

ANNEX I

Work programme for 2026 in the framework of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund for the use of technical assistance

1. Introduction

On the basis of the objectives laid down in Article 35 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 (“CPR”) and Articles 58(2) and 92b(3) of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, this work programme contains the actions to be financed and the budget breakdown for year 2026 as follows:

- a) for grants (implemented under direct management): point 2,
- b) for prizes (implemented under direct management): point 3,
- c) for procurement (implemented under direct management): point 4,
- d) for actions implemented under indirect management: point 5,
- e) for other actions or expenditure: point 6: AMI-list experts and administrative agreements.

Legal bases

Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, and in particular Articles 7(2) and 35 thereof.

Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, and in particular Article 58 thereof.

Budget lines

E.05020200-European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)-Operational technical assistance
E.05020502-NGEU-ERDF-Operational technical assistance-Financing under REACT-EU
E.05030200-Cohesion Fund -Operational technical assistance

Objectives pursued

At the initiative of the Commission, technical assistance may support preparatory, monitoring, control, audit, evaluation, communication including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union, visibility and all administrative and technical assistance actions necessary for the implementation of the CPR and, where appropriate, with third countries.

Expected results

Technical assistance will result in

- Active contribution to deliver on Commission priorities (Jobs, Growth and Investment, Digital Single Market, Energy Union etc.)
- Development of Cohesion policy and establishment of close links to other EU policies
- Demonstration and dissemination of the EU added value of Cohesion policy
- Territorial cohesion in Europe
- Sound management of the Funds
- Improvement of the performance of the internal processes

Efforts will be made to ensure synergies and complementarities between technical assistance and technical support under the Technical Support Instrument.

Mainstreaming contribution (Climate, biodiversity, gender-equality) - description of how the action(s) included in this work programme contribute to mainstreaming, in qualitative and quantitative ways

In accordance with Article 5(1)(b) CPR 2021-2027, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund shall support the policy objective ‘a greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy and resilient Europe by promoting clean and fair energy transition, green and blue investment, the circular economy, climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk prevention and management, and sustainable urban mobility’.

Member States should allocate an important part of the ERDF (at least 30%) and the Cohesion Fund (at least 37%) Union contribution to expenditure related to the achievement of the climate objectives set for the EU budget and to the mainstreaming of biodiversity actions in the Union policies.

As the actions of technical assistance at the initiative of the Commission, in accordance with the CPR, are designed to support the implementation of the Funds, in combination with the objectives of the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund as mentioned above, they will contribute to climate and biodiversity.

In accordance with Article 9(2) CPR 2021-2027, gender equality is also a cross-cutting principle (mainstreaming), meaning that gender equality and a gender perspective must be factored in and promoted throughout all stages of the process to prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes. DG REGIO’s Equality Mainstreaming Work plan 2022 also committed to explore the possibility to report on gender equality impact under the directly managed Commission initiated technical assistance.

2. Grants

The global budgetary envelope reserved for grants in 2026 is estimated at EUR 8 440 000 of which EUR 7 565 000 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line 05.020200; EUR 297 500 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line REACT-EU 05.020502-

NGEU and EUR 577 500 will be supported from the Cohesion Fund operational budget line 05.030200.

2.1. Eurostat Geospatial data

Type of applicants targeted by the direct award

Grants will be provided to National Statistical Institutes or other national authorities in accordance with Article 5 of Regulation (EC) 223/2009¹.

The grants will be awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of point (d) of Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, i.e. awarded to bodies identified by a basic act, within the meaning of Article 58 of the Financial Regulation, as beneficiaries or to bodies designated by Member States, under their responsibility, where those Member States are identified by a basic act as beneficiaries.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals, on the basis of Article 198(d) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The grants will finance the collection of harmonised data on cities and functional urban areas and activities to enhance the territorial granularity and policy relevance of sub-national statistics. In addition, the grants will explicitly include activities related to geospatial datasets (transport, health, education and other public services etc.) aligned with cohesion policy priorities.

This action will provide more insights into EU regions and cities including upcoming editions for the Regional Competitiveness Index. It will also contribute to future cohesion reports as well as other analytical outputs and reports produced in REGIO, including the State of European Cities.

As a result, more geospatial data covering new domains and updated city statistics will become available.

Implementation

The action will be implemented by DG ESTAT via a co-delegation Type II, according to the Commission Decision C(2024) 6814 final of 30.09.2024 on the internal rules for the implementation of the Commission section of the general budget of the European Union.

2.2. 34th Homologues Group Meeting

Type of applicants targeted by the direct award

Because of the treatment and exchange of confidential and sensitive information during the meeting of the Homologues Group (HGM) between the representatives of the Ministries of Finance of the Member States, the European Court of Auditors and the European

¹ Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2009 on European statistics and repealing Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1101/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the transmission of data subject to statistical confidentiality to the Statistical Office of the European Communities, Council Regulation (EC) No 322/97 on Community Statistics, and Council Decision 89/382/EEC, Euratom establishing a Committee on the Statistical Programmes of the European Communities (Text with relevance for the EEA and for Switzerland) [OJ L 87, 31.3.2009, p. 164].

Commission, the organisation of this meeting is limited to the national bodies of control and audit. These entities have decided to designate annually (during the meeting of year n-1) the body amongst them that will ensure the organisation of the meeting for year n.

The host country for the 34th HGM should be confirmed at the 33rd HGM.

The grant will be awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of point (f) of Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, i.e. awarded for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals.

As a rule, the HGM events are organised by the national audit authorities in each Member State. The choice of the place (the Member State) where the HGM event will take place is decided on a voluntary basis, that is a Member State proposes to organise the future events. The exception is applicable because of the specialisation or administrative power of the beneficiary (National Audit Authorities) as well as of the specific characteristics of the envisaged action (such events are meetings of the European Auditors of Cohesion Funds, with the participation of the European Commission, the European Court of Auditors, OLAF and the national audit authorities of all the Member States).

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals, on the basis of Article 198(f) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

This grant will finance the 34th Annual Meeting of the European financial controllers and auditors "Homologues Group". It is the annual gathering of representatives of Member States and the Commission, so as to discuss issues relating to controls of the management of the ERDF and Cohesion Fund, such as examine the annual control report, the audit opinion and the audit strategy, and to exchange views on issues relating to improvement of the management and control.

The "Homologues Group" meeting is intended to enhance the dialogue and improve the co-ordination of audit work in the field of Cohesion. It offers the Commission services and their national counterparts the opportunity to openly discuss issues on audit and control, and to exchange opinions and best practices.

The objectives of this meeting are sharing and dissemination of best practices amongst Member States. The expected result is better cooperation between Member States and the Commission.

Implementation

This action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

2.3. Promoting youth participation in the Outermost Regions

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

The beneficiary will be either a non-profit organisation, a public authority, a university or other educational institution, a research centre, a European, national, regional or local youth organisation. The organisations/entities that apply to this call for proposals must be legally based and located in one of the EU Member States. The selected beneficiary will manage

and act as secretariat of the YOUTH4OR grant scheme.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The EU outermost regions face several permanent constraints linked to their remoteness, small size, vulnerability to climate change and insularity. The situation of youth is a cause of serious concern, with alarming levels of youth unemployment, low education or training, early school leavers and brain drain.

The aim of the action is to empower and mobilise youth in the EU outermost regions, so that they become agents of change, entrepreneurs and innovators in their local communities. This project will be framed under the renewed strategy for the outermost regions and as a continuation of the similar project under the 2022 strategy for the EU outermost regions.

The selected beneficiary will provide small grants (EUR 5 000 - EUR 10 000) to (groups of) young people, to empower them to carry out projects that have a positive impact at local level. These projects should contribute to improving citizens' quality of life or local and regional development and be adapted to the specific situation of each region. Projects linked to EU priorities such as the twin green and digital transition and recovery or improving equality and inclusion will be particularly welcome.

The expected objectives of the action are the following: increase the involvement of young people from the outermost regions into their local communities; empower young people in the definition and implementation of solutions for their (outermost) region; encourage low-cost innovative solutions to support a local sustainable and fair economic recovery; reinforce the sense of belonging of youth with their region, to promote entrepreneurship that can bring economic opportunities.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

2.4. Contribution to Free, Independent and Plural Media: Support for information measures relating to the EU Cohesion policy

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

Beneficiaries will be media organisations/news agencies, non-profit organisations, universities and educational institutions, research centres and think-tanks, associations of European interest, private entities and public authorities (national, regional and local), with the exception of the authorities in charge of the implementation of cohesion policy.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The call for proposals will fund information measures promoting Cohesion policy and cohesion related investments and reforms and media pluralism at the local level, in the language of citizens.

The main aim is to provide support for the production and dissemination of information and content linked to EU Cohesion policy including inter alia the Just Transition Fund, or relevant support from the Technical Support Instrument. The proposals should provide coherent, objective and comprehensive information, in order to give an accurate overall picture of the EU Cohesion policy. The proposals should illustrate and assess the role of Cohesion policy in delivering the EU's political priorities, such as the transition to a greener and more digital economy, development of strategic technologies, housing and other priorities stemming from the mid-term review, for the EU, its Member States, regions and the local level.

Deliverables could include TV and radio reportages, analysis, news items, events in various formats, and more; all promoting EU cohesion policy while respecting complete editorial independence of the actors involved.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

2.5. Connect the macro-regional civil society network

Type of applicants targeted by the direct grant

The grant will be awarded to the European House of Budapest. The beneficiary has a long history in working with macro-regional strategies and civil society engagement.

The European House is a Budapest-based pro-European Civil Society Organisation (CSO) with the main objectives to develop an active European citizenship and identity based on shared values, foster EU ownership among citizens and promote participatory democracy. The European House plays a pivotal role in giving its members the possibility to closely follow the developments, shape and implement the EU macro-regional strategies through the already well established "Connect" network. The activities of this network bring together civil society organisations across the four macro-regions and beyond, through a series of activities.

The European House of Budapest is the only CSO in Europe with this kind of knowledge and expertise related to macro-regional strategies and civil society organisations. The European House of Budapest has been implementing and been acting as a coordinator of the Connect network activities in the past years, building a strong network of CSOs and young people, producing papers and opinions on the work of the macro-regional strategies, responding, for example, to the Macro Regional Strategies' Reports produced by the European Commission.

The action requires a particular type of body with a high degree of specialisation in macro-regional strategies and cohesion policy and a strong administrative power. Thus, the European House of Budapest is the only civil society body capable of conducting the actions of the project in the intended shape and scope. The grant will be awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of point (f) of Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, i.e. awarded for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on

condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals, on the basis of Article 198(f) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The action supports the activities of the European House of Budapest NGO for the implementation of the "Connect the macro-regional civil society network" project.

The activities will include the organisation of events involving NGOs, youth and citizens coming from the four macro-regions, public consultations, digital communication strategy to share knowledge on cooperation, macro-regional strategies, Interreg, cohesion policy, contribute to the elaboration of joint positions on various policy issues with special focus on cohesion policy.

EU macro-regional strategies (MRS) play a pivotal role in supporting the shaping and implementation of EU Cohesion policy by fostering coordinated action across borders on shared challenges and opportunities. By promoting integrated development, enhancing territorial cooperation, and leveraging existing resources more effectively, MRS contribute to reducing regional disparities, boosting innovation, and strengthening social, economic, and territorial cohesion across the EU. It is especially true in the context of the new Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034. The aim of Connect is to empower and bring together for the first time civil society organisations and like-minded societal entities across the four macro-regions and even beyond under one roof to creatively and systematically participate in and contribute in a pro-active manner to the design and implementation of EU macro-regional strategies.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

2.6. B-solutions initiative to tackle specific border obstacles (including EU accession countries)

Type of applicants targeted by the direct grant

The grant will be awarded to the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

The AEBR is a registered association with the exclusive and direct purpose to promote cross-border cooperation in Europe. AEBR is a civil society body capable of conducting and promoting projects in the intended shape and scope. Its members are European border and cross-border regions in Member States of the European Union or the Council of Europe.

Since its creation in the early 1970s, AEBR has been establishing and refining a general network of border and cross-border regions, which is not limited to the members of the AEBR or the EU, with significant expertise and experience. AEBR is the only entity representing border and cross-border regions with a European coverage. Furthermore, AEBR has been implementing the initiative since its launch, thus ensuring an effective and efficient transition to the new period.

The AEBR Secretariat's reputation, knowledge, quality control and administrative capacity to coordinate and manage cross-border cooperation pilot projects coupled with the cross-border specific knowledge can ensure successful implementation of this project.

The actions proposed by this project have specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its reputation, independence, accountability, technical competence, its high degree of specialisation and its administrative power. Thus, AEBR is the only civil society body capable of conducting the actions of the project in the intended shape and scope.

The grant will be awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of point (f) of Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, i.e. awarded for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals, on the basis of Article 198(f) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The B-solutions initiative was pivotal in demonstrating the policy need for action to solve border obstacles and its impact is felt in the cross-border regions where solutions for obstacles are identified, thus enhancing development of those territories. At European level, it allowed for acquiring knowledge on cross-border obstacles that was crucial for policy design, namely for the Interreg Specific Objective and BRIDGEforEU Regulation².

Continuing the initiative is essential to illustrate and structure knowledge allowing for an uptake by current Interreg programmes and the future Interreg Plan. Furthermore, B-solutions will support the institutional capacity of Member States to implement the BRIDGEforEU Regulation.

The action will support the continuation of the initiative for 18 months (January 2027 to June 2028) and will extend to cover EU accession countries.

The action will support the following objectives and activities: (1) assessment of new obstacles, which includes managing a call for cases and a call for experts to provide technical expertise and achieve a solid legal assessment of the root causes of each obstacle and a potential solution; (2) implementation of solutions, which includes promoting analysis on specific elements for the implementation of different solutions namely via the engagement of competent authorities in specific workshops (organised directly by AEBR); (3) financial support (sub-grants) to border regions to foster the implementation of the solutions for previously assessed obstacles.

Actions are also complemented with publications and results dissemination activities.

The action will also contribute to reinforce the implementation of B-solutions towards EU candidate countries. Support to enlargement implies developing the capacity to interlink candidate countries' national legal frameworks with those of their neighbouring EU Member States, namely, to solve cross-border legal obstacles impacting cross-border regions, and to prevent new ones.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

² Regulation (EU) 2025/925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 May 2025 on a Border Regions' instrument for development and growth (BRIDGEforEU).

2.7. Support to Moldova for accession negotiations

Type of applicants targeted by the direct grant

The beneficiary of the grant is the State Chancellery of Moldova in charge of the External Assistance and European Funds Coordination Department. This is the official national institution directly responsible for the accession negotiations under Chapter 22³ and the management of EU funds.

The grant will be awarded without a call for proposals on the basis of point (c) of Article 198 of the Financial Regulation, i.e. to bodies with a de jure or de facto monopoly or to bodies designated by Member States, under their responsibility, where those Member States are in a de jure or de facto monopoly situation.

Description of the activities to be funded by the grant awarded without a call for proposals, on the basis of Article 198(c) of the Financial Regulation, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The action aims to support Moldova in its process to accession to the EU. The activities under this action will include: identification of existing gaps for national/regional development strategies in respect with the EU Cohesion Policy priorities and policy objectives and recommendations for better alignment; support in defining roles for the bodies implementing cohesion policy; defining and setting up a national co-financing mechanism for EU funded projects; development of a monitoring and evaluation framework compatible with EU requirements etc., depending on the identified needs.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

2.8. Capacity building for Ukrainian regional policy stakeholders

Type of applicants targeted by the call for proposals

The applicants targeted by the call are non-for-profit and profit-making entities, educational institutions, registered in the EU or Ukraine with relevant previous experience.

The applicants should prove the following knowledge and expertise: regional development and cohesion policy; strategic planning and project cycle management; knowledge of Ukrainian legislative and policy framework related to regional policy; at least two years of experience in training courses for adult audience development and delivery.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The action aims to develop learning materials for Ukrainian regional development professionals at the national and subnational levels, using innovative interactive learning techniques, available through online learning platforms. The materials, to be developed in Ukrainian language, will cover the EU best practices related to cohesion policy and provide an overview of existing instruments and policies related to regional development, including

³ REGIO is chef de file for Chapter 22 of the accession negotiations, which includes regional policy and coordination of structural instruments.

visibility and dissemination components.

The action continues building upon previous TA initiatives on Ukraine's officials' capacity building and is complementary to the trainings within the EU-financed "ULEAD with Ukraine", which are focused primarily on individual aspects of the communities management, POLARIS project by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, providing exchanges and study trips to Ukrainian local authorities and by the CoR-financed TIPS4Ukraine with training and internship support to the limited number of municipal officials (20 persons). The action targets all Ukrainian regions.

As a result of the action, the knowledge of the EU regional policy best practices and instruments is enhanced at the national and subnational level. Deliverables of the action include the provision of innovative and interactive learning tools, available through the platforms of knowledge for regional development professionals, in Ukrainian language. The ability to formulate the projects for funding through different national and international funding sources will be enhanced and the capacity to participate effectively in the cooperation with the EU regional and national authorities in the domain of the regional development and cohesion policy strengthened.

The action supports the overall enlargement process, in particular the process of transposition of the EU acquis to Ukraine's legislative and administrative domain in accordance with the recommendations and observation of the screening report for Ukraine (Chapter 22) and enlargement report for Ukraine 2025.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

3. Prizes

The global budgetary envelope reserved for contests in 2026 is estimated at EUR 200 000 of which EUR 170 000 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line E.05020200 and EUR 30 000 will be supported from Cohesion Fund operational budget line E.05030200.

Description of the activities to be funded under the call for proposals, as well as of the objectives pursued and the expected results:

The New European Bauhaus (NEB) is an initiative launched by President von der Leyen in her address on the State of the Union on 16 September 2020. The initiative has the ambition to make the Green Deal a cultural, human-centred and positive, tangible experience and accelerate a sustainable greening of the built environment. More specifically, its objective is to articulate, in an innovative way, three key dimensions:

- sustainability (including circularity),
- aesthetics (and other dimensions of the quality of experience beyond functionality),
- inclusion (including accessibility and affordability).

The NEB Prizes competition supports the identification of exemplary projects with a positive impact in terms of promoting sustainable practices and solutions to our living spaces, going further beyond this dimension by simultaneously promoting inclusiveness and quality of experience for citizens. This competition boosts the engagement of citizens across Europe with the goals of the European Green Deal, and gauges on the existing expertise and creativity of citizens to deliver new innovative solutions to tackle the climate crisis and, at

the same time, make our living spaces more inclusive and pleasant. Many of the projects received through the NEB Prizes competition can be relevant for the programmes funded under cohesion policy. They serve as an inspiration on how to invest in local solutions that deliver on our climate goals and develop a more inclusive and participatory society. The 2026 NEB prizes will be awarded to the authors of projects reflecting the values of the New European Bauhaus. Following the political directions of the years to come, the priority focus area of the 2026 edition of the competition will be framed by the Commission Communication on NEB⁴.

Type of participants targeted by the contest

Applicants of all nationalities and backgrounds are eligible if their concepts and projects are implemented in the EU, the Western Balkans, Ukraine or Moldova. Applicants can submit their proposals as individuals, organisations, individuals in partnership with organisations, and organisations in partnership with other organisations.

Implementation

The action will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

4. Procurement

The global budgetary envelope reserved for procurement contracts in 2026 is estimated at EUR 59 319 385 of which EUR 45 013 929 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line 05.020200; EUR 7 783 804 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line REACT-EU 05.020502-NGEU and EUR 6 521 652 will be supported from Cohesion Fund operational budget line 05.030200.

4.1. Service contracts

General description of the contracts envisaged, including the objectives pursued and expected results

The procurement budget will be used to implement service contracts (both direct and specific under framework contracts) that will cover:

- Audit
- Communication and Publication
- Evaluation
- Informatics (IT)
- Meetings and Conferences
- Studies, statistics and data collection
- Technical and other administrative assistance to Member States
- Translations (externalised)

⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “New European Bauhaus – from vision to implementation” - COM(2025)1026 final of 16.12.2025.

- Trainings (externalised)

These procurement contracts, following several open and negotiated procedures, may support preparatory, monitoring, control, audit, evaluation, communication including corporate communication on the political priorities of the Union, visibility and all administrative and technical assistance actions necessary for the implementation of the CPR and, where appropriate, with third countries, at the initiative of the Commission.

IT development and procurement strategy choices will be subject to pre-approval by the European Commission Information Technology and Cybersecurity Board.

Implementation

Part of the procurement budget will be co-delegated via a co-delegation Type II, according to the Commission Decision C(2024) 6814 final of 30.09.2024 on the internal rules for the implementation of the Commission section of the general budget of the European Union, as follows:

- *Audit*

To DG EMPL to contribute to the ARACHNE project that is developing, testing and implementing a risk scoring tool.

To DIGIT as a contribution for the corporate ARACHNE IT project.

- *Communication and Publications*

To the Publications Office for publications and printing services and for EC Library subscriptions.

To DG COMM for contributions to the Corporate Communication.

To DG CNECT as a contribution to the Kohesio project.

- *IT*

To DIGIT for corporate IT services and for some services not covered by corporate baseline services.

To DG BUDG for ABAC DBD links and for SUMMA extension.

To DG EMPL for IT audit tool MAPAR.

- *Statistics and Data Collection*

To DG ESTAT for access to geospatial data.

- *Technical and other administrative assistance to Member States*

To DG AGRI for running the Brussels based Facility for Broadband Competence Offices and for support to the Rural Pact.

- *Translations*

To DGT.

The rest of the procurement budget will be implemented directly by DG REGIO.

5. Actions implemented under indirect management

The global budgetary envelope reserved for actions to be implemented in indirect management in 2026 is estimated at EUR 18 095 000 of which EUR 14 870 750 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line 05.020200; EUR 510 000 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line REACT-EU 05.020502-NGEU and EUR 2 714 250 will be supported from Cohesion Fund operational budget line 05.030200.

5.1. Co-operation with OECD

Implementing entity

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Description of the entrusted tasks, including the objectives pursued and expected results

- **Conferences on economic policy for cohesion**

The action aims to gather intelligence and evidence from scholars active in the field of regional policy analysis, for the preparation of the 10th Cohesion Report.

The action supports the organisation of two workshops: (1) “National strategies for regional convergence”, which will cover the national part and (2) “The general equilibrium effects of cohesion policy”, which will cover modern analyses of regional policy.

- **Extension of the regional cost-of-living project**

The action aims to broaden the geographical coverage of a current action aiming at developing proxies for subnational purchasing power parities (PPPs) and consumer price indexes (CPIs) for regions in OECD countries and selected economies.

Subnational Cost of Living indexes and PPPs measure differences in regional price levels by indicating how much money needs to be spent to buy a particular goods basket in one region relative to the price of the same goods basket in another region. They are crucial to understanding how economic conditions change in regions relative to each other and, therefore, necessary to assess economic convergence, but also to understand the true cost of services and therefore population movements.

The current project covers Germany, Czechia, and the United Kingdom and the amendment would cover 4 more countries. Once the methodology is mature, the study will be extended to cover also 3-4 more smaller Member States.

- **Study on optimising financing capacity of subnational entities**

The action aims to optimise the investment financing capacity of subnational entities. This would include identifying and activating available levers, with a view to the future programming period, where investments will be coupled with targeted reforms.

To this end, a sample of local and regional authorities will be scrutinised, with a view to assessing their untapped potential in raising resources from public assets. Recommendations will be drawn accordingly, identifying good practices, which will be shared broadly.

The outcome should be available early 2027 and will help geographical units in engaging in the negotiations of the future national and regional partnership plans (NRPPs), regarding measures and actions to be promoted under the specific objective “enhancing the efficiency of public administration and the institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders at national, regional and local level”.

- Innovative implementation of partnership principle & citizen engagement

This action seeks to embed citizen participation more firmly within EU Cohesion Policy, ensuring that public policies are better aligned with people's needs and that no community or individual is left behind. Building on earlier project phases, which supported 16 pilot territories across 9 EU countries (including two Interreg programmes) in designing, implementing, and institutionalizing innovative participation processes throughout the policy cycle, the new action will broaden this work. It will engage additional Managing Authorities and cities, strengthening their ability to reflect citizens' priorities and enhancing the policy's impact in key areas of the European Commission's agenda, such as affordable housing and climate adaptation.

The deliverables will include practical tools and guidance for managing authorities and cities to enhance citizen participation; capacity-building workshop and trainings on innovative citizen participation, including innovation methods and future looking approaches, digital and emerging technologies (artificial intelligence) for meaningful and effective participation.

- Diagnostic Tool to improve regulatory frameworks on Renewable Energy in Croatia and Romania

This action aims to apply the OECD Diagnostic Tool in Renewable Energy to map existing regulatory barriers in Croatia and Romania for the deployment of renewable energy technologies and the provision of potential solutions to address them in workshops organised in the targeted regions. This action will also raise awareness in the two countries on the importance of updating their policies and rules to facilitate entry and scaling of the selected clean technologies.

This action is linked to a project funded by DG REGIO in 2024, through which the OECD developed the Diagnostic Tool in Renewable Energy, contributing to achieve the EU climate and energy transition objectives.

The results will also inform DG REGIO services to propose targeted recommendations in the context of the European Semester exercise, and to better negotiate investments and reforms under the future Cohesion Policy framework in the two countries.

5.2. Cooperation with EIB – JASPERS 2026

Implementing entity

In the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, JASPERS will be implemented by the EIB and will pursue the following strategic objective: assisting in the quality and timely delivery of projects in the Cohesion Policy.

Description of the entrusted tasks, including the objectives pursued and expected results

JASPERS will provide targeted, advisory support to Managing Authorities and project beneficiaries during the whole life cycle of projects starting from identification, selection, development and approval of projects financed by the Funds, as well as for the financial closing of projects and their subsequent implementation and completion.

5.3. Experimentation on evaluation

Implementing entity

The action will be implemented by an international organisation that fulfils reporting, auditing, and transparency requirements defined in Article 159 of the Financial Regulation. The implementing entity will have to comply with indirect management mode conditions and applicable legal requirements. The selected entity will have expertise in key cohesion policy areas, including regional competitiveness, social inclusion, and sustainable growth, with proven experience of analysis of and work with Member States.

Description of the entrusted tasks, including the objectives pursued and expected results

The action aims to improve the knowledge accumulated on the design and implementation of cohesion policy by using experimental evaluation approaches in selected Member States. The experimental approaches will be used to increase the quantity and the quality of the evidence available on the effectiveness of the investments supported by cohesion policy.

6. Other actions or expenditure

6.1. Expert contracts – AMI list

Amount

The amount in 2026 is estimated at EUR 1 820 000 of which EUR 1 634 500 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line 05.020200; EUR 59 500 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line REACT-EU 05.020502-NGEU and EUR 126 000 will be supported from Cohesion Fund operational budget line 05.030200.

Description

This action covers expenses for technical assistance provided by experts through simplified experts contracts based on the DG REGIO AMI-list⁵.

Experts will mainly give advice on the implementation of programmes in the Member States, the design of post-2027 programmes, the assessment of selected Cohesion Policy related topics, support with audit issues, administrative capacity building etc.

6.2. Service-level agreements with the Joint Research Centre (JRC)

Amount

The amount in 2026 is estimated at EUR 3 250 000 of which EUR 2 837 500 will be supported from ERDF operational budget line 05.020200 and EUR 412 500 will be supported from Cohesion Fund operational budget line 05.030200.

⁵ Call for expressions of interest 2022/S 065-167519-01/04/2022 for external experts to support the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Description

- **Contribution to NEB Festival 2026**

Contribution to the organisation of the New European Bauhaus Festival 2026, organised by JRC.

- **Right to stay: Support to regions to address territorial challenges, including demographic change**

The action will support regions in ensuring ‘effective right to stay’ and contribute to the implementation of a new policy initiative foreseen by end 2026/early 2027. It will build on and further develop the work on the Harnessing Talent Communication and its Talent Booster Mechanism (already supported with REGIO TA actions from 2022).

Some of the deliverables include ‘hands-on’ technical assistance and the development of a methodology/roadmap with practical policy, governance, innovation and/or financial and technical guidance; multi-level dialogue opportunities/networking; and capacity building events and policy seminars; an IT online platform for data focused on Right to Stay indicators, with consideration given to a solution integrating this data into an existing, comprehensive data portal. The action will also support the preparations for the programming and implementation of post-2027 funding.

- **STRAT-Board update for 2026**

STRAT-Board is an interactive tool that provides a comprehensive overview of how EU Cohesion Policy supports integrated urban and territorial development. It serves as a central repository of integrated territorial strategies implemented across the EU in the 2021–2027 period, built in close cooperation with Managing Authorities from all Member States. The tool is public and is maintained and updated by JRC.

- **Cities and Rural Integrated Spatial Projections (CRISP)**

The action will support the following activities: updating and maintaining the Annual Regional Database (ARDECO); a new and updated global cities database; a new and improved global set of functional urban areas (the last one was published in 2019); measures of urban green and urban expansion at the kilometric and the 100m scale for the EU and the globe; update and maintain the EU Urban Data Platform in support of the EU cities agenda. Wherever possible, the action will consider a solution integrating the global cities data and urban data into an existing comprehensive data portal.

- **Composite Indices and Quality of Life in EU Cities report**

The action covers a 3-year (2026-2029) agreement with JRC to cover our composite indexes and the Quality of Life in EU Cities report. It supports REGIO analytical work on regional competitiveness (Regional Competitiveness Index), the monitoring of socio-economic cohesion at territorial level (European Social Progress and the Regional Female Achievement and Disadvantage Indices) as well as the cities policy agenda (Quality of Life in European Cities report). In addition to the composite indices, the agreement with JRC will cover the next edition of the Quality of Life in European Cities.

- **Territorial industrial data and modelling work**

The action will support the analytical capacity of REGIO to respond effectively to new, pressing requests over the next two years, by granting access to: the FIGARO-REG project, which is essential for analysing regional value chains and inter-regional dependency; regional data on gross value added by industry that is not available in official statistics. This collaboration will also enable us to use RHOMOLO's modelling infrastructure to explore specific regional development mechanisms and provide insights to inform the development strategies of less developed regions.