

FROM THE NEXT GENERATION EU TO THE NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN

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Abstract

This article traces the evolution of the measures taken by the European Union regarding climate change, on which the devastating effects of the health crisis are overlapped. The issue of climate change has been debated since 2016 when the first global agreement with binding legal force was launched in Paris. The agreement was signed in April and ratified by the European Union six months later. This background is rounded by the great crisis caused by Covid 19, crisis that has been spreading rapidly with the European area since 2020. In this context, the European Union decides to establish a temporary financial instrument, the Next Generation EU, with a total value of 750 billion Euros, separate from the long-term budget of the Union. The aim is to provide support to Member States against the challenges generated by the spread of the pandemic. The recovery and resilience mechanism is the main pillar of Next Generation and has an allocated budget of €672.5 billion. The scope of the recovery and resilience mechanism is to provide the necessary support for essential investments and reforms in order to recover and improve the economic and social resilience of the Member States.

Keywords: *climate changes, alternative sources of energy, Paris Agreement, Next Generation, Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan, National Recovery and Resilience Plan, pandemic crisis, energy crisis.*

Introduction

In 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic broke out in Europe, the EU was fully engaged in implementing measures to improve the effects of climate change. Starting with Paris Agreement, approved in 2015, it was stipulated that each country should present its own national plan to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions called the “nationally determined contributions” or NDC by which it undertakes to take measures in this respect. By means of this agreement, the EU provided for the funding and transfer of technology and knowledge. Regarding funding, the signatory states committed to mobilise an amount of \$100 billion annually until 2025 to help less developed countries meet their climate goals. Furthermore, funding will also be used to support research and development of cleaner and more energy efficient technologies.

In this context, the Romanian Govern adopts Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (PNIESC) in December 2019⁵⁴. This plan aims the adoption of actual measures for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the use of renewable energy in all sectors of the economy. The plan covers the period between 2021-2030 and sets clear and measurable objectives to reach these goals.

After the violent outbreak of the pandemic in Europe, starting with 2020, after a moment of decline, due to the extent of the spread and contagion of the virus, all the measures of the European Union were redirected in this regard. Therefore, the Next Generation plan was launched at the EU level, a recovery and resilience instrument to help Member States to cope with the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and to continue the projects already started, to build a greener and more digital future. This funding instrument which is worth €750 billion shall be available to the Member States in the coming years. The major scopes of the project shall be the following:

- Supporting the economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Consolidation of economic and social cohesion within the European Union;
- Stimulating economic growth and competitiveness at the European level.

Next Generation Plan is structured on two major components: on the one hand, the recovery and resilience fund, and on the other hand, just transition fund.

⁵⁴ https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-04/ro_final_necp_main_ro_0.pdf.

NRRP is the acronym for the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, a document issued by the Government of Romania following the approval of the EU of the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism (MRR), the main scope of which is the economic and social recovery of Romania after the effects of COVID-19 pandemic⁵⁵.

NRRP represents a national medium and long-term investment strategy targeting a number of key areas, such as infrastructure, energy, environment, health, education and digitization, the stimulation of economic growth and employment, the reduction of regional gaps and the sustainable development of the country are aimed.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan was developed in close cooperation with civil society, academic environment and the private sector and is to be implemented between 2021-2026.

If the Recovery and Resilience Fund will provide direct funding to Member States to support the reforms and investments that will be made, then the Just Transition Fund will help the regions of the European Union that are most affected by the transition to a greener economy to cope with its economic and social impact. The recovery and resilience mechanism represents an allocation of over €600 billion, which is distributed throughout the EU by means of national recovery and resilience plans. These national plans must be approved by the European Commission and take the shape of investment in areas such as infrastructure, innovation, digitization and the transition to a greener and more sustainable economy. The Just Transition Fund provides temporary financial support of around 100 billion Euros to protect jobs and prevent the risk of unemployment across the Union following the pandemic.

What is the Next Generation?

The recovery instrument, called Next Generation EU, will have available a budget of €750 billion, which will be additional to the long-term budget. The money for the Next Generation EU shall be raised by temporarily increasing own resource ceiling to 2% of the EU's Gross National Income. This will allow the Commission to use its very strong credit

⁵⁵ The Council of the European Union, Interinstitutional file: 2021/0309 (NLE), The General Secretariat of the Council, APPENDIX to the Council Implementing Decision on the approval of the assessment of the recovery and resilience plan for Romania, Brussels, 22 October 2021.

rating to lend €750 billion on financial markets for the EU for the next generation. All money raised through Next Generation EU and the new EU budget will be channelled through EU programmes⁵⁶.

The money raised for the Next Generation EU will be invested across three pillars, by means of €500 billion in grants and €250 billion in loans granted to Member States.

The first pillar is the support to Member States with investments and reforms:

- A new recovery and resilience instrument (Recovery and Resilience Facility), with a budget of €560 billion - distributed in grants and loans. It will support Member States to implement investments and reforms that are essential for a sustainable recovery. Member States will draw up their own national recovery plans, based on investment and reform priorities identified as part of the European Semester, in line with national climate and energy plans, just transition plans and partnership agreements and operational programmes from EU funds.

- A new initiative, REACT-UE, will provide assistance for cohesion to Member States, with a budget of €55 billion. This will be available from 2020 and will be distributed according to a new allocation key, taking into account the impact of the crisis. This will ensure there is no disruption to funding for key crisis recovery measures and support for the most disadvantaged. It will support workers and SMEs, health systems and green and digital transitions and will be available across sectors - from tourism to culture⁵⁷.

- To support the green transition, the Commission proposes to provide additional funding for the Just Transition Fund and the European Rural Development Fund. Cohesion policy programmes will also be strengthened in the next EU budget period to also allow greater flexibility.

The second pillar is kick-starting the EU economy by incentivizing private investments:

- The Solvency Support Instrument will mobilise private resources to provide urgent support to healthy companies. Investments will be channelled to companies in the most affected sectors, regions and countries. This will help level the 'playing field' for those Member States that are less able to support through state aid. It can be operational as of 2020, with a budget of €31 billion, aimed at unlocking more than €300 billion in solvency support. Guidelines will be developed to help align investments with EU priorities⁵⁸.

- The Commission aims to modernize InvestEU, the EU's main investment programme, by doubling its capacity.

- In addition to all the above, the Strategic Investment Facility will be created within InvestEU⁵⁹. It will be able to unlock €150 billion in investments thanks to the €15 billion brought to it by Next Generation EU. This will invest in strengthening our resilience and our strategic autonomy for key technologies and valuable chains.

⁵⁶ https://next-generation-eu.europa.eu/index_en.

⁵⁷ https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/react-eu_en.

⁵⁸ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659264/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)659264_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/659264/EPRS_BRI(2020)659264_EN.pdf).

⁵⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/european-fund-strategic-investments_en.

The third pillar is about addressing the lessons of the crisis:

The Commission proposes to create a new autonomous EU4 Health programme with a budget of €9.4 billion. It will invest in prevention, crisis preparedness, purchasing vital medicines and equipment, and improving long-term health outcomes. A number of other key programmes will be strengthened to learn the lessons of the crisis, notably rescEU and Horizon Europe.

In addition to the three pillars, the Commission proposes to develop several programmes from the EU budget. The following are included:

- Common Agricultural Policy;
- European Maritime and Fisheries Fund;
- Single Market Programme and programmes supporting tax and customs cooperation;
- Connecting Europe Facility;
- Erasmus +;
- Creative Europe Programme;
- Digital Europe Programme;
- European Defence Plan;
- Internal Security Fund;
- Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund;
- Integrated Border Management Fund.

New Generation EU is one of the largest investment programmes in the history of the EU and shall have a significant impact on the European economies in the following years. Investments and reforms supported by the recovery and resilience fund will contribute to job creation and will increase economic competitiveness in Member States. Furthermore, investments in the green and digital transition will help Europe meet its climate goals and remain at the forefront of the digital revolution globally. Furthermore, the plan will have a significant impact on economic and social cohesion within the European Union. The Recovery and Resilience Fund will be made available to all Member States.

European Union Recovery and Resilience Plan

The European Union launched a recovery and resilience programme to help Member States to cope with the economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and to build a greener and more digital future. This programme, called New Generation EU, is an important part of the overall EU economic recovery plan and aims to mobilise significant investment in the

European economy in the coming years. This study aims to analyse the New Generation EU, as well as provide an insight into how this plan can contribute to strengthening and modernizing the European Union.

New Generation EU is a funding instrument which is worth €750 billion and shall be available to the Member States in the coming years. The plan consists of two components: recovery and resilience plan and just transition fund. The Recovery and Resilience Fund will provide direct funding to Member States to support reforms and investments that will contribute to economic recovery and the digital and green transformation of their economies. The just transition fund⁶⁰ will help the EU regions most affected by the transition to a greener economy to cope with its economic and social impact.

National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP)

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (**NRRP**) is a significant investment plan launched by the European Commission, within the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, in order to help Member States of the European Union to cope with the economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This plan, which is based on the priorities and needs of each Member State, is designed to help boost European economies and support their transition to a green, digital and more sustainable economy. In this context, this article focuses on the analysis of the NRRP and its importance for Romania.

NRRP for Romania

NRRP is a key-component of the Romania's Recovery and Resilience Plan, being dedicated both to the economic development and to social protection. The total costs of the plan amounts to €29.2 billion, of which €14.5 billion are grant allocation and €14.7 billion are loan allocation.

NRRP has 4 main pillars, respectively:

- Green transition
- Digital transition
- Support for enterprises and innovation
- Infrastructure

⁶⁰ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism/just-transition-funding-sources_ro.

Each pillar has a series of concrete objectives and projects, aimed at economic development, social protection, increasing competitiveness and improving environmental sustainability. For example, in what concerns green transition, the scopes of Romania are related to improving energy efficiency, developing sustainable transport and combating climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In what concerns digital transition, the objectives of Romania are focused on the development of communications infrastructure and digital services, increasing innovation capacity and increasing the degree of digitization of public and private services. As regards support for enterprises and innovation, the objectives are related to increasing economic productivity and competitiveness by supporting enterprises and innovation.

NRRP represents a unique opportunity for Romania to accelerate the transition to a green, digital and more sustainable economy. The investments proposed in NRRP can help improve transport infrastructure, health system, education system.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is an important strategy whereby Romania aims to obtain financing worth €29.2 billion from European funds. This plan is considered an essential instrument for the recovery of the economy after COVID-19 pandemic and to accelerate digital transformation and the transition to a greener economy. We shall analyse in this study, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and its importance for Romania.

NRRP targets the following components⁶¹:

	NRRP component	billion Euros
1.	Water management	1.9
2.	Forests and biodiversity protection	1.3
3.	Waste management	1.2
4.	Sustainable transport (road, railway, metro)	7.6
5.	Renovation wave	2.2
6.	Renewable energy and hydrogen gas infrastructure	1.6
7.	Government cloud and interconnected digital public systems	2.0
8.	Fiscal and pension reforms	0.682
9.	Support for the private sector, research, development and innovation, and reform of state-owned companies	1.7
10.	Local fund for green and digital transition	2.1
11.	Tourism and culture	0.20
12.	Fund for hospitals and for increasing access to health	2.4

⁶¹ <https://www.project-management-romania.ro/articole/planul-national-de-redresare-si-rezilienta-pnrr>.

13.	Social reforms	0.233
14.	Public administration reform, strengthening social dialogue and increasing the efficiency of justice	0.137
15.	Educated Romania	3.6

As for programme components, these are subsidiary projects and programmes that are designed and implemented to produce specific outputs and outcomes. These are carefully monitored to ensure the delivery of the intended benefits of the NRRP.

Each component of the programme is linked to the complementary objectives of the NRRP by tracking them. Each component contributes to the delivery of benefits directly or indirectly by means of their impact on the economy, environment or society.

To ensure the success of NRRP programme, it is essential that all components are designed and implemented in an integrated and coherent manner so as to maximize benefits and mitigate risks. In this respect, it is important that each component is monitored and evaluated on a regular basis, to ensure that programme objectives are being met and benefits are being delivered effectively.

NRRP implementation in Romania by sectors

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is an economic, social and environmental investment and reform plan, which aims to stimulate the recovery and modernization of the Romanian economy after COVID-19 pandemic. NRRP is divided into several investment and reform areas, targeting a wide range of sectors and economic activities. We will detail some of these sectors hereinafter:

- Health and education:

Within NRRP, Romania will invest in the modernization of medical infrastructure and equipment, in the development of the digital health system and in increasing the capacity for testing and vaccination against COVID-19. In what concerns education, Romania will invest in the modernization of school infrastructure, in the digitization of the education process and in increasing the quality of education⁶².

- Infrastructure and transport:

⁶² <https://monitorpnrr.eu/componenta-15-educatie/>.

NRRP foresees significant investments in the modernization of road, railway and airport infrastructure in Romania, in the development of electric transport and in increasing the energy efficiency of transport. Furthermore, investments shall be made in the development of communications infrastructure, including the expansion of fiber optic networks and 5G technology⁶³.

- Environment and energy:

In the sector of the environment and energy, NRRP provides for investments in the development of renewable energy production infrastructure, in the modernization of energy distribution networks and in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, Romania will invest in protecting biodiversity and developing a sustainable agricultural sector.

- Economy and digitization:

NRRP aims to modernize the Romanian economy by means of investments in innovation, digitization and professional training⁶⁴. Investments shall be made in the development of the private sector, increasing the competitiveness of enterprises and stimulating innovation and technology transfer. Furthermore, investments shall be made in the development of research and development capacity, including in the field of artificial intelligence.

These are just some of the areas of investment and reform stipulated in the NRRP. As a general rule, the plan aims at a broad and diversified modernization of the Romanian economy, by means of significant investments in infrastructure, environment, energy, health, education, innovation and digitization.

Challenges encountered by Romania in implementing the NRRP

NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) is an important programme for Romania, which aims to ensure economic recovery and the country's resistance to future shocks by means of investments in infrastructure, digitization, energy transition, innovation and human capital development.

⁶³ <https://monitorpnrr.eu/componenta-c4-transport-sustenabil/>.

⁶⁴ <https://www.old.research.gov.ro/ro/articol/5626/programe-europene-planul-national-de-redresare-i-rezilien-a-pnrr-transformare-digitala-componenta-7>.

Notwithstanding, the implementation of NRRP encountered certain challenges in Romania. Some of them are detailed below:

1. Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic procedures are often complicated and slow down the NRRP implementation process. This led to delays in the approval of projects and the use of funds.

2. Absorption capacity: The limited capacity of the government and public bodies to absorb the allocated funds was a significant problem. In the past, Romania had similar problems in managing European funds, which were not always used effectively and remained unused.

3. Priority sectors: The prioritization of investment areas and projects in the NRRP has been criticised by some non-governmental organizations and analysts, who claim that funds are allocated inequitably and that some areas, such as education and health, are underfunded.

4. Transparency: The level of transparency in the funding allocation process has also been criticised. There are concerns that the government has allocated funds without being transparent about the selection criteria and that there is a risk that the projects will be affected by corruption.

5. Civil society: Civil society involvement in the NRRP implementation process has been limited, which may affect the level of accountability and transparency of the process.

To conclude, NRRP implementation is essential for the economic recovery of Romania. Notwithstanding, the government must overcome these issues and ensure that projects are allocated in a transparent, fair and efficient manner so as to achieve a real and sustainable impact for the country's economy and citizens.

The stage of implementation of the NRRP in Romania

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is an essential instrument for the recovery of the Romanian economy and society after the crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic. In what concerns Romania, NRRP was officially presented to the European Commission in April 2021. This is structured around 6 pillars and 19 components, and the total value of the investments amounts to over €30 billion. The scope of this paper is to

analyse the stage of implementation of the NRRP in Romania and to identify the main challenges and opportunities in this regard.

NRRP was officially launched in Romania at the beginning of September 2021. At this time, there is a clear plan of action for NRRP implementation, involving all stakeholders, including government, private sector and civil society.

NRRP is structured around 6 main pillars, which include:

- Green transition
- Digital transition
- Transport and mobility infrastructure
- Economic competitiveness
- Education and research
- Health and social resilience

For each of these pillars, there are specific components that include investment in development projects and programmes, such as upgrading green energy networks, expanding broadband networks, improving transport infrastructure, supporting start-ups and developing health and education systems.

As a general rule, the NRRP of Romania aims to modernize and digitize the Romanian economy and society, strengthen the research and innovation sector, create jobs and improve the citizens' quality of life. Furthermore, the NRRP of Romania is aligned with the objectives of the European Union strategy, including the European Green Pact and the Digital Agenda.

The implementation of the NRRP in Romania faces a great number of challenges, among which⁶⁵:

- Corruption and bureaucracy, which can affect project implementation and delay the implementation process.
- The limited capacity of public institutions and the private sector to manage large-scale projects.
- Lack of expertise in specific areas, such as renewable energies or 5G technology.

Conclusions

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is an essential document for the economy and social development of Romania in the following years. NRRP was developed in

⁶⁵ https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/events/conferinta-anuala-privind-implementarea-pnrr-2022-11-08_ro.

the context of the economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic and has as its main objective the revitalization of the economy and the improvement of people's lives.

In what concerns NRRP objectives, they are linked to four important dimensions: green transition, digital transition, social cohesion and economic development. Therefore, NRRP aims to support investments in areas such as renewable energies, transport infrastructure, digitization of public administration, improving education and health system, as well as increasing economic competitiveness.

In what concerns the implementation of NRRP, there are still many questions and uncertainties. NRRP is an extremely complex document, which requires close collaboration between government, local authorities, business environment and civil society. On the other hand, there is also the risk that some of the measures included in the NRRP to be difficult to implement or not to produce the expected effects.

Generally, the conclusions on the NRRP in Romania are mixed. On the one hand, there is a broad consensus on the need for significant investments in transport infrastructure, renewable energies and digitization of public administration. Furthermore, NRRP can be an important instrument to stimulate economic growth and reduce the economic and social gap between different regions in the country.

On the other hand, there are also concerns about issues such as the transparency and efficiency of the funding allocation process, as well as the government's ability to implement the necessary reforms to ensure the success of the NRRP.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) is a major investment programme funded by the European Union to help member states recover their economies affected by COVID-19 pandemic. In Romania, NRRP was approved by the European Commission in September 2021, after a period of negotiations and consultations with various stakeholders. The conclusions of the NRRP in Romania are analysed in the following paragraphs.

1. NRRP is a unique opportunity for Romania to modernize its economy and improve its infrastructure.

NRRP provides Romania with a total budget of €29.2 billion to be spent over a six-year period, between 2021 and 2026. This budget is designed to finance projects that contribute

to the achievement of four main objectives: green transition, digital transition, social cohesion and economic resilience.

Although the NRRP has a considerable size, it could be insufficient to cover all of Romania's economic needs. Notwithstanding, it is important to remember that NRRP represents a unique opportunity for Romania to accelerate reforms and make investments that will increase the country's long-term competitiveness. Furthermore, this programme can help modernize Romania's infrastructure and improve the living conditions of the population.

2. NRRP can help to improve business environment of Romania

NRRP includes a series of measures the scope of which is the improvement of the business environment of Romania. These include investments in digital infrastructure, education and training, research and development, but also measures to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of businesses. Furthermore, NRRP also provides for the creation of financing and support instruments for SMEs and entrepreneurs.

Improving the business environment in Romania is essential to attract foreign investment and to increase the competitiveness of the Romanian economy. In this respect, NRRP can be an important factor for attracting foreign investments in Romania and for creating a more attractive business environment.

3. There is a risk that the NRRP is affected by corruption and poor governance.

NRRP is an important and complex programme, which entails a series of projects and investments.

In recent months, considerable efforts have been made to develop an NRRP that focuses on key areas that can have a significant impact on Romania's economy. These include: digitization, education, infrastructure, environment and climate, health and economic competitiveness.

One of the main conclusions regarding the NRRP in Romania is that this initiative can bring significant positive change. By means of an adequate funding and effective implementation, the NRRP can significantly improve the quality of life for Romanians, increase the country's economic competitiveness and contribute to sustainable growth.

One of the positive aspects of the NRRP is that it covers a wide range of areas, thus providing the opportunity to address various structural issues. For example, investments in digitization could improve the efficiency of public services, health could be improved by modernizing and expanding the medical infrastructure, and investments in education could improve the capabilities and future prospects of the Romanian workforce.

Furthermore, NRRP can significantly contribute to the reduction of economic gaps between different regions of Romania. For example, by investing in infrastructure and digitization in rural areas, access to public services and economic opportunities can be improved, which could lead to a more balanced economic growth.

Notwithstanding, one of the main issues in what concerns NRRP is the modality in which the funds will be spent and managed. It is important to ensure that the funding is used efficiently and transparently, without the risk of corruption or misuse of funds. A solid monitoring and evaluation system is required to ensure that investments are effective and have the expected impact.

Furthermore, another important point to consider is that NRRP should not be seen as a magic solution to economic problems.

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