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# THE EU'S PROPOSED NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP PLANS (NRPPS)

AN EXPLAINER FOR IRISH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

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# The EU's proposed National and Regional Partnership Plans: An explainer for Irish Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

## What are the proposed National and Regional Partnership Plans?

National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs) are a [proposed feature of the European Union's](#) long-term budget (MFF) for 2028-2034. They will [change how many major EU funds are planned and delivered](#) by replacing multiple separate programmes with one integrated national plan (potentially structured in thematic or sectoral components) per Member State, agreed between the national government and the European Commission.

Under this model, funding from areas such as cohesion policy, and potentially elements of agriculture, fisheries and parts of social and national affairs spending would be brought together under a single planning framework. The [intention is to make EU funding more strategic](#) by linking investment and policy reforms to EU priorities and measurable outcomes.

For countries like Ireland, this means that many EU-funded investments and reforms would be coordinated through one overarching national strategy, which would guide how EU funds are used to support priorities such as economic development, social cohesion, and the climate transition.

The [NRPP model is still a proposal under negotiation](#) (as of early March, 2026), so details and deadlines may evolve.

**For Irish civil society organisations, NRPPs will become one of the most important entry points for influencing how EU funding is spent in Ireland after 2028.** Decisions taken during the design of Ireland's plan will shape investment in climate action, biodiversity, infrastructure and social priorities for the next decade.

## Why NRPPs matter for climate and nature

NRPPs will shape how a large share of EU funding is allocated and spent after 2028. By bringing multiple funding streams into a single national plan, they could play a role in directing investment toward climate transition, biodiversity protection, and broader environmental goals. If designed well, this approach could help align public spending with EU commitments such as National Energy and Climate Plans and nature restoration efforts. However, this also means that environmental priorities will no longer sit in protected funding streams, but will compete directly with other national priorities within a single plan.

The Commission has proposed that at least 35% of the overall EU budget should contribute to climate and environmental objectives.

## Key risks to watch out for

While NRPPs could improve coordination of EU funding, several risks have been highlighted by civil society organisations, regional authorities and policy analysts.

- **Non-compliance with the partnership principle:** The proposal states that Member States should apply the partnership principle when preparing and implementing their national plans, meaning that regional authorities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders should be involved in the process. However, [many civil society groups](#) are concerned that the proposal does not yet provide strong enough guarantees that this participation will be meaningful in practice.
- **Centralisation of decision-making:** The single national plan model could [concentrate planning power within national governments](#), particularly finance ministries, potentially weakening the role of regional authorities and stakeholders unless strong partnership processes are established. The actual [influence of regions and local authorities may depend heavily on national choices](#), because the proposal's design can still allow national governments to dominate planning and revisions if consultation structures are not meaningful and enforceable.
- **Competition between policy priorities:** Bringing multiple policy areas under one national funding envelope means climate, biodiversity, cohesion, agriculture, social policy and other priorities [may compete for limited resources](#), increasing the risk that environmental investment is squeezed.
- **Dilution of environmental objectives:** Some environmental priorities that are currently addressed through specific EU programmes [could become less visible within a broader funding framework](#), giving Member States greater discretion over how environmental spending is defined and prioritised.
- **Dilution of social and regional investment:** [Bringing multiple funds together risks](#) weakening the specific objectives, accountability and impact of existing programmes (such as social inclusion and regional development funds), particularly where spending is no longer ringfenced.
- **Lack of biodiversity ring-fencing:** The current proposal does not include a dedicated spending target for biodiversity. Experience from previous EU funding programmes suggests that, [without clear targets, nature restoration and biodiversity protection may receive limited funding](#) compared with other climate or infrastructure investments.
- **Reduced transparency under performance-based payments:** Because payments may be linked to the achievement of milestones and targets rather than reimbursing project costs, there may be new [challenges for transparency, oversight and public scrutiny of how funds are used](#).

For CSOs, these risks make the design and governance of NRPPs particularly important. [Strong transparency, clear environmental targets, and meaningful stakeholder participation](#) during the preparatory, planning stage will be critical to ensure that the plans genuinely support climate and nature objectives rather than weakening existing environmental safeguards.

## What Ireland will have to do?

**2026-2027:** Ireland begins preparing its plan

**Early 2028:** Plan submitted to the European Commission

**Mid-term review:** Member States will be required to review and update their plans around the midpoint of the budget period.

## What to look for in practice:

- **Early transparency:** whether the Government publishes a clear timetable, lead department(s), stakeholder process, and drafts early enough for real input (not “informing” after decisions).
- **Meaningful partnership structures:** whether consultation is continuous (working groups and monitoring committees) and includes local/regional authorities, environmental CSOs, social partners, and energy communities in practice, not just in principle.
- **Alignment that is specific, not rhetorical:** whether the NRPP explicitly maps spending/reforms to the NECP, Nature Restoration Plan and other strategic framework obligations (with milestones), rather than citing them as general background.
- **Climate/environment spending integrity:** how Ireland classifies climate and environment spending, and whether this is backed by credible methodologies and guards against relabelling business-as-usual as ‘green.’
- **DNSH applied to every measure:** whether each investment/reform is screened for environmental harm and (where appropriate) subject to environmental impact assessment, especially for transport, land use, energy, and large infrastructure measures.
- **Nature funding is real and visible:** whether Ireland builds an internal, trackable nature restoration budget line with delivery milestones.
- **Capacity to plan for investment gaps:** whether Ireland produces a [transparent climate investment gap assessment and financing strategy \(public and private\)](#) rather than treating the NRPP as a compilation of existing spend.

CSOs may also wish to monitor which government departments lead the drafting process, how reforms and investments are balanced within the plan, how progress indicators are defined, and how stakeholders will be involved in the mid-term review.

## What Irish CSOs can do now

For Irish CSOs, **the most important period for engagement is before and during the drafting phase** (i.e., now), when national priorities and spending plans are being developed. CSOs can:

- **Actively track and shape** Ireland's position in MFF negotiations, particularly on flexibility, governance, and climate spending targets, including in the context of Ireland's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU. See [EJNI's MFF explainer](#) and [MFF priorities](#) documents for context;
- **Coordinate with EU-level CSOs and networks** to align messaging, share resources and amplify common positions;
- **Engage early and strategically with key Departments** (especially the Department of Finance but also climate, environment, agriculture and public expenditure), making the case for strong environmental earmarking, alignment with climate and nature targets, and robust governance and transparency
- **Push for a clear and transparent national roadmap for NRPP preparation**, including: timelines, consultation processes, opportunities for stakeholder input (and challenge any lack of clarity or delays)
- **Advocate for meaningful application of the partnership principle**, ensuring civil society is not just consulted, but has a real role in shaping priorities and monitoring implementation.
- **Prepare early positions on key risks**, including: dilution of climate and biodiversity spending; excessive flexibility reducing long-term investment; weak performance and accountability frameworks.

## General advocacy recommendations for CSOs

*These recommendations outline some initial principles that may guide CSOs with the development of the NRPPs. As negotiations progress, additional recommendations are likely to emerge from EU-level CSOs and policy networks. Irish CSOs may wish to monitor these developments and begin formulating their own priorities and recommendations for Ireland's national plan.*

- **Engage early in the planning process:** advocate for early and meaningful participation in the preparation of NRPPs, ensuring transparency and genuine stakeholder involvement before national priorities and spending decisions are finalised. This includes early consultation before decisions are finalised, transparent stakeholder processes, and participation in monitoring committees and oversight structures.
- **Promote strong climate, nature and social investment:** call on the Government to ensure that NRPP funding prioritises climate action, biodiversity protection and a fair transition for communities affected by economic change. [WWF recommends at least 60% of NRPP](#) spending for climate and environment, including ring-fencing a portion for biodiversity protection and restoration.
- **Ensure strong environmental safeguards:** Advocate for all measures included in NRPPs to undergo a *Do No Significant Harm* assessment, and where relevant should also be subject to environmental impact assessments to prevent harmful investments.
- **Highlight climate and nature investment needs:** Call on the Government to identify investment gaps in areas such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, transport and nature restoration, and ensure NRPP funding addresses these priorities.
- **Protect the role of regional and local actors:** advocate for strong regional and territorial chapters within the national plan to ensure funding reflects local needs and vulnerabilities.

- **Promote a just transition approach:** advocate for dedicated support for regions and sectors undergoing structural change. NRPPs should also include regional and territorial chapters developed in partnership with local and regional authorities, ensuring that the transition is implemented through a genuine multilevel governance approach.
- **Support technical capacity and participation:** advocate for dedicated technical assistance funding to support regional authorities, civil society participation and project development.

**EJNI will continue to monitor developments around the NRPPs and the development of Ireland's NRPP. Civil society organisations are encouraged to follow EJNI for updates at [www.ejni.net](http://www.ejni.net)**

**Further resources:**

- Plan4Climate (March 2026) *Supporting a just transition to climate neutrality through the National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPP): Lessons from the practice and recommendations for the 2028-2034 MFF.* [Available here.](#)
- CAN-Europe (December 2025) *Ensuring transparency in the NRPPs* (December 2025), An Open Letter from Climate Action Network Europe. [Available here.](#)
- WWF (September 2025) 'An EU budget that delivers on climate and nature: Getting National and Regional Partnership Plans right'. [Available here.](#)