

MID-TERM EVALUATION

OF THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND, THE COHESION FUND AND THE JUST TRANSITION FUND



2021
2027

POLICY OBJECTIVE 4

A MORE SOCIAL EUROPE



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
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Annex 6.5
Fiche Policy Objective 4
'A more social Europe'

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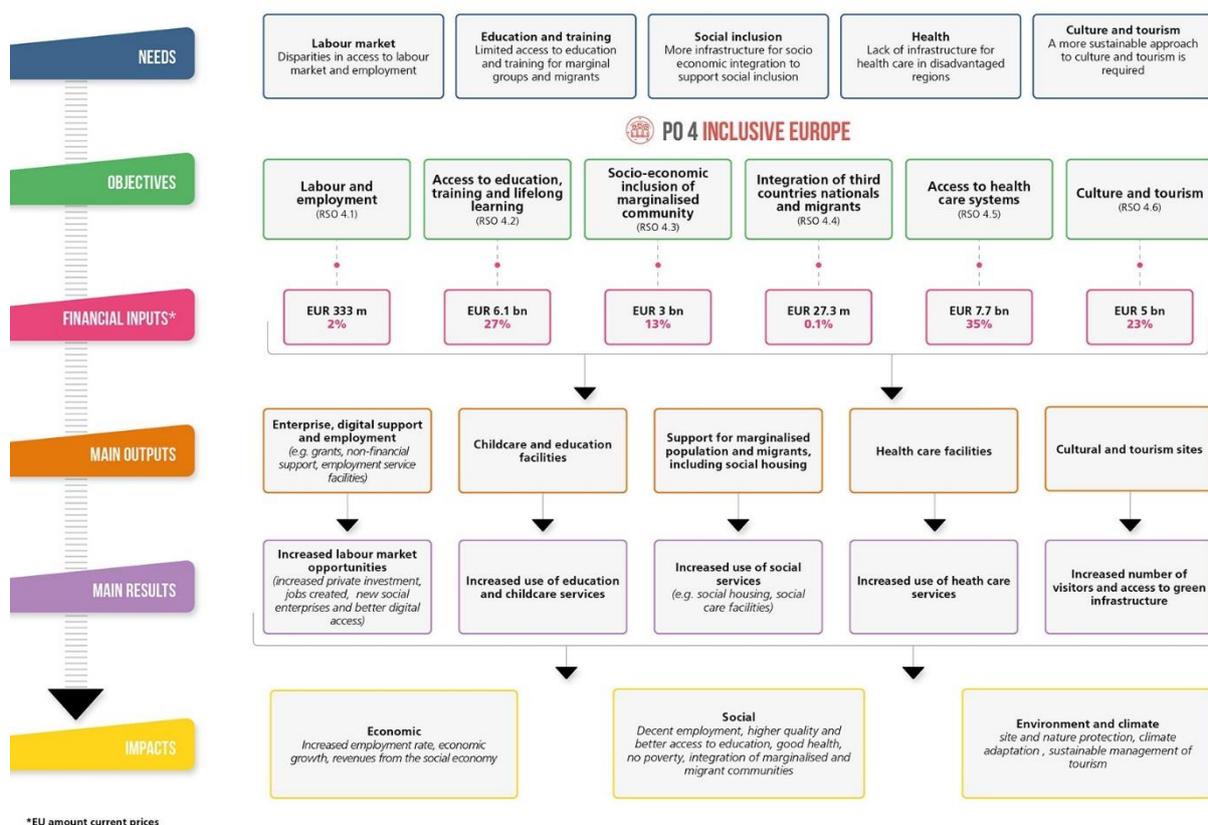
Policy objective 4: 'A more social Europe'

This fiche describes the intervention logic of PO 4 and summarises key evaluation findings and lessons learnt. The illustration of the intervention logic covers needs, objectives, inputs, actions, outputs, results and impacts.

1. Part 1: Intervention logic

The following infographic summarises the main components of the PO4 described below.

Figure 1 - PO4 Intervention logic illustration



Source: Consortium elaboration, 2024. Note: planned financial data ERDF

1.1. Needs

Social and inclusive growth is a priority of cohesion policy for 2021-2027. As highlighted in the 9th Cohesion Report, existing social and economic disparities are likely to increase in the future. While disparities between Member States are decreasing, within Member States they are increasing. The digital and green transitions may further increase territorial disparities in terms of growth and prosperity, especially between rural and urban areas, remote and outermost regions. The poorest and most vulnerable are particularly affected by these changes. This is notably relevant in regions undergoing structural change, where declines in traditional sources of employment lead to skills mismatches, labour gaps, and higher poverty and social

exclusion rates. The 9th Cohesion Report also shows that territorial specificities played a role in the severity of impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Generally, peripheral and less developed regions were more exposed. The asymmetric effects were compounded by uneven institutional capacity at different levels to respond to the challenges (European Commission. Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, 2024). This confirms that resilience to ongoing trends and future crises in the EU requires increased coordination between levels of governance and with relevant stakeholders, as well as more effective means to map infrastructure and service needs. Ongoing economic change, fostered by the digital and green transitions, coupled with persisting social disparities and the impact of demographic change, is leading to different needs ranging from the provision of high-quality non-segregated services, such as employment, education, training, long-term care services and cultural opportunities, to affordable housing and healthcare. In addition, the culture and tourism sectors are integral to achieving sustainable development goals, especially in regions heavily dependent on these industries. As these sectors undergo digital and green transformations, there is potential to foster long-term environmental, social, and financial sustainability. This transformation could create quality employment, stimulate innovation, and generate spillover effects that benefit other sectors, ultimately enhancing the region's attractiveness. Moreover, by increasing the resilience of the tourism and cultural sectors to external shocks, such as economic crises or environmental changes, these industries can serve as pillars for social inclusion and regional cohesion. As socio-economic conditions evolve, regions also need to address demographic challenges, such as population ageing, which has a considerable impact on the economic and social security system, with a decrease in the labour force and an increasing burden on care services providers and pension systems. The diminishing EU working age population requires an adaptable labour force and calls for actions to attract inactive people into the labour market. In relation to this, the Commission has launched the Talent Booster Mechanism, which supports EU regions affected by the decline of working age population, in training, retaining and attracting people. In the Communication on Harnessing Talent in Europe's Regions (2023) Cohesion Policy is highlighted as a catalyst for place-based policies that provides regions facing a talent development trap with an integrated strategic framework for planning long-term investments.

1.2. Objectives

Cohesion policy funds are essential to strengthening the resilience of social systems, promoting skills, increasing employability, improving the quality, labour market relevance and inclusiveness of education and training as well as facilitating access to affordable non-segregated social housing and accessible mainstream social, long-term care and health services. This support strengthens efforts from Member States and regions to turn the European Pillar of Social Rights into reality. Cohesion Policy funds also recognise the transformative power of sustainable tourism and culture in

driving socioeconomic development, social inclusion and social innovation. The ERDF and CF regulation identifies six specific objectives under PO4 which can be supported by the ERDF.

- RSO4.1 aims to improve the efficiency and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment by developing social infrastructure and promoting the social economy.
- RSO4.2 aims to improve equal access to inclusive and quality education, training and lifelong learning services through the development of accessible infrastructure, including by promoting resilience for distance and online education and training.
- RSO4.3 aims to promote the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups, including people with special needs, through integrated actions including housing and social services.
- RSO4.4 aims to promote the socio-economic integration of third-country nationals, including migrants, through integrated measures, including housing and social services.
- RSO4.5 is to ensure equal access to health care and promote health care sustainability, including primary care, and to encourage a shift from institutional to family and community care.
- RSO4.6 aims to strengthen the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation.

1.3. Programme Inputs

1.3.1. Financial planned resources

The first part of this section provides an overview, with the ERDF planned amount (total EU amount), its distribution across Member States, specific objectives and categories of regions defined by Article 108 CPR as *less developed*, *transition*, and *more developed regions*.

The second part assesses the territorial distribution of the financial planned resources allocated under PO4 and the use of resources under each intervention field primarily referring to PO4 according to the Cohesion data platform correspondence table ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2021-2027-Categorisation/Correspondence-21-27-to-14-20-intervention-fields/4s7y-iy43/about_data

PO4 has a budget of EUR 112.3 billion across all Member States. The ESF+ and the ERDF play key roles in supporting and investing in employment, education, health and social care. Additionally, EUR 3.7 billion is allocated to support sustainable tourism and culture, while EUR 3 billion is dedicated to sustainable urban development and EUR 2.3 billion to non-urban territories. The ESF+ contribution amounts to EUR 92.7 billion, while the ERDF contributes EUR 19.3 billion (to which EUR 2.4 billion dedicated to Interreg are added), playing a central role in supporting inclusive growth priorities, mainly through infrastructure and equipment. PO4 often takes a major, if not dominant, share of Cohesion Policy funds in a Member State, mainly linked to the concentration of ESF+ funding. Under ERDF, the allocation under PO4 by type of region is:

- More developed regions, some 3%, ranging from 22% in Lithuania to 1% in Hungary
- Transition regions, approximately 6%, ranging from 25% in Malta to 3% in Portugal, France and Belgium
- Less developed regions, approximately 11%, ranging from 26% in Czechia to 4% in Belgium.

Intervention fields primarily associated with PO4 account for a significant share of funding. It is also relevant to highlight that several intervention fields not originally categorized under PO4 also contribute to PO4 objectives and that intervention fields initially linked to PO4 have been allocated under other POs ⁽²⁾.

The EU average per capita is EUR 56 with:

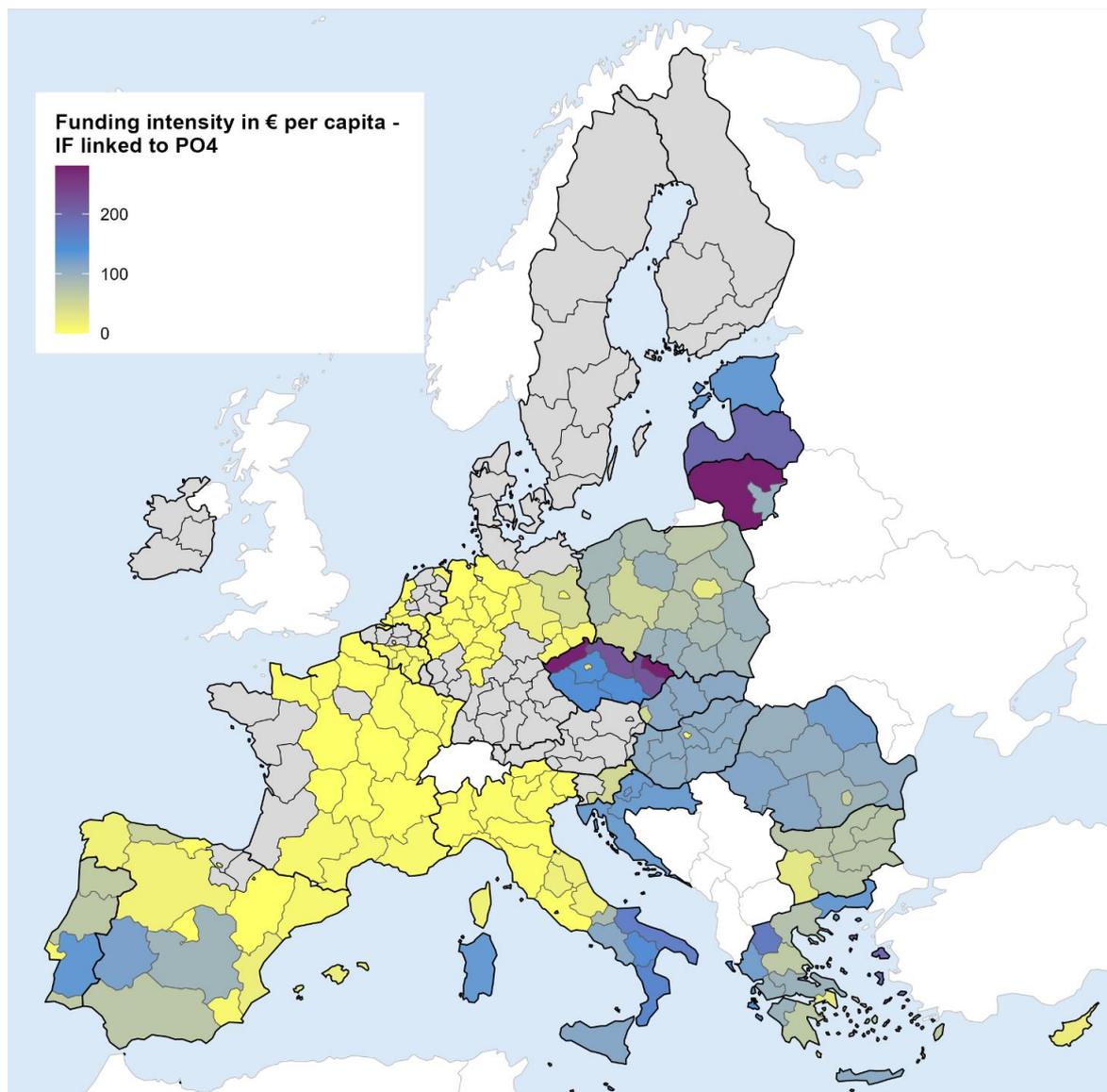
- Less developed regions averaging EUR 167 for a total of EUR 20.5 bn
- Transition regions averaging EUR 31 for a total of EUR 3.5 bn
- More developed regions averaging EUR 5 for a total of EUR 1.1 bn

Territorial patterns of planned financial resources

Particularly high per capita funding is in eastern and south-eastern Europe, with peaks in northern Czechia, Lithuania and Slovakia. Although there is relatively even distribution throughout the Member States, there are regions without PO4 funding in Sweden, Ireland and Austria.

⁽²⁾ A total of EUR 5.6 bn allocated for PO4 intervention fields is used under other POs, bringing the total expenditure for these fields to EUR 25.2 bn.

Figure 2 - Funding intensity for PO4

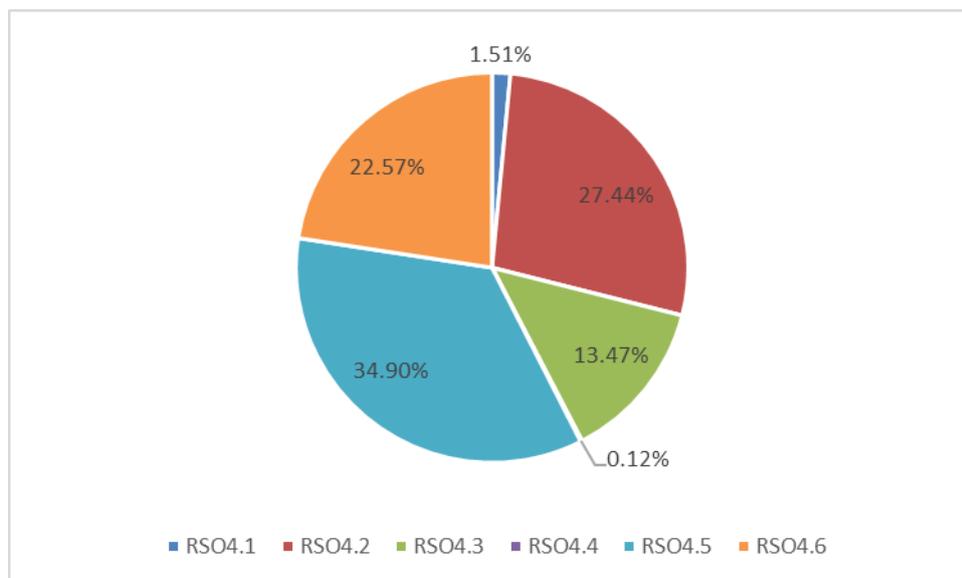


Source: Consortium elaboration, based on 2024 data

PO4 resources are mainly provided grants (95%), but also through financial instruments (equity or quasi equity, guarantee, loan).

Most of the ERDF and Interreg allocation is concentrated in RSO 4.5 about equal access to health care, followed by RSO 4.2 on equal access to education and training and RSO 4.6 on culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation. RSO 4.1 on the efficiency and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment and 4.4 about the socio-economic integration of third-country nationals have a minor contribution to the PO4 budget. This might be explained through the fact that they are related to topics typically addressed by the ESF. Analysis of the intervention fields associated with each RSO according to the Cohesion Data platform indicative correspondence table enables an estimate of population coverage and per capita budget.

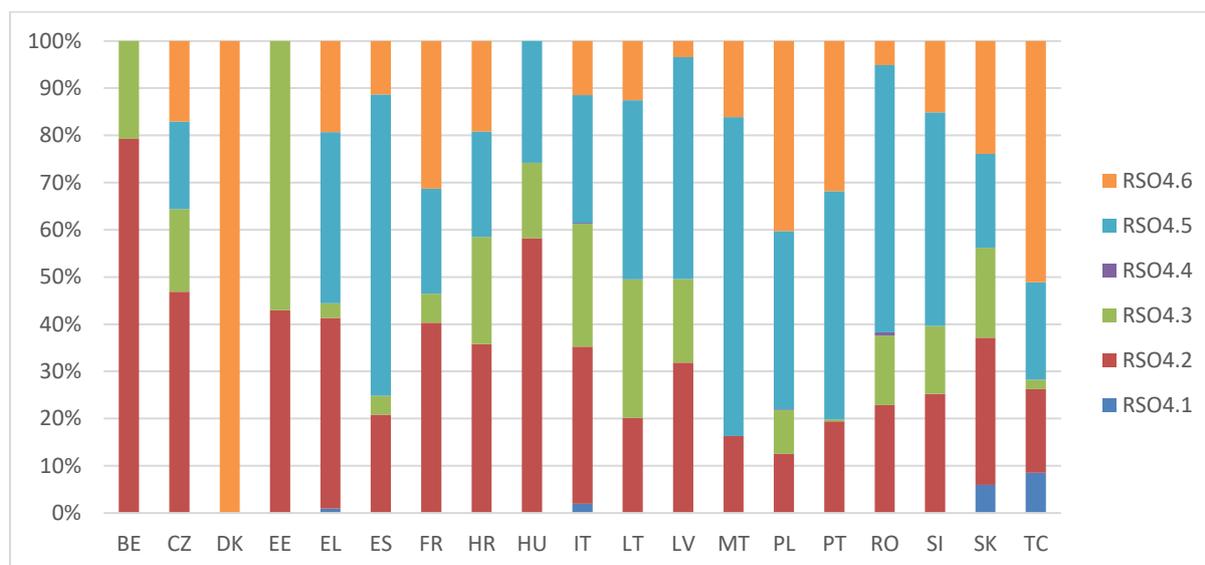
Figure 3 - Total PO4 allocation under ERDF and Interreg, per specific objective



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

Figure 4 further specifies the planned allocation of PO4 per specific objective per Member State. While the EU level split (Figure 3 **Error! Reference source not found.**) is well reflected, several national specificities are worth noting. For example, while equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems (RSO 4.5) is supported in almost all Member States, Spain and Malta clearly emphasise this type of support. Moreover, although the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation (RSO 4.6) is supported by almost all countries it appears as particularly relevant for Interreg programmes (50% of the budget as the column on Territorial Cooperation -TC- shows), Denmark, which allocated its entire PO4 budget to this RSO (EUR 16.5 million) and Poland which allocated the highest amount of budget across member states to this RSO (EUR 1.7 billion). RSO 4.2 on equal access to education and training is also present in all countries, but with a considerable relevance in Belgium and Hungary. As stated, at the European level, RSO 4.1 and 4.4 have a minor role. Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets (RSO 4.1) is supported by Slovakia, Italy, Greece and some and Interreg programmes. Promoting socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants (RSO 4.4) is instead present only in Italy, Poland and Romania.

Figure 4 - PO4 supported specific objectives per Member State



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

RSO4.1 – Intervention fields under RSO 4.1 follow the goal of ‘Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy’. In total, around 1.5% of the total budget is planned for PO4 under ERDF (including Interreg). The breakdown is ERDF 37% and Interreg 63%. Of the 199 million people living in regions eligible for funding more than half (111 million) live in less developed regions. 54 million in more developed regions, while 34 million are in transition regions. The funding per capita is EUR 17 for less developed regions, EUR 10 for regions in transition and EUR 2 for more developed regions. The measures are almost exclusively focused on countries that joined the EU since 2004. A noticeable exception is Italy, where funding for the whole territory is available. Apart from Italy, few regions from EU members before the 2004 accession, namely Germany, France, Spain and Portugal decide to allocate resources under this RSO.

Interventions fields linked to RSO 4.1 cover 65.3 million people living in rural areas (some 33% of the population covered), with 42.6 million living in rural areas in less developed regions, 11.8 million in more developed regions, and 10.9 million in transition regions.

RSO4.2 – RSO 4.2 addresses the ‘Improvement of equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning through developing accessible infrastructure, including by fostering resilience for distance and on-line education and training’. Intervention fields linked to this specific objective represent around 27% of the PO4 budget under ERDF (including Interreg). The funds breakdown is ERDF 93% and Interreg 7%. Overall, 282 million citizens live in regions eligible for funding under RSO 4.2, with a majority in less developed regions. The funding per capita is highest in less developed regions (EUR 42), followed by transition regions

(EUR 17) and more developed regions (EUR 4). Vast areas in Northern and Western Europe decided not to programme support under this RSO.

Intervention fields linked to RSO 4.2 cover 79.6 million people in rural areas (some 28% of the population covered), with 45.1 million people in rural areas in less developed regions, 15.8 million in more developed regions, and 18.8 million in transition regions.

RSO4.3 – The funding of intervention fields linked to RSO 4.3 ‘Promoting the socioeconomic inclusion of marginalised communities, low-income households and disadvantaged groups including people with special needs, through integrated actions, including housing and social services’ represents 13% of all PO4 funding under ERDF (including Interreg). The fund breakdown is: ERDF 98% and Interreg 2%. Regions which allocated resources to this RSO have a population of 172 million, the second lowest of all specific objectives. More than half (101 million) live in less developed regions, which have the highest funding per capita (EUR 8). Regions in transition have a per capita funding of EUR 4 and more developed regions, EUR 2. Funding is only available in 11 member states, which are all in eastern or southern Europe.

Interventions fields linked to RSO 4.3 cover 52.7 million people in rural areas (some 31% of the population covered), with 36.2 million in rural areas in less developed regions, 10.4 million in more developed regions, and 6.1 million in transition regions.

BOX 1 - Focus on Roma populations in ERDF

Although actions for Roma are mainly envisaged under the ESF+, RSO 4.3 includes interventions to be implemented under ERDF for the Roma population to improve living conditions and access to services for the Roma population. The 2021-2027 programming period emphasises better coordination between ESF+ and ERDF, in particular encouraging more integrated and comprehensive approaches. Slovakia, Romania and Hungary are the only Member States that have allocated part of their budget to the intervention field 'Access of Roma to education, employment and social inclusion'. Of the total EUR 206 million, EUR 184 million has been allocated by Slovakia. Other intervention fields which can envisage actions in support of Roma communities are '126 Housing infrastructure (except for migrants, refugees and persons enjoying or applying for international protection)' and '155 Support for civil society working with marginalised communities such as Roma'. While twelve Member States have programmed a total of EUR 862 million to intervention field 126, measures under intervention field 155 are only programmed under territorial cooperation (EUR 400 million). However, long-term ERDF support has often been insufficient in the past, with most projects spanning only 1-2 years, raising concerns about effective implementation and commitment from local authorities. To ensure that ERDF funds effectively reach Roma and other marginalised communities, Member States should improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This includes setting up robust tracking systems to follow the flow of funds, regularly assessing the outcomes of funded projects, and ensuring transparency in reporting. Furthermore, long-term strategies are crucial for success, with projects spanning at least three years to allow for sustainable impact. Aligning these efforts with broader EU initiatives, such as the European Child Guarantee, and focusing on comprehensive, large-scale measures across multiple sectors will help move beyond short-term, localised actions. (interview with an international network specialised in the use of Cohesion Policy funds to support the Roma community).

Source: Consortium elaboration

RSO4.4 – Intervention fields under RSO 4.4 'Promoting the socio-economic integration of third country nationals, including migrants [...]' make up only 0.1% of the budget for PO4 under ERDF. For RSO4.4 there is no allocation under Interreg. Both the figures for the available budget as well as the number of citizens living in regions eligible for funding (68 million) are by far the lowest of any specific objective, with more than half of the population living in more developed regions. However, funding per capita for those regions at EUR 0.02 is extremely low. Funding is only available in Italy, Poland and Romania.

Intervention fields linked to RSO 4.4 cover 17.9 million people living in rural areas (some 26% of the population covered), with 4.9 million living in rural areas located in less developed regions, 8.7 million in more developed regions, and 4.3 million in transition regions.

RSO4.5 – Intervention fields linked to RSO 4.5 'Ensuring equal access to health care and fostering resilience of health systems, including primary care, and promoting the

transition from institutional to family-based and community-based care' have a budget of around 35% of the funding available for PO4 under ERDF (including Interreg). For RSO4.5 the funds breakdown is: ERDF 93% and Interreg 7%. 219 million citizens live in regions where funding is available, mostly in less developed and transition regions. Funding per capita is highest in less developed regions with EUR 45, followed by transition regions with EUR 11 and more developed regions with EUR 7. Funding is mostly allocated in eastern Europe, but also across many regions in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal.

Interventions fields linked to RSO 4.5 cover 73.6 million people in rural areas (some 34% of the population covered, with 44.9 million people in rural areas in less developed regions, 4.5 million in more developed regions, and 24.3 million in transition regions).

RSO4.6 – Intervention fields linked to RSO 4.6 'Enhancing the role of culture and sustainable tourism in economic development, social inclusion and social innovation' have a budget represent 23% of the budget for PO4. The funds breakdown is ERDF 75% and Interreg 25%. RSO 4.6 covers areas with a population of 328 million people, being the specific objectives under PO4 which covers the largest population. Less developed regions have EUR 58 funding per capita access, followed by transition regions (EUR 13) and more developed regions (EUR 3). Funding is allocated across most Member States excluding Ireland, Sweden, Estonia, the Netherlands, Austria and large parts of Southern Germany.

Interventions fields linked to RSO 4.6 cover 101.8 million people in rural areas (some 31% of the population covered), with 44.9 million in rural areas located in less developed regions, 21.1 million in more developed regions, and 35.8 million in transition regions.

An analysis of funding intensity and objectives highlights the uptake of funding under PO4 at regional level. It examines the intersection between PO4 support and other relevant indicators such as population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, participation in education and training and the number of medical doctors per 100 000 inhabitants in NUTS2 regions.

PO4 funding is well targeted on social exclusion or poverty in a region, especially towards the regions with the highest needs on the periphery of the EU (e.g. southern Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, eastern Poland). However, there are also regions with relatively high poverty but very little funding per capita (such as parts of western Germany, on the French-Belgian border and urban centres in western Europe such as Brussels). Some urbanised regions for instance in northern Italy do not receive any funding under PO4. On the other hand, there is significant funding in regions with less poverty or social exclusion, particularly in central Europe (Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia and western Hungary).

The patterns between RSO 4.2 funding per capita and participation in training and education ⁽³⁾ over the last month in regions receiving support is also analysed. Regions with low participation rates and high funding per capita are mostly in the Baltics, southern Italy, Greece and parts of central Europe. There are few regions with low participation rates which receive limited support from cohesion policy funding, situated in Belgium and Germany. There are also few regions combining high funding per capita and high training rates (in Estonia, Spain and Sardinia in Italy). While not very numerous, those regions may not necessarily represent cases of imperfect targeting of such funds – rather, they may represent cases of regions with well-functioning adult training and education systems with prominent use of cohesion policy funds. Overall, regions with low participation rates generally receive more funding than those with high participation.

Support under RSO 4.5 is targeted at fewer, mostly eastern and southern European regions. The relationship between RSO 4.5 funding and the number of medical doctors per 100 000 inhabitants at NUTS2 level shows that regions with fewer doctors receive more support from RSO 4.5 per capita. These regions are in Poland, Romania, southern Spain and Portugal. There are also regions with fewer doctors and little support from cohesion policy in France and Hungary. The relationship between RSO 4.5 funding and medical doctors per 100 000 inhabitants is not necessarily linear possibly due to the structure of the health system or national governance and funding approaches.

More information on funding intensity at regional level can be found in annex 6.3.

1.3.2. Administrative and organisational aspects

Implementation of PO4 under the ERDF is shared between the European Commission and Member State authorities. ERDF programmes are implemented at national or regional level, with some being multi-fund programmes (which include also ESF+ and/or CF and/or JTF). Out of the 297 analysed programmes, 177 invest in PO4 (of these 66 are multi-fund programmes and 70 are Interreg programmes). The survey and interviews of stakeholders under this study provide information on administrative and management aspects. This is not PO4-specific.

1.3.3. Enabling conditions

For the 2021-2027 period, the CPR entails horizontal enabling conditions applicable to all specific objectives and thematic enabling conditions for ERDF, ESF+ and the Cohesion Fund. The horizontal conditions concern public procurement and State aid, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the United Nations

⁽³⁾ Source: Eurostat “Participation rate in trainings and education (trng_lfse_04)”

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). To implement PO4 under the ERDF the following thematic enabling conditions linked to specific objectives have to be considered:

- A strategic policy framework for active labour market policies in the light of employment guidelines. It should include arrangements for jobseeker profiling and assessment of their needs as well as information on job vacancies and employment opportunities and evidence-based and targeted youth employment interventions including for NEET;
- A national strategic policy framework for gender equality focusing on measures to address gender gaps in employment, pay, pensions, and to promote work-life balance;
- A national or regional strategic policy framework for the education and training system, including measures to ensure equal access to, participation in and completion of quality, affordable, relevant, non-segregated and inclusive education and training, skills anticipation and forecasting, measures targeting low-skilled, low-qualified adults and those with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, measures to support educational staff and learning and teaching mobility;
- A national or regional strategic policy or legislative framework for social inclusion and poverty reduction including evidence-based diagnosis of poverty and social exclusion and measures to prevent and combat segregation in all fields and measures for the shift from institutional to family- and community-based care;
- A national or regional strategic policy framework for health which maps health and long-term care needs and includes measures to ensure the efficiency, sustainability, accessibility and affordability of health and long-term care services as well as measures to promote community and family-based services through de-institutionalisation, including prevention and primary care, home-care and community-based services.

1.4. Planned activities under PO 4

Planned actions differ across the specific objectives under PO4. Analysis of sub-themes and Annex I CPR - interventions fields enables mapping of planned action under each RSO of PO4.

RSO 4.1 actions cover:

- Access to employment, with specific measures for long-term unemployed people;

- Youth employment and socio-economic integration of young people;
- Self-employment and business start-ups and for social economy and social enterprises;
- Modernising and strengthening labour market institutions and services to assess and anticipate skills needs and to ensure timely and tailor-made assistance;
- Labour market matching and transitions and labour mobility;
- Women’s labour market participation and reduced gender-based segregation in the labour market;
- Work-life balance, including access to childcare and care for dependent persons;
- Healthy and well–adapted working environment addressing health risks, including promotion of physical activity;
- Development of digital skills and adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change.

The most relevant intervention fields for the ERDF are the following:

Intervention field	EU allocation (indicative amounts)
127 Other social infrastructure for social inclusion	€ 42,521,939
138 Social economy and social enterprises	€ 35,305,000
139 Modernise labour market institutions to anticipate needs	€ 12,066,450
143 Work-life balance	€ 27,000,000

Source: Cosortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

The most relevant intervention fields for Interreg are 134 Access to employment (EUR 49 millions) and 139 Modernise labour market institutions to anticipate needs (EUR 31 millions).

The main RSO 4.2 actions refer to building, renovation, and expansion of infrastructure, equipment, to support:

- Early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education;
- Vocational education and training and adult learning.

The most relevant intervention fields for the ERDF are the following:

Intervention field	EU allocation (indicative amounts)
121 Infrastructure for early childhood education and care	€ 808,696,880
122 Infrastructure for primary and secondary education	€ 2,581,283,300
123 Infrastructure for tertiary education	€ 1,105,183,724
124 Infrastructure for vocational education and training	€ 559,880,667

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

The most relevant intervention fields for Interreg is 149 Primary and secondary education (excluding infrastructure) (EUR 66 millions).

RSO 4.3 primarily supports housing for marginalised communities and improved access of marginalised groups to education and employment.

The most relevant intervention fields for the ERDF are the following:

Intervention field	EU allocation (indicative amounts)
043 New energy efficient buildings	€ 137,193,556
126 Housing infrastructure	€ 862,954,468
127 Other social infrastructure for social inclusion	€ 1,454,529,691
154 Access of Roma to education, employment and social inclusion	€ 185,523,091

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

The most relevant intervention fields for Interreg are 127 Other social infrastructure for social inclusion (EUR 30 millions) and 163 Social integration of people experiencing poverty/exclusion (EUR 13 millions).

RSO 4.4 primarily supports housing for migrants, refugees and persons under or applying for international protection and their increased participation in the labour market. The most relevant intervention field is 127 Other social infrastructure for social inclusion with EUR 25 mil allocation under the ERDF.

The main RSO 4.5 actions refer to:

- Health infrastructure, equipment and mobile assets;
- Digitalisation in health care;
- Critical equipment and supplies to address emergency situations.

The most relevant intervention fields for the ERDF are the following:

Intervention field	EU allocation (indicative amounts)
127 Other social infrastructure for social inclusion	€ 321,257,215
128 Health infrastructure	€ 3,739,241,414
129 Health equipment	€ 1,875,232,872
131 Digitalisation in health care	€ 345,935,547

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

The most relevant intervention fields for Interreg are 128 Health infrastructure (EUR 152 millions) and 160 Accessibility, effectiveness & resilience of health systems (EUR 97 millions).

The main RSO 4.6 actions primarily refer to the protection, development and promotion of public tourism assets, tourism services, cultural heritage and cultural services.

The most relevant intervention fields for the ERDF are the following:

Intervention field	EU allocation (indicative amounts)
083 Cycling infrastructure	€ 61,472,865
165 Public tourism assets and related tourism services	€ 868,276,621
166 Cultural heritage and cultural services	€ 2,457,616,360
167 Natural heritage and eco-tourism other than Natura 2000	€ 70,920,574

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

The most relevant intervention fields for Interreg are 165 Public tourism assets and related tourism services (EUR 328 millions) and 166 Cultural heritage and cultural services (EUR 358 millions).

1.5. Output

The following table shows the established 2029 ERDF target output indicators.

Table 1 - Common output indicators PO 4

	Unit	2029 target	ERDF
Enterprise, digital support and employment			
RCO01 Enterprises supported	Enterprises	657	
RCO02 Enterprises supported by grants	Enterprises	290	
RCO03 Enterprises supported by financial instruments	Enterprises	251	
RCO04 Enterprises with non-financial support	Enterprises	116	
RCO14 Digital: Public institutions supported for Digital	Users	1 426	
RCO15 Firms: Capacity of incubation created	Enterprises	40	
RCO61 PES: Surface of facilities for employment services	Users	23 176	
Childcare and education facilities			
RCO66 Education: Classroom capacity of childcare facilities	Users	493 691	
RCO67 Education: Classroom capacity of education facilities	Users	3 271 609	
Intervention for marginalised population and migrants, including social housing			
RCO113 Integrated actions for inclusion of marginalised pop.	Users	257 241	
RCO65 Social Infra: Capacity of new or modernised social housing	Users	48 806	
RCO70 Social Infra: Capacity of social care facilities	Users	29 253	
Health care facilities			
RCO69 Health: Capacity of health care facilities	Users	59 104 915	
Intervention in ITI and CLLD, cultural and tourism sites supported			
RCO114 Open space created or rehabilitated in urban areas	Square meters	497 196	
RCO57 Urban Trans: rolling stock for public transport	Passengers	128	
RCO74 Population covered in integrated territorial development	Users	49 888 994	
RCO75 Strategies for integrated territorial development	Strategies	308	
RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Users	23 141	
RCO80 Community-led local development strategies supported	Strategies	104	

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

1.6. Results

The following table shows the established 2029 ERDF net target result indicators.

Table 2 - Common result indicators PO 4

	Unit	2029 ERDF net target
Enterprise, digital support and employment		
RCR01 Jobs created in supported entities	Annual FTEs	941
RCR02 Firms: Private investments	Euro	16 549 294
RCR11 Digital: Users of new and upgraded public digital services	Users	1 018 312
RCR12 Digital: Users of digital services by enterprises	Users	7 500
RCR17 Firms: New enterprises surviving in the market	Enterprises	30
RCR65 PES: Annual users of employment services	Users/year	120 099
Childcare and education facilities		
RCR70 Education: Annual users of childcare facilities	Users/year	417 462
RCR71 Education: Annual users of education facilities	Users/year	2 769 712
Intervention for marginalised population and migrants, including social housing		
RCR67 Social Infra: Annual users of social housing	Users/year	49 552
RCR74 Annual users of new or modernised social care facilities	Users/year	35 574
Health care facilities		
RCR72 Health: Annual users of e-health care services	Users/year	4 393 132
RCR73 Health: Annual users of health care facilities	Users/year	30 567 203
Intervention in ITI and CLLD, cultural and tourism sites supported		
RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites	Users	41 261 901
RCR95 Env: Pop. with access to green infrastructure	Users	470 552

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on February 2024 data

1.7. Impacts

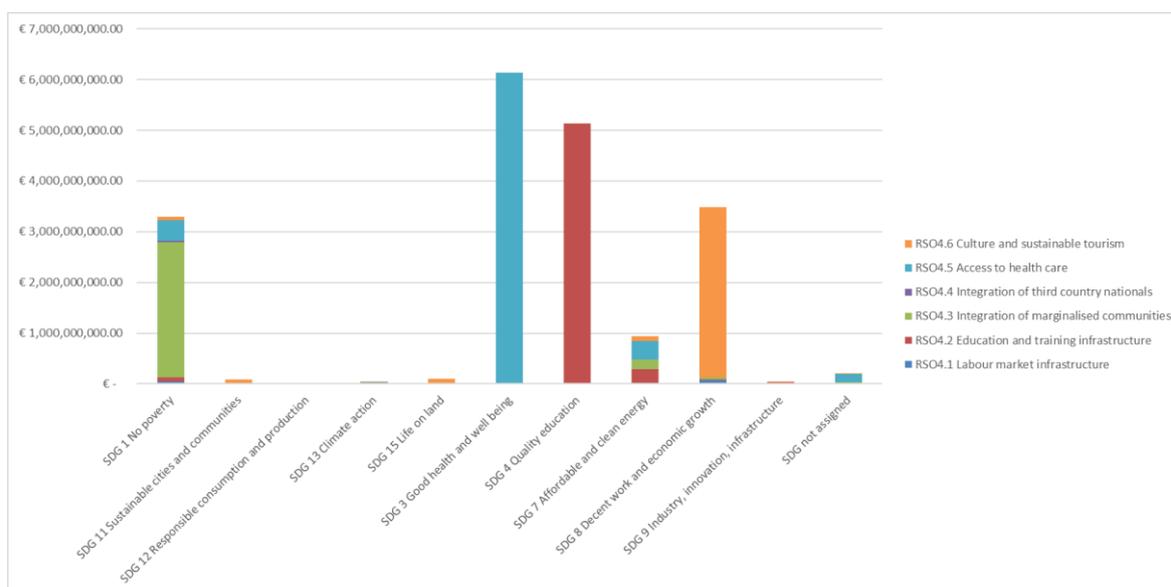
Given the early implementation stage of PO4 ERDF support for the 2021-2027 programming period, information gathered for this study only examines current implementation. Financial and physical progress does not provide much substantiated evidence for a robust assessment of PO4 impacts.

The planned contribution of PO4 support to SDGs is considered as a proxy to assess expected impacts of PO4 on the wider economy and society.

Figure 5 indicates PO4 funding principally contributes to:

- SDG 1 No poverty (EUR 3.3 billion of PO4 funding),
- SDG 3 Good health and wellbeing (EUR 6.1 billion of PO4 funding),
- SDG 4 Quality education (EUR 5.1 billion of PO4 funding),
- SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth (EUR 3.5 billion of PO4 funding).

Figure 5 - Planned contribution of the PO4 activities to SDGs



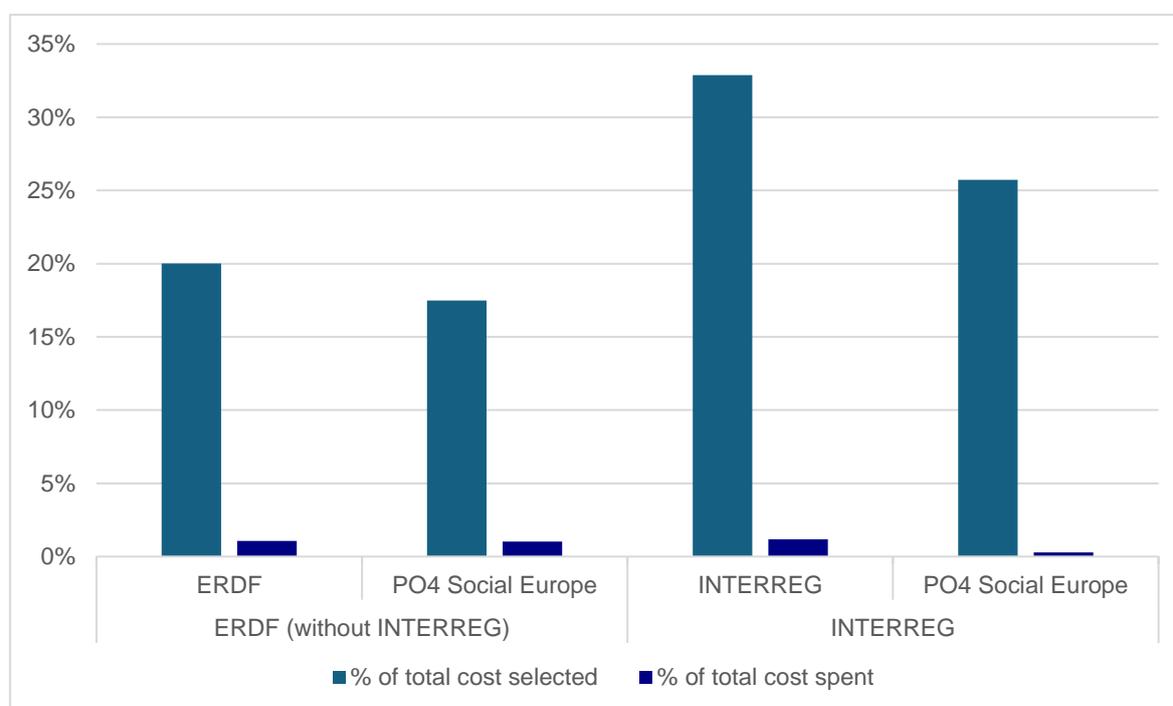
Source: Consortium elaboration, based on data from DG REGIO, 2024

2. Part 2: Key evaluation findings from the implementation and lessons learnt

2.1. Current implementation progress

The figure below illustrates the financial progress of programmes in the first half of 2024. PO4 decided resources for ERDF were EUR 3.4 billion and for Interreg, EUR 742 million. The share of financial resources already spent is marginal for total fund allocation and for PO4. Under PO4, only EUR 200 million of ERDF was spent (1.2% of the total) and EUR 8 million for Interreg (0.3% of the total) at the end of June of 2024.

Figure 6 - Decided and spent value by fund (PO4 and total), share of total allocation



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on June 2024 data

The following table highlights progress in decided and implemented values for each output indicator for PO4 under ERDF. The period spans from the beginning of implementation to 30 June 2024.

Decided values refer to expected contributions by the project. Implemented values refer to finalised operations financed by the programme. Decided values refer to expected outputs (if projects are implemented as expected) while implemented values refer to closed projects.

	Unit	Decided (% of milestone by 2024)	Implemented (% of the milestone by 2024)
Enterprise, digital support and employment			
RCO01 Enterprises supported	Enterprises	483.72%	0%
RCO02 Enterprises supported by grants	Enterprises	0%	0%
RCO03 Enterprises supported by financial instruments	Enterprises	904.35%	0%
RCO04 Enterprises with non-financial support	Enterprises	0%	0%
RCO14 Digital: Public institutions supported for Digital	Users	0%	0%
RCO15 Firms: Capacity of incubation created	Enterprises	0%	0%
RCO61 PES: Surface of facilities for employment services	Users	0%	0%
Childcare and education facilities			
RCO66 Education: Classroom capacity of childcare facilities	Users	6.03%	0.83%
RCO67 Education: Classroom capacity of education facilities	Users	51.57%	1.33%
Intervention for marginalised population and migrants, including social housing			
RCO113 Integrated actions for inclusion of marginalised pop.	Users	0%	0%
RCO65 Social Infra: Capacity of new or modernised social housing	Users	21.23%	0.76%
RCO70 Social Infra: Capacity of social care facilities	Users	0%	0%
Health care facilities			
RCO69 Health: Capacity of health care facilities	Users	60.22%	0.02%
Intervention in ITI and CLLD, cultural and tourism sites supported			
RCO114 Open space created or rehabilitated in urban areas	Square meters	0%	0%
RCO57 Urban Trans: rolling stock for public transport	Passengers	0%	0%
RCO74 Population covered in integrated territorial development	Users	148.43%	112.86%
RCO75 Strategies for integrated territorial development	Strategies	52.94%	14.71%
RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Users	28.92%	1.15%
RCO80 Community-led local development strategies supported	Strategies	0%	0%

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on June 2024 data

As shown in the table, at the end of the first semester of 2024 the share of fund financial resources already spent is marginal. Only a few common output indicators were implemented.

The following table provides a status of physical progress in implementing PO4 (decided targets and achievements for the most widely used Results indicators). The period spans from the beginning of implementation to 30 June 2024.

Decided values refer to expected contributions by the project. Implemented values refer to finalised operations financed by the programme. Decided values refer to expected outputs (if projects are implemented as expected) while implemented values refer to closed projects.

	Unit	Decided share (2024)	Implemented share (2024)
Enterprise, digital support and employment			
RCR01 Jobs created in supported entities	Annual FTEs	12.11%	0%
RCR02 Firms: Private investments	Euro	25.57%	0%
RCR11 Digital: Users of new and upgraded public digital services	Users	0%	0%
RCR12 Digital: Users of digital services by enterprises	Users	0%	0%
RCR17 Firms: New enterprises surviving in the market	Enterprises	0%	0%
RCR65 PES: Annual users of employment services	Users/year	0%	0%
Childcare and education facilities			
RCR70 Education: Annual users of childcare facilities	Users/year	2.77%	0.05%
RCR71 Education: Annual users of education facilities	Users/year	9.56%	0.02%
Intervention for marginalised population and migrants, including social housing			
RCR67 Social Infra: Annual users of social housing	Users/year	0.99%	0%
RCR74 Annual users of new or modernised social care facilities	Users/year	0%	0%
Health care facilities			
RCR72 Health: Annual users of e-health care services	Users/year	0.35%	0%
RCR73 Health: Annual users of health care facilities	Users/year	20.32%	0.76%
Intervention in ITI and CLLD, cultural and tourism sites supported			
RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites	Users	11.90%	0.13%
RCR95 Env: Pop. with access to green infrastructure	Users	0%	0%

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on June 2024 data

2.2. Emerging challenges and EU citizen needs

This paragraph examines how sample programmes cover emerging challenges and basic needs of EU citizens and also consider partnerships and multi-level governance.

PO4 is the second most relevant PO after PO2 for addressing basic human needs (see section 4.5, EQ 14, of the main report). According to the analysis of the programmes, the needs most cited in relation to PO4 are health and wellness, access to basic knowledge, tolerance and inclusion. For needs related to demographic changes, investments under PO4 mostly concern the healthcare system.

The specific objective with the most capacity to address demographic challenges is RSO 4.5 on access to health care. Several programmes investing under this RSO refer to demographic challenges such as ageing (e.g. Castilla y Leon ERDF, Norte Regional Programme, Reunion ERDF-ESF+, Sardegna ERDF) or depopulation ((Castilla – La Manca ERDF). Programmes investing in RSO 4.2 Education and training infrastructure mainly address topics such as access to basic knowledge or advanced education. Topics related to tolerance and inclusion are mainly addressed through RSO 4.3 Integration of marginalised communities and 4.2 Education and training infrastructure.

2.3. Coherence with other funds and alignment with the European Semester process

Analysis of the programmes and partnership agreements shows that ESF+ measures are closely linked to ERDF measures under PO4. There are significant synergies between the two, for example in measures to promote access to quality and inclusive education and training to support up-skilling and re-skilling. ERDF, CF and JTF programmes rarely mention other instruments such as Erasmus+ and AMIF within PO4. Interactions with Erasmus+ are mostly mentioned in RSO4.2 - Education and training infrastructure, as the two funds promote synergies in access to education.

Interventions to improve labour market policies, promote social inclusion and ensure fair and equal access to social services and health systems in line with the macro objectives of PO4 are also included in the NRRPs. The many and diverse beneficiaries of the RRF can also be beneficiaries and implementing bodies of Cohesion Policy funds, potentially meaning a significant policy overlap.

The analysis of Annex D investment needs identified in the 2019 Country Report and programme finance highlights how much adopted programmes ensure coverage of investment needs mentioned in the European Semester process, at least for the given year. Funds have been allocated to cover most of investment

needs identified in Annex D of the 2019 Country Report. PO4 has the highest coverage (94%). However, the programmes generally give a lower priority to investment needs than in Annex D of the country report. The only exception is health (RSO 4.5), where the Country Report prioritisation is similar to the programme allocation (i.e. 44% of programmes give the same prioritisation as Annex D). Several programmes cite European Semester documents in PO4, some with specific references to the recommendations. For example, the Czech Integrated Regional Programme cites the 2019 Country Report in detail in RSO4.2, RSO4.3 and RSO4.5 as the basis for selecting interventions. Other programmes make more general references to the European Semester process documents, ensuring that selected actions contribute to fulfilling Country Specific Recommendations (see annex 6.2 for the complete analysis).

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