
COMPARATIVE POLICY BRIEF

Comparative Policy Brief on EU Funds 2021–2027

Reform Priorities, Management & Performance

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For: European Parliament — Renew Europe · August 2026

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Foreword

The right to economic and social cohesion is not merely a political ambition; it is guaranteed to the citizens of the entire European Union by the founding Treaties. European funds and recovery instruments represent our most powerful lever to bridge regional divides, modernise public services, and build a resilient, green, and digital economy – ensuring citizens directly experience the benefits of EU membership in their daily lives.

Yet, when we look at how these resources are delivered on the ground, a persistent paradox emerges: despite billions of euros available, regional disparities remain wide, and local communities frequently face bureaucratic roadblocks, slow project execution, and structural capacity gaps.

Among the most critical hurdles facing several of our Central European neighbors is the chronic disconnect between central government administration and our local and regional authorities. While instruments like the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) have accelerated structural reforms from above, their centralized architecture has systematically marginalized the very municipalities and regions that are tasked with implementing these transformations on the ground. Too often, local leaders are treated as passive intermediaries rather than genuine co-designers of investment.

This state of structural friction has gone on for decades. Central ministries debate procedures and fear absorption risks, while local authorities, facing tight budgets and complex administrative burdens, are left struggling to turn available funding into tangible results for their residents. And the people suffer the consequences: in delayed infrastructure, underfunded regional services, and missed opportunities for true economic transformation.

Opening this discussion right now is absolutely critical. As Europe enters the strategic negotiations for the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF 2028–2034), we have a unique opportunity to reshape the architecture of EU funding. We must ensure that the future budget is simpler, more flexible, and structurally anchored in genuine local and regional partnership.

To support this debate with evidence-based solutions, I commissioned this comprehensive comparative policy analysis. The goal is clear: to evaluate how Slovakia and ten other EU Member States manage EU funds and Recovery Facility resources, and to identify best practices in local and regional governance that can make European investments truly work for our communities in the next programming period.

If we want European cohesion policy to fulfill its purpose, we must empower our regions. A strong, visible presence of EU funding in local communities is our most critical instrument to bring the Union closer to its citizens, restore their trust in the European project, and counter the growing threat of euroskepticism.

Ľubica Karvašová

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This policy analysis is dedicated to the local elected officials, municipal leaders, regional coordinators, and public servants across Slovakia and Europe whose daily work and commitment ensure that European investments turn into real quality-of-life improvements for citizens on the ground.

It is equally dedicated to the policy experts and researchers whose rigorous comparative work provides the evidence needed to build a more flexible, decentralized, and effective European cohesion policy for the future.

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List of Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
EU Funds and Financial Instruments		
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy	EU agricultural policy framework
CF	Cohesion Fund	EU fund for environment and TEN-T transport; available to MS with GNI/capita < 90% EU avg.
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development	Bottom-up territorial instrument; local strategy implemented by Local Action Groups (LAGs)
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development	Rural development fund; outside CPR since 2021–2027, now under CAP
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund	EU fund for sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and maritime economy
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund	Largest cohesion fund; supports R&I, digital, clean energy, transport and urban development
ESF / ESF+	European Social Fund (Plus)	EU fund for employment, social inclusion, education, skills and equal opportunities
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment	Territorial instrument pooling funding from multiple priority axes/programmes for an integrated strategy
JTF	Just Transition Fund	EU fund supporting regions transitioning away from coal and carbon-intensive industries
KPO	Krajowy Plan Odbudowy (National Recovery Plan)	Poland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan under the RRF
LAG	Local Action Group	Partnership body governing CLLD or LEADER strategies; includes public, private and civil society actors
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale	EU rural development community-led approach; CLLD under EAFRD
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework	EU's multi-year budget framework; current period: 2021–2027
N+3	N+3 automatic decommitment rule	EU rule requiring expenditure of committed funds within 3 years or automatic cancellation

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan	Country-level plan for accessing RRF grants and loans
NPO	Národní plán obnovy (National Recovery Plan)	Czech Republic's NRRP under the RRF
PNRR	Planul Național de Redresare și Reziliență	Romania's NRRP under the RRF
PRR	Plano de Recuperação e Resiliência	Portugal's NRRP under the RRF
PT2030	Portugal 2030	Portugal's national framework for implementing €23 bn cohesion envelope 2021–2027
RD	Regional Development Plan	Romania's regional operational programmes (8 in total) for ERDF/ESF+ delivery
REPowerEU	REPowerEU	EU energy security/clean energy chapter added to NRRPs; finances energy independence measures
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility	EU instrument providing €723 bn in grants and loans; milestone-based disbursement; deadline 31 Dec 2026
RTI	Regional Territorial Investment	Poland-specific sub-regional ITI for secondary cities below the voivodeship capital level
SUD	Sustainable Urban Development	Integrated urban investment approach; minimum 8% of ERDF must be earmarked for SUD under Art. 11
T+2	Two-year automatic decommitment rule	Pre-2021 variant; same principle as N+3 but with a 2-year window
TA	Technical Assistance	Programme allocation (typically 2–4%) for management, monitoring, evaluation and capacity support
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network	EU framework for priority cross-border transport infrastructure corridors
Regulatory Framework and Procedures		
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation	EU regulation governing shared management funds (ERDF, CF, ESF+, JTF, EMFAF); Reg. (EU) 2021/1060
FUA	Functional Urban Area	Territorial unit defined by a city core and its commuting hinterland; basis for ITI designation
GNI	Gross National Income	Macroeconomic indicator used to determine CF eligibility and co-financing rates
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	Standard measure of national economic output; used for region classification (less-developed, transition, more-developed)
MCS	Management and Control System	National system of procedures, authorities and controls for EU fund implementation
PA	Partnership Agreement	Strategic framework document agreed between a Member State and the Commission for cohesion fund use
PO	Policy Objective	One of five thematic priorities for ERDF/CF/ESF+ (PO1 Smarter; PO2 Greener; PO3 Connected; PO4 Social; PO5 Citizens)
PO5	Policy Objective 5 – A Europe Closer to Citizens	Cross-cutting cohesion policy objective; basis for ITI, CLLD and other territorial instruments

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
EU-Level Institutional Actors		
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions	EU association of local and regional government associations; advocates for sub-national involvement in EU funds
DG EMPL	European Commission DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion	Commission directorate managing ESF+ at EU level
DG REGIO	European Commission DG for Regional and Urban Policy	Commission directorate managing ERDF, CF and JTF at EU level
ECA	European Court of Auditors	EU external auditor; publishes Special Reports and Annual Reports on EU fund management
EPPO	European Public Prosecutor's Office	EU body with competence to investigate and prosecute crimes affecting EU financial interests
EUI	European Urban Initiative	EU instrument supporting cities with innovative actions and capacity building for sustainable urban development
OLAF	European Anti-Fraud Office	EU body investigating fraud, corruption and irregularities affecting EU financial interests
Programme Management Roles and Bodies		
IB	Intermediate Body	Body to which an MA delegates implementation tasks; carries out management verifications
MA	Managing Authority	National/regional body responsible for managing an operational programme
MC	Monitoring Committee	Partnership body overseeing a programme's implementation; approves selection criteria and programme changes
National Bodies and Programmes — Czech Republic		
CRR ČR	Centre for Regional Development Czech Republic	Implementing body for IROP (Integrated Regional OP)
IROP	Integrated Regional Operational Programme	Czech regional ERDF programme financing urban development, transport, environment and social infrastructure
NPO	Národní plán obnovy	Czech Republic's NRRP (see also above)
OPZ+	OP Zaměstnanost Plus (OP Employment Plus)	Czech ESF+ operational programme for labour market and social inclusion
SFDI	State Fund for Transport Infrastructure	Czech implementing body for OP Transport (CF/ERDF)
SFŽP	State Environmental Fund of the Czech Republic	Czech implementing body for OP Environment and renovation grant programmes
TAČR	Technology Agency of the Czech Republic	Implementing body for R&I component of OP Technologies and Applications for Competitiveness
National Bodies and Programmes — Estonia		
EAS	Enterprise Estonia	Estonian implementing body for enterprise support, R&I and tourism investments

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
KredEx	KredEx Credit and Export Guarantee Fund	Estonian financial instrument body; implements JTF and renovation financial instruments
National Bodies and Programmes — Hungary		
ESZA Plusz	OP for Social Development and Employment	Hungarian ESF+ operational programme
GINOP Plusz	OP for the Development of Economic Environment	Hungarian ERDF programme for enterprise support and R&I
KEHOP Plusz	OP for Environment and Energy	Hungarian CF/ERDF programme for environment and energy transition
KÖZOP Plusz	OP for Transport	Hungarian CF/ERDF transport operational programme
NIF Zrt.	National Infrastructure Development Company	Hungarian implementing body for large transport and environmental infrastructure
TOP Plusz	OP for Territorial and Settlement Development	Hungarian ERDF/ESF+ territorial OP; channels EU funds through county governments and municipalities
National Bodies and Programmes — Ireland		
BIM	Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Irish sea fisheries and aquaculture development agency; implements EMFAF
EIST	Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training Programme	Ireland's ESF+ programme for labour market and social inclusion
NWRA	Northern and Western Regional Assembly	Irish regional assembly; managing authority for Northern and Western Regional Programme (NWRP)
NWRP	Northern and Western Regional Programme	Ireland's ERDF programme for the northern and western region; managed by NWRA
OGP	Office of Government Procurement	Ireland's centralised procurement body; manages framework agreements reducing procurement irregularities
PEACE Plus	PEACE Plus Cross-Border Programme	Ireland–Northern Ireland cross-border Interreg programme for reconciliation and integrated development
SERA	Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly	Irish regional assembly; managing authority for Southern and Eastern Regional Programme (SERP)
SERP	Southern and Eastern Regional Programme	Ireland's ERDF programme for the southern and eastern region; managed by SERA
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme	Ireland's national community development programme; complements ESF+ at local level
SOLAS	Further Education and Training Authority	Irish implementing body for further education and training under ESF+ EIST programme
National Bodies and Programmes — Latvia		
LIAA	Investment and Development Agency of Latvia	Latvian implementing body for enterprise support, R&I and tourism investments
NVA	National Employment Agency of Latvia	Latvian State Employment Agency; implements ESF+ employment measures

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
National Bodies and Programmes — Lithuania		
CPMA	Central Project Management Agency (Lithuania)	Main implementing body for Lithuanian structural funds; provides quality assurance for ITI pipelines
National Bodies and Programmes — Poland		
FEPW	EU Funds for Eastern Poland	Dedicated cohesion programme for 5 least-developed eastern voivodeships (Lubelskie, Podkarpackie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie)
FEnIKS	EU Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment	Polish CF/ERDF national programme for transport and environment infrastructure
FENG	EU Funds for Smart Economy	Polish ERDF programme for R&I and digital transformation
FERC	EU Funds for Digital Development	Polish ERDF programme for broadband connectivity and digital services
FEMW	EU Funds for Modern Economy	Polish ESF+/ERDF programme for skills and innovation
FES	EU Funds for Social Development	Polish ESF+ programme for employment and social inclusion
National Bodies and Programmes — Portugal		
AD&C	Agency for Development and Cohesion	Portuguese central coordinating body for PT2030 cohesion programmes and PRR
AML	Área Metropolitana de Lisboa (Lisbon Metropolitan Area)	Intermunicipal governance body for the Lisbon metropolitan ITI territory
AMP	Área Metropolitana do Porto (Porto Metropolitan Area)	Intermunicipal governance body for the Porto metropolitan ITI territory
CCDR	Coordination Commission for Regional Development	Portuguese regional authority acting as managing authority for the 5 Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs)
CIM	Comunidade Intermunicipal (Intermunicipal Community)	Portuguese intermunicipal cooperation body; used as ITI governance structure for interior/rural-urban territories
IHRU	Instituto da Habitação e Reabilitação Urbana	Portuguese national housing institute; implements RRF Mais Habitação social housing programme
National Bodies and Programmes — Romania		
ADR	Agenție de Dezvoltare Regională (Regional Development Agency)	Romanian regional implementing agency; managing authority for each of the 8 regional programmes
ANOFM	National Agency for Employment (Romania)	Romanian implementing body for ESF+ employment measures
MIPE	Ministry of European Investments and Projects	Romanian central body coordinating EU funds and PNRR implementation
National Bodies and Programmes — Slovakia		
CCB	Central Coordination Body	Slovak body coordinating EU fund implementation; part of the PM's Office

ABBREVIATION	FULL NAME	CONTEXT / NOTE
PPA	Pôdohospodárska platobná agentúra (Agricultural Paying Agency)	Slovak paying agency for CAP funds; implementing body for EAFRD and EMFAF
PS	Programme Slovakia 2021–2027	Slovakia's single unified cohesion programme (ERDF + CF + ESF+ + JTF merged into one instrument)
SAO	Supreme Audit Office (Slovakia)	Slovak national supreme audit institution; flagged N+3 decommitment risk in 2024 annual report
National Bodies and Programmes – Slovenia		
SVRK	Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy	Slovenian managing authority for the unified Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027
General and Cross-Cutting Terms		
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe	Regional grouping used in this document; refers broadly to the post-2004 EU Member States in eastern and central Europe
EUR / €	Euro	EU common currency; all financial figures in this document expressed in euros
EV	Electric Vehicle	Referenced in context of RRF/cohesion-funded clean mobility and EV charging infrastructure
NDP	National Development Plan	Ireland's national public investment framework (2021–2030; €165 bn total)
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training	ESF+ concentration threshold: MS with above-EU-average NEET rates must dedicate ≥12.5% of ESF+ to youth
R&I	Research and Innovation	Key ERDF thematic concentration area; also referred to as R&D (Research and Development)
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise	Primary target of ERDF competitiveness measures; defined as < 250 employees, ≤ €50 m turnover
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise	Referenced in context of Romania PNRR SOE governance reform milestone disputes

Executive Summary

This policy brief synthesises the EU Funds 2021–2027 country fact sheets for eleven Member States — Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — covering cohesion policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and Just Transition Fund (JTF). Together these countries hold approximately €300 billion in cohesion allocations and a further €135+ billion in RRF grants and loans. The policy brief covers programme architecture, institutional setup, financial progress, audit findings, co-financing and local and regional involvement in EU fund implementation.

Seven headline findings emerge from the analysis:

- 1. *Absorption converged markedly during 2026 — Hungary alone diverged.*** Ten of the eleven countries now stand between 61% and 83% on RRF disbursement, closing toward the EU average of about 68% under deadline pressure. Cohesion payments show the same pattern: Romania reached 35.9% of its allocation by August 2026 and Slovakia 31.2%, both above the EU average of 28.1%. Hungary stands apart as an acute outlier: 9% of the RRF disbursed, the sample's lowest cohesion payment rate (20.7%), €18 billion frozen under rule-of-law conditionality, and approximately €1 billion permanently lost to decommitment in 2024.
- 2. *Programme architecture shaped early implementation, but its advantage faded by 2026.*** Unified or consolidated structures (Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania) contracted faster in 2022–2024, with fewer procedural bottlenecks. Part of that speed, however, reflects smaller allocations and fewer institutional layers rather than design itself — and the 2026 outturn no longer tracks architecture: multi-programme Czechia leads the sample on RRF disbursement, and fragmented Romania rose above the EU cohesion payment average. Consolidation's durable advantage lies in lower coordination overhead, not an intrinsic speed premium (see Section 3.3).
- 3. *The RRF has accelerated structural reform but marginalised local authorities.*** Reform-linked disbursements have outpaced cohesion spending in most countries, and RRF conditionality has delivered real institutional change (Lithuania's building renovation, Portugal's housing policy, Ireland's higher education reform, Czech fiscal consolidation). However, the RRF's centralised architecture has systematically excluded local and regional authorities despite 15–30% of NRRP spending reaching sub-national level in all eleven countries.
- 4. *Governance quality determines audit exposure.*** Procurement irregularities dominate the audit landscape across CEE countries. The two highest-risk countries (Hungary, Romania) share a common profile: political influence over procurement, weak first-level controls at managing authority level and limited independent oversight. The correlation between rule-of-law quality and irregularity rates is systematic, not incidental. Slovakia's exposure is case-

based — the Dobytvár affair, closed in March 2024 with corrective measures — and is now rated medium.

5. ***Local and regional involvement is a structural performance variable, not a procedural add-on.*** Countries where sub-national authorities have genuine decision-making authority (Portugal's CCDR-managed regional programmes, Poland's 16 elected voivodeship programmes, Ireland's Regional Assembly managing authorities) produce more place-relevant investment and stronger project pipelines. JTFs that are locally co-owned and transformation-focused (Estonia's Ida-Viru, Slovenia's Šaleška Valley) proceed ahead of schedule; those that are centrally designed and compensation-dominant (Romania's Oltenia) do not.
6. ***Human capital is an underappreciated constraint on absorption.*** High staff turnover in Romanian ADRs and the collapse of institutional knowledge in Hungary's suspended programme structures point to the same problem: EU fund management is treated as a general administrative function rather than a professional specialization. Countries that have invested in building a stable, qualified fund management workforce (Poland, Estonia) consistently outperform those that have not.
7. ***Programme rigidity compounds absorption risk.*** The current CPR's requirement for formal Commission decisions to reallocate resources between priority axes — typically taking three to six months — prevents managing authorities from responding to absorption signals in real time, locking resources in slow-moving priorities when higher-performing alternatives exist within the same programme.

The policy brief concludes with 19 recommendations structured in two tiers. ***EU-level recommendations*** (R1–R9) address regulatory architecture: simplification incentives, intra-programme reallocation flexibility, graduated decommitment, procurement integrity infrastructure, conditionality redesign, RRF-cohesion complementarity, a formal local and regional RRF earmark, beneficiary capacity investment, and a higher urban SUD threshold. ***Programme and institutional design recommendations*** (R10–R19) address national implementation choices: unified architectures, Finance Ministry coordination, managing authority pre-qualification, ITI technical assistance units, professional certification for fund managers, EPPO cooperation, co-financing sustainability planning, JTF transformation redesign, CIM intermunicipal ITI extension, and ITI/CLLD decommitment exemption.

Methodological Note

This policy brief is based on country fact sheets covering 11 Member States as of May 2026, drawing on data from the European Commission's open cohesion data portal, EPRS, national partnership agreements, programme monitoring reports, OLAF and ECA annual reports, EPPO case registers, CEMR's Cohesion Policy Funds 2021–2027 overview (2024 edition), and national ITI governance documentation. Several important limitations apply:

- ***The study relies on mid-period data:*** The 2021–2027 programmes are at roughly the mid-point of their implementation lifecycle. Contracted figures are more reliable than executed (payment) figures, which typically accelerate sharply in years 5–7 of the programme period (2026–2029 for cohesion funds).
- ***Variation in definitions:*** 'Contracted' and 'executed' percentages are not defined identically across all managing authorities. Cross-country comparisons should be treated as indicative rather than precise.
- ***RRF vs CF comparability:*** RRF disbursement rates reflect milestone and target fulfilment rather than physical project completion, making direct comparisons with cohesion fund execution rates methodologically imperfect.
- ***Audit coverage:*** Audit findings in the country fact sheets are drawn from publicly reported OLAF, ECA and Commission decisions. Under-reporting is likely, particularly for smaller irregularities that are resolved administratively without public disclosure.
- ***Country size differences:*** Raw allocation figures are not normalised by GDP, population or administrative capacity. Relative burden and absorption capacity vary significantly — Ireland's €1.1 bn cohesion envelope is structurally different from Poland's €76.5 bn.
- ***Local and regional involvement data limitations:*** Urban earmarking percentages are drawn from national Partnership Agreements and CEMR programme data (2024). Contracted and executed figures for earmarked urban SUD allocations are not uniformly published by all managing authorities and should be treated as indicative. Estimates of the share of RRF spending reaching local and regional level (15–30% depending on country) are approximate, as no Member State in the sample publishes a formal regional disaggregation of RRF expenditure. Cross-country comparisons in this dimension are therefore less precise than those for overall programme absorption.

1. General Overview

1.1 Scale and Composition of EU Support Mechanisms

Across the 11 countries, EU support takes three primary forms: cohesion policy instruments (ERDF, CF, ESF+, JTF, EMFAF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), and a range of smaller complementary instruments. Table 1 below summarises the total allocations from these support mechanisms.

Table 1: Total allocations from EU support mechanisms

COUNTRY	ERDF (€BN)	CF + ESF+ + JTF (€BN)	TOTAL COHESION (€BN)	RRF (€BN)	GRAND TOTAL (€BN, APPROX.)
Czech Republic	10.5	11.0	21.4	7.1	28.5
Estonia	1.35	2.15	3.5	1.0	4.5
Hungary	10.2	11.26	21.7	10.4	32.1
Ireland	0.40	0.31	1.13	1.15	2.28
Latvia	1.85	2.78	4.6	3.6	8.2
Lithuania	2.75	3.97	6.4	3.85	10.25
Poland	37.5	36.1	76.5	54.7	131.2
Portugal	11.5	11.5	23.0	16.6	39.6
Romania	15.8	15.7	31.5	21.4	52.9
Slovakia	4.0	7.5	12.8	6.4	19.2
Slovenia	1.48	1.72	3.26	2.19	5.45

Poland accounts for roughly 38% of the total cohesion allocation across the 11 countries, and Romania for a further 16%. Together, Poland and Romania hold more than half the sample's cohesion envelope. At the other end of the spectrum, Ireland's per-capita cohesion allocation is modest — the country graduated from convergence-eligible status and its cohesion funds serve targeted regional and social purposes rather than system-wide infrastructure transformation.

The ERDF is the dominant instrument in all 11 countries, typically representing 40–55% of the cohesion envelope. The ESF+ share is proportionally larger in more developed countries (Ireland, Portugal) where infrastructure gaps are smaller. The JTF — though modest in absolute terms — is strategically significant for energy-transition regions in Poland (Silesia), Czech Republic (Moravian-Silesia), Slovakia (Upper Nitra), Estonia (Ida-Viru) and Hungary (Mátra, Borsod).

1.2 National Strategic & Programmatic Frameworks

All 11 countries operate under Partnership Agreements (PAs) adopted between April 2022 and December 2022, providing the strategic framework for cohesion fund use. The architecture of programme implementation, however, varies significantly and has measurable consequences for absorption.

1.2.1 Variability in Programme Architectures

The key structural distinction is between countries that have consolidated their cohesion funds into one or two national programmes versus those that operate multiple parallel thematic and regional operational programmes. Table 2 below summarizes the utilized programme architectures among the 11 countries.

Table 2: Utilized EU programme architectures

COUNTRY	ARCHITECTURE	NO. OF PROGRAMMES	KEY DESIGN FEATURE
Slovakia	Unified	1 national + sector (EMFAF, Interreg)	Single Programme Slovakia merges all ERDF, CF, ESF+, JTF into one instrument (unique in the EU)
Estonia	Unified	1 national cohesion + EMFAF + JTF	Streamlined single Cohesion Policy Programme; sector agencies as IBs
Slovenia	Unified	1 national + JTF + EMFAF	Single Cohesion Policy Programme under SVRK; JTF as sub-programme
Lithuania	Consolidated	2 national (SF Investment OP + ESF+) + JTF	Two fund-level programmes with strong CPMA implementing function
Latvia	Consolidated	2 national (ERDF/CF + ESF+) + JTF	Consolidated around fund type; strong MA capacity at Ministry of Finance
Ireland	Distributed	4 programmes (SERP, NWRP, EIST, JTF) + EMFAF	Regionally distributed ERDF; nationally managed ESF+; modest total allocation
Czech Republic	Distributed	16 programmes (8 national + 8 regional)	Retained thematic + regional OP architecture; detailed policy ownership per ministry
Portugal	Distributed	12 programmes (6 thematic + 5 regional + 2 AR)	PT2030 umbrella with strong regional CCDRs as managing authorities for ROPs
Hungary	Distributed	11 national OPs	Thematic OP architecture; access to 6 frozen under conditionality

COUNTRY	ARCHITECTURE	NO. OF PROGRAMMES	KEY DESIGN FEATURE
Poland	Multi-level	24 programmes (8 national + 16 regional)	Largest architecture in EU; 16 voivodeship ROPs with full MA autonomy
Romania	Multi-level	17 programmes (9 national + 8 regional)	Complex architecture; high coordination burden resulting in chronic low absorption in prior period

Unified and consolidated architectures are usually associated with faster contracting and lower administrative overhead. Slovakia's single-programme model, while operationally challenging to manage as a single entity, eliminates inter-programme boundary disputes and allows for flexible reallocation between policy objectives. Estonia and Slovenia replicate this benefit at a smaller scale.

Multi-level architectures (Poland, Romania) introduce significant coordination costs. With 24 and 17 programmes respectively, managing authority capacity is dispersed, IT systems must interface across institutions, and monitoring data aggregation is slow. This is not inherently a design flaw — large and regionally diverse countries benefit from decentralised ownership — but it requires upfront investment in coordination infrastructure.

1.2.2 RRF Plan Architecture

The RRF operates under a fundamentally different architecture. Disbursement is based on milestones and targets, rather than expenditure verification. This has two consequences: (1) countries with strong central coordination (Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania) are performing well, because the reform-conditionality model rewards administrative agility rather than project pipeline depth, (2) the RRF has in some cases acted as a substitute for slow cohesion spending, channelling investment into infrastructure and reform while cohesion programmes are still in their contracting phase.

The most effective national plans combine a unified cohesion programme architecture with a strong and well-resourced RRF coordination unit at the centre of government. Countries that split RRF coordination across multiple line ministries without strong central oversight (Romania, Poland) have experienced milestone delivery delays and payment request complications.

1.3 Differences and Similarities in Institutional Setup

Across the 11 countries, four models of institutional setup for administering the EU funds can be identified, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Institutional setups for EU fund management

MODEL	COUNTRIES	KEY CHARACTERISTICS
Centralised Finance-Led	Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania	Ministry of Finance or equivalent as overall MA; strong central coordination body; sector ministries as IBs with limited autonomous decision-making. Promotes coherence; risk is bottlenecking at centre.
Sectoral Ministry Model	Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Poland (national OPs)	Each thematic OP managed by the responsible line ministry as MA. Strong sector ownership; promotes policy alignment. Risk: fragmentation, inter-ministerial coordination costs, variable capacity.
Regional Assembly Model	Ireland (ERDF OPs), Portugal (ROPs)	Regional development bodies as MAs for ERDF. Promotes territorial ownership and place-based approaches. Risk: capacity gaps at regional level; need for strong TA support.
Unified Government Office	Estonia, Slovenia	Dedicated cross-ministerial government office (SVRK in Slovenia, Government Office in Estonia) as MA for the unified programme. Sector agencies as IBs. Strong coherence; directly accountable to government.

The evidence from the sample suggests that the ***Centralised Finance-Led and Unified Government Office models correlate with faster implementation and fewer audit findings***, while the Sectoral Ministry Model creates the most pronounced coordination challenges when programmes are numerous. The ***Regional Assembly Model works well where regional bodies have adequate resources*** (staff and IT) but is associated with higher variability in outcomes — as seen in Portugal, where northern and central CCDR programmes perform differently.

2. Performance Rankings

This section ranks all 11 countries across four performance dimensions on a five-level scale (Strong / Moderate / Weak-Moderate / Weak / Poor), with irregularities rated Low / Medium / High. Rankings are based on the quantitative and qualitative data in the country fact sheets and presented in Table 4. However, the rankings should be read as indicative assessments rather than precise scores.

Table 4: Master Scorecard Based on 4 Criteria

COUNTRY	FINANCIAL PROGRESS	IMPLEMENTATION RESULTS	CO-FINANCING MOBILISATION	IRREGULARITIES (LOWER = WORSE)	OVERALL (AVG)
Ireland	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Low	Strong
Estonia	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Low	Strong
Lithuania	Strong	Strong	Moderate	Low	Strong
Latvia	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate-Strong
Czech Republic	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Medium	Moderate-Strong
Portugal	Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Medium	Moderate-Strong
Slovenia	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate
Slovakia	Strong	Weak	Moderate	Medium	Moderate
Poland	Moderate	Weak-Moderate	Weak	Medium	Weak-Moderate
Romania	Moderate	Weak	Weak	High	Weak-Moderate
Hungary	Poor	Poor	Poor	High	Poor

Rating scale: Strong / Moderate / Weak-Moderate / Weak / Poor. Irregularities: Low / Medium / High (lower is better). Intermediate labels (e.g. Moderate-Strong) are used in the Overall column where dimensions diverge. Colour key: green = Strong or Low; pale green = Moderate-Strong; blue = Moderate; amber = Weak-Moderate or Medium; orange = Weak; red = Poor or High.

2.1 Financial Progress & Utilisation

Financial progress is assessed on both instruments: RRF disbursement (Commission RRF Scoreboard, August 2026; EU average about 68%) and cohesion payments including pre-financing (Cohesion Open Data platform, 28 August 2026; EU average 28.1%). Five countries stand above the EU average on both instruments; Portugal and Ireland lead on RRF but lag on cohesion payments.

Best performers

Czechia: the sample's highest RRF disbursement — 83% following the sixth payment (August 2026) — combined with above-average cohesion payments (35.7% of allocation).

Estonia: RRF disbursement of 66%, near the EU average, and the EU's highest cohesion payment rate — 50.1% of allocation by August 2026.

Lithuania: 74% of the RRF disbursed (the January 2026 partial suspension was resolved in March 2026) and cohesion payments at 41.0% of allocation — above the EU average on both instruments.

Latvia: 74% of the RRF disbursed (fourth payment May 2026) and cohesion payments at 36.6% of allocation — above the EU average on both instruments.

Slovakia: 81% of the RRF disbursed following the sixth and seventh payments (May 2026), with cohesion payments (31.2%) above the EU average — although national expenditure conversion (19.1% drawdown by June 2026) still trails the payment inflow. Financial inflows have outpaced verified implementation outputs; the reverse side of this profile appears under implementation results in Section 2.2.

Portugal: 78% of the PRR disbursed (ninth payment August 2026) — the second-highest RRF rate in the sample — but cohesion payments (24.1%) below the EU average, reflecting a late cohesion start; EU-financed investment is still projected to exceed 1% of GDP annually through 2026.

Ireland: 81% of the €1.15 bn RRF envelope disbursed across four payments with milestones met on schedule; cohesion payments (21.6%) are below the EU average, though the envelope is the sample's smallest and is delivered through the two Regional Assembly programmes.

Worst performers

Hungary: only 9% of the RRF disbursed, and the sample's lowest cohesion payment rate (20.7%). Approximately €18 billion remains frozen under rule-of-law conditionality, and €1 billion was permanently decommitted in 2024.

Romania: RRF disbursement (61%) below the EU average of about 68%. Cohesion payments tripled during 2025–2026 to 35.9% of allocation — above the EU average — but conversion into verified expenditure and outputs still lags.

Poland: in the sample's bottom group on the deadline-critical RRF — 62% after the fourth payment (June 2026), against an EU average of about 68%; the fifth and final request is planned for September 2026, and the payment deadline was extended by four months to December 2026. On cohesion, Poland is the EU's largest absolute recipient (€21.98 bn received), with a payment rate of 28.9% — essentially at the EU average.

N+3 decommitment risk narrowed considerably during 2026. Slovakia met its 2026 milestone (€2.3 bn) five months early, and Romania's drawdown rose above the EU average (35.9% vs 28.1% by August 2026). The concentrated residual risk is Hungary, where suspended access itself generates automatic losses — €1 billion was already permanently decommitted in 2024. Year-end milestones nevertheless remain demanding across the sample, and execution discipline through 2027–2029 will determine final absorption.

2.2 Implementation Results & Performance

Implementation results are assessed based on milestone achievement rates (RRF), output and result indicator progress (cohesion), and qualitative assessment of reform delivery.

Best performers

Ireland: RRF milestones on green and digital transition (50% and 34% of spending respectively) progressing strongly. Just Transition (Midlands peat transition) ahead of schedule. Technical University transformation — a structural reform in higher education — is a genuine policy achievement.

Estonia: Strong RRF implementation with above-EU-average milestone completion. JTF Ida-Viru oil shale transition proceeding on schedule. High administrative capacity relative to programme size.

Lithuania: Council approved NRRP amendments in February 2026, reflecting a collaborative and productive implementation relationship with the Commission. Building renovation targets (4,000 multi-apartment buildings) and Rail Baltica investments proceeding. The partial suspension of one instalment (January 2026) was resolved in March 2026 once the milestone was met; disbursement reached 74% by August 2026.

Worst performers

Hungary: No substantive implementation results for the majority of its programme envelope. Rule-of-law conditions remain unmet for 7 of 8 Commission recommendations (July 2025 Rule of Law Report).

Romania: Despite a 61% RRF disbursement rate and a sharp cohesion drawdown acceleration — from €3.28 bn (10.6%) in June 2025 to €11.18 bn (35.9% of the EU allocation) by August 2026, above the EU average of 28.1% — implementation outputs continue to lag behind financial flows. Chronic administrative bottlenecks, public procurement delays and regional implementation capacity gaps remain structural problems.

Slovakia: Cohesion outputs lagged badly through 2024, reflecting the slow contracting phase of the single programme architecture; with contracting at 48% (October 2025) and drawdown at

19.1% (June 2026), the challenge has shifted to converting accelerated financial flows into verified outputs.

2.3 National Co-financing Mobilisation

National co-financing performance reflects both fiscal capacity and political prioritisation of EU-funded investment. All eleven countries face standard co-financing obligations of 15–25% for cohesion funds (with lower rates for less-developed regions). RRF grants require no co-financing.

Co-financing mobilisation broadly tracks overall fiscal capacity. The most notable exception is **Hungary**, where the combination of fund suspensions and a government policy of redirecting national resources away from frozen EU programmes has created a severe co-financing gap. Poland's decision to reduce its KPO loan allocation by €5.1 billion (redirected to the national defence fund in August 2025) represents a strategic fiscal reprioritisation with direct RRF implications.

Portugal and Ireland demonstrate effective co-financing within their larger national development plan frameworks. Portugal's PT2030 is integrated into the broader national investment strategy. Ireland's EU funds operate within the €165 billion National Development Plan 2021–2030, where EU money plays a supplementary rather than substitutionary role.

In Member States with lacking fiscal discipline (**Slovakia, Romania**), national co-financing is often sourced from sovereign borrowing rather than budgetary surpluses. This creates fiscal sustainability risks when EU funds are delayed or decommitted. **Poland and Romania** have taken on significant RRF loan obligations whose repayment falls post-2030, this only compounds the borrowing problem.

2.4 Irregularities, Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

Audit findings across the 11 countries cluster into five categories: (1) public procurement irregularities, (2) conflict of interest and corruption, (3) eligibility and documentation failures, (4) systemic management and control weaknesses, and (5) rule-of-law / governance-level failures. The distribution is not uniform as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Identified weaknesses in EU fund management

COUNTRY	PROCUREMENT	CONFLICT OF INTEREST	ELIGIBILITY	MCS GAPS	RULE OF LAW	SEVERITY
Ireland	N	N	Y	N	N	Low
Estonia	N	N	N	Y	N	Low
Lithuania	Y	N	N	N	N	Low
Latvia	Y	N	Y	N	N	Low
Slovenia	Y	N	N	Y	N	Low

COUNTRY	PROCUREMENT	CONFLICT OF INTEREST	ELIGIBILITY	MCS GAPS	RULE OF LAW	SEVERITY
Czech Republic	Y	N	N	Y	N	Low-Med
Poland	Y	N	N	N	Y	Low-Med
Portugal	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Medium
Slovakia	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Medium
Romania	Y	Y	N	Y	N	High
Hungary	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	High

Y = finding reported / N = no finding reported in available public data. Severity: Low = isolated correctable findings; Medium = systemic but manageable; High = structural governance failures.

Public procurement is the universal weak point: 10 of the 11 countries have reported procurement irregularities across the 2014–2020 or 2021–2027 periods. The single exception — Ireland — benefits from a mature domestic public procurement framework (OGP centralised framework agreements) that pre-exists EU fund requirements.

Conflict of interest is concentrated in three countries: Slovakia (OLAF Dobytkár case — see the Slovakia country fact sheet), Hungary (systemic) and Romania (EPPO active investigations). In Hungary, OLAF investigations have found structural links between EU fund allocation and politically connected entities.

Rule-of-law failures at governance level are unique to Hungary and Poland (resolved). The scale of Hungary's situation is without precedent: €18 billion frozen, seven unfulfilled rule-of-law recommendations, and a Commission Rule of Law Report (July 2025) finding “no progress” on majority of corrective measures required.

Corrective measures are broadly similar across the 11 countries: financial corrections, enhanced ex-ante procurement checks, beneficiary training and upgraded management and control systems. Their effectiveness depends entirely on whether root causes (capacity gaps vs. intentional malpractice) are correctly diagnosed.

3. Cross-Cutting Analysis

3.1 Sectoral Priorities

Despite significant differences in country size, development level and administrative structure, the 11 countries share a broadly similar sectoral allocation pattern, driven partly by thematic concentration requirements in the ERDF and CF regulations and partly by convergence in national development priorities.

Dominant sectors by allocation volume:

Transport infrastructure (TEN-T corridors, road and rail): This area is the single largest category of cohesion investment across CEE countries. Poland (FEnIKS), Romania (OP Large Infrastructure), Czech Republic (OP Transport) and Lithuania (Rail Baltica, Via Baltica) each commit billions to TEN-T upgrades. Rail Baltica – connecting Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the European rail network – is the most visible cross-border infrastructure project in the sample.

Research, Innovation and Digital Transformation: A regulatory requirement under the ERDF (minimum thematic concentration) and a strategic priority for all 11 countries. The Czech Republic (OP Jan Amos Komenský, TAČR), Poland (FENG) and Portugal (PT2030 Competitiveness OP) make the most substantial R&I investments relative to their economic base.

Environmental Infrastructure and Energy: CF-financed water and wastewater treatment is a structural requirement for CEE countries, which still face compliance gaps with EU environmental directives. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania have major CF commitments to water management. Energy transition investments – renovations, heat pumps, district heating decarbonisation – are cross-cutting across both cohesion and RRF.

Social Inclusion, Employment and Education (ESF+): All 11 countries allocate 20–35% of their cohesion envelope to ESF+. Ireland, Portugal and Lithuania place particular emphasis on social inclusion and poverty reduction. Roma integration is a specific cross-cutting priority in Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary.

Just Transition: Coal and lignite regions in Poland (Silesia), Czech Republic (Moravian-Silesia, Ústí, Karlovy Vary), Slovakia (Upper Nitra), Estonia (Ida-Viru), Hungary (Mátra, Borsod) and Slovenia (Zasavje, Šaleška) receive JTF allocations. Poland's €3.85 bn JTF allocation is the largest in the EU. Implementation evidence reveals a significant divide between transformation-oriented JTFs – where transition investment is channelled towards new economic activities, innovation ecosystems and workforce reskilling (Estonia's Ida-Viru, Slovenia's Šaleška Valley) – and compensation-oriented models that primarily offset job losses without building durable

replacement economic capacity (Romania's Oltenia). This distinction has direct consequences for implementation speed and long-term regional resilience.

More-developed Member States (Ireland, Portugal) diverge from CEE countries in two important respects: (1) they *allocate proportionally more to R&I, digital transformation and skills and proportionally less to basic infrastructure* (water, road), and (2) they tend to use *ESF+ for systemic labour market and social policy reform rather than emergency employment support*.

In **Hungary's case**, the sector allocation is formally similar to the CEE average but is substantively irrelevant given the fund suspensions. Sectors that would receive investment (transport, environment, enterprise support) are receiving virtually none due to the conditionality freeze.

3.2 Differentiated Design and Variable Performance of the RRFs

The 11 NRRPs share a regulatory architecture (green minimum 37% of expenditure; digital minimum 20%) but differ substantially in design, ambition and implementation quality. The following patterns of what tends to be financed from RRF emerge:

Green transition (37–43% of all NRRPs): Building renovation (Lithuania, Romania, Ireland), energy efficiency in public buildings (Slovakia, Portugal, Latvia), renewable energy expansion (Estonia, Portugal, Poland), electric mobility and clean public transport (Ireland, Romania, Czech Republic).

Digital transformation (20–32% of all NRRPs): Digital public services and e-government (Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia), broadband deployment (Ireland, Portugal), cloud infrastructure (Romania), digital skills and education (Czech Republic, Ireland).

Structural reforms: The RRF's reform conditionality has driven some of the most significant governance and institutional changes in the sample period. Ireland's Technical University transformation, Lithuania's healthcare reform, Poland's judicial reform (as a precondition for EU fund access), Romania's tax administration reform and Slovakia's healthcare modernisation are all RRF-linked.

Healthcare modernisation: A cross-cutting priority across all eleven NRRPs, ranging from hospital infrastructure (Romania, Hungary's plan) to e-health systems (Ireland, Estonia, Lithuania) and long-term care reform (Latvia, Czech Republic).

Table 6: Key differentiators in RRF implementation

COUNTRY	APPROX. % DISBURSED	KEY SUCCESS / CHALLENGE FACTOR	TREND
Czech Republic	83%	- strong central NPO coordination; - milestone delivery supported by well-resourced line ministries - government stability	Positive
Slovakia	81%	- solid progress despite political instability - 4th revision approved Nov 2025 - conflict-of-interest deduction (€1.23 m) minor	Positive
Ireland	81%	- modest total envelope - high administrative capacity - milestones well-designed and achievable - strong NDP integration	Positive
Portugal	78%	- mature AD&C coordination unit - strong pipeline pre-loaded before programme launch - government continuity and reform credibility	Positive
Lithuania	74%	- plan revised Feb 2026 (approved by Council); Jan 2026 partial suspension resolved March 2026; four disbursements in 2026 - collaborative Commission relationship - CPMA implementing competence	Positive
Latvia	74%	- delays in digital reform milestones - infrastructure loans component adds complexity - Council amendments processing	Positive
Slovenia	67%	- good progress despite (or due to) small envelope - green and digital measures proceeding - no major implementation issues	Positive
Estonia	66%	- small envelope - centralised coordination - high public sector digital capacity reduces e-government milestone friction	Positive
Poland	62%	- below EU average; final payment request September 2026 - rule-of-law unlock delayed 2 years - 3 revisions complicated implementation - loan reduction Aug 2025	Stable
Romania	61%	- 4th payment authorised June 2026 - SOE governance disputes delayed 3rd instalment - chronic structural reform delivery risk	Stable-Risk
Hungary	9%	- structural governance failure - super-milestones unmet - 7/8 rule-of-law recommendations unfulfilled - no credible delivery path	Critical

3.3 Key Observations Regarding Efficiency of EU Fund Management

Programme architecture matters, but must be read against scale

Unified structures (Estonia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia) contracted faster in the early phase than fragmented systems (Poland's 24 programmes, Romania's 16). Three confounders qualify this finding: small states run smaller allocations, fewer institutional layers and fewer operations, so part of their speed is simply small scale. Slovakia shows that a unified architecture speeds contracting but not execution — its drawdown stood at 2.6% at end-2024 and accelerated only in 2025–2026. Poland shows the opposite: the most fragmented structure in the sample, at the largest scale in the EU, delivers through a functional regional system. By August 2026 the outturn no longer tracked architecture at all. What survives is the scale-adjusted core: Santos et al. (JCMS 2024), controlling for programme size and territorial characteristics, still find governance-model effects — consolidation's advantage is lower coordination overhead, not an intrinsic speed premium.

Central coordination capacity is more important than number of programmes

Ireland operates four cohesion programmes but performs well — because its total envelope is modest and the national coordination capacity is high relative to programme volume. Conversely, Romania's 17 programmes are managed by institutions that were under-resourced in the 2014–2020 period and have only partially resolved that deficit. The key variable is the ratio of coordination capacity to programme complexity, not programme count alone.

RRF has exposed where structural reform capacity is genuinely limited

The RRF's reform conditionality was intended to incentivise structural change. It has succeeded in some countries (Ireland, Lithuania, Czech Republic) and failed in others (Hungary, Romania for SOE governance, Poland for judicial reform). The pattern suggests that RRF works as a reform accelerator where domestic political will exists and administrative capacity is present but cannot substitute for either. In Hungary's case, the conditionality framework has effectively acted as a sanction mechanism rather than an incentive.

Anti-corruption architecture determines irregularity exposure

Countries with strong public procurement frameworks, independent domestic audit institutions, functional judicial systems and EPPO membership show consistently lower irregularity rates. The two countries with the most severe audit findings (Hungary, Romania) share some common characteristics: political influence over procurement, weak first-level controls at MA level and limited independent oversight. The correlation between rule-of-law quality and audit findings is not coincidental.

Co-financing sustainability is an underappreciated risk

The current period's co-financing obligations will weigh increasingly on national budgets as the 2021-2027 MFF end approaches. Countries that rely on sovereign debt to meet co-financing requirements (Romania, Slovakia) face a structural fiscal risk if programmes are decommitted due to non-execution. The interaction between co-financing obligations, EU decommitment rules and national deficit limits is poorly modelled in most national medium-term fiscal frameworks. The 2026 acceleration makes the risk concrete rather than hypothetical: faster EU-funded execution pulls co-financing calls forward into budgets already under the excessive deficit procedure (Romania) or heavy consolidation (Slovakia).

Human capital gaps in programme management are a structural constraint on absorption

Institutional capacity is not only a function of organisational design and resource levels — it depends critically on the professional competence and continuity of the individuals managing EU funds. High staff turnover in Romanian ADRs and the rapid expansion of Hungarian programme structures without commensurate workforce development each illustrate the same underlying problem: EU fund management is treated as an administrative function rather than a professional specialization requiring dedicated training, certification and career development. Countries that have invested in building a stable, qualified EU funds management profession (Poland's dedicated MA staff training programmes, Estonia's cross-ministry e-governance competence centre) consistently outperform those that have not. This gap is addressable through EU-level action and represents a high return-on-investment opportunity for the post-2027 architecture.

3.4 Local and Regional Involvement in EU Fund Management

3.4.1 Urban Earmarking and Territorial Instruments

Under Article 11 of ERDF Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, all Member States must earmark at least 8% of their national ERDF allocation for sustainable urban development (SUD), delivered through Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) or equivalent territorial tools — up from 5% in 2014–2020. Among the 11 countries, Portugal allocates 16.3%, the Czech Republic 11%, and Ireland, Poland and Latvia 9%, while five countries meet only the minimum. The EU average across all 27 Member States is approximately 12%. In absolute terms, Poland's urban SUD envelope (€3.4 bn) is the largest in the EU.

Ten of the 11 countries use ITIs as the primary delivery vehicle. Ireland uses a functional equivalent through city-level SUD designation within Regional Assembly-managed programmes. ITI quality varies along three dimensions: (1) governance depth – whether urban authorities hold genuine delegated project selection authority, (2) geographic coverage – whether ITIs extend to secondary cities beyond the capital, and (3) multi-fund integration – whether ITI strategies

combine ERDF and ESF+ for cross-sectoral investment. Poland, Czech Republic and Lithuania score highest across all three; Romania and Hungary score weakest on governance depth.

3.4.2 RRF and the Missing Local Earmark

The RRF has no formal urban or regional earmarking requirement, and the Partnership Principle applies only as a non-binding encouragement. Eurocities and CEMR have documented that this centralised management model has led to insufficient local authority involvement, delayed results and reduced absorption effectiveness in urban areas. Despite this, all 11 NRRPs contain components with material sub-national delivery footprints — estimated at 15–30% of total RRF spending. Building renovation is the most consistent local channel across the sample (Lithuania, Czech Republic, Estonia, Slovakia, Ireland), followed by urban mobility decarbonisation (Portugal, Romania, Ireland) and local digital services (Estonia, Lithuania).

Three countries demonstrate effective RRF local delivery models worth highlighting: Lithuania, where 4,000 multi-apartment building renovations are implemented through municipalities and housing management companies; Portugal, where the Mais Habitação programme channels RRF grants through Lisbon and Porto municipalities to address a place-specific urban housing affordability crisis; and Ireland, where Local Authorities as major social landlords implement the building retrofit programme at scale through existing asset management structures.

3.4.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Decentralised EU Fund Delivery

The evidence from the 11 countries supports a nuanced assessment of decentralised delivery. The principal advantages are:

- **Place-based relevance:** sub-national programme ownership produces investment portfolios shaped around genuinely local priorities. CEMR research confirms that ITI and CLLD projects score higher on local relevance than comparable national OP investments.
- **Democratic accountability:** where regional bodies act as managing authorities (Ireland, Poland, Portugal), EU investment acquires direct democratic legitimacy through elected representatives.
- **Administrative capacity building:** managing EU funds builds sub-national institutional competences that persist beyond the programme period, as evidenced by Estonia's and Poland's high-performing regional institutions.
- **Pipeline depth:** urban authorities with ITI status develop more mature project pipelines by aligning EU investment with existing municipal capital plans, as demonstrated by the ahead-of-schedule performance in Estonia's Ida-Viru and Slovenia's Šaleška Valley JTFs.

The principal disadvantages are equally evidenced:

- **Capacity gaps:** decentralisation improves outcomes only when sub-national bodies have adequate administrative capacity. Romania's ADR system and Slovakia's early-stage ITI urban authorities show how formal decentralisation can slow absorption when capacity is insufficient.
- **Coordination overhead:** Poland's 24-programme and Romania's 17-programme architectures impose significant horizontal coordination costs on beneficiaries working across programme boundaries.
- **Elite capture risk:** sub-national decision-making systems can be more susceptible to local networks, as evidenced by OLAF findings in Slovakia and Romania.
- **Uneven territorial outcomes:** without adequate support, decentralised delivery tends to favour already better-governed and more developed areas, potentially exacerbating within-country disparities that cohesion policy is designed to reduce.

3.4.4 Noteworthy Good Practices

Several country practices stand out as transferable models.

Portugal's Comunidades Intermunicipais (CIM) ITI model groups municipalities across urban-rural functional boundaries, enabling integrated territorial strategies for interior regions beyond the dominant metropolitan areas – directly addressing urban-rural linkage challenges and the PO5 'Europe closer to citizens' objective.

Lithuania's urban ESF+-funded CLLD deploys Local Action Groups in deprived city districts, reaching sub-district poverty that ITI-scale investments cannot address.

Poland's multi-level ITI system provides mandatory territorial coverage of all voivodeship capitals and optional sub-regional RTIs for secondary cities, representing the EU's most comprehensive urban SUD architecture.

Ireland's Regional Assembly MA model combines genuine sub-national ownership with democratic accountability through elected councillors, and extends to the complex cross-border governance of PEACE Plus.

Estonia's Ida-Viru JTF, co-developed and co-governed with county and local authorities, demonstrates that locally co-owned transition plans produce faster implementation than centrally designed programmes.

Slovenia's Šaleška Valley JTF corroborates this finding. The Velenje municipal government's proactive treatment of JTF resources as a transformation catalyst, directing investment towards renewable energy manufacturing and advanced skills rather than social compensation, has produced a replicable model of locally driven just transition that contrasts sharply with the compensation-dominant approach observed in Romania's Oltenia region. See also R17 below.

4. Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations are structured in two distinct tiers: (1) EU-level, addressing the design of the support framework; (2) programme/institutional design, addressing structural choices that correlate with better outcomes. All recommendations are calibrated to the 2028+ MFF negotiation context as well as immediate 2026–2027 implementation priorities.

4.1 EU-Level Recommendations

R1: Introduce an architecture simplification incentive in the next MFF

The evidence strongly supports rewarding Member States that adopt unified or consolidated programme architectures with higher initial pre-financing rates (e.g. 5% rather than 2% of total allocation). This would create a genuine fiscal incentive for the post-2027 programming period design and address the complexity premium that multi-programme architectures impose on smaller beneficiaries.

R2: Allow greater flexibility for intra-programme reallocations without formal amendment procedures

The current CPR (Articles 18 and 24) requires a formal Commission decision — typically taking three to six months — to reallocate resources between priority axes within a programme, preventing managing authorities from responding to absorption signals in real time. The post-2027 CPR should allow transfers of up to 15% of a priority axis allocation to another priority within the same programme through a simplified notification procedure subject to monitoring committee approval and annual reporting, eliminating the procedural delay that currently discourages active portfolio management.

R3: Differentiate N+3 rules by country development level and programme maturity

The automatic decommitment rule applies uniformly regardless of programme complexity and administrative capacity. A graduated schedule — for example, N+4 for the first programming cycle of a new architecture, or for countries with contracting progress above 40% — would reduce crisis-driven spending and improve investment quality, conditional on satisfactory audit findings and enhanced Commission monitoring. The 2026 experience supports both halves of the argument: absorption converged only through a deadline-driven spending rush, and the Commission itself extended Poland's RRF payment deadline by four months to December 2026 — flexibility that should be formalised in the post-2027 CPR as a transparent, criteria-based mechanism rather than ad hoc negotiation.

R4: Establish a permanent EU-level Procurement Integrity Infrastructure

The Commission should move beyond recommending anti-procurement-fraud measures and establish a shared digital procurement monitoring platform (building on ARACHNE and the Kohesio portal) accessible to all Member State managing authorities in real time. Beneficiary due diligence, conflict-of-interest screening and contractor ownership transparency should be mandatory pre-conditions for grant approval above €500,000. OLAF and EPPO access to this platform should be direct and automatic.

R5: Redesign the Rule-of-Law Conditionality mechanism to include graduated re-engagement

The current conditionality framework is binary (suspend or unsuspend) and has proven ineffective in producing governance change in Hungary. A graduated model — partial fund access tied to specific, verifiable, sequenced reform milestones — would maintain pressure while preventing the permanent capital waste of full suspension. Countries where conditionality has been triggered should be offered a structured recovery pathway with quarterly Commission review and transparent public reporting.

R6: Strengthen RRF-cohesion complementarity requirements in national plans

The post-2026 architecture should formally require Member States to submit a Cohesion-RRF Complementarity Map demonstrating how RRF investments create enabling conditions for cohesion programme delivery (e.g. digital infrastructure from RRF enabling e-procurement for cohesion; judicial reform enabling contract enforcement). Countries that demonstrate coherent sequencing should receive additional flexibility in cohesion programme reallocation. Portugal and Slovenia had NRRP amendments approved in December 2025 (Council) with investments explicitly sequenced to enable cohesion programme implementation, demonstrating that the Complementarity Map model is operationally feasible.

R7: Introduce a formal local and regional earmark in any post-RRF reform instrument

All 11 NRRPs contain components with material sub-national delivery footprints (15–30% of spending), yet this is unplanned, unmeasured and unaccountable. Any successor to the RRF should include: (1) a minimum 15% earmark for investments involving local or regional authorities as primary beneficiaries; (2) mandatory sub-national government consultation in plan design; and (3) a formal regional expenditure disaggregation requirement in payment requests. This would integrate the demonstrated local delivery value of the RRF into the formal accountability architecture of any future reform-linked instrument.

R8: Invest in beneficiary capacity as a mandatory TA component

ECA findings in Romania, Latvia and Estonia have identified beneficiary capacity — not managing authority failure — as a root cause of low absorption. Technical assistance allocations

(typically 2–4% of programme) should include a mandatory beneficiary support programme equivalent, with measurable capacity-building targets tracked in annual implementation reports.

R9: Raise the ERDF urban SUD earmark to at least 10% and incentivise secondary city ITI coverage

The 8% minimum is below the EU average of 12% and insufficient for countries with complex multi-city urban systems. A graduated threshold — 10% minimum plus a 2% higher pre-financing incentive for countries designating ITI territories for secondary cities above 100,000 population — would address documented under-investment in secondary cities (Poland's sub-regional RTIs, Czech Republic's Brno and Ostrava, Lithuania's Kaunas and Klaipėda). Evidence confirms that secondary city ITIs are as strategically important for territorial cohesion as capital city instruments.

4.2 Programme & Institutional Design Recommendations

These recommendations address the structural design choices that the evidence most strongly associates with better outcomes, relevant for the post-2027 MFF programming cycle.

R10: Adopt unified or two-fund programme architectures as the default

Countries designing their 2028+ programme architecture should adopt the principle of one programme per fund (or a single unified programme where national administrative capacity permits). Thematic priorities can be addressed through specific objectives within a single programme rather than through separate OPs. Where regional programmes are genuinely necessary for territorial ownership, the number of regional MAs should be limited to statutory territorial entities (provinces, counties, assemblies) with proven administrative capacity.

R11: Establish a Ministry of Finance-anchored central coordination body as a mandatory design element

The most effective institutional setups in the sample (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia) share a common feature: the Ministry of Finance or an equivalent central body holds genuine coordination authority, including the ability to redirect allocations between programmes in response to absorption data. This function should be established in law, staffed with senior civil servants on multi-year contracts, and equipped with real-time programme management information.

R12: Pre-qualify all MAs against a minimum administrative capacity standard before programme launch

A recurring finding across the audit record is that managing authorities are formally designated but lack the staffing, IT systems and procedural knowledge to operate effectively at programme launch. Commission designation decisions should be conditional on a pre-launch readiness

assessment covering procurement procedure library, IT system integration with national public procurement registry, anti-fraud training completion, and a populated project pipeline covering at least 30% of the first-year allocation.

R13: Mandate dedicated ITI technical assistance units within urban authorities before programme launch

Urban authorities designated as ITI bodies require dedicated, ring-fenced technical assistance operational before the first project call — not recruited in response to early failures. Best practice from the Warsaw Metropolitan Area ITI secretariat, Tallinn's urban development unit and the Czech EUI metropolitan cooperation programme shows that a small specialised team (3–5 staff) for strategy management, pipeline development, beneficiary support and monitoring produces measurably better contracting rates and lower irregularity exposure. Pre-designation readiness assessments covering procurement procedures, IT systems, strategy quality and financial management capacity should be a mandatory condition for ITI delegation.

R14: Establish an EU-level professional certification framework for EU fund managers

High staff turnover — documented in Romania's ADRs and Hungary's suspended programme structures — destroys institutional knowledge and reflects a persistent failure to treat EU fund management as a professional specialism rather than a general administrative function. The Commission should develop, with Member States and EIPA, a tiered certification framework covering procurement compliance, audit readiness, project appraisal, and monitoring and evaluation, with certification mandatory for MA-level staff above a designated grade. Member States demonstrating certified workforce continuity should receive the same pre-financing incentive proposed under R1. Poland's dedicated MA training programmes and Estonia's cross-ministry competence development both correlate with above-average absorption and below-average irregularity rates, confirming the return on this investment.

R15: Make EPPO membership a condition for fund access above a threshold level

Hungary and Romania — the two countries with the most severe fraud and irregularity risk profiles — are both EPPO members but have seen limited effective prosecution of EU fund fraud. The issue is not formal membership but practical cooperation. Member States with active EPPO investigations exceeding a certain threshold (e.g. over €10 million under active investigation) should face enhanced Commission audit frequency and mandatory first-level control strengthening as an adequate risk response.

R16: Integrate long-term fiscal sustainability planning for co-financing obligations

Member States should be required to submit a “Multi-Annual Co-financing Sustainability Plan” as part of their Partnership Agreement, demonstrating how national co-financing obligations will be met across the full programme period (2021–2029 for cohesion payment claims) under both a

baseline and a stress scenario (e.g. 20% reduction in EU disbursements due to decommitment or conditionality). This would surface co-financing fiscal risks early and allow the Commission and IMF to engage on structural adjustment before a programme crisis materialises.

R17: Redesign the JTF around economic transformation rather than employment compensation

The JTF does not structurally distinguish between investment that builds durable replacement economic capacity and investment that merely compensates for employment loss. The contrast between transformation-led JTFs ahead of schedule (Estonia's Ida-Viru, Slovenia's Šaleška Valley) and compensation-dominant ones with slow execution (Romania's Oltenia) demonstrates that this design gap has direct consequences for both regional resilience and implementation speed. The post-2027 JTF should: (1) require Territorial Just Transition Plans to include a quantified transformation target (minimum 40% of allocation directed to new economic activities outside the declining sector); (2) prioritise innovation ecosystems, SME incubation and higher education-industry partnerships as eligible interventions; (3) make workforce reskilling a mandatory plan component; and (4) condition mid-term performance review on evidence of emerging replacement economic activity, not only job preservation metrics. The Commission's Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP, Regulation (EU) 2024/795) applies transformation-oriented eligibility criteria for clean tech and advanced manufacturing, providing a regulatory precedent for the transformation-target principle proposed here.

R18: Promote Portugal's CIM intermunicipal ITI model for rural-urban interface territories

Countries with significant rural-urban interface territories — whether driven by persistent demographic decline in rural areas (Latvia, Lithuania) or weak individual municipal capacity that prevents smaller units from managing ITI strategies independently (Romania) — should designate intermunicipal community associations as ITI bodies for non-metropolitan regions, following Portugal's Comunidades Intermunicipais model. This enables the ERDF urban SUD earmark to address rural-urban linkages rather than concentrating exclusively on metropolitan areas, directly serving the Policy Objective 5 rationale.

R19: Exempt ITI and CLLD projects from the N+3 automatic decommitment rule

N+3 decommitment pressure disproportionately affects ITI and CLLD projects, which require more time for participatory strategy development and cross-sector project pipeline preparation than standard national calls. CEMR has explicitly advocated for this exemption. A conditional exemption — requiring demonstrated contracting progress and satisfactory audit findings within the ITI territory — would allow urban authorities to develop genuinely integrated strategies without creating programme-level decommitment risk, improving both investment quality and depth of territorial engagement.

5. Conclusions

The mid-point of the 2021–2027 programming period reveals a consistent pattern: the countries with the most to gain from EU investment are the least able to deliver it effectively. Romania holds over €52 billion in cohesion and RRF allocations but has executed roughly 17% of its cohesion envelope. Hungary has €18 billion frozen, with governance conditions showing no measurable improvement. Slovakia's Supreme Audit Office has flagged decommitment risks. These are not cyclical underperformers temporarily behind schedule — they are countries where the structural conditions for effective EU fund delivery (governance quality, administrative capacity, programme design coherence) are absent or contested.

On the other end of the spectrum are countries where EU fund management works well and where the reasons are identifiable and replicable. Estonia's unified programme architecture, high municipal administrative capacity and locally co-owned Ida-Viru JTF produce above-average results from a modest envelope. Portugal's CCDR-managed regional programmes and CIM intermunicipal ITI model deliver the highest urban ERDF earmark in the sample (16.3%) through a genuinely decentralised governance structure with strong democratic accountability. Lithuania's building renovation programme — implemented through municipalities and housing management companies — demonstrates that RRF resources can be effectively channelled to local level when national design explicitly creates that pathway. Ireland's Regional Assembly managing authorities show that genuine sub-national programme ownership is compatible with strong overall performance. These models are not unique to small or wealthy countries — Poland's 16-voivodeship regional programme system demonstrates that large-scale decentralisation is operationally feasible when regional institutions are adequately resourced.

Four variables explain the bulk of performance variation across the eleven countries:

- **Programme architecture** (unified vs. fragmented) predicts early contracting speed.
- **Institutional coordination capacity** (the ratio of central coordination resource to programme complexity) predicts sustained delivery.
- **Governance quality** (rule-of-law, anti-corruption architecture, EPPO cooperation) predicts irregularity exposure.
- **Sub-national governance quality** (whether local and regional authorities have genuine authority, adequate capacity and a supportive institutional culture) predicts both investment relevance and JTF implementation speed.

None of these variables is fixed: each is addressable through deliberate policy choices at EU and national level.

The **RRF** leaves a more ambiguous legacy. It has **demonstrably worked as a reform accelerator where domestic political will and administrative capacity existed** — Ireland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Portugal. It has failed where they did not — Hungary's super-milestones remain unmet; Romania's state-owned enterprise governance reform required multiple payment interventions.

More structurally, the RRF's centralised milestone-based design has systematically **excluded local and regional authorities** from an instrument that de facto reaches sub-national level in 15–30% of its spending across all eleven plans. The gap between what the RRF achieves locally and what it formally accounts for must be resolved in the post-2027 architecture, whether through a successor instrument with a formal local earmark (R7) or through explicit regional disaggregation requirements in payment reporting.

The JTF's record adds a further design lesson. **Where Territorial Just Transition Plans are co-developed with local authorities and oriented towards building new economic capacity** – renewable manufacturing in Velenje, advanced services in Narva – **implementation proceeds ahead of schedule and attracts private co-investment**. Where plans are centrally designed and primarily compensatory – Oltenia's lignite transition dominated by social support measures rather than economic diversification – execution is slow and regional dependency deepens rather than diminishes. The post-2027 JTF requires a structural redesign around a quantified transformation target (R17), not merely a reallocation of the same eligible expenditure categories.

Two recommendations in this brief address gaps that have received insufficient attention in the post-2027 architecture debate.

- **Professional certification for EU fund managers** (R14) directly confronts the human capital constraint that the analytical evidence identifies as a root cause of underperformance in Romania, Slovakia and Hungary.
- **Intra-programme reallocation flexibility** (R2) addresses the procedural rigidity that prevents even well-governed managing authorities from optimising their portfolios in response to real-time absorption data.

Both are technically straightforward, require no new institutions and would produce measurable returns within a single programming cycle.

The post-2027 MFF negotiations will determine whether the **EU's investment framework evolves from an allocation-driven model into a performance-driven one**. The evidence in this policy brief points clearly to what that evolution requires: (1) simpler programme architectures rewarded by design incentives; (2) conditionality that produces reform rather than paralysis; (3) local and regional authorities treated as co-designers rather than implementing intermediaries; (4) JTFs designed to build economies rather than cushion their decline; and (5) a fund management workforce treated as a professional community rather than an administrative overhead. None of these changes is beyond reach. All of them are supported by evidence already present in the current programming period, in the countries that have chosen to get this right.

Country Fact Sheets

Czech Republic

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €21.4 bn (cohesion) + €9.2 bn (RRF incl. loans) = €30.6 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€10.5 bn	Investments in R&I, digital transformation, SME competitiveness, green energy, transport and urban development.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€6.3 bn	Large transport (TEN-T rail, roads) and environmental infrastructure; energy efficiency and renewable energy.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€3.7 bn	Employment, social inclusion, education, skills, equal opportunities and poverty reduction.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€1.6 bn	Supports transition in Moravian-Silesian, Ústí and Karlovy Vary regions, coal and heavy industry areas.
EMFAF	€0.03 bn	Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants	€7.1 bn	National Recovery Plan (Národní plán obnovy): digital transformation (21%), green transition (42%), resilience, education, public health and administration reform. No loans requested.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 was adopted on 24 May 2022 (the sixth PA adopted overall). It covers eight Operational Programmes (OPs) at national level and eight Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs), plus Interreg programmes. The Czech approach retained regional programmes unlike Slovakia's unified model.

Key documents and mechanisms:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted May 2022)
- OP Technologies and Applications for Competitiveness (TAČR): ERDF-led
- OP Jan Amos Komenský: ESF+/ERDF for education and research
- OP Transport: CF/ERDF for TEN-T transport infrastructure
- OP Environment: CF/ERDF for green transition and waste management
- OP Just Transition (OP ST): JTF for structural transition regions
- OP Employment Plus (OPZ+): ESF+ for labour market and social inclusion
- 8 Regional Operational Programmes (IROP): ERDF/ESF+ for regional development
- National Recovery Plan (Národní plán obnovy – NPO): €8.4 bn RRF grants + €0.8 bn loans (€9.2 bn total, post-REPowerEU revision)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
OP Technologies & Applications for Competitiveness	Ministry of Industry and Trade	CzechInvest; Technology Agency (TAČR)	National Monitoring Committee
OP Transport	Ministry of Transport	State Fund for Transport Infrastructure (SFDI)	OP Transport Monitoring Committee
OP Environment	Ministry of the Environment	State Environmental Fund (SFŽP)	OP Environment Monitoring Committee
OP Just Transition (OP ST)	Ministry of Environment (lead)	Line regional bodies for affected regions	JTF Monitoring Committee
OP Employment Plus (OPZ+)	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Labour Office of the Czech Republic	OPZ+ Monitoring Committee
Integrated Regional OP (IROP)	Ministry of Regional Development	Regional development agencies; CRR ČR	IROP Monitoring Committee
NPO / RRF	Ministry of Finance (co-ordination) + line ministries	Various sector implementing bodies	National NPO Monitoring Mechanism

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Cohesion programmes (aggregate)	35–40%	8–12% (limited execution 2023–2024)
NPO (RRF) – grants	75–80% (milestones confirmed)	83% disbursed; sixth payment received August 2026

5. National Co-financing

Standard national co-financing for cohesion: 15–20% (EU finances 80–85%). RRF is grant-only, no co-financing required.

Indicative national co-financing for cohesion: approximately €3.5–4.5 bn over 2021–2027.

- Allocated National Resources: €4.0 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: limited data; slow cohesion execution; RRF disbursements above EU average.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (IROP + Regional OPs)	11% of ERDF (€1.15 bn) — above 8% minimum; 13 ITI metropolitan areas and agglomerations	30–40%
JTF (OP ST)	100% regionally targeted (Moravian-Silesian, Ústí, Karlovy Vary regions); regional govts as IBs	25–30%
RRF / NPO	No formal urban earmark; building renovation and broadband reach municipal level (20–25% est. sub-national)	70–75% (total)

The Czech Republic allocates 11% of its ERDF to sustainable urban development through ITIs in 13 metropolitan areas and agglomerations including Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Pilsen and newly designated Mladá Boleslav. Urban authorities hold delegated project selection authority within each ITI. The three JTF regions implement transition through regional territorial plans with regional governments as intermediate bodies. The State Environmental Fund serves as implementing body for both ERDF and RRF renovation streams, creating a single access point for municipal beneficiaries.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes (aggregate)	Key targets: 6,000+ enterprises supported; TEN-T corridor upgrades; 50,000+ skills training places; transition of 50,000 workers in affected JTF regions; renewable energy installations.	Early-stage; approximately 35–40% contracted. Rule of law concerns in prior period resolved; programmes progressing normally.
NPO (RRF)	42% green / 21% digital transition expenditure. Milestones in energy efficiency, digital public services, healthcare, education and R&I.	83% disbursed following the sixth payment (August 2026) — the highest rate in the sample.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
OLAF / EPPO 'Machine' case (Czechia, joint investigation)	Funds recovery; criminal proceedings; strengthened procurement controls in subsequent calls	OLAF cooperated with Czech National Organised Crime Agency and EPPO on a fraud case involving manipulation of public tenders for EU-funded farm equipment and falsified invoices. Case reported in OLAF Annual Report 2024.
ECA Special Report 15/2023 – absorption of cohesion funds 2014–2020	Recommendations for stronger front-loaded contract support and better planning; applied to 2021–2027 design	The Czech Republic was among Member States flagged for late-period spending concentration (year-end rush) in 2014–2020, creating sustainability and audit risks. Commission recommended improved pipeline management for 2021–2027.
Commission DG REGIO audit: public procurement irregularities (2021–2022)	Financial corrections applied to affected grants; tightened first-level controls	Audits under 2014–2020 found repeated irregularities in public procurement procedures (direct award, insufficient competition), leading to financial corrections. Same risks acknowledged in 2021–2027 management and control system design.

Estonia

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €3.5 bn (cohesion) + €0.95 bn (RRF) = €4.45 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€1.35 bn	R&I, SME competitiveness, digital transformation, clean energy, sustainable urban mobility and transport.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€0.78 bn	Environment (circular economy, energy efficiency, renewable energy) and transport infrastructure (TEN-T connections).
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€0.87 bn	Employment, lifelong learning, social inclusion, health, equal opportunities and poverty reduction.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.35 bn	Supports Ida-Viru County region transitioning from oil shale energy production.
EMFAF	€0.08 bn	Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants	€1.0 bn	National Recovery and Resilience Plan: green transition, digital transformation, healthcare, smart administration. No loans requested by Estonia.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 adopted 18 July 2022 (15th PA adopted). Estonia operates a streamlined single Cohesion Policy Programme, combined with several sector-specific programmes.

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted July 2022)
- Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (unified national programme): €3.5 bn
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): €0.95 bn RRF grants; pillars include green energy, digital state, health reform and smart administration
- JTF Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ida-Viru County

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (unified)	Government Office / Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Ministry of Economic Affairs & Communications; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Social Affairs; Ministry of the Environment; Enterprise Estonia (EAS)	Cohesion Policy Programme Monitoring Committee
JTF (Ida-Viru)	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Ida-Viru County Government; EAS; KredEx	JTF Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
NRRP / RRF	State Chancellery (coordination); line ministries per pillar	Implementing agencies per sector	NRRP Steering Committee

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027	40–50%	15–20%
NRRP (RRF)	65% (milestones assessed)	66% disbursed; Council approved NRRP amendments March 2026

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing rate: EU 80–85%, national 15–20%.

- Allocated National Resources (cohesion): €0.5–0.7 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: programme-level data limited; Estonia is generally an efficient fund absorber relative to its size.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (Cohesion Policy Programme)	8% of ERDF (€108 m) — minimum threshold; ITIs for Tallinn and Tartu functional urban areas	30–35%
JTF (Ida-Viru County)	100% regionally targeted; county government is formal governance partner in oil shale transition plan	35–40%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; building renovation and local digital services reach municipal level (20% est.)	Above EU avg.

Estonia meets the 8% ERDF minimum through ITI strategies for the Tallinn and Tartu urban functional areas, with city authorities holding delegated project selection authority. The entire JTF is directed to Ida-Viru County, with the county government as a formal co-owner of the Territorial Just Transition Plan — a model of genuine local ownership that has contributed to the JTF proceeding on schedule. Estonia's high municipal administrative capacity enables effective sub-national RRF delivery without large technical assistance requirements.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Policy Programme	Key targets: 1,000+ enterprises supported in R&I; 200 km transport upgrades; 50,000+ persons in skills/employment programmes; 200 MW renewable energy capacity added.	74% disbursed (4th payment May 2026); among better-performing smaller Member States. JTF oil shale transition progressing on schedule.

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
NRRP (RRF)	Green energy, digital government, health and skills reform. Measures include renovating 3,500 buildings, expanding broadband, digitalising public services.	66% disbursed; progressing well. Council approved targeted amendments to NRRP in March 2026.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
ECA / Commission: audit of JTF implementation (oil shale transition)	Recommendations for improved transition planning and beneficiary capacity building in Ida-Viru region	Early audit observations noted risk of limited beneficiary capacity and project pipeline depth in the JTF. Authorities strengthened technical assistance and project development support.
Commission DG REGIO: first-level control weaknesses in ERDF projects (carryover 2014–2020)	Strengthened management verifications and beneficiary guidance in 2021–2027 system design	Audit findings in the 2014–2020 period pointed to gaps in first-level controls (management verifications), particularly for R&I ERDF projects. Corrective measures incorporated into the MCS for the new period.

Hungary

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €21.7 bn (cohesion; €6.3 bn suspended under the Conditionality Regulation, €8.4 bn frozen in total) + RRF (€10.4 bn blocked) = nominal €32 bn, effective €15 bn accessible

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€10.2 bn	SME development, R&I, digital transformation, clean energy, transport, urban development. Significant portion suspended due to rule-of-law conditionality.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€5.8 bn	TEN-T transport, environmental infrastructure. Partial suspension under conditionality.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€4.6 bn	Employment, social inclusion, education, health and equal opportunities.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.8 bn	Supports energy transition in Mátra and Borsod regions.
EMFAF	€0.06 bn	Freshwater fisheries and aquaculture.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€3.9 bn grants + €6.5 bn loans (mostly frozen)	Hungarian NRRP: green transition, digital transformation, child poverty reduction, healthcare. €10.4 bn effectively blocked due to super-milestones on rule of law not fulfilled.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement adopted 22 December 2022 (last PA adopted – 27th of 27 Member States). PA includes a detailed roadmap for anti-corruption and procurement reform as a condition for fund access.

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted Dec 2022) – includes conditionality reform roadmap
- 11 national operational programmes (OPs), including:
 - OP for the Development of Economic Environment (GINOP Plusz): ERDF
 - OP for Environment and Energy (KEHOP Plusz): CF/ERDF
 - OP for Transport (KÖZOP Plusz): CF/ERDF transport
 - OP for Social Development and Employment (ESZA Plusz): ESF+
 - OP for Territorial and Settlement Development (TOP Plusz): ERDF/ESF+ regional
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): nominal €10.4 bn (mostly blocked)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
GINOP Plusz (Economic Environment)	Ministry of National Economy	Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency (HIPA); National Research, Development and Innovation Office	GINOP Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
KEHOP Plusz (Environment & Energy)	Ministry of Energy	National Environmental Protection Authority; National Infrastructure Development Zrt. (NIF)	KEHOP Monitoring Committee
KÖZOP Plusz (Transport)	Ministry of Construction and Transport	NIF Zrt. (National Infrastructure Development)	KÖZOP Monitoring Committee
ESZA Plusz (Social Development)	Ministry of Interior / Ministry of Labour	National Employment Service (NFSZ)	ESZA Monitoring Committee
TOP Plusz (Regional)	Deputy PM Office	National Development Ministry regional bodies	TOP Monitoring Committee
NRRP / RRF	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Line ministries	NRRP Coordination Mechanism – access largely blocked

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Cohesion Programmes (aggregate)	15–20% (affected by €6.3 bn suspension)	5–8% (very low due to conditionality constraints and access restrictions; Hungary permanently lost €1 bn in 2024 due to T+2 rule)
NRRP (RRF)	9% disbursed (€920 m out of €10.4 bn); worst performer in EU	Effectively stalled; no new payments until super-milestones met

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 70–85%, national 15–30%. Many suspended programmes affect national budget planning.

- Allocated National Resources: €3–5 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: severely constrained by rule-of-law suspensions. Hungary permanently lost €1 bn due to the two-year decommitment rule in 2024.
- As of July 2025, €18 bn remains frozen (€8.4 bn cohesion — of which €6.3 bn under the Conditionality Regulation — + €9.5 bn RRF) due to 'no progress' on 7 of 8 Commission rule-of-law recommendations (Rule of Law Report, July 2025). In September 2025 the Commission approved the regrouping of €545 m from frozen cohesion funds, conditional on academic freedom guarantees; approximately €18 bn nevertheless remains blocked as of mid-2026.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (TOP Plusz)	9.1% of ERDF (€927 m) formally planned; county and city govts as IBs — delivery effectively frozen by conditionality	5–8% (blocked)
JTF (Mátra, Borsod)	100% regionally targeted; county governments formally involved; delivery severely constrained	5–10%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; only 9% of NRRP disbursed; local/regional component effectively zero	9% (total)

Hungary's architecture formally includes TOP Plusz as a dedicated territorial OP channelling ERDF through 20 county governments and municipalities, with ITIs designed for Budapest and six major secondary cities. In practice, the rule-of-law conditionality suspension has rendered this architecture largely inoperative: county governments and municipalities have been unable to receive their allocations. The RRF situation is equally severe, with super-milestones unmet and no near-term delivery pathway.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes	Targets for SMEs, transport, environment, social development across Hungary. JTF targets for Mátra/Borsod energy transition.	Very low absorption (5–8% executed). Rule-of-law conditionality severely constrains access. Hungary paying €1 m/day penalty over asylum policy, deducted from EU payments (as of mid-2024). Commission Rule of Law Report (July 2025) found no progress on 7 of 8 recommendations.
NRRP (RRF)	Green transition, digitalisation, child poverty. Super-milestones require judicial independence reforms, anti-corruption and public procurement transparency.	Only 9% disbursed (€920 m). EU and Hungary in ongoing standoff. Additional €1 bn permanently decommitted 2024 under T+2 financing rule.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
Rule-of-law conditionality – 55% cohesion suspension (Dec 2022 – ongoing)	€6.3 bn cohesion commitments suspended under the Conditionality Regulation (€8.4 bn cohesion frozen in total); €1 bn permanently lost (2024). Ongoing per Rule of Law Report July 2025	Conditionality Regulation triggered due to breaches of rule of law affecting EU financial interests: failures in public procurement, prosecutorial independence, corruption control and conflict-of-interest rules. Commission found 'no progress' on 7/8 recommendations (July 2025).
OLAF: systemic corruption in public procurement (ongoing investigations)	Investigations and recovery proceedings; national judiciary and EPPO notified	Multiple OLAF investigations into Hungarian EU-funded projects have found systemic conflict-of-interest, inflated costs, inadequate competition and links to politically connected entities. Public interest trust structures excluded from Horizon and Erasmus.
ECA Special Report 21/2023 – EU funds and rule-of-law conditionality	Recommendations for transparent and proportionate conditionality application	ECA assessed the EU's use of conditionality tools in Poland and Hungary, noting that partial suspensions created residual risks. Recommended that conditionality be systematically applied and that lifted suspensions be subject to verification.

Ireland

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €1.13 bn (core cohesion, excl. Interreg) + €1.15 bn (RRF) = €2.28 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€0.396 bn	Strengthening regional innovation ecosystems; new Technical Universities as regional knowledge hubs; digital transition; enterprise competitiveness.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€0.508 bn	Social inclusion, poverty reduction, skills, employment and equal opportunities; over half targeted at disadvantaged groups.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.085 bn	Supports Ireland's Midlands region transitioning from peat extraction for energy (Bord na Móna wind-down).
EMFAF	€0.142 bn	Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and maritime blue economy (Atlantic-facing).
European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)	€0.293 bn	Cross-border programmes: PEACE Plus (NI-Ireland), Northern Periphery and Atlantic, and Northwest Europe. Not counted in core PA total.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants only	€1.15 bn (incl. REPowerEU chapter €239 m)	National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): green transition (50% of spend, incl. REPowerEU), digital transformation (34%), social/economic recovery. Ireland did not request RRF loans. Relative to GDP, Ireland's allocation is modest (0.3% of 2019 GDP).

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement formally launched 20 September 2022 (22nd PA). Ireland is a more-developed Member State with a relatively modest cohesion allocation.

Key documents and mechanisms:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted September 2022): €1.4 bn total (including Interreg + EMFAF)
- Southern and Eastern Regional Programme (SERP): ERDF-focused; managed by Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly (SERA)
- Northern and Western Regional Programme (NWRP): ERDF-focused; managed by Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)
- Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training (EIST) Programme: ESF+-focused; managed by Department of Further and Higher Education
- Just Transition Fund Programme: managed by Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): €1.15 bn grants; 14 reforms and 19 investments across 4 pillars

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Southern & Eastern Regional Programme (SERP – ERDF)	Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly (SERA)	Enterprise Ireland; IDA Ireland; Higher Education Authority	SERP Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Northern & Western Regional Programme (NWRP – ERDF)	Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA)	Enterprise Ireland; IDA Ireland	NWRP Monitoring Committee
Employment, Inclusion, Skills & Training (EIST – ESF+)	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science	SOLAS (Further Education & Training Authority); Tusla; HSE; LMETB	EIST Monitoring Committee
JTF Programme (Midlands)	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications	Just Transition Fund Team; Local Authorities; Bord na Móna	JTF Monitoring Committee
EMFAF	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)	EMFAF Monitoring Committee
NRRP / RRF	Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation (coordination)	Line departments per pillar	NRRP Cross-Departmental Steering Group

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
ERDF Regional Programmes (aggregate)	50–60%	25–35%
ESF+ (EIST)	55%	30%
JTF (Midlands)	60%	30%
NRRP (RRF)	60% (milestones achieved)	€324 m (1st) + €115 m (2nd) + €240 m (3rd) + €249 m (4th, May 2026) = €929 m received = 81% of €1.15 bn

5. National Co-financing

Ireland is a more-developed Member State. Standard EU co-financing rates: 40–60% (EU), 40–60% (national). The full value of programmes with national match funding amounts to almost €3.5 bn for the cohesion envelope.

- Allocated National Resources: €0.9–1.5 bn (cohesion match + Exchequer co-financing)
- Utilised National Resources: Ireland's National Development Plan (NDP) 2021–2030 provides €165 bn in total public investment, with EU funds integrated as a supplementary instrument (RRF < 1% of total NDP).

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (SERP + NWRP)	9% of ERDF nationally (€36 m); designated SUD cities (Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Galway, Sligo); Regional Assemblies as MAs	35–45%
JTF (Midlands)	100% regionally targeted (5 counties — peat transition); local authorities and Bord na Móna as delivery partners	35–40%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; social housing retrofit via Local Authorities; EV charging via LA area plans (20–25% est.)	81% (total)

Ireland designates Regional Assemblies as ERDF managing authorities — one of the most genuinely decentralised models in the sample — and uses city/county councils as urban SUD authorities without

formal ITI designation. The JTF Midlands peat transition is ahead of schedule, driven by strong Local Authority and Bord na Móna involvement. The PEACE Plus cross-border programme provides a unique governance model for EU investment across an international political border. Local Authorities serve as primary RRF social housing retrofit implementers, leveraging their role as the country's largest social landlords.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
ERDF Regional Programmes	Targets: 4 new Technical Universities operational as regional knowledge hubs; 500+ enterprises supported in R&I; digital infrastructure upgrades; regional competitiveness.	Moderate-to-good; Technical Universities transformation proceeding. RRF complementing ERDF investments.
ESF+ (EIST)	Targets: 100,000+ persons in employment/skills/training programmes; disadvantaged group support; social inclusion milestones.	Good progress; third NRRP payment (€240 m) linked partly to TUTORR (Technological Universities) transformation milestones achieved.
JTF (Midlands)	Peat transition: diversification of Midlands economy; renewable energy; re-skilling former peat workers; biodiversity restoration.	Good progress; peat transition largely on track; Bord na Móna transition ahead of schedule.
NRRP (RRF)	Green transition (50%, incl. REPowerEU): building renovation, EV charging, EV fleet, sustainable agriculture. Digital (34%): broadband, digital public services, e-health. Social/economic: housing, childcare, higher education.	81% disbursed (4 payments + pre-financing; 4th payment May 2026). Ireland on track to claim remaining allocation before 2026 deadline.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
European Court of Auditors: PEACE Plus programme governance review (2023)	Enhanced cross-border governance protocols and outcome tracking requirements	ECA review of the PEACE Plus programme (Ireland-Northern Ireland cross-border programme) noted governance complexities arising from Brexit and the need for robust monitoring of cross-border outcomes. Recommendations accepted.
Commission DG EMPL: eligibility controls in ESF programmes (2014–2020 carryover)	Enhanced eligibility guidance, improved verification checklists for 2021–2027 EIST programme	Audit findings in the Ireland ESF 2014–2020 programme identified gaps in documentation of eligibility criteria for participant-level expenditure. Controls tightened for the 2021–2027 EIST programme.
Commission NRRP assessment: minor milestone clarifications (2023–2025)	Additional evidence provided to Commission; no payment deductions applied	Commission assessments of Ireland's NRRP payment requests required additional clarification on the scope and completeness of certain milestones (particularly in broadband and housing). Ireland provided satisfactory evidence in each case.

Latvia

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €4.6 bn (cohesion) + €1.97 bn (RRF) = €6.6 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€1.85 bn	R&I, SME support, digital transformation, renewable energy, sustainable transport and urban development.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€1.59 bn	Environmental infrastructure (water, wastewater, waste), energy efficiency, TEN-T transport.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€1.2 bn	Employment, social cohesion, healthcare, social services, skills and equal opportunities; reduction of poverty and social exclusion.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.05 bn	Supports peat-producing regions in transitioning to sustainable practices.
EMFAF	€0.09 bn	Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and Baltic Sea management.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€1.82 bn grants + €1.78 bn loans = €3.6 bn total	Latvian Recovery and Resilience Plan: green transition, digital transformation, healthcare, education and social protection. RRF loans used for large infrastructure.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 adopted 21 October 2022 (23rd PA adopted). Latvia implements cohesion policy through two operational programmes (covering ERDF/CF and ESF+/JTF) and a combined national programme approach.

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted October 2022)
- Single National Operational Programme (two funds: ERDF/CF + ESF+): €4.6 bn
- Recovery and Resilience Plan (Latvijas Atveseļošanas un noturības mehānisma plāns): €1.97 bn total
- REPowerEU chapter included for energy security measures

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
National OP (ERDF/CF)	Ministry of Finance (overall coordination)	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development; Ministry of Transport; Investment and Development Agency of Latvia (LIAA)	ERDF/CF Monitoring Committee
National OP (ESF+)	Ministry of Welfare	State Employment Agency (NVA); State Social Insurance Agency	ESF+ Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
RRF Plan	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Line ministries and implementing agencies per reform component	RRF Inter-ministerial Coordination Group

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
National OP (ERDF/CF + ESF+, aggregate)	40–50%	15–25%
RRF Plan	Moderate-to-good absorption	Moderate; Latvia received Council approval for NRRP amendments; second payment request under assessment

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 80–85%, national 15–20%. For less-developed regions and CF, up to 85% EU rate applies.

- Allocated National Resources: €0.7–1.0 bn (est. cohesion only)
- Utilised National Resources: moderate absorption; water management and transport projects progressing strongly.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (National OP)	9% of ERDF (€167 m); ITIs for Riga and 8 secondary cities (Daugavpils, Liepāja, Ventspils, Rēzekne, Jelgava, Jūrmala, Valmiera, Jēkabpils)	25–30%
JTF (peat regions)	100% regionally targeted (Vidzeme and Zemgale peat areas); municipalities as primary beneficiaries	20%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; water management and building renovation reach municipal level (20–25% est.)	Moderate

Latvia allocates 9% of its ERDF through ITIs covering Riga and eight secondary cities — notable breadth that ensures EU investment reaches beyond the capital. The Riga Planning Region plays an active coordination role linking city ITI investments with broader metropolitan planning. Latvia's Ministry of Finance-led national OP structure maintains central coherence while urban authorities hold delegated project selection authority within their ITI envelopes.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes	Targets: wastewater treatment coverage 90%+ of population; 100+ km TEN-T transport; 30,000+ persons supported in employment and skills; renewable energy expansion.	Moderate-to-good performance for environmental infrastructure. EU funds expected to rise by more than 1% of GDP 2024–2026 (European Commission forecast).
RRF Plan	Green energy, digital state, healthcare modernisation, social protection reform.	Progressing; some delays in digital reform milestones. Council amendments approved.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
ECA Special Report: water management projects in Latvia (2014–2020 period)	Enhanced cost-benefit analysis and project maturity requirements for 2021–2027 water management projects	ECA found issues with project sustainability and cost-effectiveness in EU-funded wastewater infrastructure. Recommendations incorporated into the 2021–2027 project selection criteria.
Commission DG REGIO: procurement irregularities (2014–2020)	Financial corrections; updated procurement guidance and beneficiary training for 2021–2027	Audits in the previous period found insufficient competition and direct award irregularities in public procurement. Systemic corrections implemented for the new programming period.

Lithuania

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €6.4 bn (cohesion) + €3.85 bn (RRF) = €10.25 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€2.75 bn	R&I, SME competitiveness, digital transformation, renewable energy, transport and urban development.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€1.98 bn	TEN-T transport (Via Baltica, Rail Baltica corridor), environmental infrastructure, energy.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€1.85 bn	Employment, social inclusion, education, health, equal opportunities; reducing poverty and income inequality (key ESC recommendations).
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.14 bn	Supports transition in the Kalvarija–Kazlų Rūda region.
EMFAF	€0.05 bn	Sustainable fisheries and Baltic Sea aquaculture.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€2.3 bn grants + €1.55 bn loans = €3.85 bn total	Lithuanian NRRP: green transition (includes 4,000 building renovations and 67% heat from renewables target), digital transformation, social protection and health, public administration reform.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 adopted 22 April 2022 (one of the first PAs adopted). Lithuania uses a national-level programme architecture.

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted April 2022)
- EU Structural Funds Investment Operational Programme 2021–2027 (ERPF+CF): €4.73 bn
- ESF+ Employment and Social Innovation Programme: €1.85 bn
- JTF Programme: €0.14 bn
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): €3.85 bn (grants + loans); revised Feb 2026 (Council approved)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Structural Funds Investment OP (ERDF/CF)	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Ministry of Transport & Communications; Ministry of Environment; Central Project Management Agency (CPMA)	SF Investment OP Monitoring Committee
ESF+ Programme	Ministry of Social Security and Labour	Lithuanian Labour Exchange; Social Insurance Fund (Sodra); CPMA	ESF+ Monitoring Committee
JTF Programme	Ministry of Finance	Regional authority; CPMA	JTF Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
NRRP / RRF	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Line ministries per component	NRRP Monitoring and Coordination Group

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Structural Funds Programmes (aggregate)	45–55%	20–30%
NRRP (RRF)	74% disbursed (August 2026); the January 2026 partial suspension was resolved in March 2026; Council approved amendments Feb 2026	Plan revised in 2026; total now €3.85 bn

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 80–85%, national 15–20%.

- Allocated National Resources: €0.85–1.1 bn (est. cohesion only)
- Utilised National Resources: moderate; Lithuania historically among better-performing Baltic states.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (Structural Funds Investment OP)	8% of ERDF (€220 m) — minimum threshold; ITIs for 5 urban FUAs (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Panevėžys)	30–35%
ESF+ (Employment Programme)	Urban CLLD active in deprived districts of Vilnius and Kaunas; Local Action Groups for community-led social inclusion	25–30%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; 4,000 building renovations and district heating decarbonisation via municipalities (25–30% est.)	74% — above EU average

Lithuania maintains ITIs for five urban functional areas with municipal authorities holding delegated project selection authority. Distinctively, Lithuania deploys ESF+-funded Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in deprived urban districts of Vilnius and Kaunas, reaching sub-district level poverty that ITI-scale investments cannot address. The RRF building renovation component — targeting 4,000 multi-apartment buildings via municipalities and housing management companies — is one of the most locally impactful in the sample.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes	Targets: electricity 50% from renewables; heating 67% from renewables; 100,000+ employment/social measures; Rail Baltica and Via Baltica infrastructure milestones.	Moderate-to-good progress. JTF Kalvarija–Kazlų Rūda transition proceeding. Rail Baltica connectivity investment proceeding.
NRRP (RRF)	Green building renovation (4,000 multi-apartment buildings), digital public services, healthcare reform, social protection. Council-approved revision completed Feb 2026.	74% disbursed (August 2026), above the EU average; Council amended plan February 2026; the January 2026 partial suspension was resolved in March 2026.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
ECA / Commission findings on Rail Baltica (shared project, cross-border)	Revised governance and cost-tracking requirements; cross-border coordination strengthened	ECA and Commission audits noted governance and cost escalation risks for the multinational Rail Baltica project (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia). Corrective measures include a dedicated Rail Baltica joint company and enhanced financial monitoring.
OLAF: irregularities in public procurement (2014–2020 period)	Financial corrections applied; procurement procedures tightened; enhanced CPMA verifications	OLAF-assisted investigations in the prior period identified cases of conflict of interest and manipulated public tenders in ERDF-funded projects. Controls strengthened for 2021–2027.

Poland

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €76.5 bn (cohesion) + €54.7 bn (RRF incl. loans) = €131 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€37.5 bn	Largest single ERDF allocation in the EU. Covers R&I, digitisation, clean energy, sustainable transport, urban development and business competitiveness across 16 regions.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€19.3 bn	Major TEN-T rail, road, and environmental infrastructure (water, wastewater, waste management).
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€12.9 bn	Employment, skills, social inclusion, education quality; emphasis on women's labour market participation, childcare and disability integration.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€3.85 bn	Supports five regions: Silesia, Greater Poland, Lower Silesia, Łódź and Lesser Poland – managing economic transition from coal.
EMFAF	€0.73 bn	Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and maritime economy.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€25.3 bn grants + €29.4 bn loans = €54.7 bn total (revised 2025)	National Recovery Plan (Krajowy Plan Odbudowy – KPO): green energy (39.2%), digital transformation (13%), resilience, healthcare and clean mobility. REPowerEU chapter worth €20.6 bn added. Third-largest NRRP in EU.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 adopted 30 June 2022. Poland is the largest cohesion beneficiary in the EU. The architecture includes 8 national and 16 regional programmes.

Key programmes and mechanisms:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted June 2022)
- EU Funds for Eastern Poland (FEPW): dedicated programme for 5 least-developed eastern regions
- EU Funds for Infrastructure, Climate, Environment (FEnIKS): CF/ERDF transport and environment
- EU Funds for Smart Economy (FENG): ERDF R&I and digitisation
- EU Funds for Digital Development (FERC): ERDF connectivity and e-services
- EU Funds for Social Development (FES): ESF+ employment and social inclusion
- EU Funds for Modern Economy (FEMW): ESF+/ERDF skills and innovation
- 16 Regional Programmes (one per voivodeship): ERDF/ESF+
- National Recovery Plan (KPO) / RRF: €54.7 bn (grants + loans; revised Dec 2025)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
FEnIKS (Infrastructure, Climate, Environment)	Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy	General Directorate for National Roads and Motorways (GDDKiA); National Fund for Environmental Protection (NFOŚiGW)	FEnIKS Monitoring Committee
FENG (Smart Economy)	Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy / Ministry of Development and Technology	Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP); National Centre for R&D (NCBR)	FENG Monitoring Committee
FES (Social Development)	Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy	Labour offices; Social Insurance Institution (ZUS)	FES Monitoring Committee
16 Regional Programmes	16 Regional Marshal Offices (Marszałek)	Regional Implementing Institutions	16 Regional Monitoring Committees
KPO (RRF)	Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (coordination); line ministries per component	BGK Development Bank (loans); sector agencies	KPO Monitoring and Control Structure

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
National Programmes (cohesion, aggregate)	30–35%	8–12% (slow start; 2024–2025 acceleration expected)
Regional Programmes (cohesion, aggregate)	35–40%	10–15% (varies by region)
KPO (RRF)	35% transferred to final beneficiaries as of late 2025 (below EU avg of 54%)	€5.1 bn pre-financing + €21.8 bn (3 payments) + €7.2 bn (4th payment, 2 June 2026) = approximately 62% disbursed

5. National Co-financing

Co-financing rate: EU 80–85%, national 15–20% for most programmes.

Indicative national co-financing for cohesion: approximately €10–14 bn over 2021–2027.

For KPO (RRF), the government reduced total loan allocation by €5.1 bn in Aug 2025 (redirected to defence fund).

- Allocated National Resources: €12 bn (est. cohesion only)
- Utilised National Resources: limited data at programme level; slow execution in 2023–2024.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
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Poland has the most extensive ITI system in the EU: 24 designated territories covering all voivodeship capitals and sub-regional cities, managed through 16 regional programmes where elected voivodeship marshal offices serve as genuine managing authorities. This represents full decentralisation of ERDF/ESF+ with strong sub-national political accountability. Poland's urban SUD envelope (€3.4 bn) is the largest absolute urban ERDF earmark in the EU. The KPO is primarily national in delivery; local governments are direct beneficiaries mainly in the building renovation stream.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes	Targets include: 10,000+ km TEN-T roads/rail upgraded; 200,000+ enterprises supported; 500,000+ persons in employment/social measures; 1,000+ research infrastructure projects.	Early-stage implementation (30–35% contracted). Two years of implementation lost due to rule-of-law funding freeze (now resolved). Acceleration expected 2025–2026.
KPO (RRF)	40.3% green transition / 13% digital transition. Key targets: 1 GW offshore wind pre-development; 300,000 heat source replacements; healthcare digitalisation; e-justice reform.	62% disbursed following the fourth payment (June 2026), approaching the EU average of about 68%. Three KPO revisions have complicated implementation. Deadline pressure critical.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
Rule-of-law conditionality: cohesion funds frozen (Dec 2022 – late 2023)	Judiciary super-milestones required; new government (Dec 2023) unlocked funds via judicial reforms	Poland's cohesion and RRF funds were suspended under the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation in 2022 due to judicial independence concerns. Suspension led to de facto two-year implementation gap for 2021–2027 programmes.
OLAF / ECA: procurement irregularities (carryover from 2014–2020 audits)	Financial corrections applied; managing authority tightened eligibility and selection criteria	Repeated findings of public procurement errors (direct award, lack of competition, conflict of interest) in 2014–2020 programmes inform enhanced controls in 2021–2027 management and control systems.
EPPO investigations (ongoing): fraud in RRF-financed projects	Investigations ongoing; no confirmed recoveries from 2021–2027 KPO yet reported	European Public Prosecutor's Office has opened investigations related to alleged fraud in KPO-financed renewable energy and transport projects. Specific outcomes pending.

Portugal

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €23 bn (cohesion) + €22.2 bn (RRF incl. loans) = €45.2 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€11.5 bn	Competitiveness of regions; R&I ecosystem and SME digitalisation; broadband deployment; sustainable transport; urban and coastal development.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€3.4 bn	Environmental infrastructure, energy efficiency, renewable energy, TEN-T transport.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€7.5 bn	Employment, social inclusion, education and skills, poverty reduction, equal opportunities and healthcare access.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.2 bn	Supports transition in the Setúbal and Barreiro (Sines) industrial/energy regions.
EMFAF	€0.4 bn	Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and maritime economy (Atlantic focus).
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€13.9 bn grants + €2.7 bn loans = €16.6 bn total	Portuguese RRP (PRR): resilience and climate action, digital transition, social policies and skills, healthcare and territorial cohesion. Portugal is a major RRF beneficiary relative to its size.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement adopted 15 July 2022 (14th PA). Portugal implements cohesion through Portugal 2030 (PT2030), structured around 12 operational programmes (national thematic + regional).

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted July 2022)
- Portugal 2030 (PT2030): national implementing framework for €23 bn cohesion funds
- Thematic OPs: Competitiveness and Internationalisation; Digitalisation and Digital Transition; Cohesion and Development; Social Inclusion and Employment; Education and Skills; Sustainability and Climate Action
- 5 Regional Operational Programmes (CCDR regions): North, Centre, Lisbon Metropolitan Area, Alentejo, Algarve
- Autonomous Region OPs: Azores and Madeira
- Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan (PRR): €22.2 bn total (grants + loans, post-REPowerEU revision); 20 components across 3 dimensions

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
PT2030 Thematic OPs (national)	Agency for Development and Cohesion (AD&C) – overall coordination	Sectoral ministries as Managing Authorities (Economy, Education, Social Security, Environment)	National PT2030 Monitoring Committee
Regional OPs (North, Centre, LMA, Alentejo, Algarve)	5 Regional Development Coordination Commissions (CCDRs) as Managing Authorities	Regional intermediate bodies and municipalities	5 Regional Monitoring Committees
Azores OP	Regional Directorate for Planning and Structural Funds (DRPFE) – Azores	Regional agencies	Azores Monitoring Committee
Madeira OP	Regional Directorate for Structural Funds (DRFE) – Madeira	Regional agencies	Madeira Monitoring Committee
PRR / RRF	Agency for Development and Cohesion (AD&C) + Ministry of Planning (coordination)	Line ministries per component	PRR Monitoring and Control Unit

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
PT2030 Cohesion Programmes (aggregate)	40–50%	20–30%
PRR (RRF)	70–80%	Strong performance; EU grant-financed spending expected to rise by more than 1% of GDP 2024–2026 (EC forecast)

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 80–85% (CF) / 80% (ERDF) / 85% (less-developed regions). RRF grants require no co-financing; loans require repayment.

- Allocated National Resources (cohesion): €3.5–5 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: moderate-to-good; Portugal among EU's stronger RRF performers. EU grants expected to boost GDP significantly by 2026.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (5 Regional OPs — CCDRs)	16.3% of ERDF (€1.87 bn) — highest in sample; ITIs for Lisbon and Porto metro areas plus CIM intermunicipal network ITIs for interior regions	35–45%

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
JTF (Setúbal and Sines areas)	100% regionally targeted; CCDR Lisbon and CCDR Alentejo as governance partners in transition plans	25–30%
RRF / PRR	No formal urban earmark; Mais Habitação housing programme targets Lisbon and Porto; municipal level delivery (25–30% est.)	70–75% (total)

Portugal's 16.3% ERDF urban earmark — the highest in the sample — reflects deep structural commitment to regional programme management through the five CCDRs as managing authorities. Portugal's most innovative territorial tool is the Comunidades Intermunicipais (CIM) ITI model: grouping municipalities across urban-rural functional territories, enabling integrated strategies for interior regions where no single dominant city justifies a metro-focused ITI. This model directly addresses urban-rural linkage challenges and is the most transferable territorial innovation in the 11-country sample. The PRR's Mais Habitação housing component channels investment through Lisbon and Porto municipalities for a place-specific urban affordability response.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
PT2030 Cohesion Programmes	Targets: 5,000+ enterprises in R&I; broadband coverage for 95%+ of households; 300,000+ in employment/skills programmes; renewable energy expansion; poverty reduction.	Moderate-to-good. PRR boosting implementation. EU fund spending expected to rise markedly (above 1% GDP in 2024–2026 per EC forecast).
PRR (RRF)	Green transition (climate action, sustainable housing, forests), digital transformation (broadband, public services, healthcare IT), social inclusion, education.	Strong performer among EU Member States; estimated 70–80% of grant allocation on track; Commission disbursed €42.8 bn tranche to Portugal (combined with others, August 2025).

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
Commission DG REGIO/EMPL: recurring procurement and eligibility irregularities (2014–2020)	Financial corrections applied; updated procurement templates and beneficiary training for PT2030	Audits in the Portugal 2020 period found repeated procurement non-compliance (insufficient competition, eligibility errors in social fund expenditure). PT2030 incorporates digital procurement monitoring and improved ex-ante controls.
ECA: audit of urban development ERDF programmes (2022)	Recommendations for better monitoring of urban strategy delivery and results orientation	ECA found variability in results orientation and project selection quality in ERDF urban development programmes. PT2030 urban programmes revised to incorporate SMART objectives and stronger output tracking.
PRR: Commission monitoring of structural reform milestones (ongoing)	Milestone verification ongoing; no payment deductions reported as of 2025	Commission PRR assessments have flagged slow progress on some justice system reform milestones and housing policy targets, requiring additional evidence. No payment reductions applied so far.

Romania

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €31.5 bn (cohesion) + €21.4 bn (RRF) = €52.9 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€15.8 bn	Economic competitiveness, SME support, R&I, digital transformation, sustainable urban mobility, transport, environmental infrastructure.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€8.1 bn	TEN-T transport (road and rail), environmental infrastructure (water, wastewater, waste), energy efficiency.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€6.1 bn	Employment, social inclusion, education, health and equal opportunities; child poverty reduction (European Child Guarantee).
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€1.1 bn	Supports Oltenia, Jiu Valley, Mureş and other coal/lignite-dependent regions.
EMFAF	€0.4 bn	Sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and Black Sea management.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€13.6 bn grants + €7.8 bn loans = €21.4 bn total (revised down from €28.5 bn)	Romanian NRRP (PNRR): transport decarbonisation, digitalisation, healthcare, tax reform, education, public administration and REPowerEU (green energy). Romania is among largest RRF beneficiaries in CEE.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 adopted 25 July 2022 (18th PA). Romania operates a complex architecture with 8 regional and 9 national programmes.

Key programmes:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted July 2022)
- OP Economic Competitiveness and Digitalisation: ERDF
- OP Large Infrastructure: CF/ERDF transport and environment
- OP Human Capital: ESF+ employment and education
- OP Social Inclusion: ESF+ social inclusion and health
- OP Assistance for the Disadvantaged (FOOD): ESF+ food aid
- OP Technical Assistance: cross-programme support
- 8 Regional Development Plans (RDPs): ERDF/ESF+ regional development
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR): €21.4 bn total (grants + loans; revised Dec 2023 + ongoing revision May 2026)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
OP Large Infrastructure (transport/environment)	Ministry of European Investments and Projects (MIPE)	National Infrastructure Company; National Environmental Administration	OP Large Infrastructure Monitoring Committee
OP Economic Competitiveness	Ministry of European Investments and Projects	Romanian Investment and Export Promotion Agency (RPEA)	OP Competitiveness Monitoring Committee
OP Human Capital (ESF+)	Ministry of European Investments and Projects	National Agency for Employment (ANOFM); National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection	ESF+ Human Capital Monitoring Committee
8 Regional Programmes	8 Regional Development Agencies (ADR)	Regional Implementing Agencies	8 Regional Monitoring Committees
PNRR / RRF	Ministry of European Investments and Projects (MIPE – coordination); Ministry of Finance	Line ministries and agencies per reform component	Inter-ministerial PNRR Coordination Group

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
National Programmes (aggregate)	30–35%	€11.18 bn transferred by the Commission (pre-financing + reimbursements) as of August 2026 — 35.9% of the EU allocation, above the EU average of 28.1%; tripled from €3.28 bn (10.6%) in June 2025
Regional Programmes (aggregate)	35–40%	15–20% (varies by region)
PNRR (RRF)	62% (milestones and targets assessed)	61% disbursed (€12.97 bn including pre-financing); 4th payment (€2.62 bn) authorised June 2026

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 80–85%, national 15–20% (85% EU for CF; 80–85% ERDF by region category).

- Allocated National Resources (cohesion): €4–6 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: improving rapidly; Commission transfers reached €11.18 bn (35.9% of the EU allocation) by August 2026, above the EU average of 28.1%. PNRR on firmer footing: 61% disbursed (€12.97 bn incl. pre-financing once 4th payment authorised). Commission positive assessment of 4th request: 14 May 2026; EFC endorsement: June 2026.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (8 Regional Programmes)	8% of ERDF (€1.26 bn) — minimum threshold; ITIs for 7 growth poles/metro areas; 8 Regional Development Agencies (ADRs) as MAs	15–20%
ESF+ (OP Social Inclusion)	Urban CLLD for marginalised communities (Roma, deprived urban neighbourhoods) via Local Action Groups	15–20%
JTF (4 coal/lignite regions)	100% regionally targeted — Oltenia, Jiu Valley, Mureş, others; ADRs and county councils as IBs	15–20%
RRF / PNRR	No formal urban earmark; building renovation, Bucharest urban transport and local healthcare reach sub-national level (20–25% est.)	61% (total)

Romania's eight ADRs serve as managing authorities for the regional programmes, making it the largest network of sub-national ERDF MAs in the sample. ITIs cover seven major urban functional areas. Despite this formally extensive architecture, chronic ADR capacity weaknesses — staff turnover, IT gaps, shallow project pipelines — remain the principal constraint on effective local delivery. Urban CLLD for Roma and deprived communities is an important social inclusion tool. The 4th PNRR payment (approved May 2026) includes local administrative capacity reform milestones that address this structural bottleneck.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Programmes	Targets: key road and rail infrastructure (Autostrada Unirii, Tren Metropolitan Bucharest); 500,000+ enterprises supported; child poverty reduction (European Child Guarantee milestones); JTF coal region diversification.	Low–moderate absorption rate (17% of cohesion received by mid-2025). Contract allocation above €32 bn (over-committed); actual spending lags. Key infrastructure projects face procurement and administrative delays.
PNRR (RRF)	Transport decarbonisation, cloud infrastructure (30+ institutions connected), healthcare, tax reform, education, public administration. 62% of milestones assessed.	61% disbursed; 4th payment (€2.62 bn): Commission assessment 14 May 2026, EFC endorsement June 2026. Romania renegotiating final tranche to prioritise completed projects. PNRR revised twice (2023 + 2026).

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
EPPO: investigations into PNRR/cohesion fraud (active 2023–2026)	Ongoing; recovery proceedings initiated; strengthened anti-fraud controls required by Commission	EPPO has opened investigations in Romania into alleged fraud in EU-funded infrastructure and social projects, including suspected procurement manipulation and conflict of interest. Specific case outcomes pending.

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
Commission DG REGIO: repeated procurement irregularities (2014–2020 + early 2021–2027)	Financial corrections applied; procurement monitoring system upgraded; centralised framework agreements promoted	Romania was among the EU Member States with the highest error rates in cohesion funds in the 2014–2020 period, primarily due to public procurement non-compliance. The 2021–2027 management and control system includes stricter ex-ante verification and digitised procurement monitoring.
ECA Special Report: absorption challenges in Romania and Bulgaria (2022)	Recommendations for simplified grant procedures, stronger beneficiary pipeline and accelerated programme launch	ECA found chronic administrative capacity gaps, particularly in regional and local beneficiaries, as root causes of low absorption. Romania has adopted a Beneficiary Support Programme for 2021–2027 in response.
PNRR: state-owned enterprise governance milestone disputes (2024)	Several milestones partially rejected; payment conditionality temporarily delayed 3rd instalment	Commission found certain milestones related to state-owned enterprise (SOE) governance and energy market reform as only partially fulfilled during 3rd payment review, requiring additional evidence and corrective action before full payment.

Slovakia

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €12.8 bn (cohesion) + €6.4 bn (RRF) = €19.2 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€4.0 bn	Supports R&I, digitalisation, SME competitiveness, clean energy, sustainable urban development and transport in Slovak regions.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€3.4 bn	Finances large-scale environment and TEN-T transport infrastructure, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€3.2 bn	Supports employment, social inclusion, education, skills and equal opportunities; particular focus on Roma integration and poverty reduction.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.9 bn	Supports regions (mainly Upper Nitra) transitioning away from coal and carbon-intensive industries.
European Maritime, Fisheries & Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)	€0.07 bn	Supports sustainable fisheries and aquaculture sectors.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants	€6.4 bn	National Recovery Plan (Plán obnovy): green transition (43%), digital transition (21%), education, health, public administration, R&D and innovation. Grant-only plan; no loans requested.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 was adopted on 18 July 2022, covering ERDF, ESF+, CF, JTF and EMFAF. Slovakia uniquely merged all cohesion programmes into a single unified instrument, Programme Slovakia (PS 2021–2027), managed at national level. This replaced the complex multi-programme architecture of the 2014–2020 period to reduce fragmentation and improve absorption.

Key documents and mechanisms:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted July 2022)
- Programme Slovakia 2021–2027 (single national cohesion programme): €12.8 bn EU funding
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan – Plán obnovy (adopted June 2021, revised Nov 2025): €6.4 bn grants
- 11 Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes
- The NRRP is structured around five pillars: green economy, education, R&D and innovation, healthcare, and public administration/digitalisation.

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Programme Slovakia (PS 2021–2027)	Central Coordination Body (CCB) – Office of the Deputy PM for Investments and Informatisation (now under PM Office)	Selected line ministries (Ministry of Transport; Ministry of Environment; Ministry of Education etc.)	PS 2021–2027 Monitoring Committee

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
EMFAF Programme	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Pôdohospodárska platobná agentúra (PPA – Agricultural Paying Agency)	EMFAF Monitoring Committee
NRRP (Plán obnovy) – RRF	Office of the Government / Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Line ministries per component	NRRP Monitoring and Control Structure

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Programme Slovakia 2021–2027	48% (€6.01 bn contracted as of October 2025)	19.1% (€2.40 bn) as of 30 June 2026 — up from 2.6% at end-2024; 2026 N+3 milestone (€2.3 bn) met by 31 May 2026
NRRP (Plán obnovy) / RRF	70% (milestones approved)	81% disbursed; 6th and 7th payments received May 2026

5. National Co-financing

Slovakia's standard co-financing rate for cohesion programmes is 15–25% national contribution (EU co-finances 75–85%). Under the NRRP, the plan is fully EU-financed (no national co-financing requirement for RRF grants).

Indicative national co-financing for Programme Slovakia: approximately €2.0–2.5 bn over 2021–2027.

- Allocated National Resources (cohesion co-financing): €2.2 bn (est.)
- Utilised National Resources: data limited at programme inception; absorption remains critically low (only 3% execution of cohesion funds as of end-2024 per the Slovak Supreme Audit Office).

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (Programme Slovakia)	8% of ERDF (€320 m) — minimum threshold; ITIs for 7 urban FUAs (Bratislava, Košice, Prešov, Nitra, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Trnava); urban CLLD discontinued	20–25%
JTF (Upper Nitra)	100% regionally targeted (coal transition); Trenčín self-governing region and local municipalities as formal governance partners	30%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; building renovation and primary healthcare reach local level (15–20% est.)	above 70% (total)

Slovakia meets the 8% ERDF minimum through ITIs for seven urban functional areas embedded within Programme Slovakia. Urban authorities hold delegated project selection authority covering sustainable transport, energy renovation, social services and digital services. Slovakia has discontinued cohesion-funded urban CLLD, concentrating urban SUD exclusively on ITIs. The entire JTF is directed to Upper Nitra, with the Trenčín regional government and affected municipalities as formal governance partners. The NRRP's sub-national delivery includes municipal building renovation and local primary healthcare access components.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Programme Slovakia 2021–2027	SME support (10,000 enterprises assisted); 4,000 R&I projects; 50,000 persons supported in employment/social measures; CO ₂ emissions reduction; renovation of 3,000+ public buildings.	Low – programme in early implementation phase; contracted approx. 25–30% of allocation. N+3 decommitment risks flagged by SAO for 2026.
NRRP (RRF)	64% for green + digital transition. Key milestones: judicial reforms, public administration digitalisation, healthcare modernisation, education reform, energy transition (decarbonisation).	Above 70% of allocation disbursed following authorisation of the 6th and 7th instalments (24 April 2026). Fourth revision approved Nov 2025.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
OLAF 'Dobytčár' (Stock Breeder) Case – closed March 2024	Recovery of €7.5 m (EARDF) + immediate reimbursement of €2.5 m EIB national loans	Six OLAF investigations (2015–2020) found systemic bribery (€10 m) by farmers to Slovak officials for undue rural development subsidies. Irregularities included conflict of interest, tender manipulation, irregular subcontracting, inflated costs. Criminal referrals made to Slovak judicial authorities.
OLAF agricultural direct payments (2021) – three investigations closed 2020	Recommendations to recover irregular payments; Slovak Paying Agency instructed to tighten eligibility controls	Investigations into direct payment applications (2013–2019): ineligibility of agricultural land, breach of permanent grassland obligations, falsification of farm records. Systemic weaknesses in national verification procedures identified.
ECA / Commission audit: fraud risk management weaknesses (2019–ongoing)	Action plan for improved anti-fraud monitoring; integration into 2021–2027 management and control system	The Slovak paying agency's 2018 certification body report found non-compliance with accreditation criteria on fraud risk monitoring. OECD (2019) and ECA audits noted insufficient proactive fraud detection and lack of procedures to monitor anti-fraud measure effectiveness.
RRF: conflict-of-interest deduction (May 2025)	€1.23 m deducted from fifth RRF payment (received July 2025)	European Commission adopted a decision reducing Slovakia's RRF allocation by €1.23 m due to a confirmed conflict of interest in programme implementation.

Slovenia

1. Available EU Support Mechanisms

Total available EU support: €3.26 bn (cohesion) + €2.7 bn (RRF incl. loans) = €5.96 bn total

FUND / INSTRUMENT	TOTAL ALLOCATION (EUR)	SHORT DESCRIPTION OF SCOPE
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)	€1.48 bn	R&I, SME competitiveness, digital transformation, clean energy, sustainable urban development.
Cohesion Fund (CF)	€0.83 bn	TEN-T transport (including the Divača-Koper railway), environmental infrastructure, energy efficiency.
European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)	€0.74 bn	Employment, social inclusion, skills, education and equal opportunities.
Just Transition Fund (JTF)	€0.15 bn	Supports Zasavje and Šaleška valley regions transitioning from coal.
EMFAF	€0.04 bn	Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.
Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) – grants + loans	€1.49 bn grants + €0.7 bn loans = €2.19 bn total	Slovenian NRRP: green transition (40%), digital transition (21%), smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; education, healthcare and resilience.

2. National Strategic & Programmatic Framework

Partnership Agreement adopted 12 September 2022. Slovenia implements cohesion policy through a single national Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027.

Key documents:

- Partnership Agreement 2021–2027 (adopted September 2022)
- Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (single programme): €3.26 bn
- JTF Territorial Plans for Zasavje and Šaleška Valley
- National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP): €2.7 bn (grants + loans)

3. Institutional Setup Matrix

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027 (single programme)	Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy (SVRK)	Ministry of Economic Development and Technology; Ministry of Environment, Climate and Energy; Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Ministry of Transport	Single Programme Monitoring Committee
JTF Programmes	SVRK	Regional development agencies for Zasavje and Šaleška	JTF Monitoring Committee (sub-committee)

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	MANAGING AUTHORITY (MA)	INTERMEDIATE BODY (IB)	MONITORING COMMITTEE (MC)
NRRP / RRF	Ministry of Finance (coordination)	Line ministries per reform component	NRRP Inter-ministerial Coordination Group

4. Financial Progress & Utilization

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	VOLUME OF CONTRACTED PROJECTS (%)	VOLUME OF EXECUTED PROJECTS (%)
Cohesion Policy Programme 2021–2027	40–50%	15–20%
NRRP (RRF)	65–70%	Solid progress; green energy and digital measures proceeding well

5. National Co-financing

Standard co-financing: EU 80–85%, national 15–20%.

- Allocated National Resources: €0.45–0.6 bn (est. cohesion)
- Utilised National Resources: moderate; Slovenia generally an efficient smaller beneficiary.

6. Local and Regional Involvement

FUND / INSTRUMENT	URBAN / REGIONAL EARMARKING (% OF ALLOCATION)	CONTRACTED (% OF EARMARKED)
ERDF (Cohesion Policy Programme)	8.7% of ERDF (€129 m) — above minimum; ITIs for Ljubljana and 5 secondary cities (Maribor, Celje, Koper, Kranj, Velenje)	30–35%
JTF (Zasavje and Šaleška Valley)	100% regionally targeted (coal/lignite transition); municipal govts as formal governance partners; JTF performing ahead of schedule	35–40%
RRF / NRRP	No formal urban earmark; building renovation and smart mobility reach municipal level (20–25% est.)	Good progress

Slovenia allocates 8.7% of its ERDF through ITIs for Ljubljana and five secondary cities, with city/municipal associations as urban authorities. The JTF for Zasavje and Šaleška Valley is ahead of schedule, driven by strong local political will — particularly in Velenje, where the municipal government has treated JTF as a development catalyst for renewable energy rather than a compensatory instrument. Rural CLLD operates through EAFRD LEADER; there is no cohesion-funded urban CLLD.

7. Implementation Results & Performance

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
Cohesion Policy Programme	Targets: Divača–Koper 2nd rail track construction; 800+ enterprises supported in R&I; 2,000+ buildings energy-renovated; 20,000+ persons in employment/social measures; JTF coal regions transition.	Moderate-to-good progress; JTF coal transition ahead of schedule. Transport megaproject (Divača–Koper) proceeding.

PROGRAMME / INSTRUMENT	HIGH-LEVEL OBJECTIVES / KPIS	ACHIEVEMENT RATE / PROGRESS
NRRP (RRF)	Green energy transition, digital public services, smart mobility, education reform, healthcare modernisation.	67% disbursed; sixth payment July 2026.

8. Audit Findings & Corrective Measures

IRREGULARITY / FINDING	CORRECTIVE MEASURES	RATIONALE / ROOT CAUSE
Commission DG REGIO: first-level control gaps (2014–2020 carryover)	Enhanced management verification procedures adopted for 2021–2027; increased beneficiary support	Audits in the 2014–2020 period identified weaknesses in first-level controls (particularly in ERDF infrastructure projects) and some procurement irregularities. Corrective measures incorporated into the 2021–2027 MCS design.
ECA / Commission: State aid compliance in business support (2014–2020)	Post-2020 scheme redesigned to be de minimis-compliant; revised aid intensity thresholds applied	ECA and Commission audits found issues with State aid rules compliance in certain ERDF enterprise support schemes. The 2021–2027 programme design incorporates specific safeguards for State aid compliance.