

EU funds absorption for Romanian rural municipalities: a spatial distribution

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Abstract

This study analyzes the spatial differences in EU funds absorption among Romanian rural municipalities through the 2014-2020 programming period. The absorption capacity for EU funds is measured by the volume of spent EU funds by inhabitant, for each Romanian rural municipality. The results of the analysis highlight the importance of the territorial dimension when studying the distribution of EU funds among the rural municipalities of Romania. Affiliation with a specific development region (NUTS 2), county (NUTS 3) or a functional urban area (FUA) is used to differentiate the volume of absorbed EU funds. Levels of fiscal capacity, locality development, EU and state budget funding experience, and population dynamics in 2021 compared to those in 2014 are also used to distinguish between categories of municipalities receiving EU funds. In Romania, rural municipalities with higher levels of absorbed EU funding are, to a statistically higher extent, located in development regions in the Center, North–West, South West and West of the country; in communes with no change, or even an increase, in population between 2021 and 2014; in the highest quartile of fiscal capacity and in communes with experience with EU funding from the preceding programming period. This article adds to the growing body of territorial evidence and can be used as a policy instrument to more closely examine the intervention tools embedded in EU funding policy. From a systemic approach, the results of the analysis are valuable for the design of integrated place-based strategies for EU, national and local level stakeholders, with the ultimate goal of improving quality of life for citizens living in rural areas.

Keywords: EU funds; rural municipalities; Romania; region; county.

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