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Freistaat Thüringen

Ministerium für Wirtschaft, Landwirtschaft und Ländlichen Raum

Mid-term evaluation of the Thuringia ERDF 2021-2027 programme

Executive Summary

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Co-funded by the European Union

Contractor

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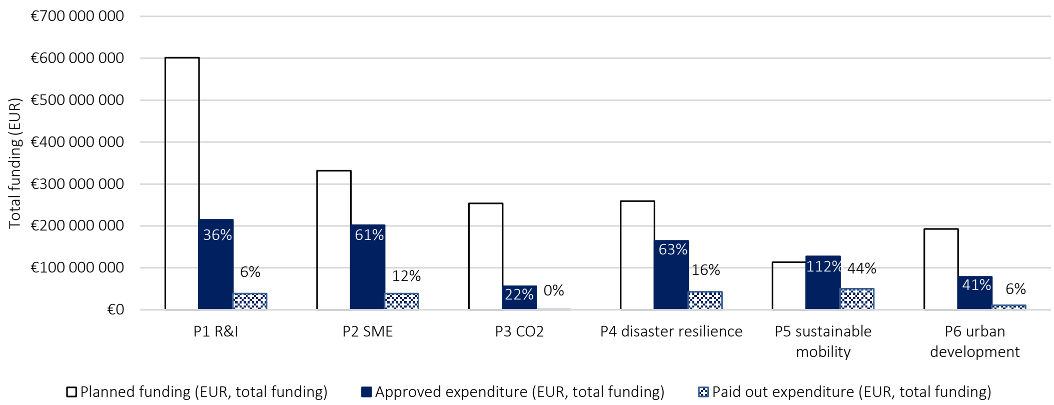
The programme ERDF Thuringia 2021-2027 provides around EUR 1.82 billion in total funding (including technical assistance), of which around 1.09 billion euros are ERDF means. These funds are dedicated to support actions under PO1, PO2 and PO5. The programme is supporting investments in *research, innovation and development* (priority 1), *enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs* (priority 2), *reducing CO_2 emissions* (priority 3), *disaster resilience* (priority 4), *sustainable mobility* (priority 5) and *integrated urban development* (priority 6).

State of implementation and challenges

By introducing regulatory uncertainty, the late adoption of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 and associated sectoral regulations contributed to the delayed start of the ERDF Thuringia programme. In addition, the overlap between the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 periods and the additional implementation of REACT-EU constrained available personnel resources and implementing capacities.

Allocation of ERDF 2021-2027 funding (total funding, absolute and relative to the planned value for 2029)



Source: ÖIR GmbH, 2025, with data values corresponding to state of implementation on 31 December 2024; Note: The percentage values correspond to the relative approval and disbursement status at priority level; the columns correspond to the absolute approval and disbursement volumes.

Nevertheless, the programme features a relatively advanced state of implementation: the rates of allocated and paid-out funding of the 2021-2027 programme are generally above the European and German average for most specific objectives. By 31 December 2024, EUR 842.3 million in total funding had been approved and EUR 180.9 million paid out. This puts the implementation status of the 2021-2027 programme at around 48% of total funding approved and 10% paid out.

Implementation is advanced in the case of SME support (priority 2; RSO 1.3; 61% of total funds approved) and for investments targeting disaster resilience (priority 4; RSO 2.4; 63%). Funds dedicated to sustainable mobility (priority 5; RSO 2.8; 112%) are already fully committed, though the overcommitment is only observed for national means. The approval and disbursement status of investments targeting research and innovation (priority 1; RSO 1.1; 36%) and for integrated urban development (priority 6; RSO 5.1; 41%) are developing positively. In the case of priority 6, significant catch-up effects were observed during 2024. Relatively less implementation progress can be seen for investments targeting CO_2 reductions (priority 3; RSO 2.1; 22%).

Implementation difficulties in relation to the achievement of the 2024 milestones were observed particularly in parts of priorities 2 SMEs and 3 CO_2. Within priority 2, reserved funding for the measure the “GreenInvest Ress Grants” has hardly been utilised to date, with only a very limited number of applications. There are challenges implementing the priority 3 measures “Heating networks and renovation projects outside of central places” and “energy efficiency enhancement for the Thuringian State computer centre (TLRZ)” due to persisting delays in setting up and finalising the measures. For the remaining measures of priority 3, initial delays were encountered due to preceding urban development competition and due to the complexity of the supported investments. However, no further significant delays or implementation difficulties are expected in priority 3, other than in the indicate measures.

Achievement of the 2029 targets

The programme is likely to achieve its implementation 2029 targets for most specific objectives. Implementation accelerated significantly throughout 2024, with sharply rising rates of project approvals and payments. As such, the target values of output indicators for priority 1 *research and innovation*, priority 4 *disaster resilience*, priority 5 *public transport* and priority 6 *integrated urban development* are likely to be achieved. However, full achievement of the target values for priorities 2 *SME* and 3 *CO_2* is unlikely due to implementation difficulties of individual measures.

Appropriateness of measures for the timely use of available funding

No significant change to the programme is necessary from new or emerging socio-economic developments in Thuringia. The programme continues to address structural needs throughout the state. However, the evaluators recommend targeting additional needs in parts of the programme (e.g. by accounting for flooding from heavy rainfall events as part of priority 4) and maintaining a high degree of flexibility in the programme’s funding scope (as part of priority 6).

Beyond these two aspects, the evaluators recommend the inclusion of measures supporting the objectives of the STEP Regulation (EU) 2024/795 and the final allocation of flexibility amount.

Inclusion of STEP objectives

The aim of the STEP Regulation (EU) 2024/795 (“STEP”) is to support critical and emerging technologies and their value chains in the European Union. The regulation aims to secure and strengthen the development and innovation capacity and associated value chains to reduce the EU’s strategic dependencies in a variety of critical sectors.

- Measures in line with STEP objectives can be introduced under PO1 of the programme, adapting existing measures from RSO 1.1. Such measures can be introduced to promote targeted research and development in digital, environmentally friendly and resource-efficient technologies, biotechnologies and technology-intensive innovation in Thuringia. Supported activities can include innovation operations and research activities of individual companies as well as joint R&D and R&D transfer operations. Opening R&D funding to large companies selectively expands the target group of potential beneficiaries and enables increased support for innovation development in critical sectors.
- The evaluators recommend a limited roll-out of measures contributing to STEP objectives due to the **relatively** advanced state of programme implementation and the small-scale

economic structure of Thuringia. Further, only a small number of large companies in Thuringia have dedicated R&D departments. The funding for measures contributing to STEP objectives can be made available by a partial allocation of the flexibility amount still to be allocated from priority 1 (RSO 1.1).

Partial reallocation of the flexibility amount

Around EUR 157 million of the approximately EUR 1.05 billion (excluding technical assistance) in EU funds for the programme constitute the flexibility amount. A proposal for the allocation of these funds must be submitted to the European Commission by 31 March 2025.

- Funding planned for priorities 2 (RSO 1.3) and 3 (RSO 2.1) by 2029 will likely not be fully implemented due to implementation difficulties of individual measures. Therefore, the evaluators recommend transferring parts of the flexibility amount tied to underperforming measures to other priorities of the programme with greater potential to implement funds. Additional demand for funding has been identified for measures in priorities 4 (RSO 2.4) and 5 (RSO 2.8). As such, the evaluators recommend an allocation of the flexibility amounts of priorities 2 and 3 to priorities 4 and 5.
- A reallocation of part of the flexibility amount of priority 3 (RSO 2.1) to priority 4 (RSO 2.4) makes it possible to utilise the funds within the scope of PO2. It also contributes to maintaining thematic concentration requirements (funds originally dedicated to the promotion of climate protection projects are used to support climate adaptation in Thuringia). As a complete reallocation within PO1 is not realistic, a partial reallocation of funds from the flexibility amount of priority 2 (RSO 1.3) to priority 5 (RSO 2.8) is recommended (supporting the e-mobility in public transport).

The recommended reallocation of the flexibility amounts is in line with thematic concentration requirements. Further, with the proposed programme adjustment, a full utilisation of the available funds and achievement of the output targets 2029 appears realistic.