

## **MID-TERM EVALUATION**

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



**2021  
2027**

**POLICY OBJECTIVE 5  
A EUROPE CLOSER TO CITIZENS**



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy  
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Annex 6.5

Fiche Policy Objective 5  
“A EU closer to citizens”

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## Policy objective 5: 'A EU closer to citizens'

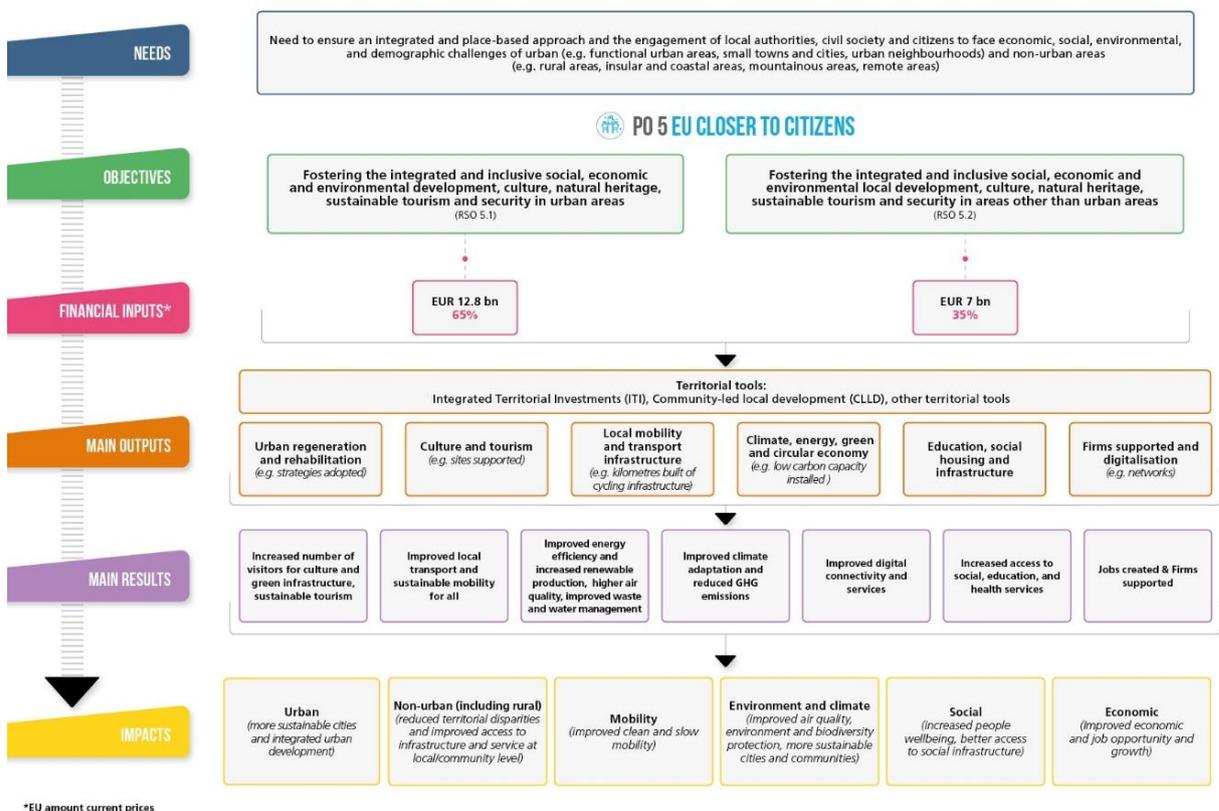
This fiche describes the intervention logic of PO 5 and summarises key evaluation findings and lessons learnt. The illustration of the intervention logic covers needs, objectives, inputs, actions, outputs, results and impacts.

# 1. Part 1: Intervention logic

In the 2021-2027 period, the European Commission introduced a stronger urban and territorial dimension with a new policy objective, 'Europe closer to citizens'. This supports a place-based approach and the engagement of local authorities, civil society and citizens in addressing local challenges. Cohesion policy supports sustainable urban development and development in other, non-urban territories with specific needs such as border areas, islands, mountains and sparsely populated areas. To achieve this, the legislation identifies two Specific Objectives that can be selected by individual programmes. In addition, the European Urban Initiative was launched to support cities with capacity building, innovative solutions, knowledge, policy development and communication activities.

This infographic summarises the main components of the PO 5 intervention logic which are described in the first part of the fiche

Figure 1 - PO 5 Intervention logic illustration



Source: own elaboration

## 1.1. Needs

The delivery of PO5 is provided through territorial and local development strategies. These tackle specific territorial challenges of urban and other, non-urban areas. The 8<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report identifies large cities and their metropolitan regions as drivers of regional economic development. Furthermore, smaller cities, towns and villages provide access to a wide range of public and private services. Ideally, their role as regional centres provides an anchor point for the wider region. However, urban areas and smaller cities are often incapable of providing all their inhabitants with a good quality of life and full access to services, shelter or jobs. Different regions face specific challenges linked to urban, densely populated areas or rural, sparsely populated areas. The long-term vision for rural areas provides a framework to address the challenges facing them. Reinforcing links between urban and rural areas within functional areas could benefit both urban and rural residents. Moreover, some regions face a legacy of structural changes that have shrunk traditional employment, leading to skills mismatches, environmental degradation and development traps. Such areas are often in middle-income countries or regions. They require targeted policies to integrate communities into the broader regional and national economy, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report states a need to complement nationwide structural policies with place-based policies that are increasingly recognised. Beyond local approaches applied in the other POs, e.g., via Smart specialisation strategies under PO1 or local green transition measures under PO2, the integrated territorial development approach and the dedicated PO5 'Europe closer to citizens' should build on local assets to promote balanced development and quality of life in all European territories.

Under PO5, cohesion policy is highly relevant to supporting sustainable urban development. Urban areas across the European Union face a wide range of challenges including affordable housing, migrant inclusion, social segregation, environmental footprint, traffic congestion, climate change, ageing and urban health. At the same time, they present opportunities for developing diversity, creativity and innovation. A recent report <sup>(1)</sup> by the network of cities Eurocities highlights the unique opportunity cohesion policy presents in fostering urban investment and involving cities in the planning stages of programme interventions.

Sustainable urban development strategies supported by EU cohesion policy are designed to target specific areas with a distinct territorial focus:

- area within city/town (districts/neighbourhoods), i.e. one or more specific districts or localities within an administrative area;

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<sup>(1)</sup> Eurocities, Outlook on the urban dimension of cohesion policy. Mapping the impact of cohesion policy in urban areas through the lenses of EU cities (2024)

- cities, towns or suburbs, i.e. a municipality with no restrictions on its population size or density;
- functional urban areas (FUAs) of multiple municipalities, i.e. two or more municipalities combined for the strategy.

Most sustainable urban development strategies implemented during the 2014-2020 programming period focus on cities, towns or suburbs (45%), followed by districts/neighbourhoods (31%), functional urban areas (20%), networks of cities (4%), and territory with specific features such as a park, an archaeological zone, or an island (0.4%). In the 2021-2027 programming period, investment in functional urban areas experienced considerable growth, and more than half the planned sustainable urban development funds under PO5 are allocated to FUAs.

Cohesion policy has encouraged a place-based approach to investments, including the participation of sub-regional territories and local communities in identifying needs and planning projects. Introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period. ITI and CLLD are designed to implement funds with an integrated and place-based approach (CPR Regulation Chapter II – Territorial development).

ITI's territorial approach is defined as 'financing of urban or other territorial strategies through combined investments from more than one priority axis of one or more programmes' (EC, 2015). As recognised in the EC Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies, ITI emphasises integrating multiple sectors and funds.

Equally important, cohesion policy funding is used to promote development of other, non-urban territories, including rural areas, often in combination with EAFRD, and in coastal regions with EMFAF. Here, LEADER has allowed the development of an important territorial tool for local-led community development (CLLD), which is now part of Cohesion fund programmes. Rural strategies introduce measures against emerging challenges related to ageing, low fertility, depopulation or migration. Rural areas are expected to be key in the green transition but need to develop capacity and build better framework conditions in digital connectivity, sustainable mobility, entrepreneurial development, work and life opportunities for women and youth as well as improving access to services.

## 1.2. Objectives

The ERDF/CF Regulation (Article 3) provides the following two ‘specific objectives’ under PO5:

- (a) RSO5.1: fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas; and
- (b) RSO5.2: fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas.

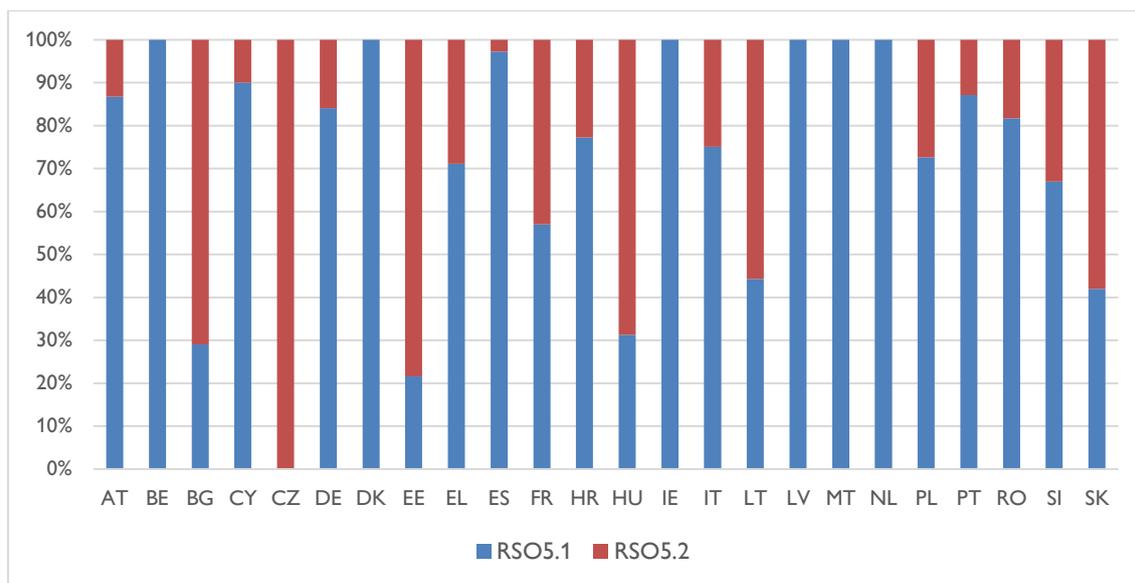
Member States elaborate national and regional programmes and may choose to cover, cover one or both specific objectives, depending on the needs to be addressed and measures to address those needs.

## 1.3. Programme Inputs

### 1.3.1. Financial planned resources

All Member States, except Finland, Luxembourg and Sweden, have programmed a total of more than EUR 19 billion in EU contribution and EUR 27.3 billion in total, with MS contribution, to support place-based investments via more than 2500 integrated and local territorial development strategies with enhanced ownership and participation of local stakeholders and communities. Almost two-thirds of this allocation is planned for investment to foster integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security within urban areas (RSO5.1), while one-third will pursue such objectives in non-urban areas (RSO5.2). There is some variation between Member States. For most, the financial allocation to RSO5.1 is higher than to RSO5.2. Bulgaria, Czechia (that doesn’t invest in RSO5.1), Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Slovakia are notable exceptions.

**Figure 2 - Share of supported specific objectives PO5, per Member State**



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

According to the EU budget foreseen for PO5, countries with the highest EU fund budget are Italy, Hungary, Spain and Poland. For PO5 funding as a share of the total fund allocation, Bulgaria with 14%, Hungary (12%), Lithuania (10%), Cyprus (9%), and Croatia (8%) have the highest allocation to PO5.

There is also some variation in investments by category of region at EU level:

- More developed regions allocate approximately 7% of funding under PO5, ranging from 19% in Hungary to 1% in Poland
- Transition regions allocate approximately 9% of funding under PO5, ranging from 31% in Bulgaria to 3% in Czech Republic.
- Less developed regions allocate approximately 10% of funding under PO5, ranging from 27% in Bulgaria to 4% in Czech Republic.

Around 64% of investments under PO5 will support integrated and place-based sustainable urban development strategies; EUR 8 billion has been programmed under ITI. The remaining 35% will be invested via ITI, CLLD and other nationally defined tools in rural and mountainous areas, islands and other territories.

Analysing the intervention fields associated with each RSO according to the correspondence table intervention fields in the Cohesion Data platform enables estimates of population coverage and per capita funding. The intervention fields primarily associated with PO5 refer to physical regeneration and territorial development initiatives.

- 168 - Physical regeneration and security of public spaces,
- 169 - Territorial development initiatives – preparation.

Programmes select other dimension codes under POs 1 to 4, making it difficult to determine which intervention fields will be most relevant from the beginning. At the EU level, around one-quarter of PO5 resources (EUR 5 billion) have been planned under these two intervention fields. Therefore, the analysis does not enable a distinction between the two RSOs. Nonetheless, it presents some idea of territorial-level needs and investments (as shown in the map below):

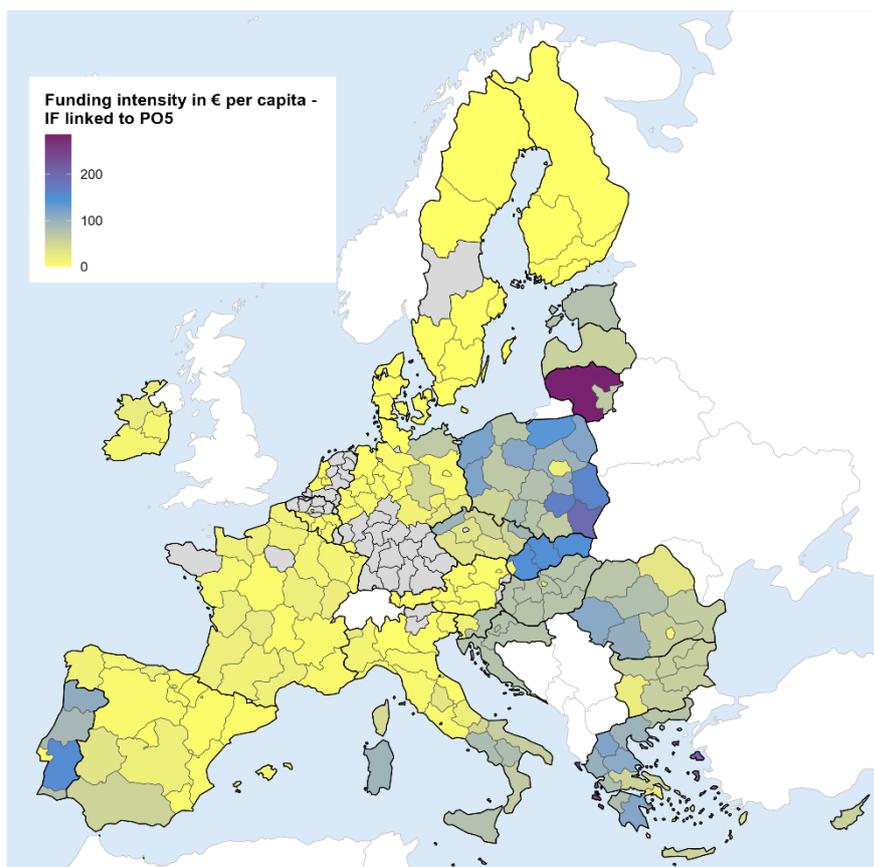
- Lithuania has particularly high per capita funding, followed by Portugal. Peaks of PO5 funding intensity are in Slovenia, Greece, Italy, Estonia, Cyprus, and some regions in Germany and Poland.
- Although there is relatively even distribution across Member States, there are regions without PO5 funding, e.g. in Finland, Germany and France.

The average per capita expenditure on directly PO5-related intervention fields is EUR 11. However, this diverges considerably across regional categories:

- Less developed regions see an average of EUR 30 per capita for a total of EUR 3.6 bn
- Transition regions see an average of EUR 9 per capita for a total of EUR 1 bn
- More developed regions see an average of EUR 3 per capita for a total of EUR 0.5 bn

The funding intensity in European regions shows only moderate deviations. Generally, the use of PO5-related intervention fields is widespread with moderate funding intensity.

## Map 1 - PO5 Funding intensity per region



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

An analysis of needs and funding can inform the coverage of the territorial needs at local level. To do this, funding intensities of PO5 are compared with the number of strategies (CLLD, SUD, ITI) financed by cohesion policy in 2014-2020 per million inhabitants. Comparing PO5 funding intensities with past use of comparable instruments reveals interesting patterns. Regions with intense past use of such approaches continue to use significant PO5 funding (e.g. in Greece, Portugal, and southern Italy).

More details are presented on Annex 6.3.

### 1.3.2. Administrative and organisational aspects

ERDF programmes are implemented at national or regional levels, some of which are involved in a multi-fund programme implementation. PO5 is often implemented via national or regional programmes with competitive calls addressing local or sub-regional territorial entities to present and implement integrated territorial strategies. The survey and interviews of stakeholders carried out as part of this study provide some information on administrative and management aspects.

Given PO5's specific character, national and regional cohesion policy programmes only provide an umbrella for territorial strategies designed and implemented at local level, for one or various municipalities, functional urban areas, or districts/provinces.

PO5 interventions are truly place-based. Strategy organisational aspects and content vary significantly from country to country and even between regions, limiting their aggregated analysis.

### **Mitigating implementation and capacity-related risks**

Analysis of the programmes shows that managing authorities acknowledge difficulties in administrative capacity and unique challenges posed by implementing integrated sustainable urban strategies. For example, the Italian programme for Sicily region plans to support authorities in strategy planning through capacity actions and technical support, facilitate associative forms capable of planning and managing operations in a unitary manner and an economy of scale. It will also introduce simplification by reducing the fragmentation of administrative procedures across institutional actors, also through the full delegation of functions to the authorities and overcome the decentralisation of functions to favour the acquisition of specialist services by the managing authority that takes care of the entire process of planning, management and control of the delegated functions.

## **1.4. Planned activities under PO 5**

As presented above, the types of planned actions under PO5 vary considerably. The following paragraphs present the main intervention fields and types of actions selected by programmes.

Strategies focusing on urban areas mainly tackle challenges such as climate change adaptation, urban regeneration and sustainable urban mobility. Most non-urban strategies develop the endogenous potential of different types of territories (e.g. rural, islands and mountainous areas).

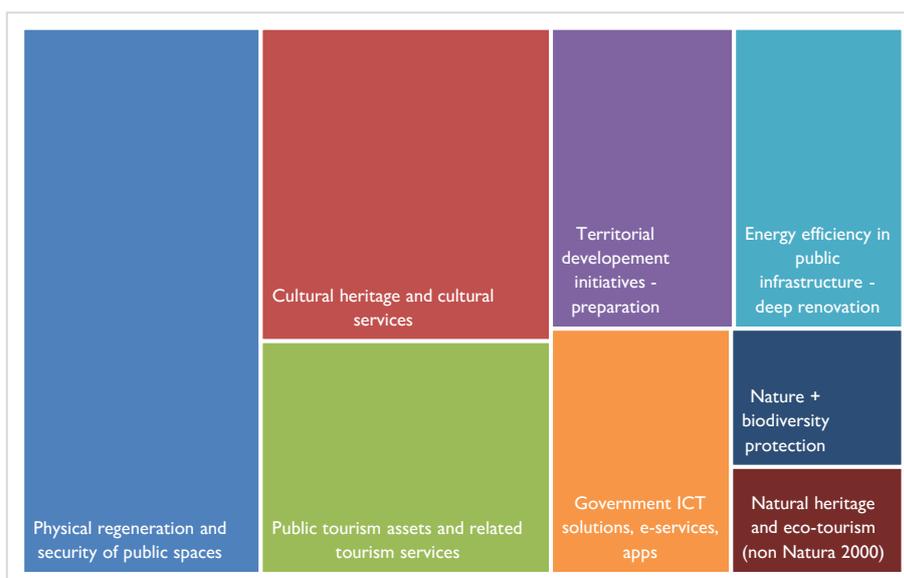
An analysis of intervention fields associated with PO5 illustrates variations in the type of planned actions. Within RSO5.1 – Integrated development in urban areas, programmes have selected investments associated with 80 intervention fields, of which 63 account for less than 1% of the ERDF allocation under the specific objective. Classification by sub-themes illustrates the main areas of investment:

- Preparation of territorial initiatives
- Physical regeneration and security of public spaces,
- Cultural assets and services,
- Tourism assets and services,
- Energy efficiency in public infrastructure,
- e-Government,
- Nature and biodiversity protection,

- Eco-tourism,
- Clean urban transport.

Analysing the intervention fields associated with RSO5.1 and RSO5.2 presents more disaggregated actions. Under RSO5.1, the intervention fields 168—Physical regeneration and security of public spaces and 169—Territorial development initiatives—account respectively for around 20% and 8% of the planned ERDF allocation. Other intervention fields with high shares of ERDF allocation are presented in the figure below. They range from Cultural heritage and cultural services, accounting for 14% of the allocation, to the 3% share of intervention field 167 Natural heritage and eco-tourism (non Natura 2000). Several intervention fields account for around 2% of the ERDF allocation and cover infrastructure investments, especially business and social infrastructure for social inclusion, primary and secondary education, and energy efficiency in public infrastructure. Other intervention fields relate to local transport, including road (other reconstructed or modernised), cycling infrastructure and clean urban transport rolling stock.

**Figure 3 - Intervention fields RSO5.1, main share (>2.5%)**



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on Cohesion data Platform

The second specific objective, RSO5.2 – Integrated development in rural and coastal areas, presents even more variation in planned intervention fields, with 89 different ones. The sub-themes of intervention are similar for this specific objective with almost 70% of the allocation going to:

- Preparation of territorial initiatives
- Physical regeneration and security of public spaces,
- Cultural assets and services,
- Other roads,

- Tourism assets and services,
- Eco-tourism,
- Cycling infrastructure,
- Nature and biodiversity protection.

**Figure 4 - Intervention fields RSO5.2, main share (>3%)**



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on Cohesion data Platform

Intervention fields 168 and 169 account, respectively, for 8% and 13% of the allocation for RSO5.2. Nonetheless, most of the same themes are repeated with respect to RSO5.1. One important difference between the two is the higher share of transport-related investments in RSO5.2.

## 1.5. Output

PO5 features integrated territorial strategies covering different interventions and using different and multiple indicators. Programmes can select any additional indicators from PO1-4 to describe PO5 progress.

Nonetheless, the main common output indicators at EU level provide some insights into programme outputs. Apart from the common output indicators related to territorial strategies (RCOs 74, 75, 76, 77, 80, 112, and 114), within RSO5.1, several programmes also selected RCO19 on the energy performance of public buildings and RCO58 on dedicated cycling infrastructures. At EU level, common output indicators for RSO5.1 represent almost 90% of the indicators selected and around 85% for RSO5.2.

**Table 1 - Common output indicators**

	Unit	2029 net target (ERDF)	
		RSO5.1	RSO5.2
RCO19 - Energy: Public buildings with improved energy performance	square metres	1 824 512	291 012
RCO58 Urban Trans: Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	km	730	993
RCO 74 - Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development	persons	111 422 037	35 801 428
RCO 75 - Strategies for integrated territorial development supported	contributions to strategies	1 397	755
RCO 76 - Integrated projects for territorial development	projects	1 633	1 698
RCO77 - Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	cultural and tourist sites	2 132	1 680
RCO 80 - Community-led local development strategies supported	contributions to strategies	25	403
RCO 112 - Stakeholders involved in the preparation and implementation of strategies for integrated territorial development	participation of stakeholders	11 864	5 270
RCO 114 - Open space created or rehabilitated in urban areas	square metres	27 298 275	5 645 745

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

## 1.6. Results

Given the diversity of territorial strategies, the ERDF Regulation does not indicate any specific result indicator. In RSO5.1, almost 70% of indicators selected by the programmes are common results indicators instead of programme-specific indicators, while this is around 60% for RSO5.2.

An overview of the most commonly used indicators (by number of programmes selecting them) provides some insights into the results. The most selected common result indicators relate to climate mitigation measures, including energy efficiency, GHG emissions reduction and green infrastructure. Another important aspect covered by several programmes is investment in culture and tourism, exemplified by the common result indicator RCR77.

**Table 2 - Common result indicators**

	Unit	2029 net target (ERDF)
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		RSO5.1	RSO5.2
RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites	visitors/year	25 506 139	11 983 775
RCR26 Energy: Annual primary energy consumption	MWh/year	-2 072 556	-108 660
RCR95 Env: Pop. with access to green infrastructure	persons	2 483 926	948 638
RCR29 Climate: Estimated GHG emissions	tons of CO2eq/year	-31 498	-23 751

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

Analysis of common results indicators highlighted:

- Urban transport, especially cycling infrastructure. Only three programmes selected common result indicators related to road investments.
- Several programmes selected result indicators related to firms
- Social infrastructure and health
- Education, including childcare facilities

## 1.7. Impacts

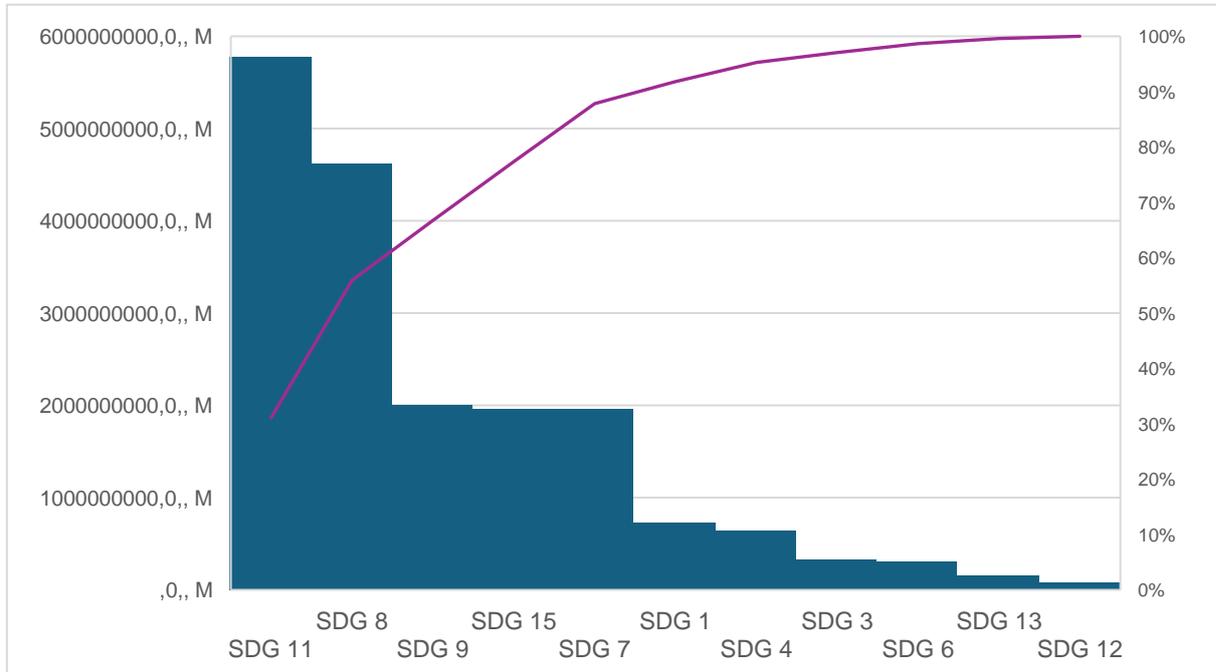
Given the early implementation stage of ERDF for the 2021-2027 programming period, this study only examines how much current implementation progress is on track. Financial and physical progress does not provide much substantiated evidence to present a robust assessment of PO5 impacts. As presented above, at this stage and on the European level, financial and physical progress is still at an early stage.

The planned contribution of PO5 support to the SDGs is analysed and considered as a proxy to assess expected impacts of PO5 on the wider economy and society. PO5 funding principally contributes to the following SDGs:

- SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities, EUR 5.78 billion,
- SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, EUR 4.62 billion,
- SDG 9 Industry, innovation, infrastructure, EUR 2 billion,
- SDG 15 Life on land with EUR 1.97 billion,
- SDG 7 Affordable and clean energy with EUR 1.96 billion,
- Investments under PO5 partially impact SDG 1, No poverty; SDG 4, Quality education; SDG 3, Good health and well-being; SDG 6, Clean water and sanitation; SDG 13, Climate action; and SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production.

The figure below provides an overview in absolute and relative terms.

**Figure 5 - PO5 contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, total allocation (EUR Million and percentage)**



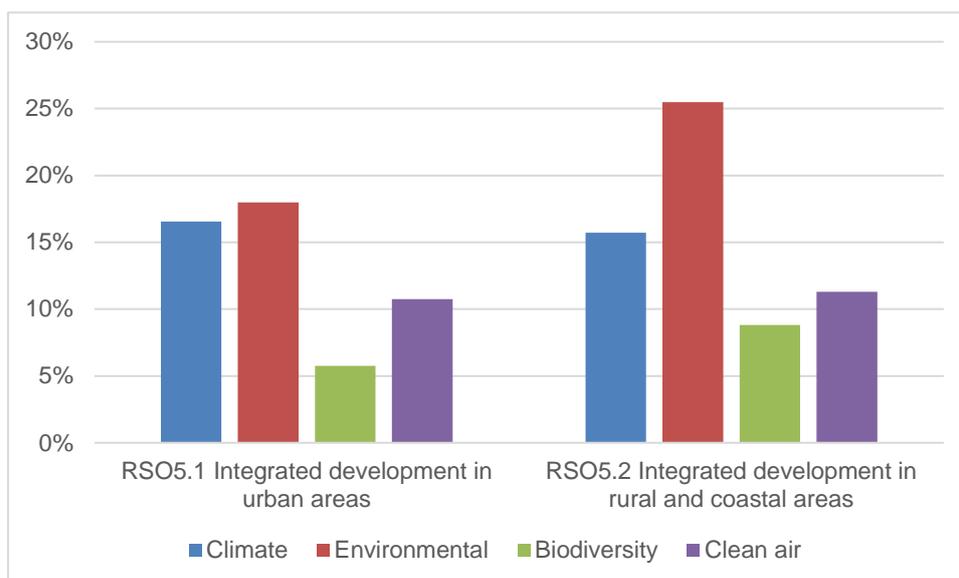
Source: Consortium elaboration, based on Cohesion data Platform

The categorisation of investments based on their support for climate, environment, biodiversity and clean air allows a more nuanced understanding of the possible impacts of PO5 investments. Tracking these measures reveals that the PO5 (ERDF total amounts excluding Interreg) contributes to:

- Climate, EUR 4.4 billion,
- Environmental, EUR 5.5 billion,
- Biodiversity, EUR 1.2 billion,
- Clean air, EUR 2.9 billion.

Substantial differences remain between the two RSOs. In absolute terms, not surprisingly, given the total allocation of the specific objective, RSO5.2 contributes less than RSO5.1. The figure below presents the differences between RSOs and categories as a share of the total allocation for the RSO. The share of investments in RSO5.2 that contribute to environmental and biodiversity objectives is higher than in RSO5.1.

**Figure 6 - Share of the contributions to climate, environmental, biodiversity and clean air objectives, by RSO**



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on Cohesion data Platform

Other aspects to classify investments are contributions to the digital transition and support for gender equality. Tracking cohesion policy expenditure contributing to the EU digital transition covers the four digital dimensions. <sup>(2)</sup> At the EU level, RSO5.1 is the sixth highest specific objective contributing to the digital transition, with a total ERDF funding of EUR 1.5 billion. RSO5.2 is expected to contribute EUR 279 million to the digital transition.

Lastly, the contribution to gender equality is also earmarked at EU level, providing insights into expected PO5 impacts. The methodology for gender tracking includes two scores assigned to actions that improve gender equality and one insignificant score assigned to the remaining actions:

- Score 01 Gender targeting for actions making a targeted positive contribution to gender equality – Interventions whose principal objective is to contribute to gender equality; improving gender equality is the main objective of the intervention; without it, the action would probably not exist.
- Score 02 Gender mainstreaming for actions making a positive contribution to gender equality through mainstreaming – Interventions having gender equality as an important and deliberate objective but not as the main reason for the intervention; gender equality is directly or indirectly improved as a side effect of the core actions.

<sup>(2)</sup> The dimensions, in line with the EU Digital Compass are: Digital skills; Secure and sustainable digital infrastructure (investment in digital connectivity networks); Digital transformation of businesses (e-solutions and e-services in and for enterprises); Digitalisation of public services (e-services in public administration; E-health services)

- Score 03 Gender neutral for actions that are gender neutral – interventions that do not target or contribute to gender equality.

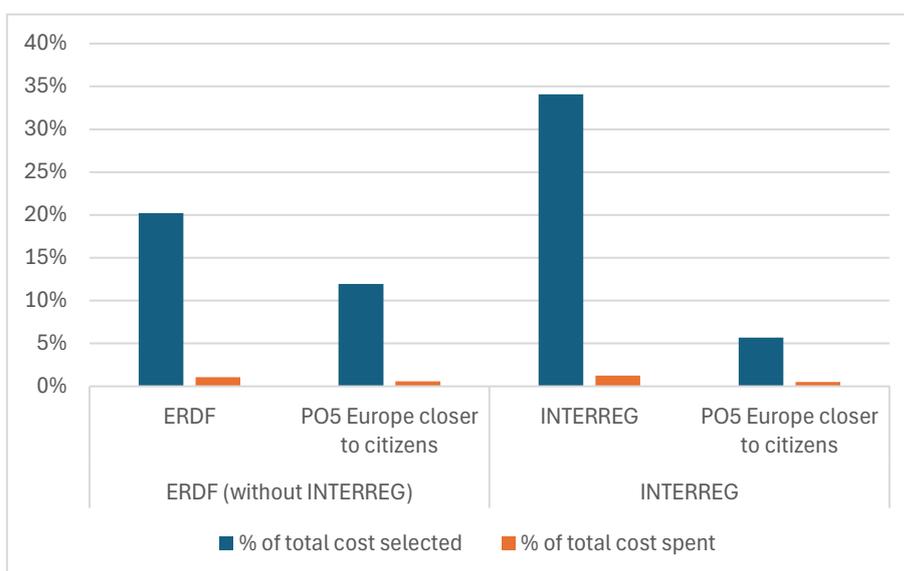
Of the total ERDF allocation (excluding Interreg), around 10% under RSO5.1 (EUR 1.87 billion) and only 3% for RSO5.2 (EUR 267 million) contribute to gender equality. EUR 71 million in RSO5.1 and EUR 59 million in RSO5.2 scored 01, making a positive contribution to gender equality.

## 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 <sup>(3)</sup>. PO5 decided resources for ERDF were EUR 3.22 billion and for Interreg, EUR 23.31 million. The share of financial resources already spent is marginal, for fund total allocation and for PO5. Under PO5, only EUR 155 million of ERDF (without Interreg) was spent at the beginning of 2024, 0.58% of the allocation.

**Figure 7 - Financial progress in June 2024, PO5**



Source: Consortium elaboration, based on DG REGIO data

For physical progress, the following tables present output indicators at the end of June 2024 for RSO5.1 and RSO5.2:

In terms of decided values, the output indicators show varied progress. Regarding implementation, only some common output indicators for RSO5.1 show any, still moderate, progress. Among these, it is significant to notice the progress of indicators RCO 74 - Population covered by projects in the framework of strategies for integrated territorial development (20.8%) and RCO 76 - Integrated projects for territorial development (12.7%) showing progress in implementing territorial strategies. The same trend is present for common output indicators related to RSO5.2.

<sup>(3)</sup> 30 June, 2024

Most of the common result indicators show no progress, with some exceptions. For instance, the results indicators related to climate – population protected from natural disasters (RCR37), environment – population with access to green infrastructure (RCR95) and education – annual users of education facilities (RCR71) indicate progress concerning the 2029 targets.

**Table 3 - Progress of common output indicators – RCO5.1**

	Unit of measure	Target 2029	Milestone 2024	Decided (% of the milestone by 2024)	Implemented (% of the milestone by 2024)
RCO01 Firms: All firms	Enterprises	2 882	165	97.6%	1.8%
RCO02 Firms: Grant aided	Enterprises	2 444	123	41.5%	0.0%
RCO03 Firms: Non grant aided	Enterprises	26	1	0.0%	0.0%
RCO04 Firms: Advised	Enterprises	1 038	35	400.0%	8.6%
RCO112 Stakeholders in integrated territorial development	Participations of stakeholders	11 730	2 027	10.3%	0.0%
RCO113 Integrated actions for inclusion of marginalised pop.	Persons	73 614	30 300	0.0%	0.0%
RCO114 Open space created or rehabilitated in urban areas	Square metres	28 713 980	657 344	232.7%	9.8%
RCO14 Digital: Public institutions supported for Digital	Public institutions	257	9	33.3%	0.0%
RCO15 Firms: Capacity of incubation created	Enterprises	1 200	400	0.0%	0.0%
RCO18 Energy: Dwellings with improved energy performance	Dwellings	1 781	54	287.0%	0.0%
RCO19 Energy: Public buildings with improved energy performance	Square metres	1 824 512	42 993	17.5%	0.0%
RCO26 Climate: Green infrastructure adapted to climate change	Hectares	913	123	16.2%	0.0%
RCO36 Env: Green infrastructure (not related to climate change)	Hectares	198	33	246.2%	0.0%
RCO38 Env: Surface area of rehabilitated land supported	Hectares	67	12	0.0%	0.0%
RCO46 Road: Length of roads- non-TEN-T	km	120	1	0.0%	0.0%
RCO57 Urban Trans: rolling stock for public transport	Passengers	16 906	1 716	26.2%	0.0%

No REGIO/2023/OP/0045 - Study to support the mid-term evaluation of the cohesion policy programmes 2021-2027 financed by the ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF (2023CE16BAT088)

	Unit of measure	Target 2029	Milestone 2024	Decided (% of the milestone by 2024)	Implemented (% of the milestone by 2024)
RCO58 Urban Trans: Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	km	701	23	0.0%	0.0%
RCO65 Social Infra: Capacity of new or modernised social housing	Persons	2 809	30	1 146.7%	0.0%
RCO66 Education: Classroom capacity of childcare facilities	Persons	4 680	182	405.5%	0.0%
RCO67 Education: Classroom capacity of education facilities	Persons	53 880	998	195.4%	0.0%
RCO69 Health: Capacity of health care facilities	Persons/year	280 000	14 000	209.8%	0.0%
RCO70 Social Infra: Capacity of social care facilities	Persons/year	747	32	0.0%	0.0%
RCO74 Population covered in integrated territorial development	Persons	111 422 037	19581 488	95.2%	20.8%
RCO75 Strategies for integrated territorial development	Contributions to strategies	1 394	395	73.4%	12.7%
RCO76 Integrated projects for territorial development	Projects	1 658	206	41.7%	2.4%
RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Cultural and tourism sites	2 138	58	56.9%	0.0%
RCO80 Community-led local development strategies supported	Contributions to strategies	28	25	8.0%	0.0%

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on DG REGIO data

**Table 4 - Progress common output indicators, RSO5.2**

	Measurement unit	Target 2029	Milestone 2024	Decided (% of the milestone 2024) by	Implemented (% of the milestone 2024) by
RCO01 Firms: All firms	Enterprises	1 242	69	326.1%	98.6%
RCO02 Firms: Grant aided	Enterprises	385	15	200.0%	6.7%
RCO04 Firms: Advised	Enterprises	2 036	172	121.5%	39.0%
RCO112 Stakeholders in integrated territorial development	Participations of stakeholders	5 210	1 976	0.0%	0.0%
RCO113 Integrated actions for inclusion of marginalised pop.	Persons	49 150	5 050	0.0%	0.0%
RCO114 Open space created or rehabilitated in urban areas	Square metres	5645 745	59 806	109.2%	0.0%
RCO122 Investments in disaster management (non climate)	Euro	1,826,804	73,072	0.0%	0.0%
RCO14 Digital: Public institutions supported for Digital	Public institutions	22	3	33.3%	0.0%
RCO15 Firms: Capacity of incubation created	Enterprises	240	20	0.0%	0.0%
RCO18 Energy: Dwellings with improved energy performance	Dwellings	2 650	133	334.6%	0.0%
RCO19 Energy: Public buildings with improved energy performance	Square metres	291 012	22 337	64.8%	0.0%
RCO24 Climate: Investments in disaster management	Euro	21,441,240	1,907,649	0.0%	0.0%
RCO26 Climate: Green infrastructure adapted to climate change	Hectares	37	2	0.0%	0.0%
RCO28 Climate: Area covered by protection against wildfires	Hectares	710,200	30,000	0.0%	0.0%
RCO36 Env: Green infrastructure (not related to climate change)	Hectares	18 448	1 830	8.4%	0.0%
RCO37 Env: Surface of Natura 2000 sites	Hectares	438	43	0.0%	0.0%
RCO38 Env: Surface area of rehabilitated land supported	Hectares	23	4	0.0%	0.0%
RCO44 Road: Length of new or upgraded roads - non-TEN-T	km	12	1	0.0%	0.0%

	Measurement unit	Target 2029	Milestone 2024	Decided (% of the milestone by 2024)	Implemented (% of the milestone by 2024)
RCO46 Road: Length of roads- non-TEN-T	km	608	30	397.8%	0.0%
RCO58 Urban Trans: Dedicated cycling infrastructure supported	km	1 223	48	622.1%	2.1%
RCO65 Social Infra: Capacity of new or modernised social housing	Persons	3 033	45	522.2%	0.0%
RCO66 Education: Classroom capacity of childcare facilities	Persons	19 383	937	259.9%	11.5%
RCO67 Education: Classroom capacity of education facilities	Persons	130 662	6 081	274.3%	5.2%
RCO69 Health: Capacity of health care facilities	Persons/year	120 000	6 000	286.0%	0.0%
RCO70 Social Infra: Capacity of social care facilities	Persons/year	1 587	79	0.0%	0.0%
RCO74 Population covered in integrated territorial development	Persons	40106 106	10804 994	34.4%	0.2%
RCO75 Strategies for integrated territorial development	Contributions to strategies	716	152	70.4%	2.6%
RCO76 Integrated projects for territorial development	Projects	2 008	287	64.5%	27.5%
RCO77 Number of cultural and tourism sites supported	Cultural and tourism sites	1 749	136	55.9%	0.7%
RCO80 Community-led local development strategies supported	Contributions to strategies	410	176	13.1%	4.0%

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on DG REGIO data

**Table 5 - Physical progress, common result indicators PO5**

	Unit measurement	Target 2029	Decided	Decided progress
RCR01 Jobs created in supported entities	Annual FTEs	380	45	11.8%
RCR02 Firms: Private investments	Annual FTEs	336 883 001	10 759 850	3.2%
RCR103 Circular: Waste collected separately	Tonnes/year	244	0	0.0%

No REGIO/2023/OP/0045 - Study to support the mid-term evaluation of the cohesion policy programmes 2021-2027 financed by the ERDF, Cohesion Fund and JTF (2023CE16BAT088)

	Unit measurement	Target 2029	Decided	Decided progress
RCR11 Digital: Users of new and upgraded public digital services	Annual users	4 608 561	45 000	1.0%
RCR18 Firms: SMEs using incubator services	Enterprises/year	120	0	0.0%
RCR19 Firms: Enterprises with higher turnover	Enterprises	154	0	0.0%
RCR26 Energy: Annual primary energy consumption	MWh/year	9 456 879	111	0.0%
RCR29 Climate: Estimated GHG emissions	tonnes CO2 eq./year	74 028	5 746	10.4%
RCR31 Energy: Total renewable energy produced	MWh/year	3	0	0.0%
RCR35 Climate: Population benefiting from flood protection	Persons	853 144	0	0.0%
RCR36 Climate: Pop. benefiting from wildfire protection	Persons	53 000	0	0.0%
RCR37 Climate: Pop protected from natural disaster (climate)	Persons	874 288	173 660	19.9%
RCR41 Water: Population with improved water supply	Persons	32 415	0	0.0%
RCR50 Env: Population benefiting from measures for air quality	Persons	5 863 358	0	0.0%
RCR52 Env: Rehabilitated land	Hectares	36 175	3	0.0%
RCR55 Road: Annual users of roads	Passenger-km/ year	26 079 351	0	0.0%
RCR56 Road: Time savings due to improved road infrastructures		4	0	0.0%
RCR62 Urban Trans: Annual users of public transport	Man-days/year	1 611 726	0	0.0%
RCR64 Urban Trans: Annual users of cycling infrastructure	Users	12 088 433	694 095	6.0%
RCR67 Social Infra: Annual users of social housing	Users/year	6 331	344	5.4%
RCR70 Education: Annual users of childcare facilities	Users/year	25 953	1 433	14.44%
RCR71 Education: Annual users of education facilities	Users/year	177 885	41 874	37.2%
RCR73 Health: Annual users of health care facilities	Users/year	4 155 246	0	0.0%
RCR77 Visitors of cultural and tourism sites	Users/year	62 070 628	874 959	2.3%
RCR95 Env: Pop. with access to green infrastructure	Persons	3 342 699	1 093 529	32.7%
RCR98 RTDI: SMEs staff completing training	Participants	2 400	0	0.0%
RCR74 Annual users of new or modernised social care facilities	Users/year	1 660 371	0	0.0%
RCR105 Estimated GHG emissions by boilers converted to gas	Tonnes CO2eq/year of	1 600	0	0.0%

Source: Consortium elaboration, based on DG REGIO data

## 2.2. Emerging challenges and EU citizen needs

The renewed focus on place-based strategies also reflects the distinct challenges faced by non-urban areas, especially in accessing essential services (Pertoldi, M et al. 2022). Territorial strategies are interlinked with demographic challenges affecting specific areas, including a reduction or progressive ageing of the population. This is partially reflected in the sample of programmes analysed, as a higher percentage of RSO5.2 actions cite demographic challenges, particularly depopulation and ageing. For example, the Estonian national multi-fund programme indicates a declining population in all areas of the Member State except the two largest urban areas.

In general, most non-urban strategies are intended to develop the endogenous potential of different types of territories (e.g. rural, islands and mountainous areas) and address demographic and territorial challenges such as unequal access to public services. For example, in Spain, the design and implementation of four integrated territorial strategies in the sparsely populated areas of Extremadura, Andalucía and Castilla y León will be funded to implement activities such as digitisation and improved connectivity in areas with difficult coverage, improving the provision of basic services, strengthening the role of rural women, generating territorial intelligence processes, improving mobility connection to urban areas, energy-efficient improvement of public buildings, rehabilitation or enhancement of cultural heritage, promotion of entrepreneurship, especially for women and young people as well as training and facilitating conditions to attract teleworkers.

Most respondents (82%) consider cohesion policy delivery systems effective in addressing territorial needs, with 37% rating them as very to extremely effective. ITI and CLLD are often cited as effective tools to address needs at local and regional levels.

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

A textual search in the section of the programmes dedicated to describing specific objective actions (section 2.1.1.1 Interventions of the Funds - The related types of actions of the programmes) illustrates citations of other EU funding instruments. The same semantic search was performed on the partnership agreements. The programme sample cites several other funding instruments within PO5. In particular, integrated urban and rural development actions are mostly financed in combination with ESF+ and EAFRD. For demarcation criteria, EMFAF will interact the most with ERDF in implementing interventions in urban and local development, intervening in the sector-specific area, as with CAP.

The Lithuanian partnership agreement notes that ESF+ and ERDF will support integrated territorial development through local development and territorial

development strategies for capital cities and/or areas with more than 6 000 people. Conversely, local development strategies financed under the 3rd priority of the Fisheries Programme (EMFAF) cannot be financed by ESF+ and/or ERDF funds.

Planned demarcation synergies between ERDF, CAP and EMFAF might reflect sector-specific funds supporting the implementation of sustainable urban development strategies and blue and green economy strategies. EMFAF and CAP will be dedicated to coastal areas, rural areas, or actors active in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors or agricultural fields.

For cohesion policy, the majority of programmes cite the RRF as a complementary fund within PO5 because most plans contribute to territorial actions, even if these are not the primary focus of intervention.

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