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COUNTRY FICHE

ITALY [IT]

In the 2014-20 programming period a diverse set of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms was used across Italy. Several types of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (SUD) were implemented reflecting the diversity of the urban and territorial structures in this country, the complexity of its administrative and governance mechanisms, and the highly differentiated financial allocations across the regions. Italy is the only country where SUD strategies are used both through a dedicated multi-fund national programme on Metropolitan Cities (NOP Metro) and through 16 Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Overall, Italy implements 195 SUD strategies across the country, with only few regions not having any SUD strategies (Valle d'Aosta, Basilicata, Lazio and the two autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano). Non-SUD Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) strategies were also implemented across Italy, while most of the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) strategies were deployed in Sicily.

POPULATION	STATE TYPE
60.59 million	Decentralised

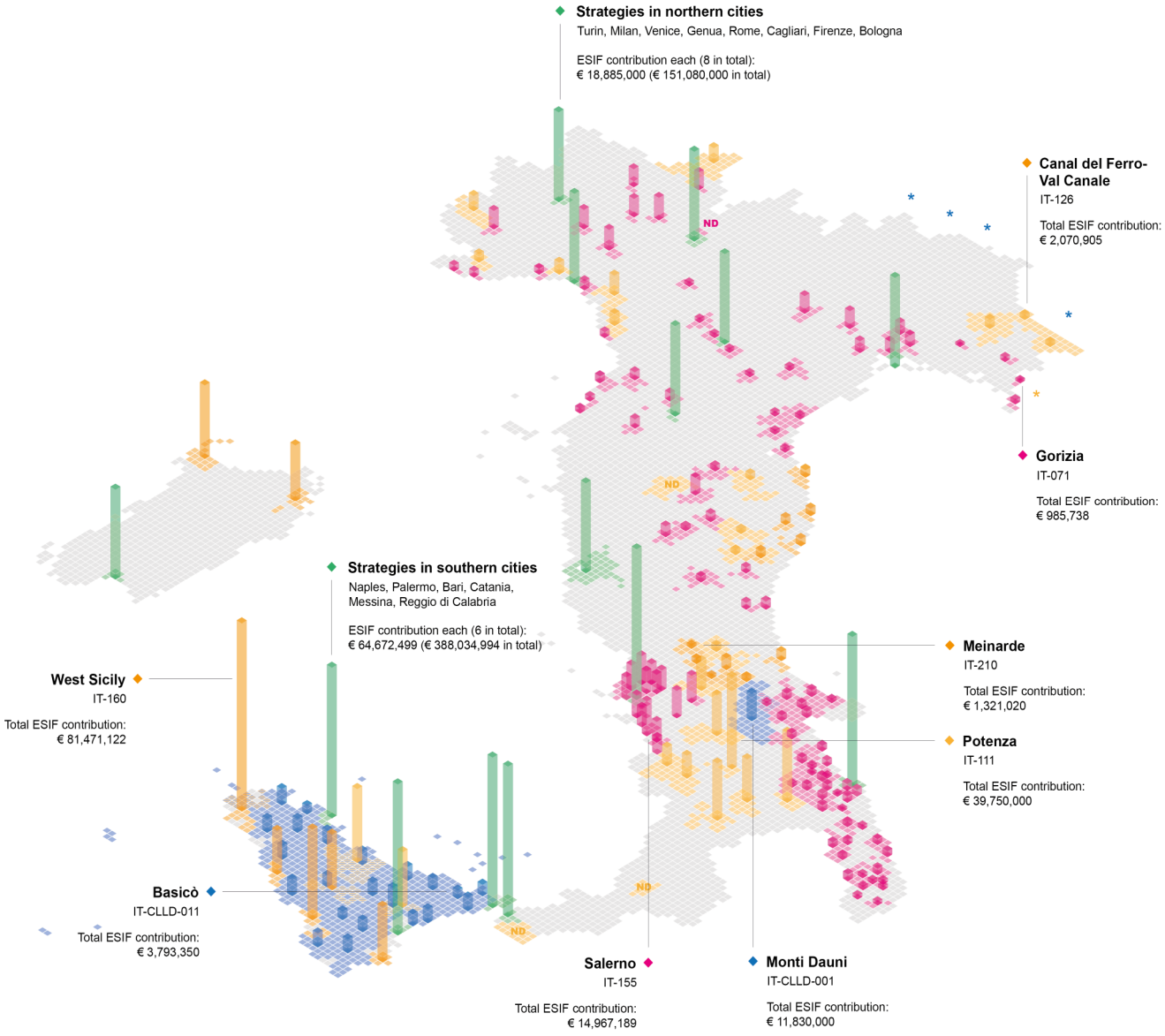
NATIONAL ESIF BUDGET	
EU Contribution (EUR)	€ 62,763,594,674
National Contribution (EUR)	€ 30,493,749,962
Total Contribution (EUR)	€ 93,257,344,636

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[2]	Share of decided allocations spent (end 2022)
SUD (Art. 7) Operational Programme	14	ERDF, ESF	4.5%	31%
SUD (Art. 7) Priority Axis	112	ERDF	1.5%	41%
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; SUD)	26	ERDF, ESF	1.5%	45%
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; non-SUD)	20	ERDF, EAFRD, ESF, EMFF	0.9%	51%
Community-led Local Development (CLLD)	23	ERDF, EAFRD	0.1%	61%
TOTAL	**195**	**-**	**8.6%**	**-**

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. In Italy, there were also 4 cross-border CLLD strategies implemented, but they were not covered by this evaluation.

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



GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

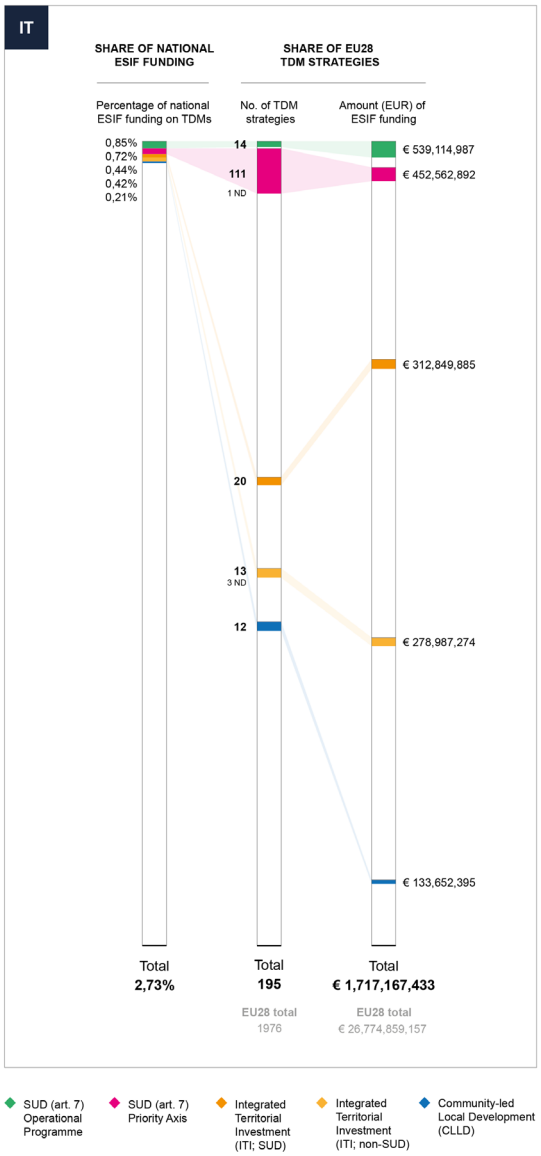
Italy has a decentralised structure that offers greater autonomy to regional and local bodies. The country is divided into regions, each with varying degrees of autonomy, and further subdivided into provinces and municipalities. Regions possess legislative powers and responsibilities in areas such as health, education, and transportation. The central government retains authority in strategic matters. Local governments, including municipalities, play a role in service delivery and local development. This multi-level governance structure aims to balance national unity with regional diversity and address specific local needs within the broader framework of the Italian state. Its territorial administration system is highly decentralised and diversified including 20 regions, 14 metropolitan cities, 107 provinces and 7901 municipalities.

COHESION POLICY CONTEXT

The 2014-20 ESIF programming period in Italy included 75 Operational Programmes (OPs) co-financed by four funds: ERDF, ESF, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Italy's decentralised system assigns each National Operational Programme (NOP; Programma Operativo Nazionale) or Regional Operational Programme (Programma Operativo Regionale) to its respective Managing Authority (MA). As regards NOPs, the MA is the department of the line ministry or the Agency for Territorial Cohesion. The same MA may serve two NOPs (e.g. the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the General Inspectorate for Relations with the EU for OP Governance and Institutional Capacity and OP on Metropolitan Cities). While ROPs are managed by regional institutions, such as the Education, Training and Employment Directorate (Direzione Istruzione, Formazione e Lavoro) in Piemonte or the Department of Labour, Vocational Training, Cooperation and Social Security (Assessorato del Lavoro, Formazione Professionale, Cooperazione e Sicurezza Sociale) in Sardinia.

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 whole bar represents the total allocation of ESIF for TDMs in the EU28. Please note that STRAT-Board data set is not always complete and correct. There may be discrepancies between it and other data bases.

Sustainable Urban Development (Art. 7) Operational Programme

There were 14 SUD OP strategies implemented across Italy, combining ERDF and European Social Fund (ESF). What distinguished the Italian approach to this Territorial Delivery Mechanism was the deployment of the innovative NOP focusing on the advancement of metropolitan regions (NOP METRO), providing a basis for these strategies, with the aim to overcome some of the coordination of various territorial and organisational obstacles encountered by the Italian metropolitan areas.

The focus of the Italian SUD OP strategies was on smart city development and social innovation. The metropolitan authorities not having a strong institutional basis, they were not appointed as Intermediate Bodies for NOP METRO. In fact, at the beginning of the 2014-20 programming period, metropolitan authorities in Italy were at an early stage, while the European Commission required that SUD strategies are managed by urban authorities with experience in implementation of interventions and adequate capacity. This forced the MAs to interact with the mayors of the 14 regional capital cities instead.

In addition, the 14 metropolitan areas were chosen and allocated resources in a top-down manner at the national level on the basis of a national assessment of territorial needs, not letting the metropolitan authorities define their priorities for the SUD OP strategies. This hindered development of strategies according to functional territorial rationales. However, the NOP METRO exerted positive impacts on the territories covered. The lack of predefined institutional structures enabled the multi-level governance process and innovation to take place at an operational level. The NOP Metro strengthened functional linkages at the metropolitan scale, creating new collaborations within the functional area, between the municipal governments involved and between them and the central government, while contributing to the development of institutional capacity of the municipalities involved and facilitating their access to EU funding. Most cities covered under the NOP Metro also received additional support from ROPs.

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

Sustainable Urban Development (Art. 7) Priority Axis

No fewer than 112 SUD Priority Axis (SUD PrAx) strategies were implemented in Italy, funded exclusively by the ERDF and in a more decentralised manner. The implementation of this mechanism in Italy led to a significant shift towards granting decision-making authority to local-level organisations, particularly in the selection of projects, and fostered stronger collaboration between regional and local authorities. The PIUs (Progetti di Innovazione Urbana) were implemented through a negotiation procedure between the region and the municipalities, focusing on selecting interventions eligible for co-financing. After identifying the most eligible PIUs, a co-planning phase involving both the region and municipality took place, culminating in the signing of a Programme Agreement between the two institutions.

For example, in the case of the SUD PrAx strategy in Rosignano Marittimo, the municipality served as an implementing body and played a pivotal role in selecting and executing operations. It worked closely with the Region of Tuscany, ensuring the strategy closely aligned with local needs and potentials, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of ERDF-funded interventions. This collaboration was facilitated through a dedicated platform for monitoring and information exchange between the region and the municipality and by engaging a diverse range of stakeholders from outside the public administration sector (e.g., schools), contributing to the development of a more place-based approach to ERDF implementation in the urban area.

Sustainable Urban Development Integrated Territorial Investment

The SUD ITI strategies in Italy combined ERDF and ESF funding, as part of ROPs. Overall 26 SUD ITIs were deployed across the country, focusing, like SUD OP strategies, on services to citizens and city users as well as on social inclusion, while having flexibility to insert an additional objective according to the local needs. Thus, overall, SUD ITIs covered a wide range of thematic objectives. Examples of SUD ITI include the Sustainable Urban Strategy Agrigento (Strategia di Sviluppo Urbano Sostenibile Autorità Urbana di Agrigento) and the Sustainable Urban Strategy Messina (Strategia di Sviluppo Urbano Sostenibile Autorità Urbana di Messina).

Non-Sustainable Urban Development Integrated Territorial Investment

The implementation of non-SUD ITI strategies was carried out across 10 regions in Italy, aligning with the National Strategy for Inner Areas (Strategia Nazionale delle Aree Interne). The primary objective was to enhance the quality of life and economic prosperity of residents inhabiting remote and sparsely populated regions, aiming to reverse negative demographic trends in 'inner areas' across Italy. The underlying rationale involved addressing socio-economic disparities by improving quality of life, creating new work opportunities, and ensuring access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and transportation, thereby fostering the development of these inner areas. These strategies exhibited a wide-ranging thematic scope tailored to local needs and developmental prospects, encompassing all Thematic Objectives. Funding for non-SUD ITI strategies was sourced from the ERDF, ESF, and EAFRD.

Community-led Local Development

Italy allocated funding to over 20 CLLD strategies, predominantly situated in Sicily, with only one exception (the Monti Dauni CLLD strategy in the Puglia region). These strategies are specifically designed for rural regions and receive financial support from both the EAFRD and the ERDF in the Sicilian case, and from the ERDF and EMFF in the case of Puglia. The strategies aim to involve citizens at the local level, through Local Action Groups (LAGs), in developing responses to social, environmental, and economic challenges.

A national strategy underpinning non-SUD ITI implementation

The National Strategy for Inner Areas (Strategia Nazionale delle Aree Interne, SNAI) is a strategic line of intervention of ESIF for both the 2014-20 and 2021-2027 programming periods. It represents an innovative national policy of development and territorial cohesion, which aims to face the demographic decline of the inner areas of our country. The strategy focus on areas defined according to the following criteria: considerable remoteness from primary hubs providing vital welfare services such as education, healthcare, and transportation; presence of valuable environmental assets including water resources, agricultural landscapes, and diverse natural and man-made environments, or cultural heritage; presence of a varied landscape shaped by the interplay of natural processes and human endeavours. Such areas cover roughly 60% of the territory of Italy, being home to about 20% of the population. From among these inner areas, 72 project areas, grouping several municipalities have been selected for the implementation of the SNAI. This strategy helped develop new methods of multilevel local governance through the adoption of an integrated approach to promote local development (Agencia per la Coesione Territoriale, n.d.; Rossitti et al., 2021).

IN SUM

Italy's case stands out for having a large number of strategies in place and implementing all types of TDMs, often integrating funding from several ESIF. A centralised design of SUD OP strategies, to some degree, hindered the tailoring of strategies to territorial needs; however, their implementation did strengthen functional linkages at the metropolitan scale, improve cross-level coordination, and empower local authorities. In the case of other TDMs used - implemented in a more decentralised manner - territorial needs were addressed in a more place-tailored way, with local authorities and other local stakeholders playing a significant role in implementation. TDMs also largely contributed to closer collaboration between local and regional authorities and across municipal boundaries, developing institutional capacity in the process.

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