Recovery plan for Europe: State of play

SUMMARY

In December 2020, the adoption of the legislative package on the 2021–2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU (NGEU) recovery instrument marked the end of an important stage in the process of launching a unique financial stimulus package – the recovery plan for Europe. However, in order to make the plan fully operational, additional conditions need to be met and preparatory steps completed.

First, there is the financing of NGEU, based on borrowing operations carried out by the European Commission on behalf of the European Union. These operations could start only once the Member States had ratified the Own Resources Decision (ORD). This procedure was completed before the end of May 2021. In the meantime, the Commission started preparing for its role as a borrower on an unprecedented scale and published its diversified funding strategy for the financing of NGEU. The Commission has ensured that the preparations are advanced and that it would be ready to begin the borrowing operations as soon as ratification of the ORD was finalised and the act in force.

In parallel, preparations are ongoing for the spending of the biggest part of NGEU (90%) under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). This process includes the drawing up of national recovery and resilience plans by the Member States, their evaluation by the European Commission, and approval by the Council of the EU. Only then will the Commission conclude an agreement with each Member State on a legal commitment authorising the financial contribution to be made, and begin pre-financing. An indicative timeline of the whole process shows that the first payments for Member States could be made between July and September 2021.

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Recovery plan for the EU: Key elements

The recovery plan for the EU is worth €2.018 trillion (current prices)¹ and consists of two parts: the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027 (MFF), and the 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) European recovery instrument for the years 2021 to 2023 (Figure 1).² In both cases, the time frame concerns the period for making legal commitments giving rise to expenditure. While the MFF ensures financial predictability for investments and means to implement various EU policies in the medium and long term, the NGEU is a temporary, short-term instrument, addressing the consequences of and challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.³

As well as covering different periods of time, the MFF and NGEU differ in their sources of financing. The MFF is financed from the EU’s own resources. Most (70 %) comes from direct payments from the Member States’ national budgets, calculated on the basis of gross national income (GNI). The rest is from customs duties, contributions based on value added tax (VAT) collected by the Member States, and since 2021, from a national contribution based on non-recycled plastic packaging waste. NGEU, however, will be financed from money borrowed by the Commission on behalf of the EU on the international capital markets. The first borrowing operations may begin in mid-2021, if all procedural requirements are fulfilled (see below). Then, as of 2028 and by 2058 at the latest, NGEU should be repaid from the EU’s own resources (the EU budget will repay the grants and their borrowing costs, while the Member States that have taken loans will be responsible for their repayment).⁴ To help repay the borrowing, new sources of revenue for the EU should be in place by that time. Therefore, according to a roadmap agreed by the European Parliament and the Member States, the Commission is to put forward concrete proposals on new own resources in 2021 and in 2024. The

Figure 1 – Overview of the recovery plan for Europe, € billion, current prices.

Source: EPRS based on European Commission data.
list of possible options includes revenue linked to a carbon border adjustment mechanism, a digital levy, the EU emissions trading system, a financial transaction tax, a financial contribution linked to the corporate sector and a new common corporate tax base.5

The resources borrowed under NGEU will be spent in the form of grants and loans through a package of programmes addressing different issues relating to the recovery and resilience of the EU economy and society. A small share (€83.1 billion, i.e. 10 %) will temporarily reinforce selected programmes existing under the 2021-2027 MFF. In other words, in the coming two to three years, Horizon Europe, InvestEU, rescEU, and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) will be partly financed and implemented under the MFF and partly under NGEU. The proportions of the NGEU and MFF component vary by programme. While the total NGEU allocation for Horizon Europe amounts to 6 %, in the JTF it is 56 %.

Similarly, funds from the EU borrowing operation under NGEU will reinforce MFF spending in the area of EU cohesion and rural development. REACT-EU (recovery assistance for cohesion and the
territories of Europe), endowed with €50.62 billion (12.6% of the total allocation for cohesion policy), will complement action under the two main cohesion policy funds – the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund. The support dedicated to post-pandemic recovery for rural development amounts to €8.1 billion (8.5% of the total allocation on rural development), and will be spent through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

However, the bulk of NGEU, 90% of the total allocation, will be implemented through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). This entirely new instrument was set up to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic in the Member States, and to make Europe more resilient, green and digital (see below). The RRF €723.8 billion allocation is divided between non-repayable grants (€338 billion) and loans (€385.8 billion). The Member States’ maximum indicative financial envelopes under the RRF have been decided in advance and pre-allocated (see below for details).

Alongside the RRF, the funds under the JTF, REACT-EU and rural development have also been pre-allocated to the Member States. Each instrument is distributed based on a different set of criteria, as laid down in the relevant legal acts. As for the RRF, in order to receive the funds, Member States must deliver strategies and investment plans describing the way they want to use the money (see below).

Figure 2 (above) shows the indicative pre-allocations per Member State and per citizen. The greatest beneficiaries are the citizens of Greece (€1 898), Croatia (€1 770) and Spain (€1 724). At the other end of the list are the citizens of Ireland (€267), Denmark (€323) and Germany (€356). Luxembourg is the only Member State for which the RRF does not represent the largest share of pre-allocated funds per capita. Luxembourg can receive more per capita from REACT-EU (€224) than from the RFF (€160).

The NGEU contribution to Horizon Europe, rescEU and InvestEU will be allocated to different beneficiaries in the Member States on a competitive basis, depending on the rules laid down in the programme-specific regulations.

Steps in the RRF activation and implementation process

In December 2020, adoption of the legislative package including the 2021-2027 MFF, NGEU and the decision on new own resources marked the completion of an important stage in the process of launching the recovery plan for Europe. It was not, however, the last hurdle. Implementation of the 2021-2027 MFF began on 1 January 2021, but additional conditions must be met before NGEU, and thereby the RRF, becomes operational (see Figure 3, below).

Before the first disbursements for Member States can begin under the RRF, a number of procedural and preparatory steps must be completed. They concern two areas in parallel, as presented on each side of the timeline in Figure 3. Legislative and organisational procedures must be completed before the financing of NGEU can become operational, and there is the process of drawing up, evaluating and approving the individual countries’ planned reforms and investments, to be implemented using the borrowed resources.

As far as the financing is concerned, the crucial role is played by the Member States and the European Commission. First, the Member States had to ratify the Own Resources Decision (ORD) enabling the borrowing operations necessary to finance NGEU. By the end of May 2021, this condition had been fulfilled. In the meantime, the Commission began preparing for its role as a borrower on an unprecedented scale. In April 2021 it announced its new diversified funding strategy and the necessary administrative arrangements and rules relating to the borrowing and lending operations. The Commission has ensured that the preparations are advanced so that it would be ready to begin borrowing operations as soon as the necessary preconditions are in place, i.e. following ratification of the ORD and once the act is in force. The Commission can start borrowing on the first day of the month following the completion of the ratification process, i.e. as of 1 June 2021. This will be based on the Commission’s borrowing decision (adopted annually) and funding plans (six-monthly). The borrowing will be concentrated between mid-2021 and 2026.
The other area of intensive preparation concerns the national recovery and resilience plans (NRRP) (see below). The preparation of the NNRPs by the Member States, their positive assessment by the Commission, and approval by Council (implementing decision adopted by qualified majority) are the key preconditions for the start of RRF implementation. Only then can the Commission
conclude an agreement with each Member State on a legal commitment authorising the financial contribution and begin the pre-financing phase.

The pre-financing should take place within two months of the adoption of the agreement and is set at 13% of the financial contribution (grants) and 13% of the loan. The Member States will implement their NRRPs and send the Commission requests for payment twice a year. The disbursements will be made providing the relevant milestones and targets set out in the implementing decision have been reached. All payments must be made by 31 December 2026.

Priorities and financial distribution of the RRF

With €723.8 billion distributed between grants and loans (see Figure 4), the RRF represents the bulk of the recovery package. Although the facility is a part of the short-term emergency NGEU package, and reforms and investments under the RRF have to be implemented by 2026 (see Figure 3), the aim is to bring about structural change with *lasting* impact in the Member States’ administrations, institutions and policies.

Priorities

To foster recovery from the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, the facility is structured around six pillars representing policy areas of European relevance, set out in the table.
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**RRF Regulation** (see Figure 4, above). The pillars express investment priorities and demonstrate the scope of application of financing under the Facility.

Any Member State wishing to use the RRF must submit a national recovery and resilience plan (NRRP). This document should outline the national reform and investment package, referring to the areas specified under the six pillars. Furthermore, to ensure sustainable and resilient recovery, the Member States must address the country-specific challenges identified in the **European Semester country-specific recommendations**. In addition, an important, cross-country quantitative requirement of the plans is the climate and digital target. In the reforms and investments included by the Member States, climate expenditure and digital expenditure must represent at least 37% and 20% of the total grant plus loan allocation respectively. The NRRP must explain how the reforms and investments do no significant harm to environmental objectives (Article 17, RRF Regulation) and how the measures will contribute to gender equality and equal opportunities for all (following Principles 2 and 3 of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**). It is worth noting that, in contrast to the Cohesion and Rural Development Funds, implementation of measures under NGEU does not require additional resources from a Member State. The measures are 100% financed from the facility.

Moreover, any projects started since 1 February 2020 are eligible for support. The Member States will be disbursed upon achievement of the milestones specified in the national plans and approved in the Council implementing decisions.

**RRF distribution by Member State**

The RRF grant allocations per Member State are based on an **indicative calculation** of the total available grants (Figure 5). The allocation of 70% of the total €338 billion (current prices) in grants is based on an **allocation key** that takes into account the Member State’s population, an inverse of GDP per capita and the average unemployment rate compared with the EU average over the past five years (2015 to 2019). This portion of the total grant allocation is thus fixed. The remaining 30% will be revised by 30 June 2022, and the unemployment rate parameter will be replaced by real loss in GDP over 2020 and the observed cumulative loss in real GDP over the 2020-2021 period. The 30% allocations in the indicative total allocations are currently based on the European Commission’s **Economic forecast for real GDP growth in 2020 and 2021**.

Based on the indicative calculation of total grants under the RRF, the three biggest total beneficiaries are Spain (€69.5 billion), Italy (€68.9 billion) and France (€39.4 billion). However, when taking into account the **inhabitants** of the Member States (based on 2020 population size), the three biggest beneficiaries per capita are Greece (€1,661), Croatia (€1,552) and Spain (€1,468).

Yet another picture emerges as a result of calculating the share of the maximum grant allocation in general government spending. Table 1 shows the figures based on general governmental expenditure in 2019 (prior to the pandemic). It illustrates the relative importance of this part of the RRF in the respective Member States. The three countries with the highest shares are Bulgaria (28.4%), Croatia (24.7%) and Greece (20.5%), and the three with the lowest shares are Ireland (1.1%), Denmark (1.0%) and Luxembourg (0.4%). It must, however, be noted that the RRF grants are allocated to the Member States until 31 December 2026, and the shares over the full period will thus be lower than for the illustrative example of 2019 (representing just one year).

In addition to the grants, the RRF makes available loans of a total of €385.8 billion (current prices) within the **ceiling** of up to 6.8% of their 2019 GNI. Member States can request loans along with the submission of the national plans, and further loans (within the ceiling) can be requested until 31 August 2023. (Article 14 of the **RRF Regulation**). Table 1 shows the maximum loan available per Member State as well as the amounts actually requested in the plans submitted so far. Only six countries have opted for the RRF loan, namely Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.
The Member States are currently submitting their NRRPs to the European Commission. By early June 2021, 22 Member States had submitted their plans (see Table 1). Bulgaria, Estonia, Malta, the Netherlands and Romania had still to submit theirs. In Estonia and the Netherlands, the submission process was delayed by recent elections and new governments. Poland submitted its plan on 5 May 2021, but the government requested a one-month prolongation of the assessment of their plan. The majority of countries have requested support in the form of grants equal to the pre-allocated maximum amount. Some countries, however, have requested somewhat higher allocations. This can be explained by the fact that the maximum allocation is indicative and, as explained above, 30% of it will be revised on the basis of updated statistics by 30 June 2022. This was the explanation used by Austria, which requested €1 billion more than the indicative maximum, referring on page 5 of its plan to the possibility that the final total grant allocation might change. Germany requested €27.9 billion whereas the pre-allocation amounts to €25.6 billion. According to the German plan, the difference (€2.3 billion) will be financed from national funds. The actual amount available to each Member State depends on the cost of the approved national recovery and resilience plan and will be specified in Council’s implementing decision.
### Table 1 – NRRPs: state of play as of 31 May 2021 (€ billion, current prices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Submission date</th>
<th>Financial allocation requested (grant/loan)</th>
<th>Financial allocation (grant/loan*)</th>
<th>Share of maximum (indicative) financial allocation in general governmental expenditure (2019)**</th>
<th>Share of maximum (indicative) grant allocation in general governmental expenditure (2019)**</th>
<th>Ratification of Own Resources Decision</th>
<th>Useful links</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>1/5/2021</td>
<td>5.9/-</td>
<td>5.9/32.8</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ BE</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3/4.2</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CZ</td>
<td>2/6/2021</td>
<td>7.1/-</td>
<td>7.1/14.3</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ CZ</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DK</td>
<td>30/4/2021</td>
<td>1.6/-</td>
<td>1.6/21.9</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ DK</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>28/4/2021</td>
<td>27.9/-</td>
<td>25.6/240.9</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ DE</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/1.9</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>28/5/2021</td>
<td>1/-</td>
<td>1/18.7</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ IE</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>28/4/2021</td>
<td>17.8/12.7</td>
<td>17.8/12.5</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ EL</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>30/4/2021</td>
<td>69.5/-</td>
<td>69.5/84.8</td>
<td>133.3%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ ES</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FR</td>
<td>29/4/2021</td>
<td>40.9/-</td>
<td>39.4/168.4</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ FR</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>15/5/2021</td>
<td>6.4/-</td>
<td>6.3/3.7</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ HR</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>1/5/2021</td>
<td>68.9/112.6</td>
<td>68.9/122.7</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ IT</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CY</td>
<td>17/5/2021</td>
<td>1/0.227</td>
<td>1/1.5</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ CY</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>30/4/2021</td>
<td>1.8/-</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ LV</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>15/5/2021</td>
<td>2.2/-</td>
<td>2.2/3.2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ LT</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LU</td>
<td>30/4/2021</td>
<td>0.093/-</td>
<td>0.1/2.8</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ LU</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>12/5/2021</td>
<td>7.2/-</td>
<td>7.2/9.7</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ HU</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3/0.8</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>6/55.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>1/5/2021</td>
<td>4.5/-</td>
<td>3.5/27.2</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ AT</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>3/5/2021</td>
<td>23.9/12.1</td>
<td>23.9/34.8</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ PL</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>22/4/2021</td>
<td>13.9/2.7</td>
<td>13.9/14.2</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ PT</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td>14.2/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>1/5/2021</td>
<td>1.8/0.7</td>
<td>1.8/3.2</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ SI</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>29/4/2021</td>
<td>6.6/-</td>
<td>6.3/6.3</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ SK</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FI</td>
<td>27/5/2021</td>
<td>2.1/-</td>
<td>2.1/16.4</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ FI</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>28/5/2021</td>
<td>3.2/-</td>
<td>3.3/6.3</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ SE</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

* Calculation of the maximum loan that can be requested by each Member State is based on the ceiling of 6.8% of 2019 GNI (Article 14 of the RRF Regulation). See: First Recovery and Resilience Dialogue with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, European Parliament, May 2021.

** Calculation based on Eurostat data.

Stakeholder views on the challenges posed by implementation of the recovery plan

The unprecedented EU recovery package and the on-going submission of the Member States' NRRPs have received broad public attention. Numerous stakeholders have highlighted challenges relating to the implementation and achievement of the goals of the recovery plan (Box 1).

Box 1: Challenges of NGEU implementation – Selected views of stakeholders and think-tanks

Local and regional authorities (LRA): the European Committee of the Regions stresses that the involvement of LRAs is essential to ensure successful implementation of the RRF. Together with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, it carried out a consultation of the involvement of LRAs in the preparation of the national recovery and resilience plans (NRRP). The results show that only a minority of Member States consulted their local and regional authorities when preparing their NRRPs. Furthermore, the European Economic and Social Committee points out that LRAs, civil society organisations and social partners should also play a role in the implementation phase of the reforms and investments.

Absorption of NGEU allocations: Bruegel underlines that it will be a challenge for the countries to absorb the NGEU funds within the short timeframe since, in addition to the NGEU funds, the countries also have to absorb remaining allocations from the 2014-2020 MFF and the new 2021-2027 MFF. According to a European Court of Auditors report, the two countries with the lowest records for absorption of EU funds are Spain and Italy (between 2014 and 2020 they absorbed 39% and 40% respectively of the total available EU funds). At the same time, these two countries are the biggest beneficiaries of RRF grants (in absolute terms). The Jacques Delors Institute meanwhile points out the two main risks to be avoided: non-utilisation and misappropriation of the funds under the recovery plan.

Importance of scrutiny: the European Economic and Social Committee highlights potential issues with the scrutiny of the NRRP within the tight deadlines for assessment. They emphasise the need for greater oversight and monitoring measures, underlining that civil society organisations must complement institutional supervision.

EU single market and competition: Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) points out that the NGEU and RRF focus on national measures, which could cause problems for the EU single market. The think tank states that ‘it is essential that the Commission aligns the procurement process with single market rules, and that the RRF support is not used to distort competition’. Similarly, the European Policy Centre (EPC) emphasises the problem of the lacking EU dimension in the requirements of the NRRP. According to the EPC, the Commission in particular should strengthen the EU dimension by highlighting potential cross-country synergies between recovery and resilience plans.

Fear of delays owing to politicisation in Council: the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) stresses that Council’s involvement in the final approval of the NRRP could lead to politicisation and delays in implementation.

Transparency in the development of the NRRPs: although the development of the NRRPs has been discussed in national political debates, the process towards the final submission of the plans was not transparent, and was managed by governments behind closed doors, with limited input from stakeholders, according to the European Policy Centre.

Climate policy dimension of the plan: the Member States are supposed to spend 37% of the total allocation on climate incentives, but according to Greenpeace and E3G the guidelines are not clear enough. E3G criticises the ‘do no significant harm’ guidelines for having loopholes that might allow countries to use fossil-fuel-based power production, since these can be used in cases where is considered necessary to facilitate the transition to cleaner energy in coal-dependent countries.

MAIN REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 All amounts are in current prices, unless otherwise stated.

2 The European Recovery Instrument is the official name of the instrument used in Council Regulation 2020/2094. However, the other name – Next Generation EU (NGEU) – was introduced by the Commission in the documents published with the proposal establishing the instrument. For the purposes of this briefing, the latter, commonly used, name will be used.

3 Whereas, according to the NGEU Regulation, the legal commitments giving rise to expenditure should be made by 31 December 2023, the payments should be made by 31 December 2026 (Article 3 of Council Regulation (EU) 2020/2094).


6 For example, for the Just Transition Fund the Member States have to submit territorial just transition plans.

7 The allocation under InvestEU will finance the funding of the guarantee (75 % of which for the European Investment Bank) and hence, as a second step, enable implementing partners to broaden their financing operations. For more see: A. D’Alfonso, InvestEU programme. The EU’s new investment support scheme, EPRS, European Parliament, March 2021.

8 The EU general budget for the financial year 2021, the first annual budget under the 2021-2027 MFF, was approved on 18 December 2020. However, owing to the late agreement on the MFF, some sector and programme-specific regulations could not be finalised and adopted before the start of the new programming period. At the time of writing, the formal adoption of provisions is pending for example for EU spending on cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy.


10 See Article 18 and Annex V of the RRF Regulation.

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