

THE NEW CONSTRUCTION FOR RECEIVING EUROPEAN FUNDS IN THE PROGRAMMING PERIOD 2021-2027

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Abstract

The new operational programmes for the programming period 2021-2027 prepared by Romania in the context of EU Cohesion Policy have been recently approved by the European Commission. There have been 16 operational programmes created, that will be financed partly by European funds and partly by national contribution of Romania, summing up a total of 46 billion EUR.

The non-reimbursable funds will be available to beneficiaries in the forthcoming period for implementing projects throughout the country and accomplishing investments in the healthcare system, transportation networks, modernisations of water infrastructure and energy systems, in educational infrastructure and tourism and for human resources development and business environment support.

This article contributes to the specialty literature on European funds received by Romania as a Member State of the European Union, by presenting the new architecture of European funds set up for the period 2021-2027, the institutional framework put in place and the operational programmes prepared by the Romanian authorities and recently approved by the European Commission.

We analyse the funds allocations per operational programmes and consider the main evolutions as compared to the construction used in the prior periods. The design of the operational programmes and the institutional framework underwent some distinctive changes with a view to simplify and make more efficient the process of accessing the EU funds.

Key words: European funds, operational programmes, programme authorities, regional development

J.E.L. classification: F36, H83, R58

1. Introduction

The EU Cohesion Policy was created with a view to reduce the development gaps between the Member States of the European Union, by helping less developed countries to catch up with more developed ones and correcting the imbalances in the economic, social and territorial cohesion throughout the European Union [1].

The new Cohesion Policy for the programming period 2021-2027 states five policy objectives dedicated to supporting growth throughout the European Union. They refer to a „more competitive and smarter Europe”, a „greener, low carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy”, a „more connected Europe by enhancing mobility”, a „more social and inclusive Europe” and „Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories”. The European funds that support the fulfillment of these objectives are the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund and the Just Transition Fund [10].

As part of the Cohesion Policy and in cooperation with the European Commission, Member States prepare partnership agreements presenting the national strategy and investment priorities as well as the operational programmes to be implemented with the support of European funds. Romania's partnership agreement for the programming period 2021-2027 was approved by the

2. Research methodology

We have researched the latest legal act and documents published online regarding the new construction for accessing the European Funds dedicated to EU Cohesion Policy in the programming period 2021-2027, as follows:

- EU regulations issued by the European Parliament and the Council referring to the new set up of the European Funds;
- national regulations issued by the Romanian Government establishing the institutions involved in the management of European funds received by Romania;
- operational programmes prepared by Romanian authorities, which have been recently approved by the European Commission.

We have analyzed the documentary material mentioned above and synthesised the main the aspects regarding the European funds. We summarized and grouped the aspects related to the requirements for responsible authorities, the design of the national institutional framework and the operational programmes of Romania for the upcoming period 2021-2027, including their financial allocations.

Based on our research, we drew conclusions regarding the main evolutions in the construction for receiving the European funds as compared to the set up used in the prior programming periods, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020.

3. The European funds and the responsible authorities in Member States

The EU Regulations establish the common and the specific provisions regarding the European funds and are adopted for each separate programming period. They have an important role in the management and utilization of European funds, as they offer the basis upon which Member States establish the institutional and procedural framework regarding the coordination, the management, the audit and control of European funds they receive.

For the programming period 2021-2027, the EU Regulation laying down the applicable common norms is the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021. This is completed by other regulations (table no. 1) addressing the specificities of each fund from which amounts are allocated to the EU Member States, such as the funds' specific objectives, scope of support, methods of implementation and eligibility of actions and expenditure.

Table no. 1 The main EU funds and regulations governing the period 2021-2027

European Fund	EU Regulation
European Regional Development Fund (FEDR)	Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund
Cohesion Fund (FC)	
European Social Fund Plus (FSE+)	Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013
Just Transition Fund (FTJ)	Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund

Source: EU Regulations published online at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>

The European funds are received through specific operational programmes and their execution is managed by shared partnership with the European Commission. Member States are

responsible for preparing the operational programmes and fulfilling the requirements on the responsible authorities for each of them, namely the managing authority, the accounting body and the audit authority, as stated by the common provisions in the Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

The **managing authority** is responsible for managing the programme so as the objectives of the programme are achieved. The functions of the managing authority include to select the operations that will be financed, to fulfill the management tasks such as carrying out management verifications and prevent, detect and correct irregularities, to supervise the intermediate bodies to which tasks are delegated and to record and store electronically the data on each operation and ensure the security, integrity and confidentiality of data and the authentication of users [7].

The accounting function is carried out by the programmes managing authority or by another body. The **accounting body** has the following main tasks: to keep electronic records, prepare and submit to the Commission the payment applications and the accounts, also confirming the completeness, accuracy and veracity of the accounts. This function does not comprise verifications at the level of the funds beneficiaries [7].

The **audit authority** is responsible for providing independent assurance to the Commission concerning the effective functioning of the management and control systems and also the legality and regularity of the expenses presented in the accounts submitted to the Commission. This is achieved by undertaking system audits, audits on operations and audits of accounts for each operational programme. Audit work must be carried out by the audit authority in accordance with internationally accepted audit standards [7].

As compared to the prior programming periods, we notice the set up of a new fund, the Just Transition Fund (FTJ) and the appearance of a new body, the accounting body. The accounting body is actually replacing the certifying authority that was functioning in the prior periods alongside the managing authority and the audit authority. The functions of the accounting body have remained similar to the ones performed by the certifying authority.

4. The national institutional framework for the period 2021-2027

Through Resolution no. 936/2020, with further modifications and completions, the Government of Romania approved the general framework for involving authorities and institutions in the process of programming and negotiating the European non-reimbursable funds for the period 2021-2027 and also the institutional framework for the coordination, management and control of the funds.

The operational programmes and their management authorities, accounting body and audit authority were established as presented below.

The Ministry of European Funds, at present named the **Ministry of Investment and European Projects (MIPE)** is the management authority for the following seven national programmes [4]:

- Programme Sustainable Development;
- Programme Education and Employment - tasks can be delegated by MIPE to the the regional centers and to the Intermediary Organism for Education, organized within the Ministry of Education;
- Programme Smart Growth, Digitalization and Financial Instruments - tasks can be delegated by MIPE to the Intermediary Organism for the Promotion of Information Society, functioning within the Authority for the Digitalization of Romania and to the Intermediary Organism for Research, organized within the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization;
- Programme Health - tasks can be delegated by MIPE to the intermediary organisms functioning within the agencies for regional development (ADR) as organized by Law no. 315/2004, also to the regional intermediary organism for Human Capital Bucharest –Ilfov,

organized in the subordination of MIPE and to the Intermediary Organism for Research, organized within the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization;

- Programme Just Transition - tasks can be delegated by MIPE to the intermediary organisms functioning within the agencies for regional development (ADR) as organized by Law no. 315/2004, respectively West, South-West Oltenia, Center, South-Muntenia și South-East;

- Programme Social Inclusion and Dignity- tasks can be delegated by MIPE to the the regional centers organized jointly with the managing authority of the Programme Education and Employment;

- Programme Technical Assistance.

In addition, eight regional programmes were created for each of Romania's development regions. For these, the **agencies for regional development (ADR)** were designated as management authorities, by the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 122/2020, approved by Law [no. 277/2021](#) [2]. The agencies for regional development (ADR) were organized by Law no. 315/2004 regarding the regional development of Romania, as follows [5]:

Table no. 2 The managing authorities of regional operational programmes

Agency for regional development (ADR)	Region and counties included
ADR North East (located in Piatra Neamt)	Development Region North East, comprising Bacau, Botosani, Iasi, Neamt, Suceava and Vaslui counties
ADR South East (located in Braila)	Development Region South East, comprising Braila, Buzau, Constanta, Galati, Vrancea and Tulcea counties
ADR South Muntenia (located in Calarasi)	Arges, Calarasi, Dambovita, Giurgiu, Ialomita, Prahova and Teleorman counties.
ADR South West Oltenia (located in Craiova)	Development Region South West Oltenia, comprising Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinti, Olt and Valcea counties.
ADR West (located in Timisoara)	Development Region West, comprising Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis counties.
ADR North West (located in Baci, Cluj county)	Bistrita-Nasaud, Cluj, Salaj, Satu Mare and Maramures counties.
ADR Central Region (located in Alba Iulia)	Development Central Region, comprising Alba, Brasov, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu counties.
ADR Bucharest-Ilfov (located in Bucharest)	Development Region Bucharest-Ilfov, comprising Bucharest and Ilfov county.

Source: Government Emergency Ordinance no. 122/2020 and Law no. 315/2004

For the Programme Transport, the **Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MTI)** was designated as management authority.

To sum up, Romania set up 16 operational programmes, out of which 7 programmes are managed by MIPE, 1 programme is managed by MTI and also 8 regional programmes that are managed by each region's development agency (ADR). According to Government Emergency Ordinance no. 170/2022, MIPE recently took over also the task of coordinating the 8 regional operational programmes [3].

For all of the programmes presented above, it was established that the **Ministry of Finance**, through the **General Direction Certifying and Payment Authority**, is the accounting body and the body responsible with receiving the funds from the European Commission. Previously, the same structure functioned as the certifying authority of the operational programmes.

The audit authority designated for all of the above mentioned operational programmes is the **Audit Authority**, an independent organism functioning within the Romanian Court of Accounts, which is the same as in the previous programming periods.

As compared to the institutional architecture functioning in the prior programming periods, we notice the split up and decentralization of the regional operational programme into 8 separate regional programmes that are to be implemented by the regional development agencies. Thus the national management of the funds related to regional development was replaced by regional management, with a view to enable the local public administration and actors to access the funds faster and more efficient [6].

There are also other differences by reference to the institutional framework put in place for the prior periods and presented by Dorneanu, A. (2016), for example:

- the Regional Operational Programmes 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 were under the management of the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, while the regional development agencies (ADR) were working locally as intermediary organisms in the programmes implementation;

- the Transport Programme was included, in the period 2014-2020, in the Large Infrastructure Operational Program (POIM), which was under the management of the Ministry of European Funds. At the beginning of the period 2007-2013, it was under the management of the Ministry of Transport, similar to the arrangement in the current period;

- in the period 2007-2013, more ministries were involved as managing authorities of programmes, such as the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, the Ministry of Economy;

- in the period 2014-2020, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration was also the managing authority of the Aid to Deprived Persons Operational Programme (POAD), financed from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, that is not being maintained in the period 2021-2027.

Another new element in the set up of the programming period 2021-2027 is the creation of new operational programmes, such as the Health Programme and the Just Transition Programme, in addition to the ones that are continuing the programmes implemented in the prior periods.

5. Romania's approved operational programmes for the period 2021-2027

The operational programmes prepared by the Romanian authorities for the period 2021-2027 have been recently approved by the European Commission and they benefit from financial allocations from European funds (EU contribution) and from national funds (national contribution).

The eligibility period of the programmes is 01.01.2021-31.12.2029, representing the calendaristic period in which the actions financed can be implemented and the expenses are eligible for funding.

We present below the main facts about the new programmes based on the analysis of the EC approval decisions, the final versions of the operational programmes published online and the book “The Cohesion Policy”, issued by MIPE in April 2023 [9].

Programme Technical Assistance (PAT) was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)6130 dated 22.08.2022. It has financial allocations from FEDR and FSE+ in a total amount of 457,487,873 EUR, representing 47.68% of the programme's total value.

PAT is dedicated to the system of coordination and control of funds and management of national programmes run by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, which do not have a technical assistance priority. It aims to provide support for the efficient and effective implementation of the funds in Romania and also targets potential beneficiaries [8].

Programme Sustainable Development (PDD) was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)8703 dated 24.11.2022. It is financed from the FEDR and FC in a total amount of 4,044,073,646 EUR, representing 76.97% of the programme's total value.

PDD is intended to improve the quality of life by financing projects in the following domains: water and wastewater infrastructure, waste management, conservation of biodiversity; air quality;

remediation of contaminated sites; risks management; adaptation to climate change through improved energy efficiency, increased use of renewable energy and development of intelligent energy systems [8]. Such projects were previously included for financing within the operational programme on large infrastructure, POIM 2014-2020 [6].

Programme Health (PS) was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)8934 dated 30.11.2022. It is financed from the FEDR and FSE+ in a total amount of 2,274,208,945 EUR, representing 38.67% of the programme's total value.

PS is a new programme that will support investments in the resilience of the health system, mainly in: cancer diagnosis and treatment, transplantation, control of contagious diseases, national transfusion system. The programme will provide funds for the medical infrastructure and building of new regional hospitals, for research and innovation solutions in healthcare and use of digital technologies to facilitate access to information and education [8].

Programme Just Transition (PTJ), was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)9125 dated 02.12.2022. It is financed from the FEDR and FSE+ in a total amount of 2,139,715,532 EUR, representing 84.55% of the programme's total value.

PTJ is a new programme that covers actions located exclusively in Mures, Galati, Prahova, Dolj, Gorj and Hunedoara counties and it is realized in accordance with the Territorial Plans for a Just Transition developed by the six counties' Councils. It is intended to support economic diversification that is environmentally sustainable and to increase the capacity and competitiveness of local economies affected by the accelerated transition to climate neutrality. The investments will use the best available technologies in terms of environmental protection and energy efficiency and will contribute to the creation of sustainable and secure jobs [8].

Programme Social Inclusion and Dignity (PIDS) was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)9635 dated 14.12.2022. It is financed from the FEDR and FSE+ in a total amount of 3,366,046,600 EUR, representing 81.07% of the programme's total value.

PIDS contains a set of integrated measures for the implementation of national and local strategies designed to reduce poverty and to offer support to vulnerable groups, such as persons from the rural areas, single-parent families, persons without a home, families with a poor situation, immigrants, disabled persons, elder, victims of domestic violence in order for them to overcome social exclusion. This programme is continuing the financing of projects similar to the ones covered by Aid to Deprived Persons Operational Programme in the previous period (POAD 2014-2020) [6].

Programme Education and Employment (PEO) was approved by the European Commission's Decision no. C(2022)9362 dated 09.12.2022. It is financed from FSE+ in a total amount of 3,484,205,000 EUR, representing EU 80.24% of the programme's total value. PEO is the correspondent of the former period's programme POCU 2014-2020 [5].

The measures contained in this programme are targeted at ensuring sustainable employment and helping the workforce achieve the skills adapted to the technological and digital change, as well as the global trends. The general objective is to make Romania's labour market sustainable, resilient, proactive and based on social innovation [8].

Programme Smart Growth, Digitalization and Financial Instruments (PCIDIF) was approved by the European Commission by Decision no. C(2022)9445 dated 09.12.2022. It is financed from the FEDR in a total amount of 1,650,000,000 EUR, representing 74.95% of the programme's total value. PCIDIF is continuing the former period's programme POC 2014-2020 [6].

PCIDIF will finance investments in the areas of research, development and innovation/smart specialisation, entrepreneurship and digitalization, funded through grants or financial instruments, to respond to challenges identified at the national level [8].

Programme Transport (PT) was approved by the European Commission by Decision no. C(2022)9754 dated 16.12.2022. It is financed from the FEDR and FC in a total amount of 4,650,515,326 EUR, representing 48.31% of the programme's total value.

PT is aimed at sustaining a better quality transport infrastructure network, ensuring the connectivity of Romania with other EU countries and also the connectivity between the regions of Romania, safely and in accordance with the objectives of climate neutrality and environmental protection [8]. Projects concerning transport infrastructure were previously included for financing within the large infrastructure programme, POIM 2014-2020 [6].

Regional Programmes (RP) were approved by the European Commission and received financial allocations from FEDR and national funds, as presented in table no. 3.

Table no. 3 Regional Operational Programmes

Regional Operational Programmes	European Commission approval Decision	EU Contribution EUR	National Contribution EUR	Total EUR	EU Co-financing rate
		a	b	(c)=(a)+(b)	(d)=(a)/(c)
West	C(2022)7252 / 07.10.2022	981,173,747	197,920,079	1,179,093,826	83.21%
South Muntenia	C(2022)7253 / 07.10.2022	1,312,118,844	264,677,627	1,576,796,471	83.21%
North West	C(2022)7386 / 11.10.2022	1,194,579,461	242,673,010	1,437,252,471	83.12%
South West Oltenia	C(2022)7441 / 14.10.2022	997,844,705	211,141,225	1,208,985,930	82.54%
North East	C(2022)7637 / 21.10.2022	1,457,086,893	302,335,295	1,759,422,188	82.82%
South East	C(2022)7639 / 21.10.2022	1,238,760,838	250,016,103	1,488,776,941	83.21%
Central Region	C(2022)7893 / 26.10.2022	1,152,064,526	232,391,813	1,384,456,339	83.21%
Bucharest-Ilfov	C(2022)9211 / 05.12.2022	586,585,917	879,878,877	1,466,464,794	40.00%
Total		8,920,214,931	2,581,034,029	11,501,248,960	

Source: EC decisions and approved Regional Operational Programmes published by MIPE

The total amount received by the regional programmes is 8.92 billion EUR. According to the current development needs, the region receiving the biggest allocation of funds is North East (1.447 billion EUR), followed by South Muntenia (1.312 billion EUR) and South East (1.238 billion EUR). The regions are receiving significant rates of financing from the EU funds (82%-83%), except for Bucharest-Ilfov region, which is considered more developed and is receiving a lower rate, of 40%.

The specific objectives of individual regional programmes as designed for each of Romania's development regions are briefly presented below.

The overall objective of the **North-East RP** is to stimulate a balanced development based on a smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth process, leading to the improvement of the quality of life and the reduction of intra- and inter-regional development discrepancies [8].

South-Muntenia RP has the overall objective of stimulating smart, sustainable and balanced economic growth. It is intended to improve the life quality of local communities by supporting the innovation and digitalization capacity of the local administration and regional economy, developing in a sustainable way the infrastructure and services and enhancing the region

cultural and tourism potential [8].

South-East RP's objective is to increase regional economic competitiveness and improve the quality of life of local communities by supporting the development of the business environment, infrastructure and services, aimed at reducing interregional disparities and stimulating sustainable development, through efficient resource management, capitalizing on the demographic and innovation potential and assimilating technological progress [8].

North-West RP aims to develop research, innovation and digitalization capacity, increase energy performance of the existing pool of public and residential buildings, capitalizing on urban degraded areas, promote the sustainable mobility of urban areas, develop the network of county roads and the educational infrastructure, and to capitalize on the cultural, touristic and spa potential [8].

Central RP will finance projects aimed at transforming the region in a competitive region through innovation and dynamic enterprises for a smart economy, in a digital region, with environmentally friendly communities, sustainable and accessible urban mobility and attractive tourism [8].

South-West Oltenia RP covers various domains such as innovation/research, technological transfer, growth of small and medium enterprises' competitiveness, digitalization for the benefit of citizens, energy efficiency, urban development, mobility and accessibility, green infrastructure and biodiversity, educational infrastructure, tourism, cultural heritage and integrated territorial development [8].

West RP is aimed at having a competitive region at European level, with a high level of research and development, innovation and digitalization, able to attract and capitalize on investments, connected internally and internationally, whose citizens benefit of efficient public services, in localities with a high quality of life [8].

Bucharest-Ilfov RP is meant to create a competitive region through innovation, digitalization and dynamic enterprises. It will finance projects targeted at sustaining a digital, environmentally friendly region with high and accessible urban mobility and a modern, attractive and inclusive educational infrastructure [8].

We present suggestively the total values in EUR allocated as EU contribution and as national contribution to the operational programmes, both national and regional ones (figure no. 1).

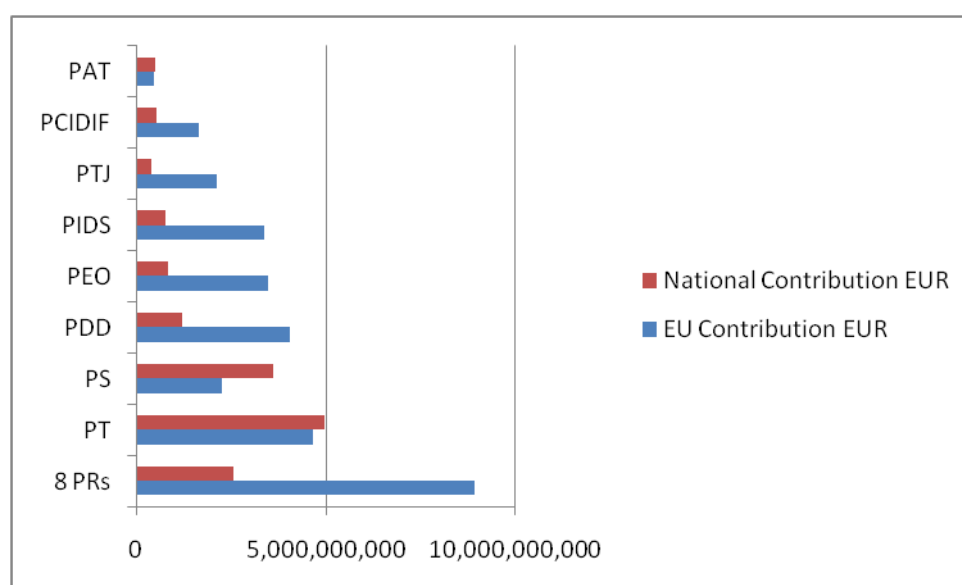


Figure no. 1 The total values of Romania's operational programmes

The total EU contribution offered from FEDR, FC, FSE+, FTJ to Romania's operational

programmes amounts to 30,986,467,853 EUR. The biggest allocations from the European funds are received by the regional programmes, followed by the programmes Transport, Sustainable Development, Education and Employment, Social Inclusion and Dignity, Health, Just Transition, Smart Growth, Digitalization and Financial Instruments and Technical Assistance.

The total national contribution for the operational programmes' financing amounts to 15,461,615,472 EUR. The biggest sums are allocated to the programmes Transport and Health, which benefit of lower EU co-financing rates (48.31% and, respectively 38.67%).

The total value of the operational programmes presented above is 46,448,083,325 EUR. From the point of view of their financial allocations, the biggest operational programmes are the Regional Programmes, Transport and Health, followed by Sustainable Development, Education and Employment, Social Inclusion and Dignity, Just Transition, Smart Growth, Digitalization and Financial Instruments and Technical Assistance.

6. Conclusions

The European Commission has recently approved Romania's operational programmes for the programming period 2021-2027. There are 8 national programmes and 8 regional programmes that will receive a total amount of 30.99 billion EUR from European funds as part of EU Cohesion Policy, together with 15.46 billion EUR as national contribution. European projects are to be selected, financed from these funds and implemented until the end of year 2029.

Romania has appointed the managing authorities, accounting body and audit authority for each of the programmes, in accordance with the new requirements stipulated by the EU regulations for the period 2021-2027.

The most important change in this period as compared to previous ones is the decentralisation of the management of the regional operational programme, which was realized by creating 8 programmes per each of Romania's development regions and by the nomination of the agencies for regional development as their managing authorities.

Also for simplifying and making more efficient the process of accessing the EU funds, the Ministry of Investment and European Projects as managing authority of programmes will delegate tasks to regional centers and to intermediary organisms organized at the local level.

In the context of the new Cohesion Policy, the former programme on large infrastructure (POIM 2014-2020) was split in two new programs, related to financing projects the areas of environment/sustainable development and transport, similar to the construction used in the period 2007-2013. The Ministry of Transportation is involved as managing authority of the Transport Programme, while the Sustainable Development Programme is under the management of the Ministry of Investment and European Projects.

There are also new programmes that did not have corresponding ones in the previous programming periods.

Programme Just Transition is a newly-created programme that will provide finance only for actions located in six counties of Romania, aimed at supporting environmental protection, energy efficiency and the creation of sustainable and secure jobs.

Programme Health is also a newly-created programme aimed at financing investments in the resilience of the health system.

The biggest operational programmes from the point of view of the total financial value allocated to them are the Regional Programmes and the programmes Transport and Health.

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