

Towards a just transition in the national and regional partnership plans: Recommendations on regional chapters

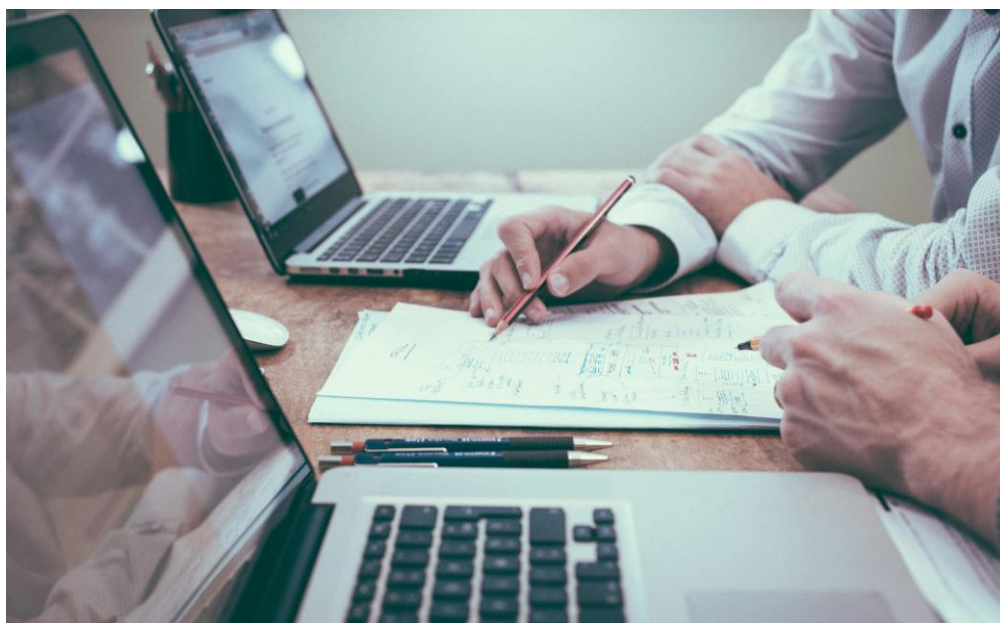


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From 1 January 2028, the EU will operate under a new budgetary framework in which the four existing cohesion policy funds will be merged into a single national and regional partnership plan (NRPP) for each Member State.

The current legal framework for the NRPPs is set out in the European Commission's Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, Agriculture and Rural, Fisheries and Maritime, Prosperity and Security¹ (hereinafter referred to as 'the Proposal'), together with the Template for the National and Regional Partnership Plan contained in Annex V to the Proposal.²

¹ European Commission, [Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#), 16 July 2025.

² European Commission, [Annexes to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#), 10–33, 16 July 2025.

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According to Article 21 of the Proposal, the NRPPs may include regional and territorial chapters, ‘where relevant’,³ but their inclusion is not obligatory.

The case for mandatory regional chapters

The decision to make regional chapters voluntary runs counter to the EU’s established commitments to regional ownership and the place-based approach to development. By leaving these chapters optional, regional contributions to the NRPPs would remain dependent on the willingness of managing authorities at the national level.

This imbalance is highly likely to further concentrate resources within major urban centres while marginalising peripheral areas of lower strategic importance and carbon-intensive regions that are already lagging behind.

Such an approach could also be exploited through political wrangling between national and regional authorities of different political backgrounds. Furthermore, centralised management of funds can lead to delays in implementation that regions undergoing transition can no longer afford, as well as a lack of adequate inclusion of regional needs and solutions identified locally.

Notably, the European Parliament’s draft report on the Proposal, issued in May 2026, states that regional chapters, as well as sectoral and territorial chapters, should be obligatory parts of the NRPPs and should include territorial just transition strategies.⁴

Regional chapters should therefore be mandatory and subject to approval by the European Commission. They should be developed in cooperation with the relevant local and regional authorities of the territories concerned. To support these efforts, regional and local authorities should be entitled to interact directly with the Commission during the preparation of the chapters and to participate in the approval process.

Where relevant, regional chapters should include dedicated measures to support a just transition. Such support should cover not only territories currently benefiting from the Just Transition Fund but also other emission-heavy and energy-intensive regions facing comparable challenges.

The selection of eligible territories should be guided by criteria similar to those established under the Just Transition Fund Regulation, taking into account the expected reduction in greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the transition, as well as its employment, economic, social and environmental impacts. The EU’s 2025 report on the state of regions and cities should serve as a key reference document in this process.⁵

Given the scale of the transition challenge and the insufficient administrative capacity often found at local and regional levels, dedicated technical assistance must be provided to support the preparation, implementation and monitoring of just transition strategies within regional chapters. This assistance

³ European Commission, [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#), 52.

⁴ European Parliament, [Draft report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509 \(COM\(2025\)0565 – C10-0179/2025 – 2025/0240\(COD\)\)](#), 11 May 2026.

⁵ European Committee of the Regions, [The state of regions and cities: EU annual report 2025](#), 15 October 2025.

should focus primarily on developing robust, evidence-based just transition plans and ensuring their timely and efficient delivery. To this end, 6% of the budget allocated under each national and regional partnership plan should be earmarked for technical assistance and made directly accessible to regional authorities.

A financial framework for the just transition

Just transition funding should be programmed within the relevant categories of regions in which the eligible territories are located and should be based on established just transition plans. These plans should provide detailed information on the elements referred to in point 1.5 of the Template for the National and Regional Partnership Plan.⁶

The plans should build on the existing territorial just transition plans (TJTJs) developed under the Just Transition Fund, while incorporating necessary modifications and amendments. These just transition plans should continue to be developed in accordance with the provisions set out in Article 11 of the Just Transition Fund Regulation.⁷

Co-financing rates for just transition measures should vary according to the region's needs and level of prosperity – preferably up to 85% for less developed regions, 70% for transition regions, and 50% for more developed regions.⁸ In addition, all regions applying for just transition funding should be required to submit credible decarbonisation strategies and transition timelines, irrespective of the general provisions on climate-related earmarking within the NRPPs.

Regional and local authorities should be able to use technical assistance funding to strengthen their capacity to prepare, adjust and implement just transition plans. Experience from implementing the Just Transition Fund has shown that outsourcing the design of the TJTJs can be counterproductive. In several Member States, externally prepared TJTJs failed to reflect national and regional challenges or facilitate effective negotiations with the European Commission.⁹

It is also vital that the lessons learned from implementing the Just Transition Fund are taken into account when drawing up just transition plans under the new Fund. This should include an analysis of which projects delivered the expected results and which did not, examining the reasons for their underperformance and the potential consequences of inaction.

⁶ European Commission, [Annexes to the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#), 12–15.

⁷ European Parliament, Council of the European Union, [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund](#), 10–11, 30 June 2021.

⁸ For the definitions of these regions, see: European Commission, [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion, agriculture and rural, fisheries and maritime, prosperity and security for the period 2028-2034 and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2023/955 and Regulation \(EU, Euratom\) 2024/2509](#), 40.

⁹ Marion Guénard, https://plan4climate.caneurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/NRPP-Report_Plan4Climate-March-2026.pdf Supporting a just transition to climate neutrality through the national and regional partnership pl..., Germanwatch, 15 March 2026.

Essential aspects of just transition plans

1. Demonstrating that the expected transition process leads to a climate-neutral economy through:
 - an annual estimation of greenhouse gas emissions reduced through implementation of the plan;
 - direct references to the national energy and climate plan (NECP) and a clear indication of the methodology proving that the plan contributes to the objectives of the NECP. However, alignment with climate neutrality should take precedence over consistency with the NECP; and
 - an annual estimation of remaining installed capacity of coal and other high-emission industrial activities, depending on regional circumstances.
2. Identifying not only ‘declining’ and ‘transforming’ sectors, as set out in the Just Transition Fund Regulation, but all economic activities within the region, including the development of new skills and new technologies.
3. Assessing existing social challenges in the region. Many mono-industrial regions have faced social disadvantages for decades; therefore, the just transition must also address historic inequalities and find solutions for the most vulnerable groups.
4. Identifying the types of operations envisaged and their expected results. This should also include a list of excluded or unjustified operations under the Just Transition Fund, such as investments in extremely large projects, businesses unable to guarantee quality employment, or investments in unsustainable sectors.
5. Establishing concrete provisions for stakeholder participation and a timeline for the participation procedure.
6. Establishing monitoring and evaluation measures that adhere to the following principles:
 - The definition of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Qualitative indicators may include sustainable development outcomes, contributions to climate neutrality, creation of quality jobs, economic diversification, and improvements in quality of life;
 - The establishment of an effective monitoring body, supported by a verification system of checks and balances to guarantee a meaningful participatory process.

Priority activities for just transition plans

1. Investments in the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises, including microenterprises and startups, leading to economic diversification and modernisation.
2. Investments in the creation of new firms, including through business incubators and consulting services, leading to quality job creation.
3. Investments in research and innovation activities, including by universities and public research organisations, and fostering the transfer of advanced technologies.

4. Deployment of technologies, as well as of systems and infrastructure for affordable clean energy, including energy storage technologies and greenhouse gas emission reduction.
5. Development of renewable energy, in accordance with the 2018 Renewable Energy Directive, incorporating its sustainability criteria, as well as energy efficiency measures, including those addressing energy poverty.
6. Investments in smart and sustainable local mobility, including decarbonisation of local transport systems and infrastructure.
7. Rehabilitation and upgrading of district heating networks to improve energy efficiency, including heat production installations supplied exclusively from renewable energy sources.
8. Investments in digitalisation, digital innovation and digital connectivity.
9. Regeneration and decontamination of brownfield sites and land restoration, including green infrastructure and repurposing projects, taking into account the ‘polluter pays’ principle.
10. Enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling.
11. Upskilling and reskilling of workers and jobseekers, as well as job-search assistance and active inclusion of those seeking employment.
12. Other activities in the areas of education and social inclusion.

Conclusions

No region – whether it has already embarked on the just transition or has yet to begin – will be able to develop without dedicated financial support. This is not solely a matter of delivering an energy transition consistent with the EU’s climate policy targets, but of ensuring the comprehensive economic and social development of these parts of the Union.

If Europe is to maintain its strength and competitiveness, its key industrial regions must not become ‘blank spots’ on the map, mired in decline and continued dependence on outdated, unprofitable sectors of the economy. The only way to avoid this path is to ensure that the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework provides adequate funding for the regions concerned – funding that is targeted, well-planned, and placed in the hands of local authorities and communities, with state support where necessary.



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