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AN OVERVIEW ON COHESION POLICY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR CITIES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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01.

INTRODUCTION



1. Introduction

This document explains what Cohesion Policy within the European Union means. It describes the new framework for 2021-2027 and in particular, the urban dimension. It is an introduction to the functioning of Cohesion Policy as well as the tools and instruments elaborated for its implementation. The goal of this document is to help city stakeholders to get familiar with the opportunities offered at the European level to implement a sustainable urban development strategy or plan. To get further information about Cohesion Policy, you will find hyperlinks and websites on the different funds and instruments that will help you start your project. Then, you will be redirected to a database, a Miro board. Click on the heading that interests you the most and you will be able to see which funds and programmes are available for your project at the EU level.

02.

COHESION POLICY AND ITS PRINCIPLES



2. COHESION POLICY AND ITS PRINCIPLES

The aim of [Cohesion Policy](#) is to **strengthen the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union** and to encourage the harmonious development of its countries and regions. That is why this policy is focused on the less developed European regions, even though every European territory can benefit from it according to its needs.

Cohesion Policy is implemented through a partnership between the European Commission and the national and/or regional bodies. Its framework covers a seven year period, the current one being 2021-2027.

2.1. The principles of Cohesion Policy

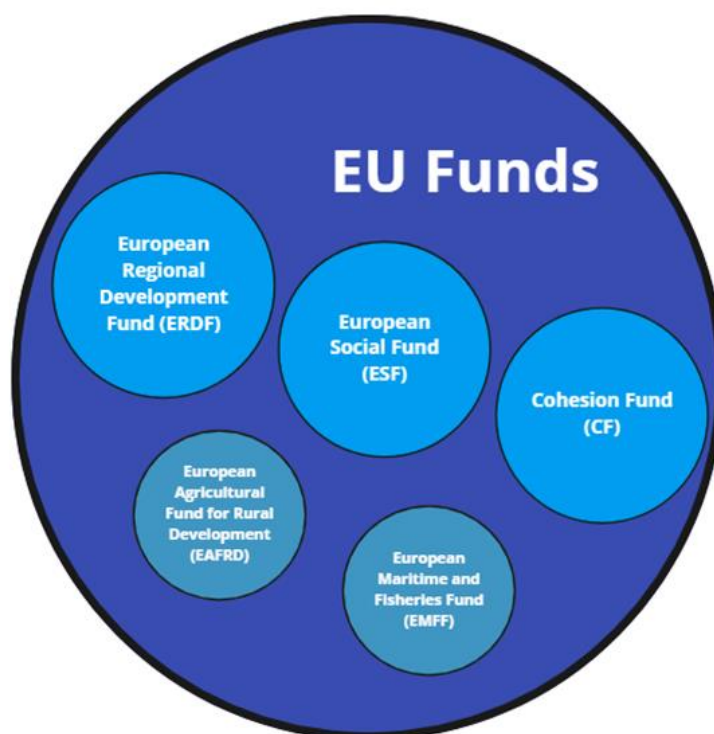
[Four principles](#) guide the functioning of Cohesion Policy:

- **Concentration** – of resources (the majority of the funds are dedicated to the less developed regions), of effort (the investments are focused on priorities), of spending (the funds must be spent by the end of the second year after their allocation).
- **Programming** – Cohesion Policy is based on multi-annual national programmes.
- **Partnership** – the programming process implies the cooperation of authorities at all levels: European, regional, local, social partners and civil society. Each country produces a Partnership Agreement outlining its strategy within the Cohesion Policy framework, as well as Operational Programmes. These documents are negotiated with the European Commission.
- **Additionality** – financing from the EU funds are added to the national spending of the Member States. For more information on the EU funds, see the next section.

EU Member States and their regions are in charge of implementing the Operational Programmes through Managing Authorities, which select and monitor the different projects in the framework of Cohesion Policy.

2.2. The EU Funds

To achieve its goal, several funds are available within the Cohesion Policy framework. You will find below the traditional funds implemented by the European Union. These are completed with others – particularly the Just Transition Fund – which will be presented in the section The new Cohesion Policy framework (2021-2027).



The EU funds can co-finance projects through financial instruments or European programmes – such as the ones under Interreg for the ERDF (see below). For more information on the financial instruments, see Section 5 the tools available to implement territorial development projects. For a detailed list of the programmes and funding opportunities available for cities, please, refer to the Miro boards (see last chapter of this report).

The first three funds – ERDF, CF and ESF+ – are usually the most used by cities, even though the others can also support sustainable urban development regarding the projects concerned. Please refer to the second part of this study, the National Information Sheet, for the Managing Authorities of ERDF, CF and ESF+. They will redirect you to the right contact person if needed.

- **The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**

The goal of the ERDF is to **foster territorial, economic and social cohesion within the EU and to correct imbalances between its territories**. This is one of the most important funds available for implementing sustainable urban development projects. For the 2021-2027 period, €226 billion will be invested through this fund. The investments should focus on innovation and research, the digital agenda, support to SMEs, environment and the net-zero carbon economy.

The majority of the budget will be implemented through the **Operational Programmes** mentioned before. But smaller instruments are financed under this fund.

- First, the **European Territorial Cooperation – Interreg** instrument, which supports cooperation between EU countries and regions. This instrument includes different strands and programmes. For a detailed presentation of those strands and programmes, please refer to the Miro boards. Interreg will be allocated a budget of €8 billion for the period 2021-2027.
- Secondly, instruments such as the **Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)** or the **Community-led Local Development (CLLD)** are implemented to develop territorial and local strategies. For more information on those instruments see Section 5.1. Tools for territorial strategies.

These are additional tools but the major part of the ERDF funds are implemented through the Operational Programmes. For instance, the Interreg instrument represented 2.8 % of the total Cohesion Policy budget for 2014-2020.

■ **The Cohesion Fund (CF)**

This fund is **focused on the less developed regions and Member States** - with a gross national income (GNI) per capita below 90% EU-27 average. The goal is the same: to **correct the imbalances between the territories**. For 2021-2027, it supports the following countries: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. For the 2021-2027 period, €48 billion will be invested through this fund. The investments should focus on **environmental infrastructure, projects in Trans-European Transport Networks, energy efficiency, renewable energy or sustainable urban mobility**.

■ **The European Social Fund + (ESF+)**

The ESF + **focuses on people, especially to improve employment and education opportunities**. The investments under this fund aim to improve the situation of vulnerable people at risk of poverty. The overall fund will be endowed with a budget of €99.26 billion for 2021-2027. ESF is divided into two strands:

- The **ESF+ strand under shared management** – focusing on social inequalities and poverty, youth unemployment, child-poverty, ... The shared management strand represents €98.5 billion of the overall budget.
- And the **Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) strand** – focusing on employment and skills, labour markets, social protection, ... €762 million are allocated to the EaSI strand – under direct management of the Commission.

For a detailed presentation of those strands and programmes, please refer to the Miro boards.

■ **The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**

This fund finances the **European Union contribution to rural development programmes** (RDPs). Its goals are, amongst others, to improve the competitiveness of agriculture and to encourage sustainable management of resources.

■ **The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)**

This fund **encourages fishers to adopt sustainable practices**. It also aims to foster the diversification of coastal communities' economies to improve their quality of life.

Don't hesitate to contact Managing Authorities in your Member State to get more information on the opportunities available.

2.3. The new Cohesion Policy framework (2021-2027)

The new programming period started in 2021 and a new framework for Cohesion Policy is being implemented. It focuses now on five policy objectives. These are:

- A more competitive and smarter Europe.
- A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy.
- A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility.
- A more social and inclusive Europe.
- Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories.



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2018/06/06-08-2018-regional-development-and-cohesion-policy-2021-2027

A single regulation, the [Common Provisions Regulation](#) (CPR) is covering eight EU funds under shared management for 2021-2027: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the Cohesion Fund (CF); the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+); the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); the Just Transition Fund (JTF); the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); the Border Management and Visa Instrument; and the Internal Security fund.

The co-financing rates, which are the percentage of European investments that the States can receive for projects, are as following for 2021-2027: 40% for more developed regions; 50% for more developed regions which were in the category of the transitions regions or had a GDP per capita below 100% during the previous programming period; 60% for transition regions; 70% for transition regions which were in the category of less developed regions during the previous programming period; 85% for less developed regions.

The new Cohesion Policy framework includes **new funds** that can be used by cities for their development. Among them, the [Just Transition Fund](#): it will support the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050 to achieve the goal of the European Green Deal. The fund is endowed with a budget of €19.2 billion, coming from the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – €8.4 billion – and from NextGenerationEU – €10.8 billion – **to finance projects aiming at diversifying the economy and help people adapting to the evolving labour market**. This fund is part of the **Just Transition Mechanism** to help the regions and industries that are the most impacted by the transition. The co-financing rate will amount to 85% for less developed regions; 70% for transition regions and 50% for more developed regions.

EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 Just Transition Fund
Agreed: 10/12/2020

€ EUR 17,5 billion

#EUinmyRegion

Priorities

- Alleviate major social and economic costs in regions with carbon intensive industries
- Support transition towards climate neutral economy by 2050 within the Green Deal
- Support diversification of local economies, create new jobs and reskill affected workers

European Commission | Regional and Urban Policy

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/12/12-11-2020-commission-welcomes-the-political-agreement-on-the-just-transition-fund

Cohesion policy also has a key role to play in the recovery following the coronavirus pandemic. In this regard, the **REACT-EU** (Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe) regulation has been adopted and will constitute one of the largest programmes under NextGenerationEU, with a budget amounting to €50.6 billion. These resources will support **projects fostering crisis repair capacities in this context of crisis, preparing a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy**. This budget will be provided in 2021 and 2022 and it will be made available to the ERDF, the ESF and the European Fund for Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)¹. To ensure the efficiency of this mechanism, no national co-financing is needed in the framework of this funding and the resources can be spent in all the different regions, regardless their category and without thematic concentration. The additional resources from the ERDF will support for example investment in products and services for health services, SMEs, infrastructure providing services to the citizens, etc. The additional resources from the ESF will support job maintenance and creation, skills development, access to social services, etc.

¹ The FEAD supports EU countries' actions to provide food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived. Material assistance needs to go hand in hand with social inclusion measures, such as guidance and support to help people out of poverty.

03.
THE 2021-2027
MULTIANNUAL
FINANCIAL
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NEXTGENERATIONEU

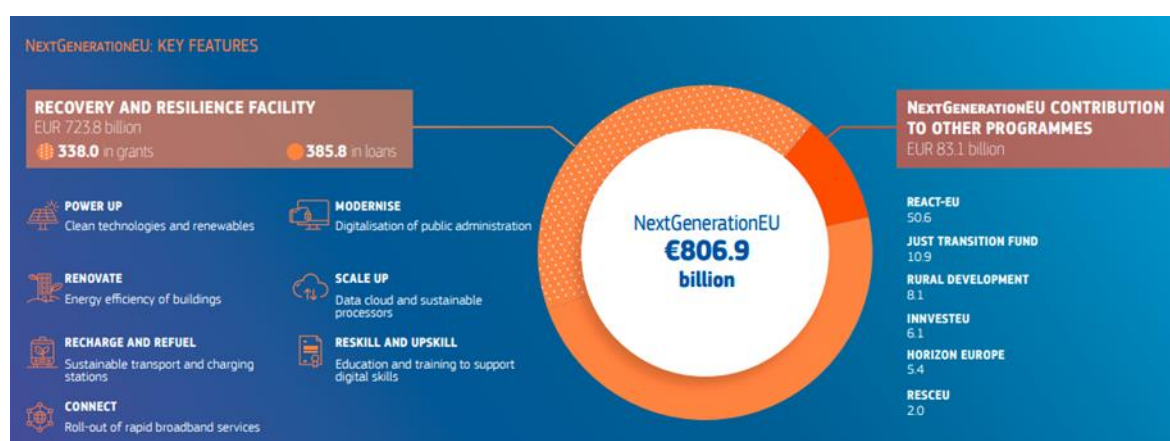


3. THE 2021-2027 MULTIANNUAL FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK AND NEXTGENERATIONEU

The **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** sets up and regulates the **long-term budget** of the European Union in a seven-year framework. A new framework started in 2021 and will run until 2027. This budget amounts €1.211 trillion in current prices (€1.074 trillion in 2018 prices). All amounts in the following figures are in billion EUR, in current prices, as of November 2020.

For the 2021-2027 framework, the long-term budget is reinforced by the **NextGenerationEU (NGEU)**² recovery instrument. The goal of this instrument is to **repair the economic and social damages caused by the coronavirus pandemic but also to support the transition towards a sustainable EU**. This instrument is endowed with a budget of €806.9 billion (€750 billion in 2018 prices), channelled through the long-term budget, in particular in the years 2021-2023. This budget will be distributed to the Member States through grants (€407.5 billion) and loans (€385.8 billion), in current prices.

The **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF)** is the main programme created to spend the NGEU budget (€723.8 billion in current prices). It will support large-scale public investments for green or digital projects for example. NGEU includes also €50.6 billion for REACT-EU, a new initiative to encourage a green, digital and resilient recovery of the economy – which has been explained before in this document.



Source: The EU's 2021-2027 long-term Budget and NextGenerationEU – Facts and figures

² NextGenerationEU is the recovery instrument to repair the economic and social damages caused by the coronavirus pandemic and to support the transition towards a sustainable EU. For more information, please see the next section of this document: “2. The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework and NextGenerationEU”.

The long-term **budget for 2021-2027**, including NGEU, amounts **€2.018 trillion** in current prices (€1.8 trillion in 2018 prices). This includes €426.7 billion from the MFF and €776.5 billion from the NGEU for the heading Cohesion, Resilience and Values³.



Source: The EU's 2021-2027 long-term Budget and NextGenerationEU – Facts and figures

If we combine the budgets of ERDF, CF and ESF+, €372.6 billion will be allocated to the objective of Cohesion between 2021 and 2027. The budget of the sub-theme “Regional development and cohesion” will amount to €274 billion for the MFF and €50.6 billion for NGEU.



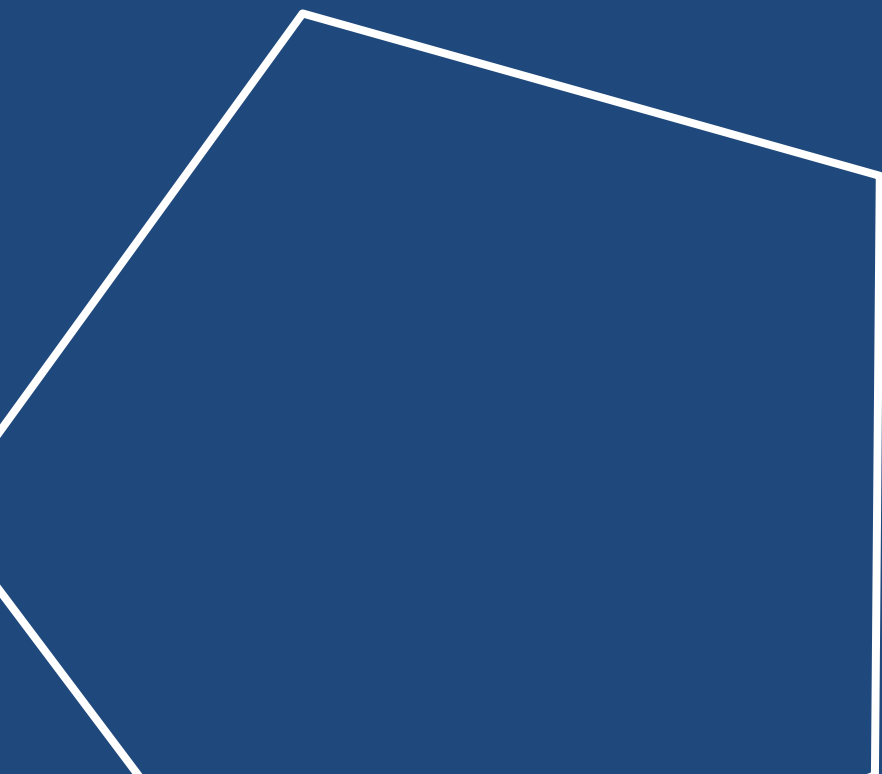
Source: The EU's 2021-2027 long-term Budget and NextGenerationEU – Facts and figures

³ This heading is in this document underlined because it includes the regional development of the EU – and its urban dimension. But the other headings also include interesting and useful funds and programmes for this dimension. For more information about the MFF: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3e77637-a963-11eb-9585-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>



0.4.

THE URBAN DIMENSION OF THE NEW COHESION POLICY



4. THE URBAN DIMENSION OF THE NEW COHESION POLICY

Under this new framework of Cohesion Policy the support to cities is growing. Two major events clearly show it: the **renewal of the Leipzig Charter** and the creation of the **European Urban Initiative**. **The share of the ERDF dedicated to sustainable urban development is also increasing**. The **New European Bauhaus** also gives a new frame to this urban dimension of Cohesion Policy.

4.1. The New Leipzig Charter

This new Cohesion Policy is based on the [Territorial Agenda 2030](#), which provides the framework for concrete actions fostering territorial cohesion in the European Union. Cities are seen as strategic territories in this regard. The [New Leipzig Charter](#) was adopted in 2020. In this document, the Member States show their commitment to promote a sustainable urban development supported by the European Union. It presents the main characteristics of the European city.

The New Leipzig Charter



First of all, it includes **three spatial levels**:

- The **neighbourhood level** can reflect social, economic and environmental issues that can be solved thanks to local participation and innovative projects.
- The **local authorities**, in charge of the local urban development, provide strategic guidelines and act as a “hinge” between the different territorial scales.
- The **functional areas** take into account the interdependencies between the cities and their surroundings, the region or the metropolis.

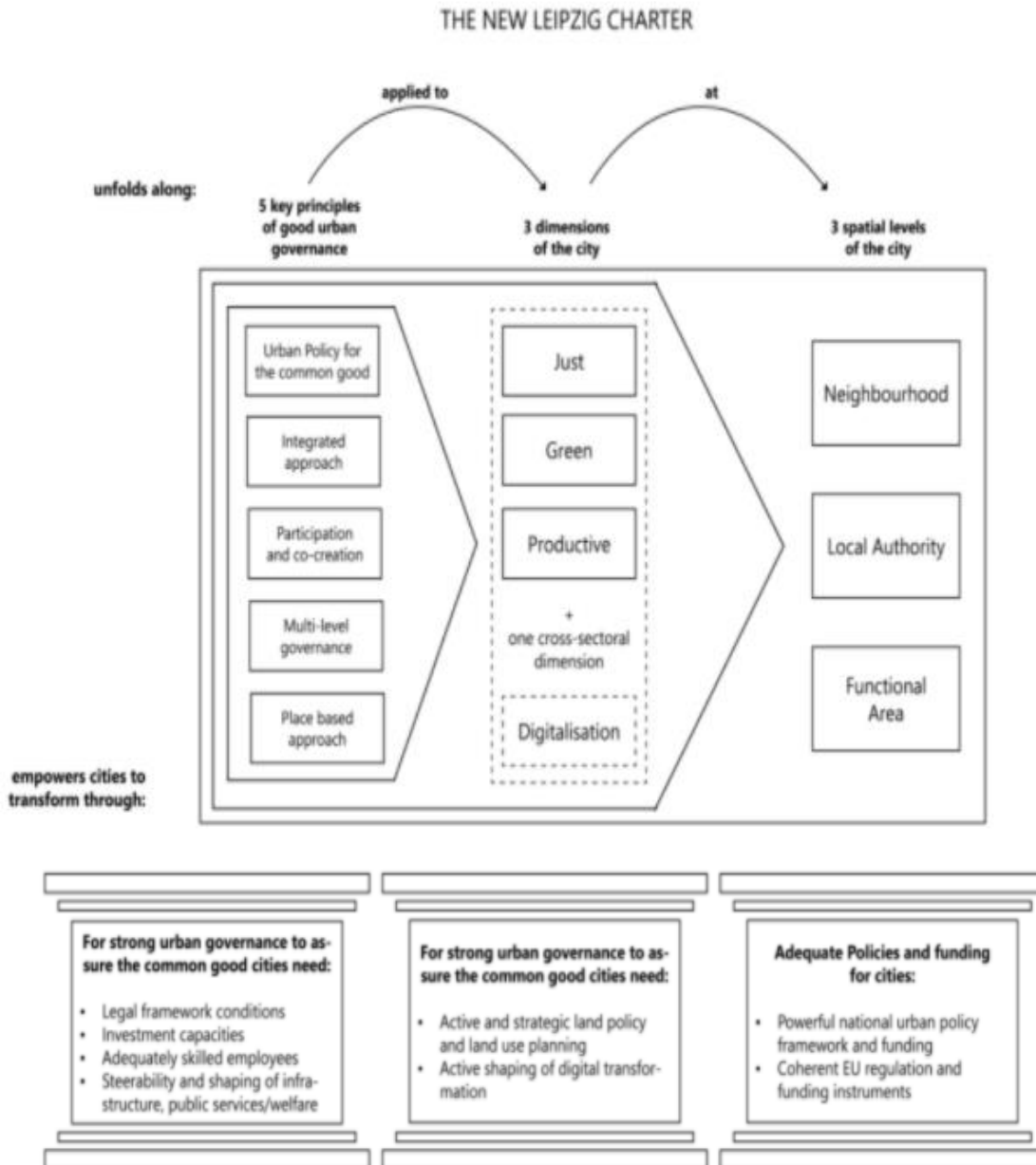
A European city should combine **three dimensions**:

- It has to be **just** and provide equal opportunities to all citizens.
- It has to be **green**, to help combat global warming and provide a high quality urban environment.
- It has to be **productive**, being based on a diversified economy to stay competitive and innovative, but also to allow the transition to sustainable development.

Finally, this document defines what the key principles of **good urban governance** are. This latter should be based on:

- **Common good;**
- **An integrated approach;**
- **Participation and co-creation;**
- **Multi-level governance;**
- **A place-based approach.**





Source: <https://urbact.eu/urbact-warmly-welcomes-new-leipzig-charter>

4.2. The European Urban Initiative

To bring together the different programmes dealing with urban development, a **European Urban Initiative** will be created. Its goal is to **strengthen the integrated and participatory approach in sustainable urban development and to ensure a strong link to Cohesion Policy**. Endowed with a budget of €400 million, it will be based on **two strands**:

- **Strand A: Support of Innovative Actions** to encourage experimentation of new solutions in the field of sustainable urban development, with a focus on the transfer of innovative solutions to urban issues.
- **Strand B: Support of Capacity and Knowledge Building, Territorial Impact Assessments, Policy Development and Communication.** This strand is divided into two sections. The first one is based on capacity building, through networks of cities and peer learning. The second one, based on “knowledge, territorial impact assessments, policy & communication”, supports capitalisation and sharing of knowledge to improve policy design in urban development, as well as communication and dissemination to encourage the mainstreaming of strategies.

4.3. Article 11 of the ERDF regulation

A special focus on sustainable urban development is provided by the [ERDF regulation](#). To achieve the objectives set in regard of the environmental, economic, climate, demographic and social challenges, the regulation supports particularly integrated territorial development and extends the principle of the community-led local development strategies to urban territories. According to **Article 11** of the ERDF regulation, **at least 8% of this fund has to be allocated to sustainable urban development at the national level**.

4.4. The New European Bauhaus

The [New European Bauhaus](#) is an initiative that aims to connecting the European Green Deal to the living spaces. Based on a participatory approach, it will bring all Europeans, experts, institutions or businesses together to build living spaces that affordable, accessible, sustainable and innovative. Financial support will be provided to innovative ideas through ad-hoc calls for proposals but also coordinated programs included in the MFF.

0.5.

**THE DIFFERENT
MANAGEMENT TYPES OF
EU FUNDING
PROGRAMMES**

5. THE DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT TYPES OF EU FUNDING PROGRAMMES

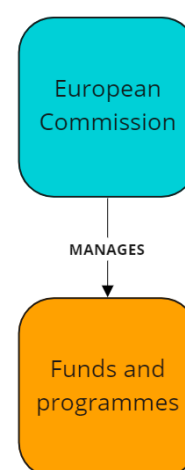
Three types of management can be identified concerning the programmes funded by the EU budget: direct management, shared management and indirect management. Here are the main characteristics of each management mode. All the information below comes from the European Commission's website and is only meant to give you an overview of the functioning of the programmes. More information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/funding-management-mode_en

5.1. Direct Management

In this case, the funding is **managed directly by the European Commission and its departments**, which are in charge of the whole process of implementation of the programme, from launching the calls for proposals to assessing the results of the projects and making payments. For the programming period covering 2021-2027, the programmes falling into this management mode represent 20 % of the EU budget.

The calls for proposals concerned by this management mode are published on the [Funding and Tenders Portal \(SEDIA\)](#).

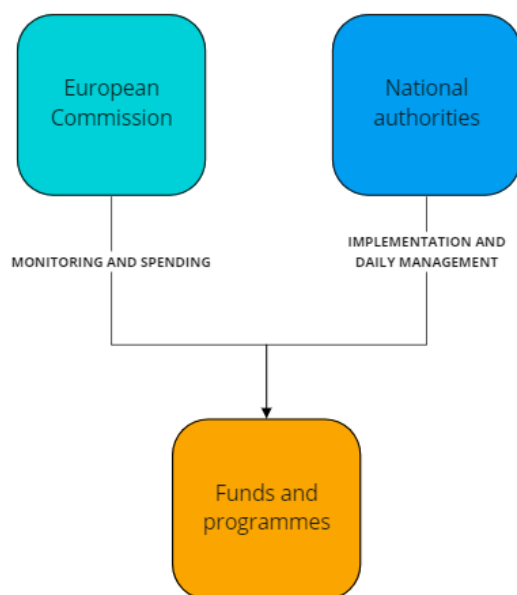
A part of the funds from NextGenerationEU will fall under the direct management mode, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which will follow special procedures. Based on the national recovery and resilience plans, the funds will be directly distributed to the Member States. For more information on the RRF and its procedures: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en



5.2. Shared Management

This management mode is used for 70 % of EU programmes. **The European Commission and national authorities in the different Member States both have the responsibility of the implementation of the programme** in this case.

The national authorities choose the projects and are in charge of their progress on a daily basis. The Commission monitors their implementation and the spending of the money.



5.3. Indirect Management

The last management mode is **indirect management**: in this case, the **programmes are implemented thanks to the support of other entities, such as national authorities or international organizations**. It concerns for example the budget allocated to humanitarian aid and international development.





0.6.

**THE TOOLS TO IMPLEMENT
TERRITORIAL
DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**



6. THE TOOLS TO IMPLEMENT TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

6.1. Tools for territorial and local development strategies

Some tools are available to design territorial and local development strategies in urban spaces. To know if those tools can be implemented in your Member State, please contact the Managing Authorities of the Cohesion Policy funds in your country – second part of this study: the National Information Sheet.

■ **Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)**

The European Union fosters an **integrated and territorial approach**, taking into account place-specific features. Sometimes, it requires going beyond the traditional administrative boundaries and the cooperation of the different levels of governance. That is why the Integrated Territorial Investments have been created. ITI is a **tool that encourages the implementation of territorial strategies in an integrated way, based on several priorities of different Operational Programmes**. It should include the following **key elements**:

- **A designated territory and an integrated territorial development strategy;**
- **A package of actions to be implemented;**
- **Governance arrangements to manage the ITI.**

For more information (based on the 2014-2020 framework):

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/iti_en.pdf

■ **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**

The second tool introduced to implement a place-based approach is the **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)**. As a local development tool, the CLLD refers to a **methodology which is led by local action groups including public and private actors**. Its goal is the **implementation of integrated development strategies tailored to local needs**. It encourages a **bottom-up approach** and can be used in the field of urban development.

For more information (based on the 2014-2020 framework):

https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf

6.2. Financial instruments

Some financial instruments can be used to implement urban development projects. Here are the three most common tools proposed by the European Investment Bank (EIB) meaningful examples.

For more information and more specific instruments, please, visit these websites:

<https://www.fi-compass.eu/> / <https://www.eib.org/en/index.htm>

■ **European Investment Bank Loans**

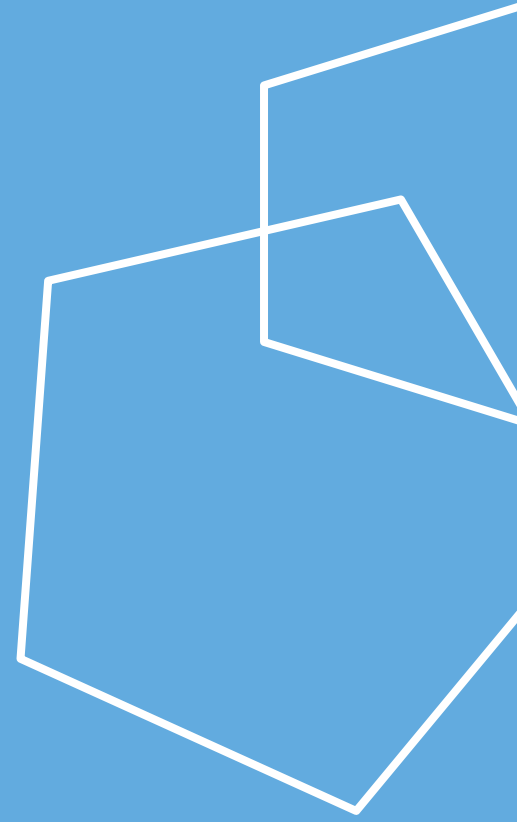
The EIB lends to the public and private sectors. For example, they invest in small companies through local banks but also in innovative start-ups. They also propose, amongst other opportunities, loans starting at €25 million to public sector entities to support a single large investment project or programme, based on its priorities.

■ **Equity**

The European Investment Bank provides **equity financing primarily investing or co-investing along with funds in the fields on infrastructure, the environment, or small- and medium-sized enterprises and mid-size corporations.** In some cases, the EIB also provides direct quasi-equity financing to invest in innovative companies. The European Investment Bank also invests in equity and debt funds which are focused on projects dealing with climate action and/or infrastructure. Moreover, they engage in equity and hybrid debt co-investments with top ranked funds and investment partners.

■ **Guarantees**

The EIB proposes different guarantee instruments, covering risks of projects. These guarantees unlock additional financing for small- and medium-sized enterprises or mid-caps by covering a portion of possible losses from a portfolio of loans. The EIB sometimes also guarantees possible losses from a project to unlock additional investment.



0.7.

**FIND THE RIGHT
EUROPEAN OPPORTUNITY**



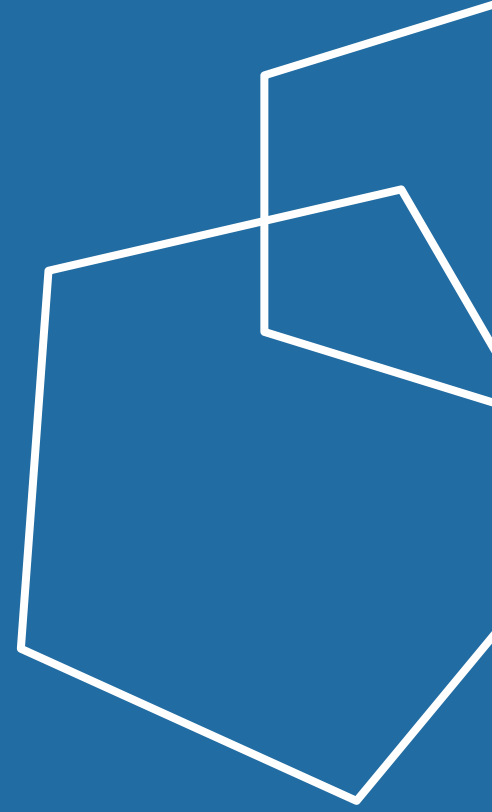
7. FIND THE RIGHT EUROPEAN OPPORTUNITY

Now that you are familiar with Cohesion Policy, follow the link below to access a database and find the right fund or programme to implement your project or strategy:

[Find me a Fund!](#)

Then, click on the headings you are interested in to see what is available for your city at the EU level. You will be redirected to different boards explaining the goals of the different programmes and funds in these fields and some useful links to get more information and know how to apply.





0.8.

GLOSSARY



8. GLOSSARY

CF	Cohesion Fund
CINEA	The European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). CINEA plays a key role in supporting the EU Green Deal through the efficient and effective implementation of its delegated programmes.
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF +	European Social Fund +
EUI	European Urban Initiative
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
JTF	Just Transition Fund
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework
NGEU	NextGenerationEU
NLC	New Leipzig Charter
REACT-EU	Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility



0.9.

SOURCES



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General information on Cohesion Policy and its urban dimension

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Disclaimer: The aim of this study and the national information sheets is to signpost cities to relevant funding sources. Every effort is made to maintain accurate and up to date information, but readers are advised to follow the links and check directly with funders.