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COUNTRY FICHE

SLOVENIA [SI]

During the 2014-20 period, two types of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms were implemented in Slovenia, with a total of 48 strategies covering most of the country's territory. First, 11 Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies, implemented through the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument, were introduced. These strategies combined funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). Second, a larger number (37) of Community-led Local Development (CLLD) strategies, governed by Local Action Groups (LAGs), were also established. These strategies integrated three funding streams: ERDF, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

POPULATION	STATE TYPE
2.84 million	Centralised

NATIONAL ESIF BUDGET

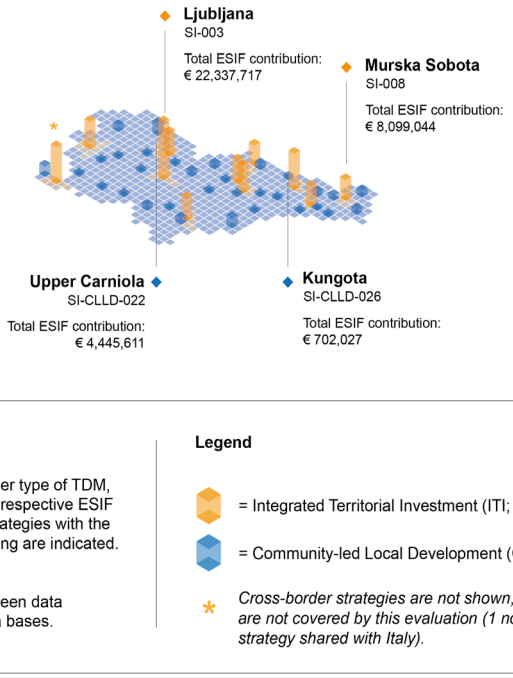
EU Contribution (EUR)	€ 4,514,507,753
National Contribution (EUR)	€ 1,106,768,697
Total Contribution (EUR)	€ 5,621,276,450

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	0	-	-	-
SUD (Art. 7) Priority Axis	0	-	-	-
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; SUD)	11	ERDF, CF	5.5%	71%
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI; non-SUD)	0	-	-	-
Community-led Local Development (CLLD)	37	ERDF, EAFRD, EMFF	1.2%	71%
TOTAL	**48**		**6.7%**	**-**

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

Slovenia operates under a unitary state system, with its territorial governance organised into 212 municipalities (Občine), including 12 urban municipalities (Mestne občine). These municipalities are responsible for managing local services such as education, healthcare, and other public utilities. In addition to this administrative structure, the country is divided into 12 statistical regions, which serve primarily for planning and statistical purposes. The central government, based in Ljubljana, manages national affairs such as defence, foreign policy, and financial administration.

Slovenia remains a centralised state, largely due to the absence of an intermediate regional administrative level between the state and municipalities, as well as the relatively small size of municipalities, which limits their competencies. National authorities hold legislative power across all sectors and supervise the legality of local government actions. Despite some decentralisation efforts, such as the establishment of regional development agencies, the central government retains significant control.

Urban development in Slovenia is closely aligned with the national Spatial Development Strategy (Strategija Prostorskega Razvoja Slovenije, SPRS), which integrates urban planning into broader spatial policy.

COHESION POLICY CONTEXT

During the 2014-20 period, Cohesion Policy in Slovenia was primarily implemented through the Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy 2014–2020, which combined funding from the ESF, ERDF, CF, and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI). The Operational Programme (OP) had a broad thematic scope, covering all 11 thematic objectives, and was centrally managed by the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development. The OP's Intermediate Bodies included the relevant sectoral ministries, as well as the Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS), which was responsible for Sustainable Urban Development.

FEATURES OF THE TERRITORIAL DELIVERY MECHANISMS

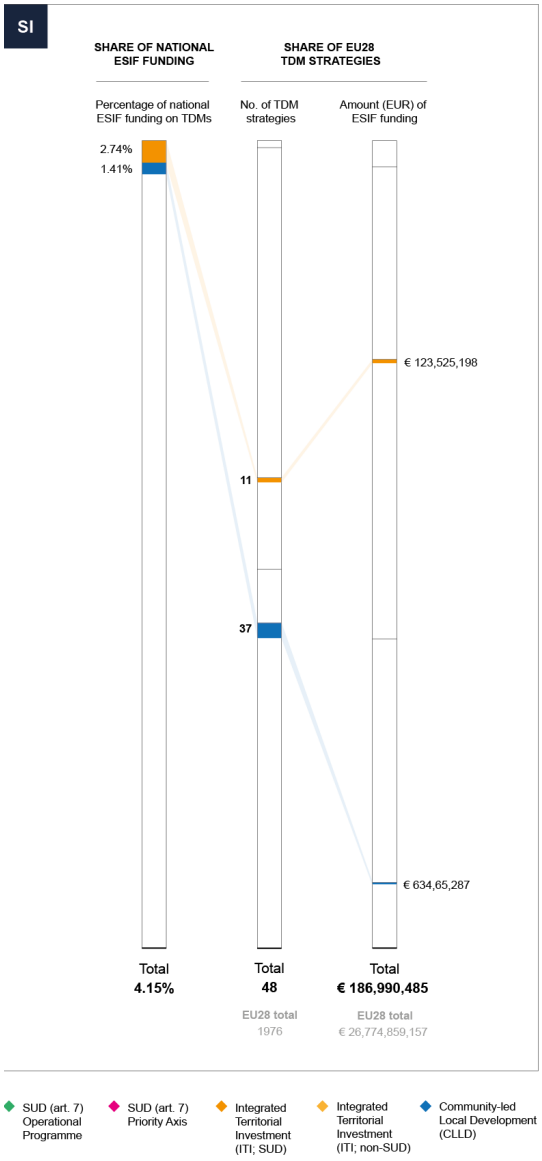
Sustainable Urban Development Integrated Territorial Investment

The 11 SUD ITI strategies in Slovenia were aligned with the investment priorities set out in the Operational Programme, drawing from two funding sources: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF). These ITIs supported the development of urban areas, with each municipality defining its own strategies.

The ERDF provided the majority of funding, focusing on projects under the thematic objective of environmental protection and resource efficiency, particularly urban renewal, and the shift towards a low-carbon economy (€124 million), with an emphasis on urban mobility. CF funding was primarily used to support energy efficiency initiatives within the same priority, with an overall ERDF/CF allocation of €45 million.

In implementing the ITI mechanism, ZMOS

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.

acted as an Intermediary Body for selecting operations, while the Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy served as the Managing Authority for SUD project implementation. The Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning oversaw projects related to environmental protection, and the Ministry of Infrastructure was responsible for those under the low-carbon economy objective.

Once strategies were approved by the central government, cities created action plans to implement ITI projects in three key areas: building renovations, urban mobility, and the renewal of deprived urban areas. ZMOS issued calls for projects in each area and evaluated proposals through an expert group. The Board of Mayors then approved selected projects before submitting them to the relevant ministries.

The Slovenian SUD ITI approach had certain weaknesses, including the lack of a clear rationale for using this instrument and weak cross-sectoral integration within the covered areas. Furthermore, there was little impact on strengthening functional linkages, as ITI territories were delineated in a top-down manner, centred around city administrative boundaries. As in many other countries, there was no integration between the ESF and ERDF at the operational level, and limited delegation of powers to city authorities beyond strategy drafting.

Nonetheless, the SUD ITI strategies enabled a more ‘city-specific’ implementation of Cohesion Policy, addressing local needs in the urban areas involved, albeit with limited community and citizen participation. The involvement of ZMOS as an intermediary significantly improved horizontal and vertical collaboration between cities and across different levels of government.

In terms of financial implementation, the SUD ITI performed better than mainstream Cohesion Policy. By the end of 2022, 71% of the allocated funding had been utilised in projects, compared to 64% for mainstream programmes

Association of municipalities as an Intermediate Body for Slovenian SUD ITI strategies

The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS) advocates for the interests of 12 urban municipalities, which, while representing only a small portion of the country’s 212 municipalities, account for over a third of the population and serve as key regional hubs for economic, social, governmental, and public services. ZMOS’s primary role is to safeguard the interests of these urban municipalities at both national and international levels. During the implementation of Territorial Delivery Mechanisms in the 2014-20 period, ZMOS was designated as an Intermediate Body for Slovenia’s SUD ITI strategies. The association was responsible for selecting projects under all SUD ITI strategies, acting as a bridge between the central government and the municipalities. Meanwhile, the urban authorities were responsible for drafting the SUD ITI strategies. This institutional arrangement improved collaboration among cities, built trust between local and national governments, and increased awareness of Cohesion Policy objectives and regulations at the urban level. These efforts were credited with improving the effectiveness of the SUD ITI instrument in the country (CEMR, 2022; Ferry at al., 2018).

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

Community-led Local Development

A total of 37 CLLD strategies were implemented in Slovenia during the 2014-20 period, using a multi-fund approach (ERDF, EAFRD, EMFF). These strategies predominantly targeted rural areas, with a smaller focus on coastal regions. Almost the entire Slovenian territory was covered by these initiatives.

ERDF funding for Slovenian CLLD was allocated exclusively to the social inclusion thematic objective. The strategies concentrated on areas such as sustainable tourism, social inclusion, health, employment and skills, culture and heritage, youth, entrepreneurship, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

These strategies had a significant impact on addressing local needs, particularly in terms of social inclusion, environmental protection, nature conservation, and the preservation of cultural landscapes and heritage. The integration of multiple funding streams broadened the scope of interventions by Local Action Groups (LAGs), originally established under the LEADER programme. Additionally, the strategies enhanced bottom-up engagement with local stakeholders, a result that was highly appreciated by those involved. The establishment of a "one-stop-shop" for supporting LAGs, known as the CLLD Coordination Committee, was instrumental in fostering collaboration and communication between Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, the paying agency, and the LAGs (LDnet, 2021).

The CLLD approach was especially beneficial for rural areas in Slovenia, as it allowed development strategies to be customised to the unique context and needs of each region, while also reflecting local principles and strategic goals. This model promoted participatory decision-making, planning, funding, and implementation. The projects and operations carried out had a notable impact at both local and regional levels. An analysis of completed projects showed that the most prominent initiatives focused on improving quality of life, marketing, tourism, social inclusion of vulnerable groups, and intergenerational cooperation. However, the administrative burden of the LEADER/CLLD programme was considered excessive, given the relatively small size of the grants, which discouraged potential beneficiaries (Potočnik Slavič et al., 2022).

By the end of 2022, 71% of the allocated funding had been utilised in projects, matching the financial performance of SUD ITI strategies.

IN SUM

Although a relatively small portion of Cohesion Policy resources was allocated to Territorial Delivery Mechanisms in Slovenia during 2014-20, the territorial coverage of these strategies was extensive. More importantly, the strategies succeeded in delivering more place-specific interventions that addressed local needs, particularly through the CLLD strategies. However, functional and cross-sectoral integration were not strong aspects of the strategies implemented, despite the more integrated approach encouraged by CLLD.

In terms of governance innovation, the work of ZMOS led to improved vertical and horizontal collaboration, but the empowerment of municipalities through the SUD ITIs was limited due to the centralised approach. While the SUD ITI strategies did not significantly engage stakeholders, the CLLD strategies were innovative in fostering bottom-up engagement with local actors.

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Contributors

Marcin Dąbrowski, Niek Lurling, Gisela Garrido Veron (TU Delft), Damjan Kavaš (IER)