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Who gets a seat at the table?



Assessing public participation in the development of national and regional partnership plans in 17 EU Member States

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KEY FINDINGS

- Of the 17 EU Member States included in this research, only 5 have established a multi-stakeholder working group to develop their national and regional partnership plans. Across almost all Member States, the development of the plans is proceeding without sufficient transparency or the involvement of relevant national and local stakeholders.
- Even where working groups dedicated to the national and regional partnership plans have been established, the quality of engagement varies significantly. Poland and Estonia stand out as positive examples; both countries offer multiple opportunities for co-development, ensuring that stakeholders' perspectives are integrated on an ongoing basis.
- Ireland, which holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July 2026, has yet to engage with stakeholders regarding its national and regional partnership plan.

Introduction

While negotiations on the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework continue at the EU level, EU Member States are already beginning preparatory work on their national and regional partnership plans at the national level. This early phase offers an important opportunity to embed the partnership principle and genuine multilevel governance from the outset. This can be achieved through timely and meaningful engagement with local and regional authorities, civil society, social enterprises, energy communities, energy agencies, trade unions, and both social and economic partners.

In early February 2026, 54 civil society organisations across Europe issued an open letter to the European Commission and Member States, calling for greater transparency and stakeholder involvement in the drafting of the national and regional partnership plans.¹ This briefing, collectively prepared by 25 civil society organisations, evaluates the current state of consultations across 17 Member States. A traffic light assessment rates Member States according to the following criteria:

- **Existence of a permanent forum:** The existence of a formal body for dialogue and exchange, such as a working group, committee or equivalent.
- **Early and inclusive consultations:** Stakeholders are given the opportunity to shape the strategic framework of the national and regional partnership plan with sufficient time provided. This requires clearly communicated timelines and accessible consultation formats, rather than simply offering comments ex post on pre-selected measures.
- **Feedback integration:** A dynamic and transparent consultation process where stakeholder feedback continuously shapes the ‘direction of travel’. All participants should be aware of the input offered by others and receive documented explanations regarding how their input was utilised or why it was not adopted.
- **Stakeholder diversity:** Ensuring all perspectives and voices contribute to the development of the national and regional partnership plans. Particular attention must be paid to underrepresented and vulnerable groups, as well as maintaining a balanced territorial representation.
- **Transparency and accessibility:** The timely publication of draft documents, meeting agendas, and all relevant supporting materials.

Faced with yet another cost-of-living and energy crisis of historic proportions, EU citizens are looking to their governments for moral and strategic clarity. Strong implementation of the partnership principle and genuine multilevel governance can maximise the added value of EU funds by enabling more targeted, place-based investments and a wider dissemination of impacts.

¹ Coalition of 54 European civil society organisations, [Open letter: Ensuring transparency in the drafting of the National and Regional Partnership Plans](#), 9 February 2026.

This approach will ensure that funds are directed towards investments that build long-term social resilience, such as affordable housing and public transport, while fostering social buy-in for national reforms that contribute to overall EU objectives. Crucially, integrating the needs of citizens into long-term financial decision-making can restore trust in European values during this period of multiple and overlapping crises.



Front-runners

Poland: The Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy – responsible for cohesion and regional policies, as well as the negotiation and programming of the national and regional partnership plan – formally entered into dialogue with partners, including civil society organisations, as early as 2023.

The process began with a ‘cohesion policy think-tank’, a series of thematic seminars where the Ministry and experts collaborated to develop the Polish vision for post-2027 cohesion policy. Later, during the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, experts and civil society representatives were included in discussions around the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework organised as part of the presidency programme.

Following the publication of the European Commission’s Multiannual Financial Framework proposal package in July 2025, the Ministry consulted partners on Poland’s position regarding key elements of the package, including the Performance Regulation and the National and Regional Partnership Plan Regulation. In January 2026, civil society representatives were invited to share their positions at a national and regional partnership plan ‘kick-off conference’.

In February 2026, a dedicated working group was formally established within the Ministry to support the preparation of Poland’s plan for the upcoming period. While the group initially included 3 civil society representatives, this number was increased to 10 following a request from civil society. By April 2026, the team members had joined eight thematic subgroups covering areas such as energy transformation, cohesion, territorial dimension and competitiveness.

The preliminary assumptions for the national and regional partnership plan are due to be finalised by these groups by June 2026. Significantly, the Ministry has agreed to civil society requests that these initial assumptions (June 2026) as well as the final draft plan (spring 2027) will be subject to public consultation.

Estonia: The Ministry of Finance initiated inclusive consultations through a series of seminars with stakeholders in autumn 2025. The first round of seminars was thematic – focusing on the economy and the environment, government, and people and society – introducing the time frame for development of the plan, the decision-making process and government positions.

These sessions enabled participants to map out key concerns and identify potential investment needs. A month later, specific ‘missions’ developed by the ministries were introduced, followed by another seminar where proposals were discussed and prioritised.

Ministries were required to submit revised missions to the Ministry of Finance by March 2026. Throughout this period, separate discussions and negotiations with stakeholders took place (organised by ministry and mission), with members of the EU funds monitoring committee also involved.

In spring 2026, the Ministry will present the selected missions, and stakeholders will discuss investments and financial mechanisms in depth. Missions are evaluated based on three core criteria: relevance, consistency with other strategic documents, and prioritisation.

Based on the feedback obtained, the missions will move to the next development stage of the national and regional partnership plan before its scheduled government adoption in September. As negotiations and approvals are finalised over the summer, it will become clearer to what extent stakeholder input has been meaningfully integrated.



Czech Republic: A general working group for the national and regional partnership plan has been established with stakeholders. However, key sectoral platforms, which will define specific interventions, have yet to be identified. The current working group includes only two members from non-governmental organisations, and it remains unclear whether, or how, these organisations will contribute to the sectoral platforms.

The current draft appears to resemble a ministry ‘wish list’ instead of a cohesive strategic document. Notably, it lacks a theory of change, intervention logic, defined reforms, indicators and financial allocations. There is also a significant risk that these key elements may be decided behind closed doors. While the draft includes community energy and energy efficiency, it lacks investments in grid modernisation, which is key to further development of renewables.

As the draft plan is a document intended for government approval, the formal consultation process is conducted through the ministries. Although non-governmental organisations can submit comments through informal channels, the ministries are under no obligation to consider their input. Indeed, the Government Commissioner for Human Rights, Taťána Malá – who serves as the civil society representative to the government – has confirmed that comments will be selectively filtered before being presented.

Romania: A working group including representatives from public authorities, non-governmental organisations, professional associations and academia has been established to discuss the future of cohesion policy under the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

While the group, coordinated by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, was set up in early 2024, it convened only once that year. After a significant period of inactivity, the group reconvened in 2026 to

discuss the broader policy context and the ongoing national efforts to strengthen cohesion policy with the aim of shaping strategic priorities at both national and regional levels. However, no other thematic working groups have been established to the knowledge of civil society.

Although future meetings are expected, the absence of a transparent consultation calendar remains a concern. Stakeholders currently have the option to submit recommendations and suggestions. But without a formal schedule, it remains unclear how these inputs will be integrated into the final national and regional partnership plan.

Netherlands: The Dutch government has indicated its intention to ensure the close involvement of local authorities and other social partners.² However, the extent to which this commitment is being operationalised remains unclear. Civil society organisations have made concerted efforts to engage with relevant ministries, particularly the Ministry of Finance. Based on the information currently available, the drafting of the national and regional partnership plan appears to be in its infancy.

While the government has clearly articulated its strategic position on the future EU budget, including the national and regional partnership plan,³ there is no evidence of plans for a structured or inclusive stakeholder consultation process, nor of early and inclusive stakeholder involvement in setting priorities.

The lack of transparent timelines and accessible information further indicates limited accountability regarding the consideration of stakeholder input. Overall, the onus is now on the government to move beyond general dialogue and establish meaningful participation to shape its national and regional partnership plan.

Slovakia: Throughout 2025, civil society representatives repeatedly requested that they be included as members of the Slovak government's regional development and EU cohesion policy council.⁴ While the council includes municipalities, trade unions and business associations, civil society remains without a representative despite numerous government promises.

In November 2025, the government approved a proposal for the coordination of the national and regional partnership plan,⁵ before releasing a formal preparation process and timeline in February 2026.⁶ A dedicated working group has since been established with approximately 76 members.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, [Fiche 2: \[MFK\] Oprichting Europees Fonds Nationale en Regionale Partnerschapsplannen](#), 16 July 2025.

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, [Kamerbrief inzake informatievoorziening over nieuwe Commissievoorstellen](#), 27 March 2026.

⁴ Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, [Zoznam členov Rady vlády Slovenskej republiky pre regionálny rozvoj a politiku súdržnosti Európskej únie](#), March 2025.

⁵ Government Office of the Slovak Republic, [Návrh koordinácie prípravy Národného a regionálneho partnerského plánu](#), 4 November 2025.

⁶ Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, [Príprava programového obdobia po roku 2027](#), accessed 14 April 2026.

The non-governmental organisation chamber nominated eight civil society representatives, who attended the first meeting in February 2026. In parallel, the Slovak Academy of Sciences has launched a participatory process for developing ‘Vision Slovakia 2040’, while the government office is drafting ‘Investment Plan Slovakia’, which will set out the country’s priority investments.

Several crucial deadlines across these multiple processes are scheduled for June 2026. This convergence is significantly increasing the pressure on stakeholders and, in practical terms, risks being less inclusive for smaller organisations with limited capacity.

Belgium: While negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework continue, specific rules for the national and regional partnership plans have yet to be agreed. This process will define how the plans should be developed, including who will be consulted and how collaboration will be organised.

As a result, formal public consultations in Belgium have yet to take place. However, the Flemish Energy and Climate Agency has highlighted that Article 6(1)(c) of the National and Regional Partnership Plan Regulation provides sufficient flexibility to involve civil society representatives, such as REScoop.Vlaanderen and REScoop.Wallonia, in this process.⁷ However, it is anticipated that stakeholders will need to proactively advocate for their inclusion in the forthcoming consultations.



Croatia: There is currently a significant lack of publicly available information on the preparation of Croatia’s national and regional partnership plan. Although civil society organisations have proactively reached out to relevant ministries to inquire about the process and offer recommendations – particularly emphasising the need for broad stakeholder involvement and transparency in line with good governance principles – no formal responses have been received.

To the best of publicly available knowledge, no working groups have been established or announced that would include the wide range of stakeholders required by the partnership principle, such as regional and local authorities, civil society, academia and the private sector. The current status of the drafting process remains unclear.

This absence of transparency and structured engagement raises serious concerns about the inclusiveness and accountability of the process. Given that the plan serves as one of the key instruments for programming and implementing EU funds under the next Multiannual Financial Framework, the lack of progress suggests

⁷ 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](#), 41, 16 July 2025.

a potential risk of delayed preparation and limited stakeholder ownership, which threatens to undermine the quality and effectiveness of the plan.

Greece: Civil society has repeatedly tried to communicate with the relevant ministries – specifically the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of the Environment and Energy – without success. These outreach efforts included the submission of an open letter in October 2025 and a specific intervention focused on the national and regional partnership plan and energy communities.⁸

The latter initiative was a collaborative effort involving several stakeholders, including the National Federation of Energy Communities, a consumer rights organisation, and the National Centre for Research and Technology. Despite this consolidated front, the government has provided no formal pathway for engagement.

Notably, the Greek government has failed to establish a multilevel climate and energy dialogue, a mandatory requirement under the EU Governance Regulation. This systemic failure means that consultations on key national energy and climate documents – most recently the national social climate plan – continue to be haphazard, non-transparent and disjointed.

Ireland: The Irish government has yet to launch a clearly identifiable public consultation process for its proposed national and regional partnership plan. While the government has formally acknowledged that stakeholder and civil society participation will be mandatory under the draft National and Regional Partnership Plan Regulation⁹ – pointing to previous consultation models used for cohesion and common agricultural policy planning – there is currently no visible whole-of-government roadmap or transparent public timeline for the plan’s preparation.

Although preparatory work has begun within the agricultural sector, broader engagement on the overall architecture and governance of the plan has yet to materialise in any meaningful public way. In response to this lack of clarity, the Environmental Justice Network Ireland has formally written to relevant department officials seeking detailed information on the status of preparatory planning.

Italy: While institutional representatives have confirmed that the relevant Italian ministries are currently negotiating the Multiannual Financial Framework package, no information regarding Italy’s national position has been shared publicly. Nor have there been any updates on domestic preparations for the national regional partnership plan.

⁸ REScoop.eu, [Stronger communities, thriving regions](#), 10 March 2026.

⁹ Houses of the Oireachtas, [EU Budgets](#), 24 March 2026.

Since the beginning of 2026, a coalition of environmental and social civil society organisations has made concerted efforts to establish contact with government ministries, including the submission of a comprehensive policy document outlining its recommendations in early March 2026.¹⁰

Aside from a brief acknowledgement, however, no substantive response has been received. Despite the lack of transparency and the government's failure to initiate formal dialogue, the coalition will continue its efforts to foster meaningful engagement over the coming months.

Portugal: There is currently no public information available on the preparation of the national and regional partnership plan. Similarly, no public consultation process has been initiated, and there is no publicly available timeline for when engagement might begin.

In an effort to bring transparency to the process, the renewable energy cooperative Coopérnico and the environmental organisation ZERO have attempted to raise awareness through the national media, and signed the open letter by the 54-strong civil society coalition in February 2026.¹¹

Despite these efforts, however, Portugal's plan has yet to receive sufficient media coverage, and the government remains silent on the matter.

Slovenia: Civil society organisations have made a concerted effort to interact with relevant government ministries – namely the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, and the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Energy – but have received no response.

As part of these outreach initiatives, a series of reports and proposals¹² coordinated by environmental non-governmental organisations, with the support of Slovenia's national community energy network, were submitted directly to the ministries in March 2026. These contributions highlight the important role energy communities play in promoting local development and a fair energy transition.

The coalition has called for the national and regional partnership plan framework to include reforms and investments targeting energy communities, emphasising the need for broad stakeholder involvement and transparency in line with good governance principles. The lack of a formal response or organised follow-up, despite these efforts, raises significant concerns over the efficacy and transparency of the national and regional partnership plan drafting process.

Bulgaria: The country has faced significant political instability for over two years, with the next general election scheduled for 19 April 2026. Despite this uncertainty, work on formulating Bulgaria's position

¹⁰ MIRA Network, [Un bilancio europeo 2028-2034 per una transizione equa, solidale e globale](#), March 2026.

¹¹ Coalition of 54 European civil society organisations, [Open letter: Ensuring transparency in the drafting of the National and Regional Partnership Plans](#).

¹² Focus, [Močnejše skupnosti, uspešne regije](#), 17 March 2026.

began in 2025. However, there is no public information on the current status of the national and regional partnership plan, except for a single public event held at the European Parliament Liaison Office in Sofia.

The Ministry of Finance has rejected demands from non-governmental organisations to disclose the national position. Similarly, there has been no response to official requests sent to the coordinating unit within the Council of Ministers and respective ministries to organise a public information campaign or involve a broader circle of stakeholders, including civil society representatives.

Unfortunately, with some exceptions such as the national social climate plan, policy processes in Bulgaria have proven that contributions from the wider public and civil society rarely influence the final versions of strategic documents. Currently, there is no established practice of early stakeholder involvement in the planning process.

Latvia: No official working group for the development of Latvia's national and regional partnership plan has been established. The Ministry of Finance has indicated that work on the priorities for the 2028–2034 planning period will only begin in the second half of 2026. The delay is attributed to the Ministry awaiting the publication of the Council's country-specific recommendations and further advancement in the negotiations of EU regulations.

While the Ministry claims it will cooperate closely with sectoral ministries and social partners – primarily through the EU funds monitoring committee – it has already asked sectoral ministries to submit their priorities and funding needs, partly to help refine Latvia's position during the EU's triilogue negotiations.

At the same time, sectoral ministries have yet to organise any exchanges or consultations with wider groups of stakeholders, despite being pushed by the Ministry to accelerate the process of formulating their sectoral needs. Some ministries have responded to civil society initiatives to open discussions on investment directions.

Overall, this is likely to result in a rushed process behind closed doors, followed once again by a formal stakeholder engagement process at a late stage, when significant changes are no longer possible and negotiations with the Commission are already well advanced.

Hungary: The development of the national and regional partnership plan does not seem to have officially commenced. Consequently, there is no public consultation process or formal practice available for assessment at this stage.

In response to a civil society inquiry, the former Minister of European Union Affairs stated that selection of the responsible ministries and drafting of the plan's content – including mandatory minimum allocations for social and climate purposes – could only begin once a high-level political agreement is reached on the Multiannual Financial Framework.

This current impasse has been compounded by Hungary's parliamentary elections, held on 12 April 2026. The previous administration's stance was to conclude existing affairs rather than initiate new strategic processes. However, the outgoing Secretary of State for Environment previously acknowledged that enforcing the principles of cohesion policy partnership, a territorial approach and long-term planning predictability remained a national priority. Now, following the major shift in Hungary's political landscape – where the Tisza party secured a parliamentary majority – the incoming government's approach to the plan has yet to be defined.

Germany: High-level meetings at the national level are currently in the initial stages, primarily focused on task allocation and determining the lead agency for development of Germany's national and regional partnership plan. While meetings with the federal states are planned, they have yet to take place. Additionally, there is currently no explicit roadmap or dedicated plan for the involvement of civil society stakeholders.

At the regional level, existing monitoring committees, such as those overseeing the European Regional Development Fund (2021–2027), have been briefed on the ongoing high-level Multiannual Financial Framework negotiations in Brussels. However, these committees are not yet involved in the preparation of the national and regional partnership plan. It remains unclear whether the government intends to leverage these existing committees for the upcoming budget cycle or if a new framework will be developed.

Recommendations

Most EU Member States have yet to commence official public consultations on their national and regional partnership plans, often citing the ongoing high-level EU negotiations regarding the exact structure and size of the Multiannual Financial Framework as a reason for the delay. Yet given the significant budget available and the tight deadline – with first drafts of the plans due in June 2027 – immediate cross-ministerial coordination and broad stakeholder consultations are essential. Poland and Estonia currently stand out as front-runners, having already integrated stakeholders through dedicated working groups, consultations and seminars.

The upcoming Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which officially begins on 1 July 2026, will play a central role in shaping the Council's general approach to the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework. This provides Ireland with a unique opportunity not only to facilitate high-level negotiations but also to define governance standards, specifically regarding the quality, timing and transparency of national and regional partnership plan consultations across all Member States.

We call on:

- **EU Member States** to utilise and strengthen existing frameworks, such as the 2021–2027 monitoring committees and multilevel climate and energy dialogues. Consultations must be early, inclusive and transparent, allowing stakeholders to meaningfully shape national and regional partnership plan priorities rather than merely providing ex post feedback on finalised drafts.
- The **Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union** to take a more proactive role in strengthening governance standards for national and regional partnership plans. This includes setting clear expectations for early, inclusive and transparent consultations, using the General Affairs Council to address the partnership principle, and facilitating the structured exchange of best practices between Member States. Crucially, Ireland must work with the European Commission to reinforce guidance on stakeholder engagement and lead by example by establishing a timely and clear whole-of-government consultation process for its own national and regional partnership plan.
- The **European Commission** to implement robust safeguards for public consultation. This should be achieved through forthcoming guidance from the Reform and Investment Task Force to Member States on the drafting of the national and regional partnership plans, and by supporting ongoing dialogue with stakeholders through the establishment of a formal EU-level ‘civil dialogue’.

Initiating organisations

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