32	M33	M34	M35	M36	M37	M38	M39	M40	M41	M42	M43	M44	M45	M46	M47	M48						
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	01	02	03	04	05	06	07						
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2.3. Submission of proposal and presentation to the NWRA																									
2.4. Establishment of the Reginal Energy Agency																									

Costs

The main costs will be from business plan analyses and engagement with key players. This will be provided by the existing staff resources currently in ATU Sligo. The registration of a legal entity for the agency will require the services of a company formation agent, which will be approximately €1,500.

Funding sources

The costs noted above related to existing staff costs will be provided by ATU Sligo. The cost for the formation of the legal entity will be provided by ATU Sligo, NWRA or the relevant Local Authority.



Stakeholder commitment

On behalf of:	Northern & Western Regional Assembly
Signature:	<div>DocuSigned by: <i>David Minton</i> 6565E00794A9467...</div>
Name:	David Minton
Date:	29/07/2022
Stamp (if available):	

On behalf of:	Atlantic Technological University
Signature:	<i>John Bartlett</i>
Name:	Dr John Bartlett
Date:	29/07/2022
Stamp (if available):	