

## IMPLEMENTATION STAGE OF THE MAIN RURAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS FUNDED BY THE EAFRD UNDER THE CAP STRATEGIC PLAN 2023–2027, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *The paper analyzes the implementation stage of the main rural development interventions financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) under Romania's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027. Using official AFIR data (October 2025), the study identifies the three most demanded measures: DR-22 – investments in processing and storage of agricultural products, DR-25 – modernization of irrigation infrastructure, and DR-30 – support for young farmers. The analysis of submitted, contracted, and paid projects highlights significant implementation gaps, emphasizing the dominance of investment-oriented measures and the essential role of generational renewal in agriculture. The study concludes with recommendations to enhance administrative efficiency and improve the absorption of EAFRD funds to foster sustainable rural development in Romania.*

**Key words:** CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, EAFRD, AFIR, implementation, interventions, Romania

### INTRODUCTION

Rural development continues to occupy a central position within the strategic agenda of the European Union, being a fundamental component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027. Rural development constitutes the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, complementing Pillar I [...] by consolidating the social, economic, and environmental sustainability of rural areas. [7] Each EU Member State must draw up its own national CAP Strategic Plan, which should combine funding for income support, rural development, and market measures. [12,14] Sustainable rural development has become a strategic direction in the European integration process due to its role in reducing the economic and social disparities that separate rural from urban areas. [2]

This policy framework promotes a multidimensional approach that integrates economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion, aiming to ensure a cohesive and resilient rural fabric across member states. Romania's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (CAP SP 2023-2027) translates these priorities into a national framework that seeks to enhance the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, foster sustainable resource management, and reinforce the socio-economic resilience of rural communities in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal and the "Farm to Fork" and "Biodiversity" strategies.

The CAP National Strategic Plan for the 2023–2027 period brings together all types of interventions supported by European funds within a single framework. It integrates both direct payments—decoupled and coupled, and sectoral interventions, such as those intended for the fruit and vegetable sector, financed by the EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund), as well as rural development measures, mainly focused on investment, financed by the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development). In addition, where necessary, the plan also includes interventions supported by the national budget, such as transitional national support. [1,14]

Specialised literature underlines that the aim is to achieve a more coherent integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives, consolidating the role of rural development as a strategic vector for territorial transformation. [3,4]

The present analysis focuses on the implementation of rural development interventions financed under Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy, which supports investment-oriented measures aimed at increasing the competitiveness of agricultural holdings, improving rural infrastructure, promoting innovation, and strengthening the socio-economic resilience of rural areas through EAFRD funding. The absorption of rural development funds is an important objective for Romania. [11] Rural development programs are co-financed from national budgets and can be drawn up either at national level or at the regional level. [3,5]

The main aim of the research was to identify the most demanded rural development interventions in relation to their financial allocations, to assess whether these allocations effectively address the real needs of rural stakeholders, and to formulate recommendations regarding the potential reallocation of funds toward measures demonstrating the highest demand and implementation capacity. By doing so, the research provides an empirical foundation for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of EAFRD fund utilization and for guiding future strategic adjustments in Romania's rural development policy.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The present study is based on a comprehensive documentary analysis combining specialized literature with official policy and implementation documents related to rural development in Romania. The main sources consulted include the CAP SP 2023–2027 for Romania, the Annual Implementation Reports, and the official report entitled “Status of the Implementation of rural development interventions financed by the EAFRD under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027” available online as of mid- October 2025.

The empirical analysis relied on official data provided by the Agency for Rural Investments Financing (AFIR), focusing on the main rural development interventions financed through the EAFRD: The dataset included indicators such as:

- ✓ the public financial allocation per intervention,
- ✓ the number of funding applications submitted,
- ✓ the number of selected applications,
- ✓ the number of signed financing contracts and
- ✓ the total value of payments actually made under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027.

The data were systematically processed and compared to highlight differences between implementation stages (submission, selection, contracting, and payment), with the objective of determining the absorption rate of EAFRD funds and identifying key factors influencing implementation efficiency.

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The analysis of financial allocations corresponding to the main rural development interventions under Pillar II of Romania's CAP SP 2023–2027 highlights a clear policy orientation toward investment-oriented measures with a structural impact on the rural economy. Recent analyses show that the experience accumulated during the 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 periods has generated both structural progress and persistent difficulties related to the fragmentation of holdings, administrative capacity, and fund absorption. [9,10] Therefore, monitoring the implementation status of the EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) interventions within the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan becomes essential for evaluating the opportunities and limitations of the new programming model.

Some authors consider that Romanian agriculture retains an outdated structure, which necessitates profound reforms. They argue that, in the current 2023–2027 cycle,

financial support should be reconfigured by granting a greater role to national decisions so that resources are prioritized toward sectors essential for domestic consumption. [8]

The largest allocation is directed to DR-36 – LEADER (Community-Led Local Development, CLLD), amounting to €500 million, which underlines the importance of community-driven governance and local partnerships in fostering bottom-up rural development.

The interventions DR-22 and DR-25, with allocations of €459.36 million and €400 million, respectively, demonstrate a consistent policy focus on modernizing production infrastructure and increasing value added in agriculture through investments in processing, storage, and irrigation infrastructure. These measures are directly aligned with the European objectives of enhancing food system resilience and adapting agriculture to climate change.

At the same time, DR-30 - Support for young farmers (€250.69 million) and DR-20 -Investments in the livestock sector (€224.61 million) reflect Romania’s strategic commitment to generational renewal and the diversification of the productive base in rural areas - two essential pillars for maintaining the socio-economic vitality of the countryside. Romania has a large number of farmers, but their average age is high compared to that of farmers in the European Union. [3,4,6] Consequently, this type of support has contributed to the rejuvenation of farmer generations, but it has not managed to cover the interests of all applicants.

Overall, the structure of financial allocations confirms that Romania has prioritized, during the current programming period, measures promoting investment, innovation, and participatory local development, thereby reinforcing the transition toward a sustainable and competitive rural development model.

**Table 1.**  
**Rural development interventions with the highest public allocation under Romania’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027**

No.	Code and name of the intervention	Public allocation (euro)
1	DR-22 – Investments in conditioning, storage, and processing of agricultural products	459,361,200
2	DR-25 – Modernization of irrigation infrastructure	400,000,000
3	DR-30 – Support for the installation of young farmers	250,691,800
4	DR-20 – Investments in the livestock sector	224,610,700
5	DR-36 – LEADER – Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)	500,000,000

*Source: Author’s own analysis based on official data from AFIR, “Status of the Implementation of Rural Development Interventions Financed by the EAFRD under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027”, October 2025 [13,15]*

In the two programming periods, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020, Romania benefited from constant support for the establishment of young farmers through the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP), first via Measure 112 and subsequently via Sub-measure 6.1. The continuity and popularity of these interventions have generated increasingly high interest among young farmers, which explains the very high level of demand recorded in the current period for Intervention DR-30 Support for the setting up of young farmers under the 2023–2027 Strategic Plan. This trend reflects both the attractiveness of non-reimbursable financing and the real need for generational renewal in agriculture. [4] Consequently, DR-30 stands out as one of the most demanded and successful measures under Pillar II, making a substantial contribution to attracting young people to agriculture, revitalizing rural communities, and strengthening the demographic and economic foundations of Romania’s rural areas.

Based on the analysis of financial allocations for rural development interventions launched under Romania’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, a significant level of interest can be observed among potential beneficiaries for several priority measures. The large number of funding applications submitted reflects, on one hand, the genuine need for investment in agriculture and rural areas, and on the other hand, the strong attractiveness of measures that support modernization, processing, and production infrastructure.

The highest number of funding applications was recorded for intervention DR-30 – Support for the installation of young farmers, which demonstrates a remarkable interest among young people in starting their own agricultural activities and establishing themselves in rural areas. This trend represents a positive sign for the generational renewal process in agriculture, especially in the context of an ageing farming population — one of the key challenges for sustainable rural development.

According to the available data, out of 3,580 applications submitted, 3,491 projects were selected, representing about 64% of all applications, with the total value of selected projects fully covering the financial allocation for this intervention. This indicates a complete absorption of available funds and highlights the strong capacity of young farmers to design and implement eligible projects.

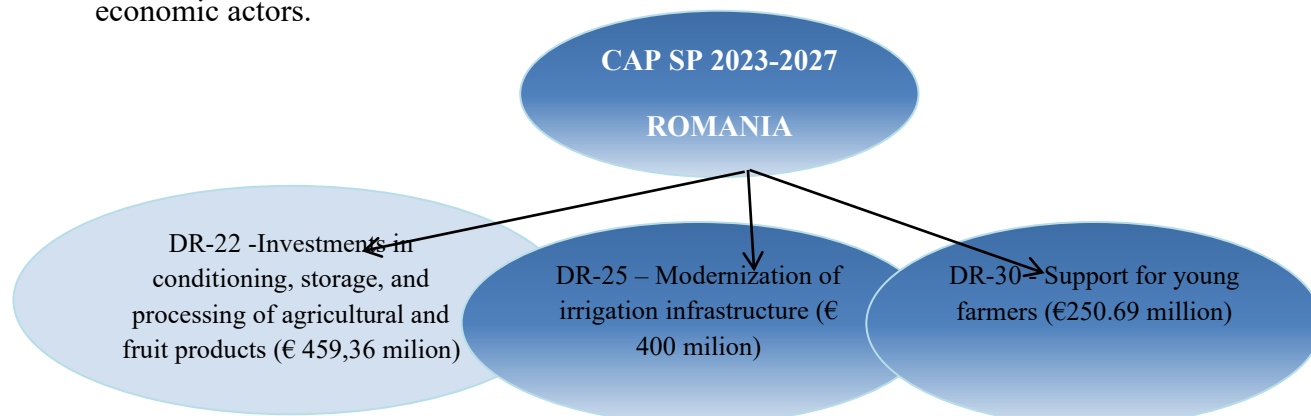
**Table 2.**

**Financial allocation and implementation progress of Pillar II rural development interventions under Romania’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027**

Code and name of the intervention	Public allocation (Euro)	Funding applications submitted		Funding applications selected		Contracts	Funding applications selected from the total submitted
		No.	Public value (euro)	No.	Public value (euro)	No.	%
DR-15 – Investments in fruit farms	151.383.527	338	220.980.836	212	150.628.065	171	63
DR-20 – Investments in the livestock sector	224.610.728	499	511.942.595	209	224.907.532	171	42
DR-22 – Investments in conditioning, storage, and processing of agricultural and fruit products	459.361.176	420	1.113.964.955	168	473.222.235	112	40
DR-24 – Investments in forestry technologies enhancing resilience and environmental value of forest ecosystems	86.641.134	353	95.301.086	225	67.053.699,00	68	64
DR-25 – Modernization of irrigation infrastructure	400.000.000	375	557.549.806	268	399.860.535	196	71
DR-26 – Establishment of irrigation systems	102.421.176	75	32.387.793	43	19.805.164	24	57
DR-27 – Creation/modernization of agricultural access infrastructure	100.000.000	188	184.343.665	101	99.102.154	100	54
DR-28 – Creation/modernization of basic rural road infrastructure	200.988.235	455	447.001.302	205	200.568.403	205	45
DR-30 – Support for the installation of young farmers	250.691.764	5.608	392.560.000	3.580	250.600.000	3.491	64
DR-33 – Establishment of producer groups in the agricultural/fruit sector	15.444.706	44	18.052.553	28	11.669.664	28	64

Source: Author’s own analysis based on official data from AFIR, “Status of the Implementation of Rural Development Interventions Financed by the EAFRD under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027”, October 2025

DR-22 - Investments in conditioning, storage, and processing of agricultural and fruit products. Alongside DR-30 - Support for the installation of young farmers, a significant level of interest has also been recorded for DR-22 - Investments in conditioning, storage, and processing of agricultural and fruit products. This intervention stands out due to the high number of funding applications submitted, although the projects selected for financing represent only 40% of the total, indicating a strong competition for the limited financial resources available. Out of 420 applications submitted, 168 projects were approved, while the total value of applications exceeded the financial allocation for the current programming period, confirming the strong attractiveness of this measure for rural economic actors.



**Figure 1: CAP SP 2023–2027 and Rural Development Interventions with the highest public allocation**

Source: Official data from AFIR, “Status of the Implementation of Rural Development Interventions Financed by the EAFRD under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027”, October 2025

The increasing demand for DR-22 highlights the strategic importance of agricultural and fruit processing activities, which contribute to enhancing value added and diversifying local agri-food supply chains. Within the broader European context that promotes the transition toward sustainable and circular economic models, investments in processing play a key role in strengthening the competitiveness of the agri-food sector and in integrating farmers into short value chains, thus improving the efficiency and resilience of rural economies.

Another highly demanded intervention is DR-25 - Modernization of irrigation infrastructure, regarded as essential for adapting agriculture to climate change and to the increasingly frequent and prolonged droughts affecting crop production across most regions of the country. The strong interest shown by farmers in this type of investment demonstrates an increasing awareness of the importance of irrigation systems in ensuring production stability, reducing climatic vulnerability, and improving water-use efficiency. Consequently, DR-25 emerges as one of the most relevant investment measures under Pillar II, both in terms of the number of applications submitted and its potential impact on agricultural sustainability and national food security.

The implementation of the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 is currently approaching the midpoint of the programming period, following an initially delayed start caused by the gradual opening of calls and the full operationalization of interventions. Nevertheless, the program remains highly attractive for agricultural beneficiaries, particularly due to the continuation of traditional farm modernization measures, which have been familiar to Romanian farmers since the first post-accession programming period.

This policy continuity ensures stability and predictability within the national agricultural support framework, sustaining beneficiaries’ interest and enhancing their capacity to manage complex investment projects. At the same time, the results achieved so

far confirm the effectiveness and relevance of interventions focusing on farm investments, irrigation infrastructure, and agri-food processing, which are essential domains for improving the competitiveness of the sector and the resilience of rural communities.

Looking toward the next Multiannual Financial Framework, greater attention should be devoted to these types of interventions, which have already proven capable of generating significant economic and social effects in rural areas. The continuation and possible expansion of funding for such measures should remain a strategic priority, as they contribute directly to the integrated development of rural space, by promoting productive investment, creating employment opportunities, and advancing the economic and environmental sustainability of Romanian farms.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the implementation of rural development interventions under Romania's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 reveals a high level of interest among beneficiaries, particularly for investment-oriented measures financed through Pillar II. The total number of funding applications submitted significantly exceeded the available allocations, indicating a clear mismatch between the financial resources provided and the actual investment needs of rural stakeholders.

The most demanded interventions DR-30 (Support for the installation of young farmers), DR-22 (Investments in processing, storage, and conditioning), and DR-25 (Modernization of irrigation infrastructure) account for the largest share of applications and reflect a strong orientation toward productive investments that enhance competitiveness and resilience to climate change.

The high selection and contracting rates observed for these key measures demonstrate efficient fund management and strong implementation capacity; yet, the imbalance between demand and available funding highlights the need for reallocating resources toward the most impactful and sought-after interventions.

Furthermore, reducing the duration of project verification and contracting procedures would significantly improve fund absorption and overall implementation efficiency. A shorter processing time would enable faster project activation, better cash flow management for beneficiaries, and enhanced institutional performance in fund administration.

Looking ahead to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (post-2027), it is crucial to preserve the current two-pillar structure of the Common Agricultural Policy, which provides a balance between direct income support (Pillar I) and long-term investment in rural development (Pillar II). Strengthening Pillar II and maintaining support for measures such as DR-22, DR-25, and DR-30 will remain fundamental for achieving sustainable rural development and socio-economic convergence within the European Union.

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