

PEACEPLUS RiSE Project Enjoys Official Launch

February 5th, 2026

A major €3.97m investment in rural renewal has been unveiled with the launch of the Rural Innovation and Social Enterprise (RiSE) Project, a transformative initiative designed to put social enterprise at the centre of sustainable rural development.

Rural Action is delighted to introduce this new cross-community and cross-border initiative, which will support rural areas to harness the potential of social enterprise as a driver of sustainability, innovation, and long-term growth.

RiSE is **a project supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.** Through the 'Unlocking the Potential of Rural Innovation and Social Enterprise (RiSE) Project', partners aim to strengthen rural communities by providing training, networking opportunities, and practical support to help organisations enhance sustainability, expand income generation, and increase access to vital community services.

The project brings together a multi stakeholder partnership comprising of Rural Action who will lead the project along with partners, Irish Rural Link, Scotland Social Enterprise Academy and Social Enterprise NI (SENI) with Community Finance Ireland as an associate partner.

Through networking, events and activities, RiSE will encourage and facilitate collaboration between rural communities on a cross-border and cross-community basis. Participating groups and organisations will benefit from shared learning and tailored training designed to maximise income generation, strengthen long-term sustainability, and widen access to essential community services. A dedicated element of the project will also focus on inspiring the next generation of social entrepreneurs through a programme of youth focused training and collaboration.

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Andrew Muir MLA said: “I am delighted that my Department along with DRCDG and SEUPB are providing funding to the RiSE project, which will strengthen rural social enterprise and build on a connected, collaborative cross-border community.

“Through its three strands RiSE will strengthen rural social enterprise organisations, support new social enterprise initiatives and provide opportunities for young people to design and lead meaningful social action. RiSE will help rural areas to thrive by enhancing skills, confidence and capacity, which will contribute to creating strong, sustainable rural communities where people can live, work and prosper.”

The Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary TD, and Minister of State with Responsibility for Community Development and Charities, Jerry Buttimer TD, welcomed the announcement.

Minister Calleary said: “I want to show my appreciation to everyone involved in creating the RiSE project. I am happy that my Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, working together with the Special EU Programmes Body and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland, will continue to provide assistance for this remarkable project. This project will bring lasting advantages to the area”.

Minister Buttimer added: “This important financing will enhance the availability of communal areas and services in rural locations. Planned investment will empower communities to flourish and achieve their complete economic, social, and environmental capabilities”.

SEUPB Chief Executive Gina McIntyre said: “Significant developments have been made in the provision of collaborative cross-border services in recent years, providing equality of opportunity for citizens in rural areas.

“The PEACEPLUS-funded RiSE project strengthens the social and economic fabric of rural communities across our region and these initiatives increase wellbeing and reduce social isolation in rural areas.

“By investing in developing approaches to social enterprise and innovation, we are helping communities work together across borders and traditions, creating opportunities that build trust and future economic opportunities. Projects like RiSE are vital to peacebuilding because they turn shared challenges into shared solutions, with cooperation and inclusion at the heart of community life.”

Speaking at the launch, Teresa Canavan Rural Action Chief Executive, said "The RiSE programme brings together three powerful strands designed to strengthen and inspire rural communities. Through Social Enterprise Leadership & Development, we are equipping people with the skills, confidence, and capacity to take forward meaningful social enterprise activity. Making it Happen focuses on turning ideas into action, offering practical support and guidance to help projects grow and succeed. And with our Youth Social Enterprise strand, we are empowering young people aged 14–25 to lead the way in shaping a sustainable future through creativity and innovation."

The RiSE programme is now open for expressions of interest from rural organisations wishing to take part. Further information is available at www.ruralaction.co as well as on the websites of all programme partners. The closing date for the first round of applications is 27 March 2026.

The PEACEPLUS Programme has been designed to promote peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, and has a total value of €1.14bn, to be delivered over the next four years.

PEACEPLUS is co-funded by the European Union, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government of Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Executive.

More information on the project will be available at www.ruralaction.co and at https://irishrurallink.ie/projects/rise-rural-innovation-social-enterprise/

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Notes to editors

1. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a North South Body with the statutory remit for managing EU funding programmes within Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.
2. PEACEPLUS is a cross-border funding Programme designed to support peace and prosperity across Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. The total value of PEACEPLUS is €1.14 billion.
3. PEACEPLUS is co-funded by the European Union, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government of Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Executive.
4. Unlocking the Potential of Rural Innovation and Social Enterprise (RiSE) is funded through the PEACEPLUS Programme – Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion – to the value of €3,971,440.
5. The project is led by Rural Action and includes partner organisations Irish Rural Link, Scotland Social Enterprise Academy and Social Enterprise NI (SENI) with Community Finance Ireland as an associate partner.
6. Rural Action was formed in 2019 as a not-for-profit social purpose company and became a registered charity in March 2022. It was established to meet an identified need for a regional delivery organisation with a focus on supporting

grassroots communities. It seeks to make a positive contribution to the everyday lives of rural communities, with an ambition to achieve this, not only through working with others, but as an organisation to give back, to support and inspire rural communities to design, deliver and implement practical projects.

7. Irish Rural Link was formed in 1991 as a non-profit organisation, representing a national network of organisations of some 600 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000. With a focus on sustainable rural development, it seeks to support rural communities through a range of operational projects and programmes, through local community development approaches, engaging with key stakeholders and disseminating good practice at both a national and European level.
8. Social Enterprise Academy (SEA) is a Scottish charity that supports social entrepreneurs in rural, women and young communities through transformational learning programmes. Since 2004, the SEA has been providing learning and development opportunities for people and organisations enabling social change in Scotland and more recently the rest of the UK as well.SEA have facilitated over 78,000 social entrepreneurs and third sector leaders to help create fairer communities with equitable access to Using social franchising and impact partnerships, they offer learning programmes in communities worldwide.
9. Social Enterprise NI was formed in 2012 and is the representative body for social enterprises and social entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland. Connecting, supporting, developing and sustaining vibrant businesses to create social change throughout NI. They also provide opportunities for collaboration between social enterprises and the public and private sectors. With a directory of over 800 social enterprises in NI.