The role of the European Social Fund + in supporting social inclusion in rural areas

Presented at the Rural Pact Conference

17 September 2025

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The role of the ESF+

EU’s key instrument for investing in people

Mission: to improve employment opportunities for workers in the Union (Art 162 TFEU) and to contribute to economic, social and territorial cohesion (Art 174 and 175 TFEU) (ERDF, CF).

Concretely: It helps to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and overcome challenges identified in the framework of the European Semester recommendations.

EU budget for ESF+ 2021-2027

€95 billion

Investments are implemented by:

Member States, which supplement €95 billion by the EU with their own budget, reaching:

Over €140 billion

Articles 7-24

European Commission under the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) Strand

€762 million

Articles 25-29

ESF+ Priorities

- EUR 44 billion to investments in employment,
- **EUR 45,5 billion to investments in social inclusion,**
- EUR 64.6 billion to investments in education and skills,
- **EUR 5,3 billion to investments addressing material deprivation.**

ESF+ specific objectives

EMPLOYMENT

- (a) Access to employment of all jobseekers
- (b) Modernising labour market institutions and services
- (c) Gender-balanced labour market participation, work/life balance
- (d) adaptation of workers & enterprises, well-adapted working environment, active & healthy ageing

EDUCATION TRAINING

- (e) Improving the quality, effectiveness and labour market relevance of education and training systems
- (f) Promoting equal access to and completion of, quality and inclusive education
- (g) Lifelong learning, re- and up-skilling, anticipating change and new skills requirements

SOCIAL INCLUSION

- (h) Active inclusion
- (i) Promoting socio-economic integration of third-country nationals, including migrants
- (j) promoting socio-economic integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma
- (k) Equal and timely access to services incl housing; social protection, healthcare systems and long-term care
- (l) Social integration of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- (m) Addressing material deprivation, including accompanying measures

ESF+ support to social inclusion

Thematic concentrations for Social Inclusion

Thematic concentration of **25% for social inclusion**:

“Member States shall allocate at least 25 % of their resources of the ESF+ strand under shared management to the specific objectives for the social inclusion policy area (…)". Calculated on proportion of the EU amount.

On average, Member States invest 31% of their resources to social inclusion (based on EU amount).

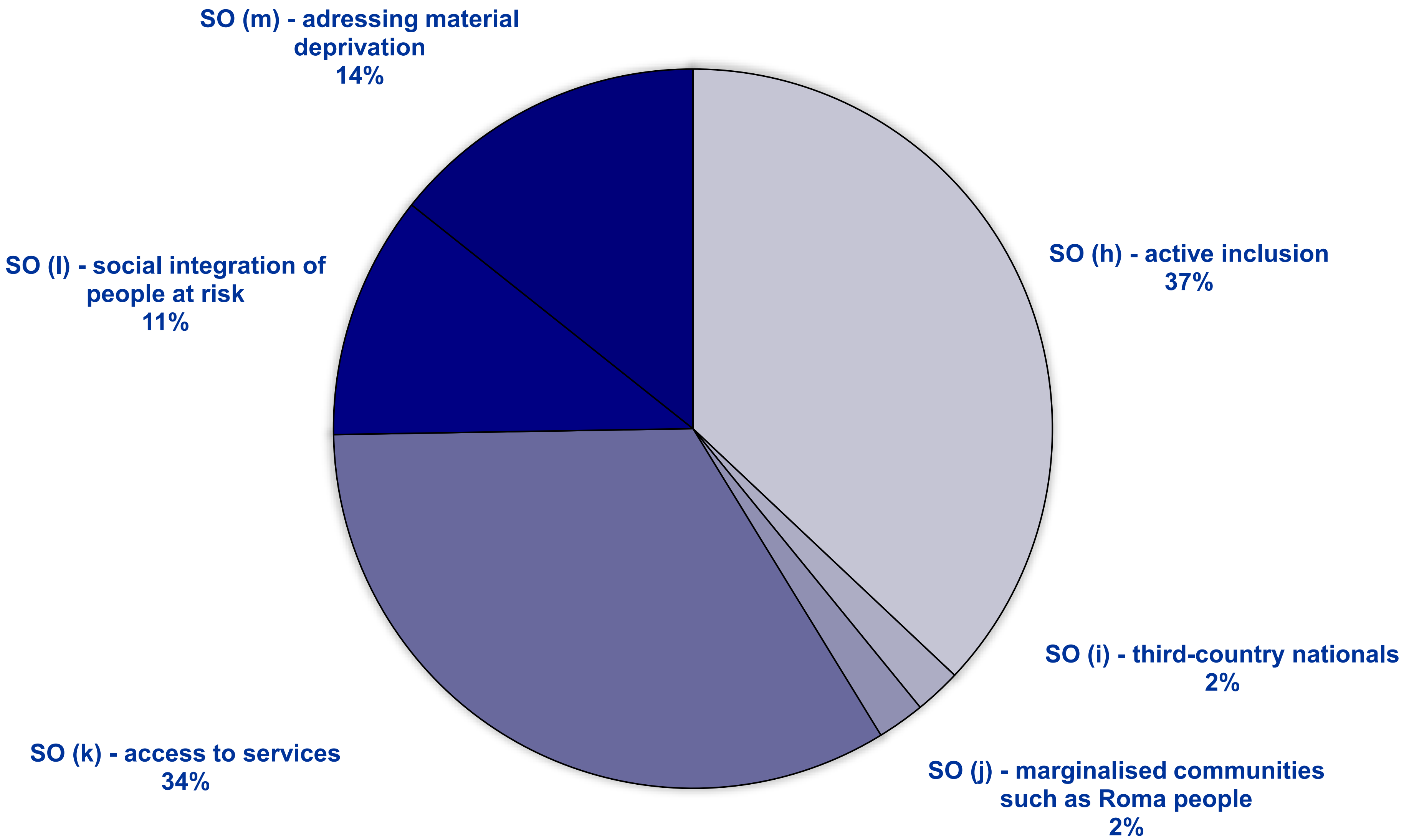
Thematic concentration of at least **5% to address child poverty** in MS that exceeded the EU average of children at risk of poverty between 2017 and 2019.

On average, Member States invest 7% (based on EU amount).

Additionally, thematic concentration of at least 3**% to support the most deprived persons**.

On average, Member States invest 5.5% (based on EU amount). Some Member States go beyond 8% (LU/FR/RO/CY).

ESF+ investments in Social Inclusion per Specific Objective (SO)



ESF+ support to social inclusion in rural areas: instruments/examples

ESF + achievements in rural areas

In the current programming period (2021-2027), until the end of 2024, around **1.4 million people were reached in rural areas** *(tracked via EECO17 – Participants from Rural Areas)*. This corresponds to around **18% of total participants** to ESF+ funded projects.

ESF+ support for individuals living in rural areas is also particularly strong in countries like **Denmark, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia**, where ESF+ funded operations reached **more than 40% of their participants in rural areas** by the end of 2024.

ESF+ territorial delivery mechanisms

Integrated Territorial Development for funds regulated under the **CPR (Regulation (EU) 1060/2021 (incl. the ESF+)** are defined by Annex 1 (Table 3) under the codes for **Territorial Delivery Mechanisms**, defining 8 types of territorial targets.

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)
Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)
Other Territorial Tools
Other approaches not under PO5

EUR 6.4 billion

Of investment reported under one of the territorial delivery mechanisms (ITI, CLLD or other territorial approaches)

CLLD is the most used for rural areas.

Rural Areas target	Incl. other targets associated to rural contexts
EUR 1.29 billion	EUR 3.49 billion
EUR 335 million	EUR 432 million

In Member States having reported ESF+ investments for the Rural Area target under CLLDs and ITIs:

DE	EUR 25.8 million
EE	EUR 7.1 million
EL	EUR 2.5 million
IT	EUR 7.5 million
PL	EUR 209.4 million
RO	EUR 181.8 million

CLLD and ITI in action for Socially Inclusive Rural Areas

ITI Strategy of Castilla-La-Mancha

Funds: ERDF, EAFRD, ESF+
Amount: EUR 3.48 million (EUR 620 000 of ESF)
Programming period: 2014-2020

Activities: The central objective is the socio-demographic recovery of the areas, through three development vectors: digitalisation of the territory, promotion of economic activity, and sustainable use of available resources. It fosters employment opportunities for vulnerable target groups.

Multi fund CLLD – Boskovice Region

Funds: ERDF, EAFRD, ESF+
Amount: EUR 508 millions (EUR 48 millions of ESF)
Programming period: 2014-2020

Activities: It addresses social exclusion in rural areas by supporting projects focused on: enhancing community engagement and active participation among local residents, strengthening family ties and building community cohesion and improving the living conditions of vulnerable groups, thereby reducing their risk of social exclusion or marginalisation.

Social innovation + Initiative

Beautiful Bees

Funds: ESF+
Amount: EUR 558 134
Programming period: 2021-2027

Activities: The project empowers young rural women through training phases like Inspiration, Coliving, Bootcamp, and Giving Back to boost entrepreneurship and employability. It builds a sisterhood-based community, fosters dialogue with institutions.

Thank you!

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