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COUNTRY FICHE

BELGIUM [BE]

Territorial Delivery Mechanisms (TDMs) were implemented across all three Belgian regions. Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) Priority Axis (SUD PrAx) strategies were deployed in the Flemish cities of Ghent and Antwerp, alongside three non-SUD Integrated Territorial Investment (non-SUD ITI) strategies targeting different types of territories in Limburg, Kempen, and West-Flanders. In Wallonia, six Sustainable Urban Development strategies implemented as SUD PrAx were implemented, covering functional areas around cities and focusing on low-carbon solutions and enhancing public spaces. The Brussels Capital Region implements its SUD strategy through a dedicated Operational Programme, focusing on a wide range of thematic areas. All strategies in Belgium benefited from funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), although the ITI strategies in Flanders received support from the European Social Fund (ESF) as well.

POPULATION	STATE TYPE
11.35 million	Federal

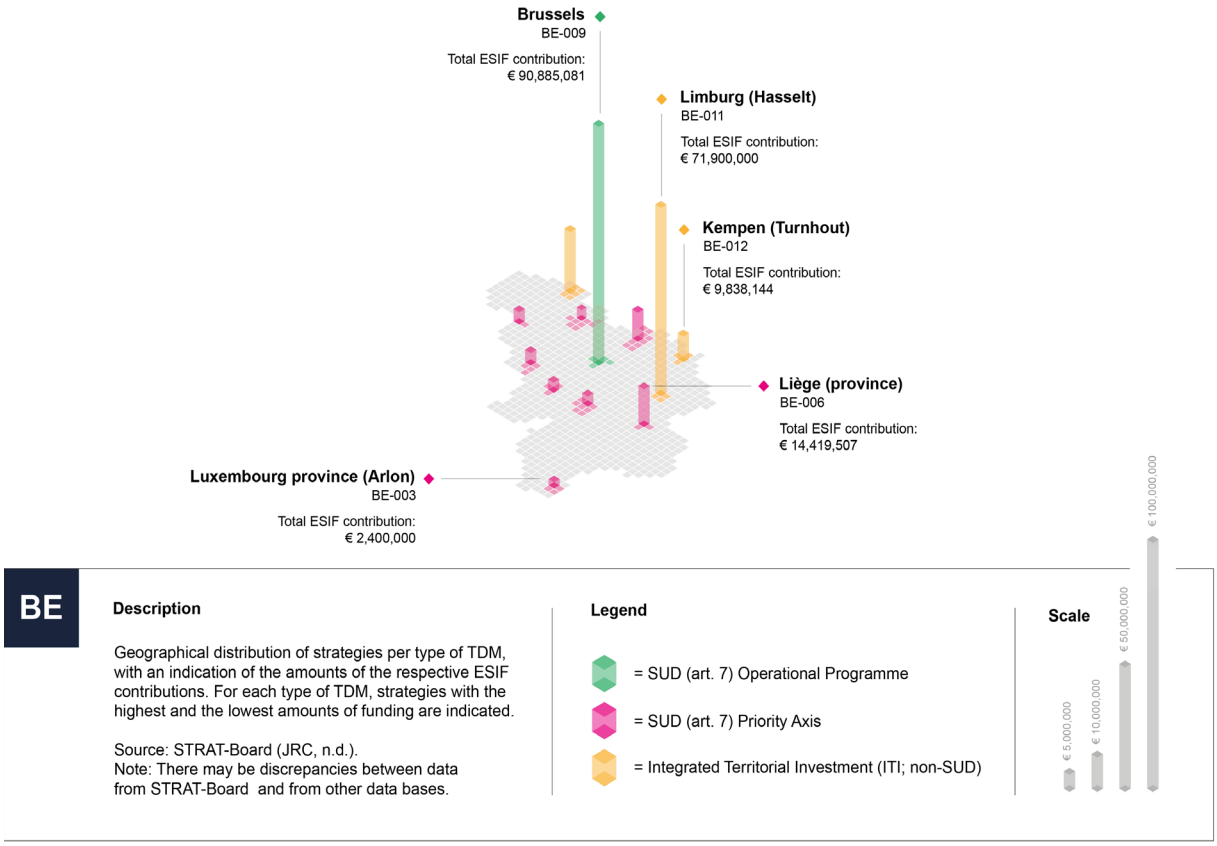
NATIONAL ESIF BUDGET	
EU Contribution (EUR)	€ 3,260,622,389
National Contribution (EUR)	€ 3,033,353,927
Total Contribution (EUR)	€ 6,293,976,316

Note: including all ESIF - ERDF, ESF, EAFRD, YEI, EMFF
Source: Cohesion Open Data Platform (European Commission, n.d.)

Territorial Delivery Mechanism type	No.	ESIF type	Share of ERDF /CF allocation	Share of decided allocations spent (end 2022)
SUD (Art. 7) Operational Programme	1	ERDF	8.6%	54%
SUD (Art. 7) Priority Axis	8	ERDF	4.9%	43%
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; SUD)	0	-	-	-
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; non-SUD)	3	ERDF, ESF	5.8%	80%
Community-led Local Development (CLLD)	0	-	-	-
TOTAL	**12**	**-**	**19.3%**	**-**

Source: allocations and spending based on Cohesion Open Data Platform (European Commission, n.d.), remaining items on STRAT-Board (JRC, n.d.).
Note: STRAT-Board data is self-reported by strategy holders. There may be inconsistencies between the data reported in STRAT-Board and other databases, such as the Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Figure 1: Geographical distribution of Territorial Delivery Mechanism (TDM) strategies



GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

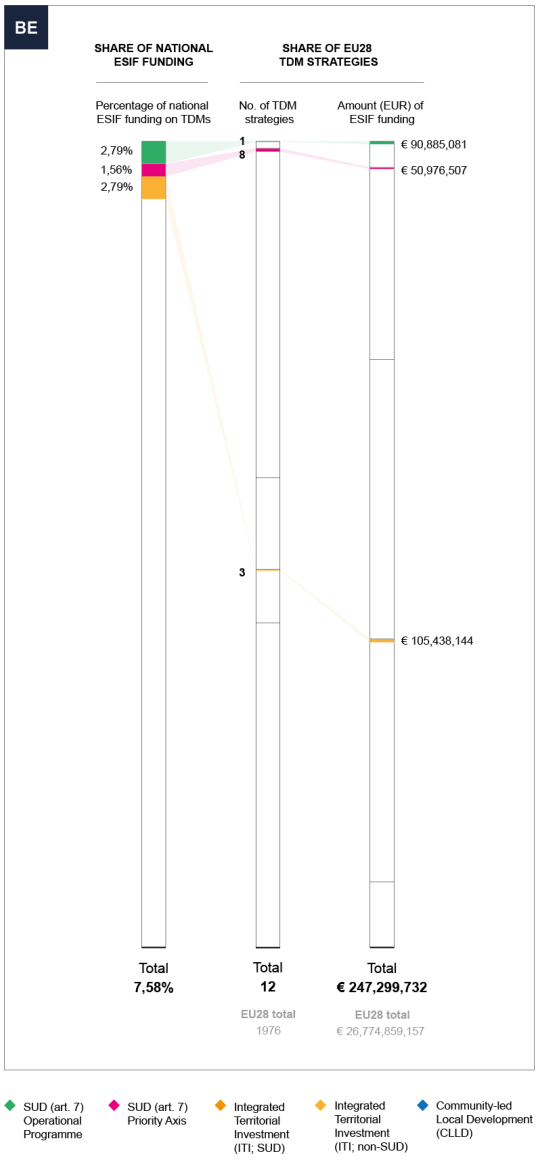
Belgium is a federal country with 3 levels of government: At the top level there is the Federal State, the Communities and the Regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels Capital Region). They are on an equal footing but have powers and responsibilities for different fields. The second level consists of 10 provinces, and at the third level are 589 municipalities. In the Belgian governance system, regions also play a key role in shaping planning through framework legislation, primarily manifested in Regional Spatial Development Plans. They also oversee crucial policy areas such as environmental legislation, energy, and building codes. In Flanders, the regional government can additionally create Implementation Plans for specific zones or development projects. Provinces act as an intermediary level, with some policies in their portfolios and a role in inter-municipal coordination. Municipalities across Belgium, especially in Flanders, hold significant authority and a prominent role in shaping spatial development. Recent trends highlight an increase in local autonomy in Flanders, while Wallonia emphasizes integrated planning for functional areas over local autonomy.

COHESION POLICY CONTEXT

Regions have almost complete autonomy in the management of Cohesion Policy. The national government plays a limited role in Cohesion Policy, which is reflected in the way the policy is implemented and Territorial Delivery Mechanisms are organised. The three regions (Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels Capital Region) have their own ERDF OPs. In addition, there are regional OPs funded by the ESF. Provinces act as an intermediary level, with some policies in their portfolios and a role in inter-municipal coordination. Municipalities across Belgium, especially in Flanders, hold significant authority and a prominent role in shaping spatial development. Recent trends highlight an increase in local autonomy in Flanders, while Wallonia emphasises integrated planning for functional areas over local autonomy.

FEATURES OF THE TERRITORIAL DELIVERY MECHANISMS

Figure 2: Types of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms (TDMs) used, amount of strategies and the corresponding shares of ESIF* contributions



Source: STRAT-Board (JRC, n.d.). Notes: On the first vertical bar from the left, the percentage of all ESIF funding for that country allocated to TDM strategies is indicated with colour. The whole bar represents all ESIF funding for that country. On the second bar (middle), the number of each type of TDM strategy implemented in this country is indicated with the corresponding colour, with the whole bar representing all TDM strategies implemented across the EU28 (1976 strategies, as indicated in grey below the bar). On the bar on the right side, the amounts of ESIF funding for the TDM strategies are indicated with the corresponding colour. The bar represents the total allocation of ESIF for TDMs in the EU28. Please note that there may be inconsistencies between the data reported in STRAT-Board and Cohesion Open Data Platform.

Sustainable Urban Development (art. 7) Operational Programme

There was just one Sustainable Urban Development Operational Programme (SUD OP) strategy in Belgium, covering the Brussels Capital Region. It was one of the four SUD OPs in Europe in 2014-20 (others being Prague, Stockholm and a territory covering 14 cities in Italy). The ERDF unit of the regional authority managed the OP, funded entirely from ERDF. The Managing Authority agreed with the European Commission to consider the whole OP as a SUD strategy in the sense of Art. 7 CPR because the territory corresponded to the city of Brussels and the OP is intrinsically urban in nature. Thus, in this OP, all priority axes contribute to the SUD. As such, the design process of the strategy is dictated by the framework for developing the Operational Programme. The SUD OP had the largest allocation of all Belgian Territorial Delivery Mechanisms and covered the largest population (1.2 million).

Thematically the SUD strategy, thus, focused innovation, low-carbon economy, competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), environment and resource efficiency, as well as social inclusion and addressing poverty and discrimination. The TDM targeted the territory of the city, rather than a functional area, however, the investments were centred on deprived neighbourhoods and economic development areas of the city. The deprived neighbourhoods targeted were located near the city centre and the canal area. The aims of interventions therein were to enhance living conditions, decrease unemployment, curb undeclared work, and foster innovation and entrepreneurship. Whereas the focus on development zones aimed at exploiting growth opportunities in specific sectors. Although the geographical concentration of the ERDF was employed in prior strategies (Federal Big City Policy - Politique des Grandes Villes) it only covered deprived areas. The Brussels region faces uneven spatial development which meant that an integrated approach was needed to emphasise economic resilience in both deprived and strategically growing areas by blending ERDF social inclusion goals with green strategies, fostering inclusive partnerships with social economy and voluntary sectors.

Sustainable Urban Development (Art. 7) Priority Axis

There are eight SUD strategies implemented through dedicated OP Priority Axes (SUD PrAx). In the region of Flanders, they cover the cities of Ghent and Antwerp. In Wallonia, the areas of Wallonie Picarde, Hainaut, Charleroi-Sud, Namur, and Liège. The Flemish SUD strategies are managed by the ERDF cell of Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO), while the Walloon ones are managed by the Walloon Government.

The SUD strategies mostly covered a combination of objectives to improve attractiveness of urban centres, competitiveness and the reduction of environmental impacts, combining SUD Priority Axis with additional two Priority Axes within the ERDF OP.

In Flanders, the SUD strategies were concentrated on the territories of the two biggest cities of the region (Antwerp and Ghent), rather than focusing on Functional Urban Areas (FUAs). Thematic focus was on economic growth, aligning with Europe 2020 goals, and to create jobs through

* In order to reflect the contribution of various funds to TDMs, this graph includes all ESIF funds (ERDF, ESF, CF, EAFRD, EMFF).

investments in the knowledge economy, SMEs, and transitioning to a low-carbon economy. Funding priorities include research and innovation, SME competitiveness, low-carbon initiatives, climate adaptation, environmental preservation, and social inclusion. Emphasis was placed on experimentation in living labs, innovative technology dissemination, housing renovation for energy neutrality, sustainable urban mobility, and social inclusion through small-scale urban projects.

By contrast, in Wallonia, the SUD strategies were based on the functional area approach (Bassin-de-vie) rather than on territories within the administrative boundaries of cities. The biggest one, in terms of allocation of ERDF monies, is the SUD strategy for the FUA of Liège. Thematically, the Walloon SUDs focused on strengthening research, innovation, and infrastructure collaboration between businesses, research centres, and education. The aim was to boost SME creation, invest in education and training, promote a low carbon economy, and preserve the environment by encouraging resource efficiency and eco-innovation for sustainable urban development.

Non-Sustainable Urban Development Integrated Territorial Investment

What distinguishes the Flemish approach to Territorial Delivery Mechanisms is also the use of Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) as non-SUD strategies. Unlike the other TDMs in Belgium, these ITIs integrate funding from both ERDF and ESF. Their rationale is to support regional socio-economic development strategies. There are three ITIs covering a population of 2.47 million. They are managed by Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) agency of the Flemish Government, supported by territory-specific steering groups. These TDMs cover the territories of West Flanders (West Deal strategy), Kempen (DYNAK strategy), and Limburg (SALK strategy). The latter is the biggest in terms of ERDF allocation due to the specific demands concerning mitigation of the effects of the closing of the Ford factory. Thematically, they share the same objectives: investment in research and innovation, low-carbon economy, as well as competitiveness of SMEs, in an effort to dynamise the local economy.

Coordination and citizen participation as part of Ghent's SUD strategy

Ghent's approach to its SUD strategy stands out in terms of its approach to coordination, multi-actor involvement and citizen participation. Internally, the city government established a special coordination unit for EU funds which helped coordinate activities across municipal departments, while the 'city contracts' concluded between the municipality and the regional government (Flanders) allowed for better flow of information across the departments involved at both regional and local levels. The city also collaborated with a broad network of actors on the SUD strategy implementation, supported by its urban development company and neighbourhood managers. Finally, the implementation of Ghent's SUD strategy involved citizens and local associations both in formulation of projects to be receive funding and in their implementation. As a result of these participatory activities the SUD included a focus on regeneration of Ghent's old Docks, public transport and synergising hard and soft policy measures (Fioretti et al., 2020).

IN SUM

Belgium experimented with a differentiated set of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms during 2014-20, leading to improved targeting of local development needs. The SUD OP strategy in the Brussels region, in particular, focused on specific urban areas most in need of intervention, drawing on input from a range of stakeholders. The deprived neighbourhoods targeted were near the city centre and the canal area. SUD PrAx strategies also addressed local needs in major cities of Flanders and specific challenges within Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) in Wallonia. Additionally, non-SUD ITIs in Flanders tackled specific socio-economic challenges in the covered territories. Regarding functional linkages, SUD PrAx strategies in Wallonia strengthened integrated responses to challenges within FUAs, aligning with the domestic urban policy approach. There is also evidence that SUD strategies in Brussels and Flemish cities, in particular, facilitated the establishment of new partnerships in local contexts and actively engaged local communities.

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Contributors

Marcin Dąbrowski, Niek Lurling, Gisela Garrido Veron (TU Delft), Martijn de Bruijn