

Regional Diagnosis Report

Marshal's Office of the Wielkopolska Region



WIELKOPOLSKA



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Executive Summary

Poland holds a leading position in the EU regarding the implementation of territorial instruments, accounting—alongside six other member states—for nearly 70% of the total ERDF and Cohesion Fund allocation dedicated to these mechanisms across the European Union. Unlike countries following a fragmented model, Poland has adopted a concentrated approach, characterized by a smaller number of strategies with a very high average budget per Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) strategy. A key element of the Polish context is the use of these instruments to strengthen Urban Functional Areas (UFA) and overcome administrative fragmentation. ITIs have become a vital tool for establishing formalized cooperation between core cities and their surroundings, often in areas where traditions of collaboration were previously weak.

Poland also distinguishes itself with the EU's highest level of European Social Fund (ESF+) integration within territorial instruments. This has enabled the linking of infrastructure investments (such as low-emission transport) with 'soft' initiatives, although achieving full synergy at the operation level was often hindered by differing eligibility rules and reporting systems for each fund.

The implementation of these instruments has generated significant positive spillover effects within the national policy system. The Polish ITI concept is directly aligned with the objectives of the National Strategy for Regional Development 2030, particularly through the identification of Strategic Intervention Areas. These instruments have opened new communication channels between national, regional, and local levels, while formalized structures (ITI offices) have supported the administrative capacity of cities, transforming them from mere 'policy recipients' into active co-creators of policy.

The regional model of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship is built upon mature territorial cooperation structures that have evolved from simple fund administration toward functional partnerships. In a region characterized by strong integration between urban and rural areas, this system has gained a unique dimension. With the dynamically developing Poznań Metropolis and seven other Urban Functional Areas, Wielkopolska has established a multi-level governance model based on partnership. This model identifies key systemic features and developmental barriers, serving as a primary driver of growth for the entire region.

Regional context and the evolution of the ITI instrument

In the 2014–2020 programming period, the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument was introduced as a mandatory tool for regional capitals and their Functional Areas (FA). This stemmed directly from the provisions of the Partnership Agreement and the requirement to allocate a minimum of 5% of ERDF resources to sustainable urban development. In this regard, Poland

adopted a concentrated implementation model, characterized by a very high average allocation per ITI strategy. In Wielkopolska, this model initially covered Poznań and its FA, with the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration ITI additionally established as a regional-level instrument. Other sub-regional centers, such as Konin, Leszno, Gniezno, and Piła, operated at that time based on less formalized territorial tools.

Under the 2021–2027 framework, this system has undergone significant expansion. Currently, seven ITI Unions are operational in Wielkopolska, comprising the two pre-existing structures, four new sub-regional ITIs, and the newly established partnership between the cities of Koło and Turek. This expansion follows recommendations from the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (MFIRP) to extend the use of this instrument to medium-sized cities losing their socio-economic functions. This aligns with the EU strategy of supporting areas facing demographic and structural challenges.

The Wielkopolska model is characterized by a strategic dual-track approach, which clearly distinguishes long-term development visions (Supra-local Strategies) from the operational tools for implementing EU funds (ITI Strategies). Governance is based on well-established local government associations, such as the Poznań Metropolis or the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration, ensuring institutional continuity and a high level of trust among local leaders. A key structural element is the functional approach, where intervention boundaries are determined by real socio-economic links rather than strictly administrative divisions. The implementation system promotes cross-sectoral integration, mandating the linkage of infrastructure projects (ERDF) with social initiatives (ESF+). Funding is primarily provided through the regional program, "European Funds for Wielkopolska" (FEW) 2021–2027.

Strengths and weaknesses of the regional model

The primary strength of this model lies in the effective reduction of administrative burdens, achieved through the systemic decision to relieve ITI offices of their role as Intermediate Bodies. This shift has allowed them to focus on providing substantive support to municipalities, facilitating animation activities, and fostering partnerships, including the integration of new members. The model is characterized by a strong capacity for building supra-local coalitions capable of implementing joint projects in areas such as mobility and climate protection. Furthermore, the institutional support from the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region (UMWW)—notably the monthly monitoring reports on project progress—is regarded by ITI offices as exemplary and unique on a national scale.

However, ensuring full social impact on ITI activities remains challenging, as support priorities are often dictated by higher-level strategic documents (e.g., the Partnership Agreement). Consequently, social participation must be reconciled with national and EU legal requirements; in large functional areas, this often results in participation being tailored to the instrument's specifics, sometimes limited to formalized procedures in line with the letter of the law.

Another barrier is the lack of direct access to CST data systems, which restricts the analytical capabilities of ITI offices. Monitoring should also incorporate more place-based result indicators that go beyond standard EU metrics. Finally, the model faces a deficit of financial resources relative to vast infrastructural needs, alongside the phenomenon of 'funding cannibalization', where national programs offering higher intervention rates weaken the incentive to pursue more complex EU-funded projects. There is also a noticeable reluctance to utilize innovative financial instruments (such as PPPs or repayable assistance) in favor of the perceived security of traditional grants.

Good practices, opportunities, and future challenges

Among the model's innovative practices is the Young Leaders' Academy in Konin, which focuses on building human capital for the regional transformation process. The model offers significant potential for scaling success, where innovative solutions piloted in core cities—such as water retention systems or mobility schemes—can be replicated across other municipalities. Another valuable practice is the capacity of ITIs to leverage synergies between various funds and programs, including Norwegian and Swiss grants.

A particularly noteworthy example of bottom-up participation is the Social Committee in Gniezno. By utilizing a selection process based on letters of motivation, this model effectively involves authentic community leaders in planning processes, moving beyond the circle of 'usual suspects' typical of public debates. These leaders actively engage in diverse projects, facilitating the transfer of proven solutions across different policy areas and strengthening the interdisciplinary nature of local initiatives.

However, key challenges remain. There is a pressing need to simplify the language of strategic documents to make them accessible to citizens, and to shift the focus from project administration to a rigorous evaluation of the shared vision. Establishing a stable demarcation of funds is also a priority to prevent competition between different support sources. Currently, EU instruments often lose out to national offers due to their more stringent procedures and complex reporting requirements. This leads beneficiaries to choose programs with more lenient conditions, which directly hampers the pace of contracting and expenditure certification within regional programs.

To address this, there is a clear call for simplifying regulations and harmonizing rules across various EU funds to facilitate integrated projects (combining ERDF and ESF+). Furthermore, the intervention logic in strategic documents should be strengthened to move away from fragmented, small-scale municipal tasks toward large-scale networked projects of functional significance. Continued technical assistance for smaller municipalities is also essential to prevent widening administrative gaps between metropolitan centers and peripheral areas. Ultimately, the future of the model lies in the evolution of ITIs into permanent metropolitan or development unions, capable of integrated public service management beyond the framework of specific EU-funded projects.

1. Introduction

1.1 General regional context

Basic Information about the Region

Wielkopolska is one of Poland's 16 voivodeships, with its regional self-government located in the regional capital, Poznań. The administrative division of the province comprises 226 municipalities (gminy) grouped into 35 counties (powiaty), four of which are cities with county rights: Poznań, Kalisz, Konin, and Leszno. On a national scale, Wielkopolska is the second-largest region by area (29,800 km²) and the third-largest by population, with 3.5 million residents in 2024.

The region's landscape is predominantly lowland, featuring occasional hills alongside numerous lake clusters and forest complexes. A significant portion of the territory is dedicated to agriculture (65.4%), while forests and wooded areas account for 26.6%. As of 2025, built-up and urbanized land represented 6.1% of the voivodeship's total area.

The voivodeship benefits from a strategic transport location in the central part of the country, situated along major corridors connecting Western and Eastern Europe. The A2 motorway (part of the European route E30) and railway line No. 3 (part of the European E20 line) provide efficient east-west connectivity.

Wielkopolska has a moderate population density of 116.7 people per km² (ranking 7th in the country), with over half of the population (52.9%) residing in 119 towns and cities. The largest urban center is the regional capital and a city of national significance, Poznań (536,200 residents in 2024, with a population density of 2,047 people per km²). Other key regional and sub-regional centers include Kalisz (92,000), Piła (69,400), Ostrów Wielkopolski (68,600), Konin (66,100), Gniezno (62,800), and Leszno (59,500).

Socio-Economic Context

In many respects, Wielkopolska is one of Poland's key regions, playing a vital role in numerous socio-economic areas and serving as a crucial link in the process of European integration.

The region's socio-economic dimension is primarily defined by its unique polycentric structure, based on a network of strong sub-regional centers (including Kalisz-Ostrów Wielkopolski, Konin, Leszno, Gniezno, and Piła). This model prevents excessive development polarization around the regional capital, Poznań, by creating a system of interconnected local markets that collectively solidify Wielkopolska's position as one of the country's economic leaders.

Compared to other Polish regions, the Wielkopolska Voivodeship has long been ranked among the most attractive areas for investment and entrepreneurship, evidenced by a high concentration of business entities. In 2024, there were 518,800 national economy entities registered in the REGON system within the region (9.8% of the national total, ranking 3rd among regions). There were 1,491 entities per 10,000 residents (5th in the country), exceeding the national average of 1,415. The highest values were recorded in the central part of the region—specifically in Poznań (2,506 entities per 10,000 residents) and the Poznań County (1,784).

The foundation of the region's stability is the highest entrepreneurial activity in Poland, expressed through the dominant role of the SME sector. Deeply rooted in the regional ethos of work and resourcefulness, family entrepreneurship makes the regional economy exceptionally resilient to global crises. The employment structure is highly diversified, ranging from advanced automotive manufacturing and logistics in the Poznań area to strong furniture, food, and textile hubs in other parts of the voivodeship.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—the fundamental macroeconomic indicator for monitoring economic trends and the average standard of living—amounts to 359.8 billion PLN in Wielkopolska (3rd in the country), representing 9.8% of the national value (2024 estimate). One of the highest GDP per capita values in Poland is recorded here at 102,100 PLN (3rd nationally), which is 105.0% of the national average. In terms of Purchasing Power Standard (PPS), the region's GDP per capita relative to the EU average (EU27=100%) stands at 81% (2023 estimate), which is higher than the Polish average of 77%.

A key indicator of social health is the labor market, characterized by the lowest unemployment rate in Poland (2.3% in 2024). However, this success generates new strategic challenges related to a growing labor shortage and demographic pressure. While the Poznań Metropolis maintains a positive migration balance, attracting young specialists, sub-regional centers face an aging population and outward migration. In response, territorial development strategies (including the Wielkopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy 2030) focus on building human and social capital: enhancing the quality of life through investments in vocational education, care services, and culture to increase the residential attractiveness of smaller cities.

The economy of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship presents a moderate level of innovation among EU regions and within Poland (according to the European Innovation Scoreboard, EIS). The economic dimension is currently undergoing a reorientation toward a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy, with closer cooperation between science and business. The region is increasing R&D spending and promoting Wielkopolska's Smart Specializations (RIS 2030), such as: bio-raw materials and food for advanced technologies, industry of tomorrow, ICT-based development, modern medical technologies, specialized logistics processes, and interiors of the future. Integration within Urban Functional Areas enables the development of joint investment zones and clusters, supported by public investment in infrastructure and social capital.

Environmental Context

Wielkopolska's contemporary environmental profile is defined by the process of energy transition. A key territorial challenge is the decarbonization of the economy, which is particularly acute in the Eastern Wielkopolska subregion (comprising the city of Konin and the counties of Konin, Koło, Słupca, and Turek). The phasing out of the lignite mining and power industries necessitates not only large-scale land reclamation of post-mining areas but, above all, the construction of a new energy identity based on hydrogen technologies and large-scale renewable energy sources (RES, including photovoltaics and wind farms). In 2023, the region produced 10,937.1 GWh of electricity (6.3% of Poland's total output), with 72.2% derived from renewable sources—significantly higher than the national average of 29.0%. Between 2017 and 2025, the number of RES installations in the region grew from 345 to 1,478, with their capacity increasing from 1,705 MW to 4,305 MW. This represents 12% of the national capacity, ranking the region 4th in Poland. Consequently, the area is becoming a testing ground for green sectors, supported by the Just Transition Fund (JTF). This requires local governments to engage in integrated spatial and economic planning that balances environmental protection with job creation.

Simultaneously, Wielkopolska faces one of the most critical hydrological issues in the country—the lowest water resources in Poland, exacerbated by ongoing climate change. This leads to soil steppe-formation, a systematic lowering of groundwater levels, and hydrological drought (in 2025, the Institute of Meteorology and Water Management issued multiple warnings for the region's catchments, including the Warta and Noteć rivers). According to data from the State Water Holding "Polish Waters," 82.0% of the voivodeship's area is at severe risk of drought. This deficit poses a direct threat to food security and the stability of ecosystems, including post-glacial lakes. Development strategies increasingly prioritize investments in blue-green infrastructure: small-scale water retention, wetland restoration, and the implementation of circular economy (CE) systems that allow for water reuse and minimize anthropogenic pressure on the environment.

The final pillar of the environmental context is the improvement of life quality in densely populated Urban Functional Areas by combating low-stack emissions. Smog and traffic noise determine investment directions within Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) strategies, where funds are channeled toward deep thermal modernization of public buildings and the development of zero-emission public transport. Integrating urban mobility systems with a commitment to clean air and urban biodiversity (e.g., through the creation of green wedges and linear parks) has become a foundation for building urban climate resilience.

These challenges are integrated with biodiversity conservation. The share of areas with potentially high biodiversity—comprising forests, wooded land, surface waters, wetlands, national parks (including the Wielkopolska National Park), nature reserves, and Natura 2000 sites—stands at 45.9% of the voivodeship's area (as of 2024). Out of the region's 226

municipalities, 90 record values above this average. In this light, the environmental transformation is no longer merely a regulatory obligation but a comprehensive tool for enhancing the territorial competitiveness of the entire region.

Institutional Context

The institutional dimension is based on a polycentric model supporting balanced growth through the strengthening of sub-regional urban centers and supralocal cooperation. Coordination of the Wielkopolska 2030 Strategy is ensured by the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region. The process is based on the principle of subsidiarity and broad partnerships with local government units, the socio-economic sector, and civil society. The primary financial pillar is the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 (FEW) program.

Territorial Policy Instruments and Cooperation

A key instrument for policy implementation is Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), operational across seven Urban Functional Areas (UFA): Poznań, Kalisz-Ostrów, Piła, Leszno, Gniezno, Konin, and Koło-Turek. These partnerships execute projects in areas such as mobility, public services, and climate protection, alongside social initiatives focused on education, social inclusion, and NGO empowerment. The institutional framework is built on formalized cooperation, either in the form of associations (Poznań, Konin, Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration, Gniezno) or inter-municipal agreements (Piła, Leszno, Koło-Turek). This structure enables the effective management of development processes that go beyond administrative boundaries, integrating environmental, economic, and social challenges into a cohesive territorial whole.

1.2 Scope of the analysis

Legal framework and hierarchy of strategic documents

The implementation system for Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) in Poland is built upon the foundation of both EU and national law, creating a multi-level planning structure. At the global and EU levels, the development vision must align with the objectives of the European Green Deal, Agenda 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Of key importance is Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council, which defines the framework for territorial instruments, as well as the national Act of 28 April 2022 on the principles of implementing tasks financed from European funds for the 2021–2027 financial perspective (the so-called "Implementation Act"), particularly Article 34.

This process is strictly linked to national legislation concerning the conduct of state development policy, following a clear hierarchy of strategic documents: from the national level—defined by the National Development Strategy 2030 and the National Strategy for Regional Development 2030 (KSRR)—through the Partnership Agreement, to the regional level, represented by the

Wielkopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy to 2030 (Wielkopolska 2030). This alignment ensures that every lower-level strategy is firmly anchored in the overarching developmental goals of both the state and the region.

The Self-Government of the Wielkopolska Region is currently implementing 49 documents that serve as detailed extensions of the Wielkopolska 2030 objectives¹. By 2025, all strategic goals were successfully met through the implementation of these detailed programming documents. The highest concentration of these documents pertains to environmental goals (21 documents) and social goals (21 documents). This distribution stems primarily from formal statutory obligations requiring the preparation of specific documentation in these areas.

National and regional level – coordination and oversight

Multi-level governance in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship constitutes a precisely structured system in which responsibility for regional development is distributed across levels ranging from the European to the local. At the national level, the primary supervisory body is the Minister of Funds and Regional Policy, who ensures the alignment of local initiatives with national objectives. The Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (MFIRP) develops key guidelines for the implementation of these instruments within the 2021–2027 financial perspective, providing the foundation for all local strategies.

At this stage, financial frameworks—such as the Program Contract for the Voivodeship—are approved, and the consistency of actions with EU goals is monitored. Consequently, territorial strategies evolve from mere 'wish lists' into effective tools for delivering cohesion policy. The Ministry also provides expert opinions on the delimitation of Urban Functional Areas (UFA) and verifies strategies for their compliance with the document: Principles for Implementing Territorial Instruments in Poland under the EU Financial Perspective 2021–2027.

The regional model and territorial tools in Wielkopolska

The Wielkopolska model is built upon mature cooperation structures that have evolved from simple fund administration toward the active facilitation of functional partnerships bridging urban and rural areas. A diverse array of tools is deployed across the voivodeship: alongside the flagship Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), the region utilizes Other Territorial Instruments (OTI) for smaller partnerships in culture and tourism, as well as Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) driven by Local Action Groups (LAGs). This framework is further reinforced by Municipal Revitalization Programs (MRP) designed to transition distressed areas out of crisis. Together, these form a synergistic system where specialized support is channeled into precisely defined functional territories. Every strategic vision—grounded in rigorous diagnosis and SWOT analysis—

¹ Further details in Chapter 4.

serves as an overarching objective that unifies the interests of multiple municipalities, moving beyond the narrow financial technicalities that often dominate local agendas.

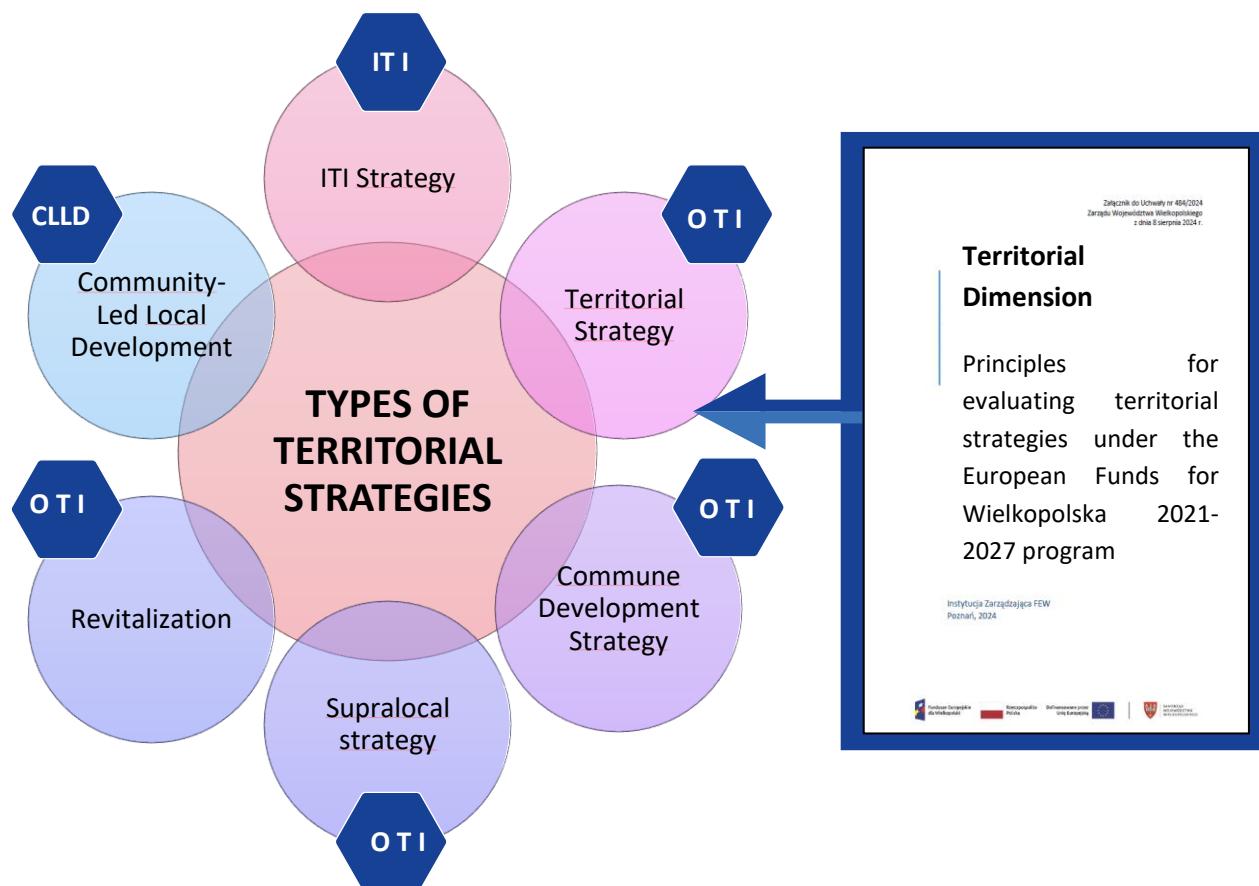
In the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region (UMWW) serves as the central coordinator and the Managing Authority (MA) for regional programs, including the 2014–2020 Regional Operational Programme and the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 (FEW). The UMWW focuses on high-level coordination, project approval, and the allocation of funds to seven key Urban Functional Areas (UFAs): Poznań, the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration, Konin, Piła, Gniezno, Leszno, and the joint Koło-Turek area—all of which function as the region's primary growth engines. Beyond defining ITI boundaries and regional assessment criteria, the UMWW provides extensive expert support and technical assistance, such as capacity-building initiatives for local staff. These efforts help local officials translate complex EU trends into local realities. Crucially, every ITI strategy must undergo a formal consistency review relative to regional development goals before its official adoption by the Board of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship.

The strategy assessment process in Wielkopolska is governed by statutory requirements and follows a two-stage approach:

1. Working Coordination Phase: Conducted with the Managing Authority of the European Funds for Wielkopolska (MA FEW).
2. Statutory Opinion Phase: Initiated following the formal adoption of the strategy by the local partnership.

A fundamental requirement is maintaining absolute consistency between the operational ITI Strategy and the visionary Supralocal Development Strategy, ensuring a seamless transition from general objectives to concrete investment projects. While the Implementation Act outlines the core components of an ITI strategy, additional requirements for supralocal strategies (which may double as ITI strategies) are dictated by the Act on Municipal Self-Government. Detailed implementation rules are codified in the Board-approved document: *"Territorial Dimension: Principles for Issuing Opinions on Territorial Strategies under the FEW 2021–2027 Program."* This

manual details the assessment procedures, defines the rules for each stage, and clarifies the obligations of all stakeholders.



The coordination process involves working consultations on draft strategies and project lists. The statutory opinion phase allows the MA FEW to formally evaluate the feasibility of financing the strategy under the FEW program in accordance with the Implementation Act. Furthermore, supralocal strategies require a formal opinion from the Board regarding their alignment with the Wielkopolska 2030 Development Strategy, specifically concerning regional spatial policy. It is important to note that a positive opinion regarding a strategy's eligibility for FEW funding does not constitute a final grant decision. Every project submitted for funding must still satisfy the rigorous criteria set by the Monitoring Committee and the specific conditions outlined in the relevant call for proposals.

Organisation of the ITI Association and operational process

The local level is the operational stage where scopes are defined, project proposals are submitted, and strategies are actively implemented. In Wielkopolska, this process is anchored in formalized partnerships within Urban Functional Areas (UFA). These structures adopt various legal forms—ranging from associations, such as the Poznań Metropolis or the Konin and Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomerations, to inter-municipal agreements, as exemplified by the Piła ITI. In this model, the core city typically assumes the role of leader, taking on the weight of technical and administrative coordination. The leader facilitates and sustains cooperation, providing an information-sharing platform through regular steering group meetings and rapid operational communication channels. This enables ITI offices to shift their focus from pure bureaucracy toward building mutual trust and initiating integrated, joint projects.

The ITI Union—an institutionalized partnership of local governments (e.g., an association or inter-municipal agreement)—is responsible for the direct implementation of the strategy. This structure includes an executive body (e.g., the Board of the Poznań Metropolis Association), a legislative body, and a mandatory advisory body representing socio-economic partners to ensure public participation. The regional strategy development process follows a two-stage approach: a working coordination phase with the Managing Authority (MA FEW), followed by a statutory opinion stage after the formal adoption of the document by the partnership.

The cooperation mechanisms within UFAs rely on the engagement of advisory bodies, such as ITI Councils or Consultative-Advisory Teams, which integrate representatives from the NGO sector, business, and civil society. Working groups composed of local leaders, officials, and experts play a pivotal operational role; their activity extends beyond standard administration to include mediating between divergent municipal interests and providing education on modern development trends. The success of these partnerships depends largely on the political maturity and mutual trust of presidents, mayors, and heads of rural municipalities (*wójtowie*), who must rise above local parochialism and financial competition in favor of shared strategic goals. In mature structures like the Poznań Metropolis or the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration, this dialogue is maintained through formalized steering groups and conventions, often supported by impartial external experts. Acting as independent moderators, these specialists help build trust between municipalities and explain the necessity of aligning local actions with global frameworks, such as the European Green Deal. The effectiveness of this cooperation is further bolstered by the stability of coordinating staff, allowing for the accumulation of relational capital and the implementation of modern participatory methods like co-design, citizen workshops, and digital consultation tools.

The process of defining ITI territorial boundaries is a synthesis of legal requirements and the region's actual functional conditions. A key reference point is the Urban Functional Area (UFA) concept, which determines boundaries based on real socio-economic links rather than rigid administrative divisions. Thus, the ITI territory encompasses the core city and its surrounding

municipalities, which form a cohesive organism through daily commuter flows, a shared public transport network, and access to public services. Formally, these boundaries are identified in the regional development strategy as Strategic Intervention Areas (SIA). Beyond statistical criteria, Functional Areas can emerge through bottom-up initiatives based on the will to cooperate—a factor that is ultimately decisive. These boundaries are subsequently ratified by the Board of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship through official resolutions.

In the functional approach, this process is characterized by flexibility, accounting for political will and local specificities. Examples include the Piła ITI, which integrated municipalities from outside its original functional zone, and the Konin Agglomeration, whose boundaries reflect county affiliations and the unique challenges of post-mining land transformation. This construction allows for development planning that is responsive to the actual needs of the community, moving beyond simple statistical units. The entire framework is embedded in an advanced multi-level governance model, where the regional Managing Authority collaborates with local ITI Associations and lobbies for ITIs at national and EU levels.

Strategic programming begins with an in-depth diagnosis and SWOT analysis, which form the foundation for a coherent development vision. On this basis, lists of integrated projects are created, playing a central role in the implementation process. To secure funding, each planned venture must demonstrate a tangible impact on at least two municipalities or the entire partnership, thereby eliminating local parochialism. Funding is based on the strategic combination of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the municipalities' own contributions.

A significant facilitator in this process is the cross-financing mechanism, which allows for the complementary pairing of infrastructure investments with "soft" actions, such as education or social service support. The entire process is subject to a monitoring system, where progress is tracked via output and result indicators linked to the regional program. These data are systematically collected in an IT system (e.g., CST) and reported by the Managing Authority, ensuring the full measurability of the strategic vision's impact and the transparency of public expenditure.

1.3 Sources and stakeholders consulted

The main documents and regulatory frameworks used in the process include:

- **EU Regulations** (including the Common Provisions Regulation and regulations concerning the ERDF and ESF+), the Polish Act of 28 April 2022 on the principles of implementing

tasks financed from European funds in the 2021–2027 financial perspective (Implementation Act), and the Act of 8 March 1990 on Municipal Self-Government.

- **"Principles for the Implementation of Territorial Instruments in Poland in the EU Financial Perspective 2021–2027"**, issued by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy as horizontal guidelines to be applied by all entities implementing TIs (ITI, OTI, CLLD, and other instruments under Article 28 of the CPR).
- **Regional-level programming and strategic documents:** The "European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027" (FEW) program along with its Detailed Description of Priorities (SZOP), the Wielkopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy 2030 (SRWW 2030), and the Program Contract.
- **Integrated Territorial Investment Strategies:** Supralocal Development Strategy for the Gniezno Functional Area until 2030; ITI Strategy for the Poznań Functional Urban Area 2021–2027; Supralocal Development Strategy for the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration until 2030; ITI Strategy for the Piła Functional Urban Area; Supralocal Development Strategy for the Konin Agglomeration 2030; Territorial Strategy for the Koło-Turek FUA ITI Partnership; ITI Strategy for the Leszno Functional Area.

Regarding databases and quantitative analysis, the diagnosis is based on:

- **Local Data Bank (BDL)** of the Statistics Poland (GUS), providing data on demography, population density, and territorial area.
- **STRATEG and CST (Central ICT System)** systems – the latter is used for the ongoing reporting of financial and physical progress of EU projects.
- **Common List of Key Indicators (WLWK)**, ensuring monitoring consistency with EU objectives.
- **Internal administrative registers** of municipalities and municipal status reports (*raporty o stanie gminy*).

A key element in gathering opinions was the INTEGRA plenary workshops (held on December 17, 2025), during which co-design methods were applied and barriers to cooperation were diagnosed through direct dialogue with practitioners. Participants in the workshops included representatives of the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region, ITI partnerships, and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The discussion focused on development directions and the financing of regional strategies, modern approaches to sustainable development, and the practical application of territorial instruments. Additionally, a valuable source of information consisted of documents prepared by individual stakeholders containing descriptions and personal experiences regarding: the establishment of the ITI, forms of cooperation employed, the development of a shared strategy, and project selection. This allowed for the inclusion of unique experiences in the diagnosis and provided a closer look at the operational methods of specific ITIs.

2. Analysis of strategies building block

2.1 Strategic Dimension

The regional model of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship defines a strategic vision for territorial development through formalized instruments, such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Other Territorial Instruments (OTI). These tools serve to integrate developmental objectives at the functional area level. This vision is embedded within the broader context of Cohesion Policy, aiming to reduce the fragmentation of public intervention and build lasting partnership structures between local government units. Territorial coalitions—including ITI unions and supra-local partnerships—are systematically encouraged, or even mandated (particularly in the case of regional capitals), to formulate such visions within their strategic documents.

Key structures involved in this process include the Poznań Metropolis Association, the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration (AKO), the Konin Agglomeration Association, the Gniezno ITI Association, as well as formalized partnerships in the Leszno and Piła subregions, and the partnership of the cities of Koło and Turek. These partnerships may choose their strategic format: either a dedicated territorial strategy (ITI/OTI) or a supra-local development strategy, the latter being regarded as a more comprehensive document better integrated into the national planning system. Regional authorities support this process by providing essential tools, such as functional area diagnoses, SWOT analyses, and strategic "skeletons," which assist partnerships in identifying their specific needs and potentials.

The primary reference documents are the Wielkopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy to 2030 (SRWW 2030) and the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027 (FEW) program. The Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region (UMWW) provides guidelines for the evaluation of territorial strategies and direct expert support, helping coalitions align local needs with the broader developmental context. External experts play a vital educational and mediatory role, helping to resolve inter-municipal conflicts and fostering a culture of cooperation based on trust and a shared vision.

The regional approach to designing territorial tools shows a profound alignment with EU agendas, such as the European Green Deal, through specific financial and thematic mechanisms:

- Ring-fencing: The system mandates the allocation of a specific portion of funds to climate and energy goals. In Wielkopolska, this has led to a radical increase in the share of RES in electricity production (from 29% to nearly 75%).
- Policy Objectives (PO): Territorial strategies align with overarching goals, particularly PO5 ("Europe closer to citizens"), focusing on tourism, culture, natural heritage, and the revitalization of public spaces.
- Sustainable Development: The model promotes urban mobility and low-emission transport as cornerstone elements of agglomeration strategies.

Territorial strategies in Wielkopolska directly reference the priorities of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is particularly evident in provisions regarding climate neutrality, climate change adaptation, improved urban mobility, and the circular economy. The territorial visions of individual partnerships are highly consistent with the regional framework, a fact confirmed through the formal strategy review process conducted by the Voivodeship Board to ensure harmony with SRWW 2030 and the FEW program.

To prevent the overlap of various strategies and initiatives, specific coordination mechanisms have been established at both national (via legislation and guidelines) and regional levels. A significant legal aspect is the statutory obligation to ensure consistency between an ITI strategy and a supra-local development strategy, where such a document has been adopted for a given Urban Functional Area (UFA). This requirement ensures that investment projects planned under ITIs are synchronized with the overarching development directions of the entire functional area. At the regional level, these guidelines have been further refined—an essential element being the demarcation of intervention scopes at the regional programming stage. This allows for a clear division of competencies between different instruments, such as ITI and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD/RLKS), preventing the duplication of activities. Additionally, regional working groups, consultation systems with the UMWW, and inter-governmental agreements on key projects at the Strategic Intervention Area (SIA) level remain operational.

The regional model also promotes innovative policy-making approaches, though their practical application varies. During the vision-building process, co-design methods are employed through stakeholder workshops, online surveys, and needs mapping. In the Leszno subregion, spatial and scenario analyses regarding transport development and demographic shifts were utilized.

The strategic vision of territorial coalitions is translated into approved documents primarily through lists of integrated key projects, which serve as the operational extension of long-term goals. For instance:

- Poznań ITI: Translated its vision of sustainable mobility into the construction of 53 integrated transport hubs and the procurement of a modern public transport fleet.
- Kalisz-Ostrów ITI (AKO): Focused on the comprehensive modernization of water and sewage management and the deep thermal modernization of public buildings.

The evolution of the model toward the new programming perspective places an even greater emphasis on the sustainability of partnerships and their role as creators of development policy, rather than merely entities focused on the expenditure of EU funds.

EXAMPLE

Integrated Territorial Investment Strategy of the Leszno Functional Area

The ITI Union was established under an inter-municipal agreement concluded on April 15, 2022. The Strategy was formally adopted by the ITI Union on October 17, 2024, and subsequently received a positive opinion from the Managing Authority of the FEW program via Resolution No. 774/2024. The development and periodic update of the ITI Strategy constitute a core responsibility of the ITI Union, as defined in the formal agreement between the Managing Authority and the Union signed on September 22, 2023.

The Strategy is programmed for the 2023–2032 period and serves as the fundamental framework for drafting project proposals aligned with the Partnership’s long-term vision and strategic objectives. A distinctive feature of the Leszno Functional Area (LOF) ITI Strategy is the clear isolation of a dedicated vision for transport and mobility. This vision has been operationalized within the Strategy through a primary objective, specific sub-objectives, and actionable measures. Following a strategic policy decision, the local governments within the Partnership have selected and recommended a definitive list of key projects to drive this vision forward.

The vision for transport and mobility in the Leszno Functional Area is to create a modern, sustainable and accessible transport system that will ensure **fast, comfortable and safe travel for all residents and encourage the use of alternative means of transport, promoting urban mobility based on the principles of sustainable development.**

→ Main goal: Improving the internal accessibility of the Partnership

→ Specific objective 3. Healthy and accessible space

→ Operational Goal 3.1. Developed Infrastructure

→ Measure 3.1.1. Development of ecological and safe public transport

2 sustainable public transport projects

→ Measure 3.1.2. Investments in pedestrian and bicycle paths

4 projects concerned bicycle paths

The vision, goals, activities and projects in the area of transport and mobility of ITI LOF are

directly aligned with the objectives of EU, national and regional policies.



In the case of the **European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021–2027** program, the link will refer to **Policy Objective 2 (PO2), ERDF Specific Objective RSO2.8: Promoting sustainable multimodal urban mobility as part of the transition to a net-zero carbon economy.**

2.2 Territorial Focus

Financial Perspective 2014–2020

Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) is an instrument that did not exist during the 2007–2013 perspective. Its introduction enabled the implementation of territorial strategies in a fully integrated manner. Under this mechanism, partnerships between regional capitals or regional cities and their surrounding municipalities, in cooperation with voivodeship authorities, jointly establish development goals and identify the investments required to achieve them. In the 2014–2020 financial perspective, funding for these activities was drawn from the Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme (WROP). This formula allowed local governments to transcend rigid administrative boundaries, resulting in a significantly greater impact for jointly implemented ventures.

The primary objectives of ITI include:

- Promoting a collaborative partnership model between different administrative units within Functional Urban Areas (FUAs).
- Increasing the efficiency of interventions by implementing integrated projects that comprehensively address the needs and challenges of cities and their functionally linked territories.
- Strengthening the influence of cities and their functional areas on the design and delivery of actions supported under Cohesion Policy.

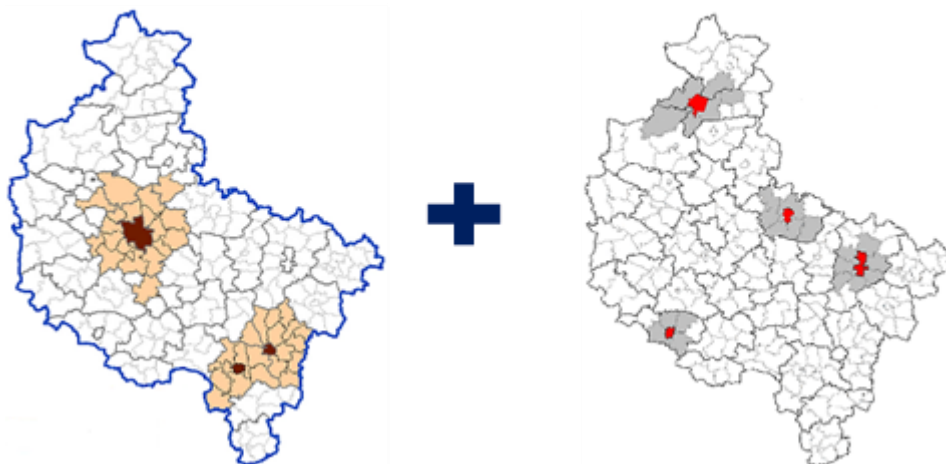
In Poland, ITI was implemented with ambitious goals rarely seen in other EU member states—it covered not only the cities themselves but their entire functional areas. Furthermore, it leveraged resources from two funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). This instrument operated through a dedicated allocation in each of the 16 regional programs and indirectly through national programs (complementary projects funded by the Infrastructure and Environment Programme and the Eastern Poland Programme), allowing for truly integrated projects financed from diverse sources.

In accordance with the Partnership Agreement, ITI implementation was mandatory for regional capitals and their functional areas, which constitute the country's primary urban centers. Additionally, the option to implement ITI in regional and sub-regional cities was established at the discretion of voivodeship governments, which chose to support these centers through this instrument.

The integration of the ITI instrument into Polish law was carried out through the provisions of the Act on the Principles of Implementing Cohesion Policy Programmes (the so-called Implementation Act). Eligible local governments could implement projects in this mode by forming a partnership (e.g., an association or inter-municipal union—known as ITI Unions) and preparing a joint ITI Strategy. In the Wielkopolska Voivodeship, this instrument was implemented based on Voivodeship Board resolutions from November 2013 and subsequent agreements. The core idea of ITI is cooperation to maximize municipal strengths and solve problems collectively; therefore, subsidized projects could not be isolated, stand-alone investments.

In the 2014–2020 perspective, ITIs were established in the Poznań agglomeration (allocation of €196.6 million) and the Kalisz-Ostrów agglomeration (allocation of €69.1 million). ITIs were not the only support instrument; for sub-regional centers (Leszno, Piła, Konin, Gniezno), assistance was provided through Strategic Intervention Areas (SIA). This integrated approach resulted in the implementation of 1,745 projects, the majority of which were in rural areas, increasing the rural implementation rate from a projected 27% to 36%.

2014-2020



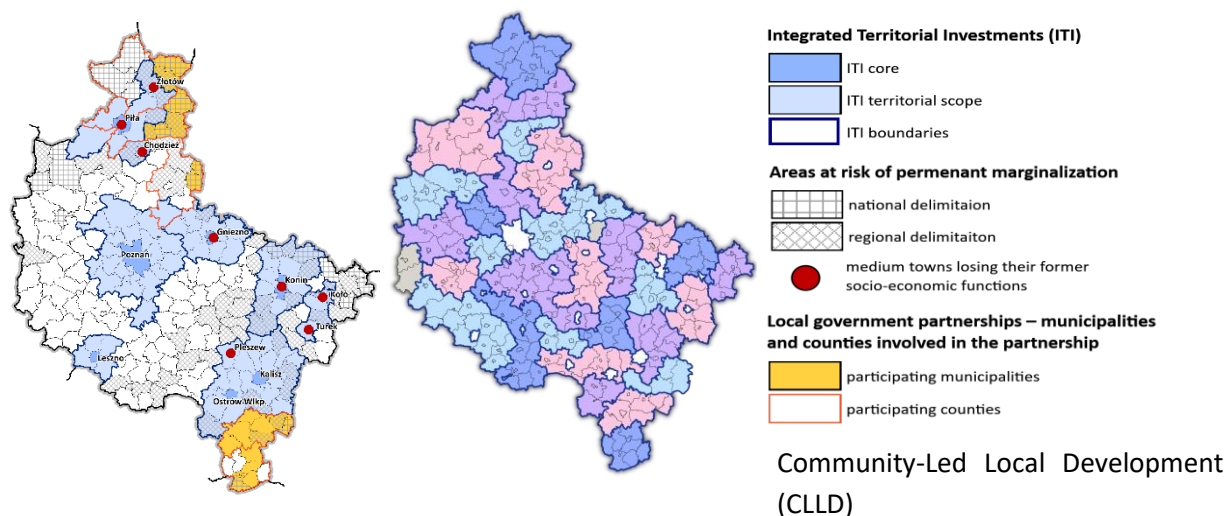
Financial Perspective 2021–2027

Drawing on past experiences, the 2021–2027 financial perspective provides for the implementation of all territorial tools listed in Article 28 of EU Regulation 2021/1060:

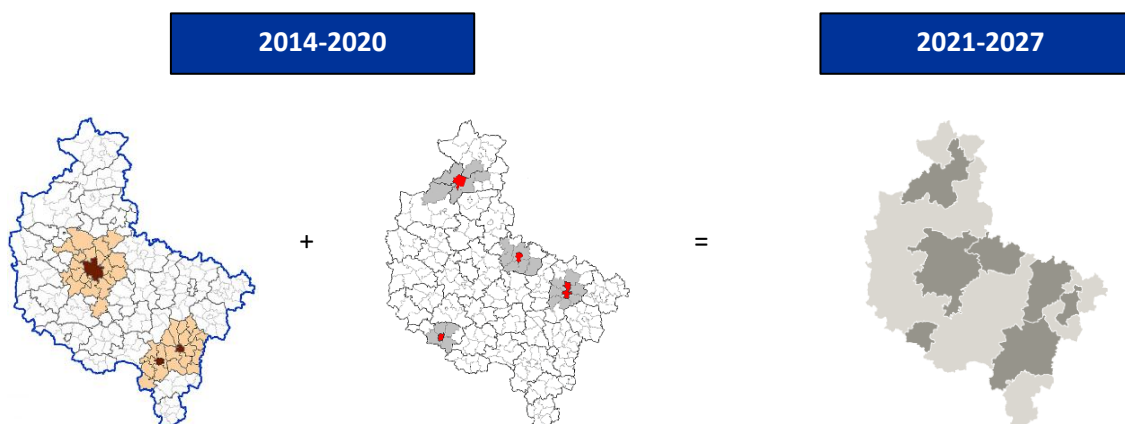
1. Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI);
2. Community-Led Local Development (CLLD);
3. Other Territorial Instruments (OTI) – a new tool.

EU regulations stipulate that a minimum of 8% of ERDF resources must be dedicated to supporting sustainable urban development. During negotiations in Poland, it was agreed that between 15.91% and 16.15% of ERDF funds from individual regional programs would be allocated to this purpose via territorial instruments. These instruments can fund projects across all Cohesion Policy objectives (PO1–PO6), provided that projects under PO5 are implemented based on a territorial strategy or a CLLD strategy.

Territorial tools in the region in 2021 - 2027



Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)



In the new perspective, the scope of ITI has been expanded—it is no longer limited to regional capital areas but includes other FUAs designated by regional authorities, particularly medium-sized towns losing socio-economic functions (defined in the National Strategy for Regional Development 2030 as SIAs of national importance). Meanwhile, the CLLD instrument enables local communities to initiate development actions through Local Action Groups (LAGs). The new OTI instrument can be used to support areas linked by functional relationships other than ITI Unions, as well as revitalization efforts. The Managing Authority is responsible for ensuring complementarity and preventing double funding. All these activities are subject to the horizontal principles arising from the Partnership Agreement and the Implementation Act.

Development Model of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship

The development model for the Wielkopolska Voivodeship to 2030² integrates regional actions with ITI, focusing on development based on knowledge, innovation, and low-emission growth. It relies on a precise definition of intervention areas based on actual functional links that transcend administrative boundaries. A key element is the concept of Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), where the core city serves as a hub organizing economic, social, and administrative life for the surrounding municipalities.

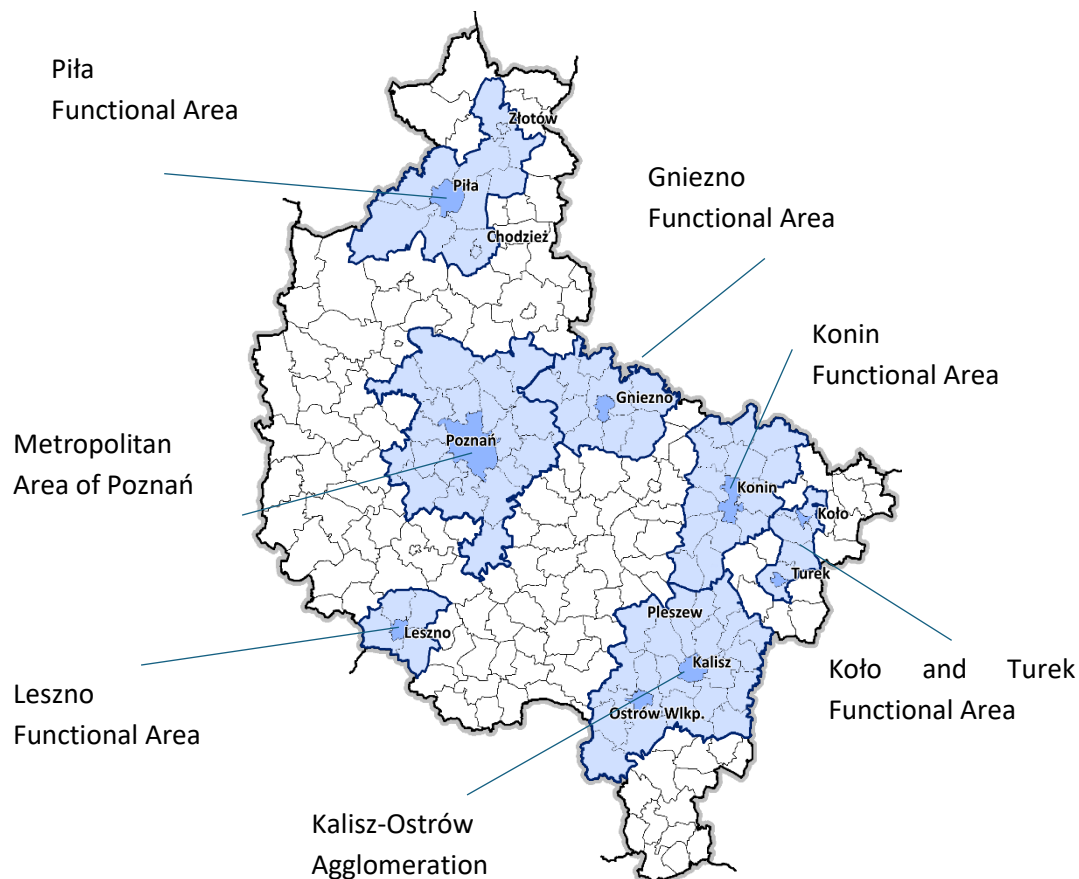
The structure of each FUA consists of three levels: the core city (urban function hub), the suburban zone with a high concentration of economic ties, and the surrounding peripheral municipalities. The delimitation process for FUAs combines quantitative analysis (commuting, migration) with institutional dimensions and a bottom-up will to cooperate. The model also facilitates international cooperation; for example, the Poznań Metropolis Association leads partnerships with cities in Poland and abroad (Georgia, Norway) regarding climate adaptation. The Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration is involved in the European Urban Initiative networks. The model's flexibility allows for the updating of FUA boundaries and key project lists (e.g., in response to mobility challenges).

The scope of approved areas within Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) for the seven FUAs is diverse and covers subregional communities with a population of 70,000–190,000 in 2024 (with the exception of the two largest agglomerations):

- Poznań Metropolitan Area (22 municipalities, 3,082 km² – 10.3% of the province's area, 1,107,100 inhabitants – 31.8% of the region's population),
- Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration (22 municipalities, 2,706 km² – 9.1% of the area, 371,500 inhabitants – 10.7% of the region's population),
- Konin Functional Area (15 municipalities, 1,661 km², 5.6% of the province's area, 194,600 inhabitants – 5.6% of the region's population),
- Piła Functional Area (11 units, 1,865 km², 6.3% of the province's area, 182,100 inhabitants – 5.2% of the region's population),
- Leszno Functional Area (5 units, 535 km², 1.8% of the province's area, 98,600 inhabitants – 2.8% of the region's population),
- Gniezno Functional Area (10 units, 1,255 km², 4.2% of the province's area, 140,700 inhabitants – 4.0% of the region's population),
- The Koło and Turek Functional Area (6 local authorities, 459 km², 1.5% of the province's area, 74,700 inhabitants – 2.1% of the region's population).

²

Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)



2.3 Governance

The effectiveness of the territorial strategy depends on a clear division of roles and the fluid flow of information between the central and local government levels. This system is based on the principles of subsidiarity and partnership. Coordination takes place across three main dimensions, ensuring so-called vertical and horizontal consistency:

LEVEL OF ADMINISTRATION	COORDINATION MECHANISM	FUNCTION IN PRACTICE
NATIONAL (TOP-DOWN)	Programme/Territorial Contract	Agreeing on investment priorities between the government and the region and securing funding.
REGIONAL (HORIZONTAL)	Regional Territorial Forums	A platform for knowledge exchange between the departments of the Marshal's Office and key stakeholders.
LOCAL (BOTTOM-UP)	Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)	Consolidating the needs of local authorities and districts into coherent projects with a wider impact.

The management of the Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) instrument in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship is built upon a partnership-based relationship between the regional level and local urban coalitions, supported by formalized coordination structures and modern digital tools. Governance in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship follows a multi-level structure, where the Marshal Office of the Wielkopolska Region (UMWW) plays a pivotal role at the regional level, serving as the Managing Authority (MA). The Voivodeship Board is responsible for the formal review and approval of territorial strategies, ensuring their consistency with regional programming documents, such as the Wielkopolska Voivodeship Development Strategy to 2030 and the European Funds for Wielkopolska (FEW) 2021–2027 program. At the national level, this process is coordinated by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy (MFiPR), which participates in the approval of ITI strategies for which national investment funding is also provided, ensuring their alignment with the nationwide cohesion policy framework.

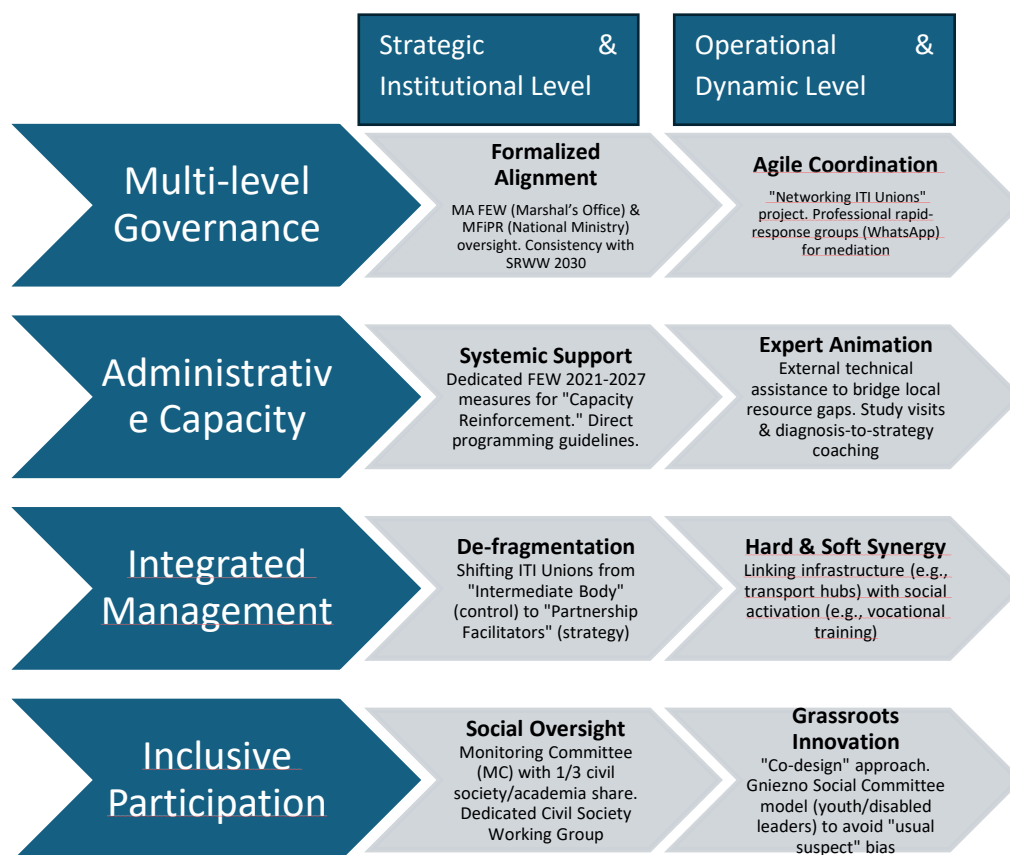
ITI is a tool co-financed by EU Structural Funds, designed to implement territorial strategies in an integrated manner. Rather than focusing on isolated projects by individual municipalities, it targets joint ventures that address challenges across an entire Functional Area (e.g., a regional capital together with its surrounding counties). For the ITI to function, local government units must establish a formalized structure:

- ITI Union (Lead Partner): Typically an association of municipalities or an inter-municipal agreement, equipped with its own dedicated office and administrative structure.

- **Intermediate Body:** The Voivodeship Board often delegates certain powers to the ITI Union, granting local governments genuine influence over the selection of projects for co-financing.

The operational process of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) is highly structured, bridging the bottom-up needs of local governments with regional development policy. The process begins with the development of a joint ITI Strategy, in which partner municipalities define objectives consistent with the directions set by the voivodeship.

The next step involves the call for proposals, conducted through competitive or non-competitive procedures. A key requirement at this stage is demonstrating synergy, proving that the joint venture will yield greater benefits than isolated actions by individual units. The final stage involves implementation and settlement; while specific municipalities are responsible for executing tasks, the ITI Office acts as the coordinator, ensuring the overall cohesion of the strategy and reporting progress to the Marshal Office.



Multi-level Coordination Mechanisms

Multi-level coordination mechanisms encompass formal planning and programming processes, regular consultations between the Managing Authority (MA) and local partnerships, and the operation of steering committees. In practice, regional networks and knowledge-sharing platforms, such as the ITI Network in Wielkopolska, as well as various working groups and consultative forums, play a vital role. An example of broader coordination is the "Networking of ITI Unions in Poland" project, which supports the exchange of experiences between agglomerations both within and beyond the Wielkopolska region, including Kalisz-Ostrów, Wałbrzych, and Jelenia Góra. At the operational level, partners also utilize informal, rapid communication channels—such as professional messaging groups (e.g., WhatsApp)—enabling efficient management of day-to-day issues between municipalities.

Administrative Capacity Building

The region supports the building of administrative capacity within territorial coalitions through dedicated tools, such as the "Strengthening ITI Potential" measures within the European Funds for Wielkopolska (FEW) program, as well as direct substantive and expert advisory services. The Marshal's Office provides programming guidelines, organizes training sessions and study visits, and offers support in drafting strategic documents. However, partners point to significant challenges: small ITI offices often struggle with insufficient staffing for independent data collection and analysis. This makes external expert support essential for maintaining the quality of the programming process, specifically regarding diagnoses, strategy development, partnership animation, and the formulation of project lists.

Territorial Management and Integrated Strategies

Local territorial coalitions have adopted a management model aimed at reducing the fragmentation of public actions by integrating investment projects (e.g., transfer hubs) with "soft" measures (e.g., training, social services). A prime example of such cross-departmental coordination is the linking of investments in care infrastructure with projects supporting the professional activation of parents. This model necessitates close cooperation between municipalities and the regional government, allowing for a more precise alignment of investments with the long-term development strategies of entire agglomerations.

Stakeholder and Citizen Engagement

The involvement of socio-economic partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the policy cycle is systematically promoted via the Monitoring Committee (MC), which serves a consultative and supervisory role. Representatives of social partners and the scientific community constitute at least one-third of the MC membership, ensuring genuine social oversight of strategy implementation. Within the MC, a specialized Civil Society Working Group analyzed ITI

implementation instruments and prepared the framework for creating new ITI Strategy Councils for the 2021–2027 perspective. Additionally, project selection criteria consistently reward ventures implemented in broad partnerships with NGOs and social economy entities.

On a territorial scale, the primary roles in strategy implementation are played by leaders (usually core cities) and the municipalities or counties associated within coalitions. Local partnerships typically rely on consolidated structures, such as associations (e.g., the Poznań Metropolis Association, active since 2011, or the Konin Agglomeration) or inter-municipal agreements (e.g., the Piła FUA ITI). While these are based on existing Local Government Unit (LGU) resources, dedicated coordination mechanisms—such as project committees or ad hoc working teams—are often created for specific EU projects. A key systemic shift in the current financial perspective is the relinquishment of the Intermediate Body (IB) role by ITI Unions. This allows their offices to focus on animating the partnership rather than on bureaucratic control.

Social Participation and Support Networks

Social participation and stakeholder involvement are promoted at all stages, though their real impact is assessed with varying degrees of success. Coalitions utilize traditional public consultations and online surveys, while establishing permanent advisory bodies such as ITI Advisory Boards or Opinion-Advisory Teams, comprising representatives from NGOs and the business sector. An innovative example, funded by Norwegian/Swiss grants and adaptable to ITI Unions, is the grassroots Social Committee in Gniezno. Here, candidates are nominated by employees (e.g., youth leaders, persons with disabilities), which helps avoid the dominance of "usual suspects" in public debates and includes individuals with specific needs in the decision-making process. Despite these efforts, barriers such as complex strategic language or low meeting attendance mean that participation is sometimes perceived as a formal requirement rather than true co-determination.

Finally, the support network—comprising European Funds Information Points and the "Project Officer" (opiekun projektu) institution—provides direct substantive support for beneficiaries implementing territorial strategies. The evolution of the model toward the 2021–2027 perspective anticipates further improvements, primarily the shift of ITI offices toward strengthened strategic and advisory functions, a direct result of systematic evaluation studies..

2.4 Cross-Sectoral Integration

The regional model of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship promotes cross-sectoral integration through a formalized strategic framework that mandates a multi-fund approach and the coordination of activities across various public policy domains. This integration is understood as a strategic process leading from a joint diagnosis and the formulation of development goals to the creation

of project bundles and the implementation of specific operations with mutually reinforcing characteristics.

Mechanisms Stimulating Integration

The primary mechanism stimulating this approach consists of regional and national guidelines, specifically the document "Principles for the implementation of territorial instruments in Poland in the EU financial perspective for 2021–2027." This document, along with project selection criteria approved by the FEW Monitoring Committee, requires local coalitions to combine interventions from different fields to secure funding.

The integrated approach is promoted primarily through strategic documents (ITI Strategies, OTI, and Municipal Revitalization Programs), which serve as a "logical puzzle of connections" for a given territory. Regional guidelines and project selection criteria explicitly encourage a multi-sectoral approach, awarding bonus points to projects implemented in broad partnerships (e.g., Local Government Units with NGOs) and those demonstrating complementarity with other interventions.

A particularly strong emphasis is placed on linking "hard" investments financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with "soft" measures from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). The promotion of this integrated approach occurs mainly through specific project selection criteria and is verified by the Marshal Office (UMWW) during the preparation of Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) strategies and individual projects. Applicants must demonstrate the integrated nature of an undertaking as early as the project concept stage (e.g., by showing the project's impact on at least two municipalities or its implementation through a partnership).

Sectoral Integration in Practice

Sectoral integration practices are considered as early as the design phase of calls for proposals and funding programs. The regional model encourages the combination of infrastructure (hard) actions with educational and social (soft) actions. This is facilitated by the non-competitive project selection mode used in the region, which allows for the negotiation of key project lists in a way that ensures mutual synergy and a direct link to the territorial diagnosis.

In practice, this means that projects financed by the ERDF (e.g., in mobility or climate change adaptation) are supplemented by information and education components financed by the ESF+. A cross-financing mechanism is applied here, allowing, for example, for the purchase of educational equipment within "soft" projects, ensuring synergy between infrastructure and competency development.

Synergies and Strategic Goals

In Eastern Wielkopolska, this integration is particularly visible in the Territorial Just Transition Plan, where investments in renewable energy and the reclamation of post-mining areas are strictly linked to the professional activation of workers leaving the mining sector. Public-private partnerships and LGU-NGO-business cooperation are highlighted as innovative forms of implementing these integrated policies.

The ITI operational process can be divided into three stages:

1. Development of the ITI Strategy: Local governments jointly define goals consistent with the voivodeship development strategy.
2. Call for Proposals: The ITI Union announces calls (competitive or non-competitive). Projects must demonstrate a synergy effect—proving that joint implementation yields better results than the sum of separate actions.
3. Implementation and Settlement: Individual municipalities execute their parts of the project, while the ITI office ensures overall consistency and reports results to the Marshal Office.

Monitoring and Evaluation

While the regional model emphasizes integrated planning, the systematic monitoring of the strategy as a whole remains a challenge. Current mechanisms focus primarily on monitoring individual projects regarding their physical and financial progress and the achievement of indicators assigned to specific "programmatic silos." There is currently no statutory obligation to monitor strategic goals that extend beyond the dedicated allocation, although some mature partnerships declare they conduct such analyses independently. The effectiveness of the integrated approach is subject to regular **evaluation studies** (e.g., mid-term evaluations) to develop recommendations for subsequent implementation stages.

Integrated project themes within approved territorial strategies



The Integrated Approach in Practice: The Wielkopolska Model

In strategies funded by the ERDF and ESF+, the systematically included thematic areas primarily cover urban mobility (promoting sustainable urban transport – Objective 2.VIII), climate change adaptation (risk prevention and disaster resilience – Objective 2.IV), education (equal access to high-quality education – Objective 4.F), and the social integration of people at risk of poverty (Objective 4.L). A constant element is also the support for integrated social and economic development in urban areas (Objective 5.1), which links culture, natural heritage, and security.

Examples of Successful Cross-Sectoral Strategy Implementation

The effectiveness of the model is confirmed by approved and implemented territorial strategies:

- ITI Poznań: Successfully combined the development of public transport (53 integrated transfer hubs) with the digitalization of public services (the MeSIP system) and support for social services delivered through broad-based partnerships.
- ITI AKO (Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration): Integrated actions in water and wastewater management with the deep thermal modernization of public buildings and the professionalization of the ITI Office as an Intermediate Body.

2.5 Funding and Finance

An analysis of the financial framework of the regional model in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship points to the dominant role of EU funds, which serve as the primary engine for cooperation within territorial coalitions. Strategies are funded mainly through the European Funds for Wielkopolska (FEW) 2021–2027 program, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). In larger centers, such as the Poznań Metropolis or the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration (AKO), resources from the Cohesion Fund (CF) under the national FENIKS program serve as a vital supplement. A specific and crucial source for Eastern Wielkopolska is the Just Transition Fund (JTF), supporting the region's move away from a coal-based economy. The funding structure is completed by the own contributions of Local Government Units (LGUs) and state budget funds.

In the 2014–2020 perspective, €196.6 million was allocated to ITI Poznań (of which approx. 10.6% was ESF) and €69.1 million to ITI AKO (approx. 11.3% from ESF). This enabled the complementary linking of "hard" infrastructure investments with "soft" measures, such as training and professional activation support. This model is supplemented by Strategic Intervention Areas (SIA) funded through so-called Territorial Mandates, with a total EU funding value exceeding €99 million.

In the 2021–2027 financial perspective, the implementation of the ITI instrument within FEW covers 7 functional areas and a total of 91 municipalities. The ITI allocation for FEW activities amounts to €241.9 million, including:

- ERDF: €212.8 million
- ESF+: €29.1 million

Within the program, 8 measures are dedicated to ITI. The allocation applies to the following intervention areas:

- Measure 3.2: Urban transport infrastructure (€119 million)
- Measure 2.6: Climate change adaptation (€60 million)
- Measure 1.4: Public e-services (€32 million)
- Measure 6.8: Education (€14 million)
- Measure 6.18: Social integration (€7.7 million)
- Measure 6.14: Social and health services (€6.4 million)
- Measure 7.4: ITI capacity support (€2 million)
- Measure 6.5: Adaptation to change (€1.3 million)

Mechanisms for combining different funds are widely used in the regional model, allowing for the implementation of complex, integrated projects. The most significant of these is cross-financing, which enables the funding of "soft" (social, educational) activities as a supplement to infrastructure investments. Partnerships also show activity in securing funds from programs such

as Erasmus+, Norwegian grants, LIFE, or direct grants from the European Parliament, building multi-source financial portfolios. However, the problem of so-called "funding cannibalization" is noted—competitive national programs (e.g., the former *Polish Deal*) sometimes offered higher co-financing levels than FEW for the same development activities, complicating the financial assembly of EU strategies.

A key achievement of the regional model in reducing administrative burdens is the resignation of ITI Unions from acting as Intermediate Bodies (IB). This shift has allowed coordinating offices to move away from tedious control and audit processes toward the active animation of the partnership. Other simplifications include the full digitalization of processes (eliminating paper documentation), the creation of standardized document templates by the Managing Authority, and the use of dedicated project lists, which reduces the risks and costs of application preparation for individual municipalities.

Despite the promotion of modern approaches, innovative financial instruments (such as PPPs, revolving funds, or guarantees) are rarely used. Most partnerships currently do not utilize them, though they consider doing so in the future. Exceptions include selected repayable instruments in Leszno and pilot initiatives in public-private partnerships and RES (Renewable Energy Sources) projects in the Konin region. The main barriers include the specific nature of public projects and difficulties in securing own contributions, making non-repayable grants the most desired form of support.

Financial resources are generally assessed as insufficient relative to strategic ambitions. While funds from FEW or JTF are significant, the needs identified in functional areas—particularly in urban mobility and energy transition—repeatedly exceed available allocations. This necessitates difficult prioritization of tasks and a search for external funding because, as local leaders emphasize, it is the actual funding, and not just the vision, that acts as the primary factor integrating municipalities within territorial coalitions. Consequently, while the regional model is effective in spending, it struggles with an insufficient link between Cohesion Policy and national funding sources, hindering the implementation of fully comprehensive territorial strategies.

2.6 Monitoring

The regional model of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship relies on a two-track approach to monitoring progress, distinguishing mandatory financial and physical monitoring of individual operations from monitoring the effectiveness of the territorial strategy itself. While oversight of individual projects is integrated into the broader system of operational programs (such as WROP 2014-2020 or FEW 2021-2027), monitoring the strategy itself presents a challenge requiring separate mechanisms. The central point for collecting data on EU operations is the Marshal Office of the

Wielkopolska Region (UMWW), which utilizes systems such as CST (for the 2021-2027 perspective) or LSI2014+ (for 2014-2020). At the regional level, there is no single, common monitoring system for all territorial strategies, as coalitions rely on national guidelines regarding territorial instruments. Importantly, ITI (Integrated Territorial Investments) units independently define additional metrics for activities implemented outside the EU allocation, allowing for more precise measurement of long-term goals.

Regional authorities support the monitoring process by providing ITI offices with monthly reports from the central system. These data are supplemented with information from the Statistics Poland (GUS) Local Data Bank (BDL), administrative registers, and direct contact with beneficiaries; in the case of in-depth analyses, the support of external experts is utilized. Monitoring results are systematically used in the adaptive management process (policy learning). Based on current data, the need for changes is identified, resulting in updates to strategic documents or the reallocation of funds between projects (e.g., shifts within ITI Poznań and ITI AKO without the need to amend entire agreements).

The following describes how the monitoring of the ITI instrument has changed between the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 perspectives.

In the 2014–2020 financial perspective, implemented under the Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme (WROP 2014-2020), the ITI instrument played a key role in coordinating actions between municipalities and the voivodeship government, focusing on ITI Poznań (Poznań FUA) and ITI AKO (Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration). The objective was to better align investments with agglomeration development strategies and reduce the fragmentation of public actions. A total of €265.7 million was allocated to these strategies (10.7% of the total WROP allocation), and 211 projects with a total value exceeding €451 million were implemented across 57 calls for proposals. Key physical outputs of this period included the construction of 53 integrated transfer hubs, the energy modernization of 140 buildings, and support for vocational education infrastructure. The monitoring model was a multi-level process based on the Local Information System (LSI2014+), which ensured continuous oversight of physical and financial progress and the early identification of risks.

During this period, the Managing Authority (UMWW) supplemented data with information from administrative registers and direct beneficiary contact. Monitoring financial progress served as a prelude to the flexible shifting of funds between WROP measures within ITI Poznań and ITI AKO. These changes were reflected in the Detailed Description of Priority Axes (SZOP). In ITI areas, great emphasis was placed on monitoring non-competitive key projects of a strategic nature, such as electronic public services (Axis 2) or social services (Axis 9), often implemented in broad partnerships with Local Government Units (LGUs) and NGOs. ITI monitoring covered a very wide range of output indicators across many axes, including transport, environmental protection, energy (thermal modernization), as well as education and the labor market.

Evolution Toward the 2021–2027 Perspective

Based on evaluation studies, including the mid-term review of the previous perspective, key recommendations were formulated for 2021–2027, the most significant being the resignation of ITIs from the role of Intermediate Body (IB). This decision aimed to optimize and simplify the fund implementation system by eliminating previously identified "bottlenecks" in the project settlement process. The new model focuses on strengthening the strategic function of territories through the planned creation of special ITI strategy councils and stronger inclusion of civil society organizations in decision-making and oversight processes. This evolution marks a transition from technical administrative support toward advisory, coordination, and strategic specialization.

The new programming period under European Funds for Wielkopolska (FEW 2021–2027) emphasizes deep digitalization, manifested by the total elimination of paper-based applications. To ensure investment continuity, a phased operations mechanism was introduced, allowing for the completion of complex undertakings started in the previous perspective. The Marshal Office (UMWW) continues to serve as the central point for data collection using the CST system. Local coalitions develop their own integrated sections dedicated to monitoring and evaluation within their strategic documents, allowing them autonomy in tracking territory-specific goals. For ITI Unions, the guidelines on territorialization issued by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy apply.

Monitoring indicators are selected in harmony with the FEW 2021–2027 regional program and are more closely aligned with the Common List of Key Indicators (WLWK), while maintaining the autonomy of local associations like AKO to define their own metrics for goals achieved outside the EU allocation. The Managing Authority supports ITI offices by providing monthly reports from the central system, as local staff lack direct access to analytical systems.

Challenges and Stakeholder Engagement

A significant challenge in the regional model remains analytical capacity and data access. Coordination offices (ITIs) typically have small staffs and no direct access to the central CST system, making them dependent on monthly reports from the UMWW—an action recognized as a unique best practice in Poland. LGUs supplement this with GUS data and administrative registers, though external experts are often required for deeper analysis.

Stakeholder engagement has evolved toward formalized bodies, such as ITI Advisory Councils or Working Groups under the Monitoring Committee, where representatives of NGOs and the economic sector review strategy changes. Although residents can submit suggestions during document updates, their direct influence on technical monitoring aspects remains limited, and the process is often perceived by citizens as complex.

In summary, the evolution of the ITI model in Wielkopolska is moving from engaging territorial structures in technical administration (the IB role) toward their specialization in strategic advice and coordination. Monitoring in the new perspective is more integrated with the FEW 2021–2027 system, providing greater transparency through the involvement of NGO representatives in the Monitoring Committee. These changes are designed to allow for a more efficient response to local needs while maintaining consistency with the development goals of the entire region.

2.7 Transformative Capacity

The regional model in Wielkopolska has evolved from a highly structured system in 2014–2020 toward a model where the regional government plays a leading role in creating assumptions, allowing for better utilization of specific regional experiences. Systemic changes go beyond simple infrastructural improvements, focusing on deep coordination between municipalities and the voivodeship government. This model is designed to reduce the fragmentation of public actions and better align investments with the long-term development strategies of entire agglomerations.

Support for experimentation and innovative methodological tools is evident in the integration of "hard" infrastructure projects with "soft" measures within ITI frameworks, allowing for the comprehensive resolution of territorial issues. The model creates favorable conditions for social and institutional innovation by firmly embedding the partnership principle in the project selection process, where additional points are awarded for involving NGOs and social partners. The transformative nature of the model is confirmed by the establishment of special ITI strategy councils for the 2021–2027 perspective, aimed at even deeper involvement of civil society in territorial governance. Additionally, the development of spatial information systems (such as MeSIP in Poznań or the system in AKO) has created an innovative database facilitating daily contact between the administration, residents, and entrepreneurs. Continuous model improvement is supported by an evaluation system which, based on conclusions from 2014–2020, led to the systemic recommendation for ITIs to resign from the Intermediate Body (IB) role so they can fully focus on their strategic and coordination functions in the new perspective.

The transformative potential of the regional strategy-making model in the Wielkopolska Voivodeship is assessed heterogeneously, depending on the specifics and challenges of a given territorial coalition. While partnerships like Leszno or Piła indicate that the model focuses mainly on promoting incremental improvements in areas such as mobility, environmental infrastructure, and public services, Eastern Wielkopolska (Konin) clearly declares an orientation toward systemic change. This difference stems from the need for deep energy and socio-economic transformation in the post-mining region, which requires a departure from the existing economic paradigm in favor of climate neutrality and new development models.

The model supports the implementation of experiments and pilot projects, although their scope is often determined by top-down EU fund programming rules, of which territorial coalitions sometimes feel like "hostages." Methodological and operational innovations are anticipated in mobility, water retention, green-blue infrastructure, and the digitalization of services. In Eastern Wielkopolska, pilots primarily concern the management of post-mining areas, innovative solutions in Renewable Energy Sources (RES), and testing new co-management models.

In terms of institutional and social innovation, the model creates conditions for testing unconventional forms of participation. A unique example is the Social Committee in Gniezno, established bottom-up to include people directly affected by issues (e.g., people with disabilities or youth) in decision-making processes—avoiding the dominance of "regulars" in public debates; this was applied during projects funded by Swiss funds. Another mechanism fostering social innovation is the Young Leaders Academy in Konin—a workshop project building leadership competencies among residents. The technological dimension of innovation is supported mainly through co-financing demonstration projects, the digitalization of administration, and the implementation of smart city management systems.

The regional model actively encourages the transfer and scaling of innovative practices within functional areas. A mechanism dominates where the core city implements new, interesting ideas, which are then gradually implemented in neighboring partner municipalities. An example is the replication of solutions in retention or bicycle mobility from Leszno to the LOF (Leszno Functional Area) municipalities. Furthermore, the networking of ITI Unions, regular in-person and online meetings, and participation in study visits serve as platforms for experience exchange, facilitating the replication of successes across different territories.

Despite transformative ambitions, finance remains the primary stimulant for action—partners indicate that without dedicated EU funds (ITI, JTF), coalitions might not have formed, and their willingness to engage in risky, innovative projects would be significantly lower. Therefore, the challenge remains to design instruments that not only finance "concrete" infrastructure but truly change the culture of cooperation and the ecological or digital awareness of both residents and local authorities.

2.8 SWOT analysis of the regional territorial tools

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Formalized and mature governance structures: Basing the coalition on existing associations (e.g., Poznań Metropolis, SAKO) and long-standing trust between the authorities. • Reduction of administrative burden: Removing the role of the ITI offices from the Intermediate Body role, allowing for focus on partnership development rather than reporting and control. • Functional approach: Strong focus on real urban-rural connections and functional areas (FUAs) instead of rigid administrative boundaries. • Cross-sectoral integration: Effective combination of funds (ERDF + ESF+) and projects (e.g., mobility + education), implementing cross-financing mechanisms. • Regional support: Access to high-quality expert advice and capacity-building tools offered by the UMWW	• The cultural identity of the ITI is not well-developed, which leads residents to perceive consultations for the ZIT area as a kind of "fiction." Residents identify more with their municipality than with the "intermunicipal association." • ITI offices lack direct access to central data systems (CST) and small staffing levels in smaller partnerships. • Complex strategic language: The use of specific, bureaucratic vocabulary makes it difficult for citizens to understand the vision. • Lack of interest in financial innovation: Very limited use of repayable instruments, PPPs, or revolving funds, in favor of safer, non-repayable grants.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Scaling innovation: Collaboration within a MUF can enable the smooth spread of developed standards to other municipalities within a given functional system. Instead of isolated activities, integrated projects allow for the joint implementation of modern solutions – for example, in the field of water retention systems or sustainable mobility. This	• Financial deficit: EU funds are considered significant, but insufficient to address the enormous needs, especially in transport infrastructure. • "Cannibalization" of funds: Risk of municipalities choosing national programs with higher funding levels. • Lack of a developed culture of cooperation: Conflicts between local

allows innovations tested in one part of the area to be effectively adopted by other municipalities, preventing technological gaps and improving the quality of public services throughout the region, regardless of distance from the central city. Knowledge exchange platforms: Developing peer-learning and study visits as tools for continuous improvement of local policy. • New models of participation: Utilizing innovative structures, such as grassroots Social Committees, to include previously unrepresented groups. • Development alliances: The potential for ITIs to evolve into lasting metropolitan alliances with broader competencies.	authorities or the domination of particular interests over the common goals of the functional area. • Regulatory rigidity: Top-down guidelines from the national and EU levels may limit local flexibility and the speed of adaptation to change. • Fading activity: Declining involvement of municipalities located furthest from the core of the functional area.
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3. Conclusions

3.1 Implications for INTEGRA Future Activities

- Good Practices and Policy Improvement Priorities

The most significant and innovative practices developed in the region include:

- **Resignation of ITI Unions from the Intermediate Body (IB) Function:** This is a crucial administrative simplification felt across the entire system. It allows ITI offices to move away from tedious control and audit tasks in favor of genuine "**partnership animation**," building trust, and providing substantive support to municipalities in project preparation.
- **Monthly Regional-Level Reporting:** Due to the lack of direct access for ITI offices to the national **CST** IT system, the Managing Authority (UMWW) voluntarily generates and distributes monthly monitoring reports for individual ITI units. This practice is considered a national benchmark.
- **Utilization of External Experts as "Cooperation Educators":** Engaging independent experts who are not affiliated with specific local authorities helps resolve conflicts between municipalities and builds awareness of shared supra-local goals. These experts assist officials in linking local actions to overarching EU frameworks, such as the **Green Deal** or the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.
- **Multi-source Financing and Networking (The AKO Example):** The Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration (AKO) actively combines Cohesion Policy funds with European Parliament grants, the Erasmus+ program, and Norwegian funds. Simultaneously, it implements the "Networking of ITI Unions in Poland" project, creating a knowledge-exchange platform across different regions.

Policy Improvement Priorities

To improve the effectiveness of the model and its alignment with EU frameworks, the following aspects should be prioritized:

- **Ensuring Coherent Demarcation and Avoiding "Funding Cannibalization":** There is an urgent need for better coordination between EU funds and national programs (e.g., the former *Polish Deal*, WFOŚiGW programs). These often offer higher co-financing rates, which weakens municipal interest in more complex but more integrated EU projects.
- **Enabling Direct Access to Data Systems:** It is recommended to include ITI offices in the **CST system** as monitoring entities without requiring them to hold the bureaucratic IB function. This would streamline data analysis and **adaptive management**.
- **Transitioning from "Pro Forma" to Genuine Participation:** The challenge lies in simplifying the language of strategies—which is currently too technical for residents—

and engaging citizens at earlier stages, before the main intervention directions are locked in by top-down financial guidelines.

- **Evaluating the Realization of Vision, Not Just Projects:** Currently, official focus remains on "tangibles" (financial spending), while the extent to which the long-term strategic vision is being achieved rarely undergoes rigorous assessment.
- **Strengthening Functional Links Over Administrative Boundaries:** Defining the scope of strategies should rely more on actual traffic flows and service-based connections rather than rigid county or municipal borders.
- Orientation for Mutual Learning activities

Inspiration for other regions can primarily be drawn from the evolution of ITI offices from bureaucratic bodies into **partnership animators**. The resignation from the **Intermediate Body (IB)** function in centers such as Poznań or Kalisz-Ostrów allowed for the redirection of resources from control and audits toward relationship building, trust, and substantive support for municipalities.

Another element worthy of replication is the establishment of durable, formalized cooperation structures, such as the **Poznań Metropolis Association** (operating since 2011) or the **Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration**. These have proven that long-term cooperation extending beyond a single project builds the social capital necessary to achieve shared supra-local goals.

Regarding **participatory mechanisms**, the Wielkopolska model provides innovative solutions that can serve as pilot projects for other territories:

- **The Gniezno Social Committee:** A bottom-up model based on letters of motivation, allowing for the inclusion of "non-obvious" leaders (e.g., people with disabilities or youth coaches) and breaking the dominance of career activists.
- **The Young Leaders Academy in Konin:** A project building the competencies of future transformation staff—crucial for regions facing **Just Transition** challenges.

Opportunities for Knowledge Exchange

Areas where Wielkopolska could benefit from exchanging experiences with other entities primarily include the use of **innovative financial instruments** and modern technologies. The region currently shows low interest in revolving funds, **Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)**, or the use of **Artificial Intelligence** in strategy design, opening a window to learn from European partners more advanced in these fields. Additionally, the challenge remains to find ways to make participation less "pro forma" and more understandable for the average resident, necessitating an exchange of communication tools that simplify technical EU terminology.

Key Drivers for Transfer and Scaling

For the effective transfer and scaling of practices, it is crucial to promote mechanisms such as:

- **Networking and Peer Review:** Examples include AKO leading the "Networking of ITI Unions in Poland" project and participating in international peer reviews (**European Urban Initiative**), allowing for the direct verification and adaptation of solutions from other countries.
- **Rapid Communication Channels:** The use of informal groups (e.g., WhatsApp) alongside official forums for the instantaneous exchange of information between municipal partners.
- **The Educational Role of Experts:** Utilizing external advisors as mediators who help municipalities recognize the benefits of **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **Green Deal**.

3.2 Lessons Learned and Preliminary Recommendations for Policy Improvement

- Strengths and Weaknesses of the Regional Model

Strengths of the Model

The primary strengths of the model include a clear and formalized governance framework and robust coordination mechanisms. Territorial coalitions often rely on existing, consolidated structures, such as the Poznań Metropolis Association (operating since 2011) or the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration Association (AKO), which ensures institutional continuity and a high level of trust between partners.

The model promotes a functional approach that transcends rigid administrative boundaries, allowing for a better alignment of interventions with the actual needs of residents regarding commuting patterns and public services. A key asset is the strong cross-sectoral integration mandated by project selection criteria and mechanisms such as cross-financing, which link "hard" investments (ERDF) with "soft" measures (ESF+). Furthermore, the regional system effectively reduces administrative burdens by having ITI unions resign from the Intermediate Body function, allowing them to focus on partnership animation. Substantive support from the Marshal Office (UMWW), including expert assistance and regular data reporting, is considered a benchmark.

Barriers and Weaknesses

On the other hand, the model faces significant limitations. The main obstacle is insufficient financial resources relative to ambitious strategic goals, particularly in capital-intensive areas like

urban mobility. The model's effectiveness is also hampered by the lack of direct access for local coalitions to the central monitoring system (CST), which limits their autonomy in data analysis and forces reliance on external reports.

Another weakness is the limited engagement of stakeholders and citizens, which in practice is often described as "pro forma" due to the complex, technical language of documents and the fact that consultations occur only after the main directions of action have been dictated by financial guidelines.

Additional Challenges

An additional challenge is the politicization of cooperation—the involvement of political leaders can sometimes act as a barrier, and the success of a partnership often depends on the degree to which the working team is "depoliticized." The model also struggles with "funding cannibalization," where competing national programs (e.g., those offering higher co-financing than EU funds) weaken the motivation of municipalities to undertake more difficult integrated projects.

Within the monitoring system, there is a noticeable lack of evaluation regarding the strategic vision itself; official attention focuses almost exclusively on "tangibles"—namely, the spending of funds on projects—rather than the degree to which long-term intangible goals are achieved. Finally, a limitation is the low utilization of innovative financial instruments, such as PPPs or revolving funds, in favor of traditional grants.

- Preliminary Recommendations for Future Strategic Development

Preliminary recommendations for the future development of the regional strategic model in Wielkopolska are based on the need to transition from fund administration to genuine strategic management and the fostering of territorial cooperation. Below are the key recommendations that form the action plan for the region, which will undergo further verification during the INTEGRA project.

1. Separating Strategic Vision from Operational Tools

A clear distinction must be made between the supra-local strategy—a document defining the long-term vision for the entire functional area—and the ITI strategy, which should serve an exclusively implementational and operational function. It is recommended that the vision should not be merely "official communication," but a shared goal, maturely developed through years of practice and experience. This process should systematically involve external experts acting as mediators to help overcome narrow municipal interests and build trust in the shared goals of the Functional Urban Area (FUA).

2. Consolidating the Role of ITI Offices as Partnership Animators

It is recommended to maintain the model in which strategy coordination offices (ITI Unions) do not perform the function of an Intermediate Body (IB). This structure allows for a shift away from bureaucracy (controls, audits) toward building municipal capacity, fostering cooperation, and supporting "soft" aspects of integration. Efforts should be made to transform these structures into permanent metropolitan or development unions that can take over certain county-level (powiat) competencies regarding the coordination of public services.

3. Optimizing Territorial Scope Based on Functionality

Future development should be based on a functional approach rather than a purely administrative one. Defining strategy boundaries should account for actual traffic flows, commuting patterns, and service links, while remaining an open model for new municipalities to join, provided they demonstrate measurable benefits from integration. Cooperation should naturally extend beyond the rigid framework of EU projects to include joint initiatives (e.g., utility purchasing groups) implemented using internal resources.

4. Reforming the Participation Model: From "Pro Forma" to Co-creation

A key recommendation is to move away from traditional, "dry" public consultations, which residents often perceive as a mere formality. Innovative tools should be implemented, such as:

- Bottom-up Social Committees (following the Gniezno model), involving community leaders rather than just "regular" participants.
- Tangible events promoting specific local investments on the ground, instead of complex strategic documents.
- Leadership Academies to engage youth and build new cadres for local governments.

5. Ensuring Financial Adequacy and Demarcation of Support

There is an urgent need to develop a system for the demarcation of support between EU and national funds to prevent "funding cannibalization"—situations where municipalities abandon complex integrated projects in favor of simpler national grants. Simultaneously, given the funding gap relative to needs (especially in mobility), it is necessary to promote innovative financial instruments (e.g., PPPs, repayable instruments), which the region currently utilizes rarely.

6. Streamlining Monitoring and Data Access

It is proposed to include ITI offices in the national CST IT system, providing them with direct access to monitoring data without requiring them to act as an IB. The monitoring system should be expanded to evaluate the degree of vision realization, rather than just financial and output indicators. Additionally, regular study visits and in-person networking between different territorial coalitions should be promoted as tools for peer-learning.

4. References

At the national and regional levels, the list of official documents includes:

- "Principles for the Implementation of Territorial Instruments in Poland in the EU Financial Perspective 2021-2027" (MFiPR).
- Territorial Dimension. Principles for Reviewing Territorial Strategies under the European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021-2027 Program (ITI, OTI, GPR).
- "European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021-2027" Program (EFW) with its Detailed Description of Priorities (SZOP). "Development Strategy for the Wielkopolska Region until 2030"
- "Program Contract for the Wielkopolska Region."
- "Regional Innovation Strategy for Wielkopolska 2030."
- "Spatial Development Plan for the Wielkopolska Region. Wielkopolska 2020+."
- "Territorial Plan for the Just Transformation of Eastern Greater Poland".

The analysis also utilized the approved strategic documents of local territorial coalitions:

- "Strategy for Supralocal Development of the Poznań Metropolitan Area 2035" and "Strategy for Integrated Territorial Investments in the Poznań Functional Urban Area for 2021-2027."
- "Strategy for Integrated Territorial Investments in the Leszczyński Functional Urban Area 2023-2032" (Leszczyński Functional Urban Area).
- "Strategy for Integrated Territorial Investments in the Piła Functional Urban Area."
- "Strategy for Supralocal Development of the Konin Agglomeration 2030" and "Strategy for the Konin County Development for 2021-2030."
- Territorial Strategy of the Kalisz-Ostrów Agglomeration Association (AKO).

Working documents constitute an important part of the bibliography, including:

- Summaries of workshops with local stakeholders (e.g., the INTEGRA plenary workshop of December 17, 2025).

- Monthly reports submitted by the Managing Authority of the Fund regarding the status of project implementation and monitoring.
- Guidelines for the MA regarding the evaluation of territorial strategies and the principles and criteria for project selection.
- Expert analyses regarding the delimitation of functional areas and documentation from reviews (e.g., the European Urban Initiative in Kalisz).
- In terms of collecting quantitative data and indicators, the diagnosis is based on the following datasets and systems:
 - Local Data Bank of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) and the STRATEG system.
 - Central Teleinformatic System (CST) for data on EU projects.
 - Common List of Key Indicators (WLWK).
 - Reports on the state of municipalities and administrative registers of individual local government units.

Below is a list of documents that elaborate on the provisions contained in the Regional Development Strategy 2030, coordinated at the regional level within the organizational structures of the Office and regional government organizational units. The Wielkopolska Regional Government implemented 48 documents that expanded on the goals of the Regional Development Strategy 2030.

Table 1. Documents implementing the SRWW 2030 goals implemented in 2025.

No.	Document Title	Validity Period
1.	Territorial Just Transition Plan for Eastern Wielkopolska (TJTP)	2021-2027
2.	Development Programme for Volunteer Fire Departments in Wielkopolska for 2021-2030	2021-2030
3.	Foreign Cooperation Priorities of the Wielkopolska Region (update)	from 2025
4.	Foreign Cooperation Plan of the Wielkopolska Region for 2025	2025
5.	Education Support Programme for Gifted Youth – Residents of the Wielkopolska Region	from 2017

6.	Strategy for the Construction and Development of the Information Society in the Wielkopolska Region: e-WIELKOPOLSKA	from 2004
7.	Strategy "Wielkopolska Education 2023-2030"	2023-2030
8.	Wielkopolska Region Budget for 2025	2025
9.	Multi-year Financial Forecast of the Wielkopolska Region for 2025 and subsequent years	from 2025
10.	Monument Care Programme of the Wielkopolska Region for 2025-2028 (adopted in Nov 2025)	2025-2028
11.	Cooperation Programme of the Wielkopolska Region Local Government with NGOs and Public Benefit Entities for 2025	2025
12.	Multi-year Cooperation Programme of the Wielkopolska Region Local Government with NGOs and Public Benefit Entities for 2024-2028	2024-2028
13.	Wielkopolska Regional Operational Programme for 2014-2020	2014-2023 [2]
14.	European Funds for Wielkopolska 2021-2027 Programme	2021-2027
15.	Programme for Reducing Food Waste and Loss in Wielkopolska for 2021-2025	2021-2025
16.	Wielkopolska Culinary Heritage and High-Quality Food Promotion Programme for 2021-2030	2021-2030
17.	"Wielkopolska Village Renewal 2020+" Programme	from 2020
18.	Regional Innovation Strategy for Wielkopolska 2030 (RIS 2030)	2020-2030
19.	Development Strategy for Hydrogen-based Wielkopolska until 2030 with a 2040 perspective	2023-2040
20.	Update of the "Asbestos and Asbestos-containing Products Removal Programme for the Wielkopolska Region"	2017-2032

21.	Air Quality Plan for the Poznań Agglomeration Zone 2020-2026	2020-2026
22.	Air Quality Plan for the City of Kalisz Zone 2020-2026	2020-2026
23.	Waste Management Plan for the Wielkopolska Region for 2019-2025 including the Investment Plan	2023-2028
24.	Air Quality Plan for the Wielkopolska Zone 2020-2026	2020-2026
25.	Air Quality Plan regarding Ozone for the Wielkopolska Zone 2019-2025	2019-2025
26.	Environmental Noise Protection Programme for the Wielkopolska Region	2024-2029
27.	Air Quality Plan regarding PM2.5 Dust for the City of Kalisz Zone	2023-2026
28.	Environmental Protection Programme for the Wielkopolska Region until 2030	2020-2030
29.	Sustainable Public Transport Development Plan for the Wielkopolska Region (2025 update)	until 2045
30.	Health Policy of the Wielkopolska Region in the field of public health, promotion, and prevention for 2021-2030	2021-2030
31.	Regional Programme for the Prevention and Resolution of Alcohol-Related Problems and Counteracting Drug Addiction for 2022-2026	2022-2026
32.	Strategic Directions for the Development of Psychiatric Care Resources in the Wielkopolska Region	from 2020
33.	Regional Mental Health Protection Programme for the Wielkopolska Region for 2025-2030 (adopted in Feb 2025)	2025-2030
34.	Health Policy Programme for the Prevention and Early Detection of Osteoporosis for residents of the Wielkopolska Region for 2025-2026 (adopted in Jan 2025)	2025-2026
35.	"Wielkopolska Family Card" Programme	from 2014

36.	Wielkopolska Social Economy Development Programme for 2023-2027	2023-2027
37.	Wielkopolska Support Programme for Persons with Limited Disabilities for 2021-2025	2021-2025
38.	Wielkopolska Support Programme for the Elderly for 2021-2025 (updated in June 2025)	2021-2025
39.	Wielkopolska Programme for Counteracting Domestic Violence for 2021-2025 (updated in June 2025)	2021-2025
40.	Wielkopolska Support Programme for the Family, Foster Care System, and Adoption for 2021-2025	2021-2025
41.	Social Policy Strategy of the Wielkopolska Region until 2030	2020-2030
42.	Wielkopolska Deinstitutionalisation and Social Services Development Plan for 2023-2026	2023-2026
43.	Spatial Development Plan for the Wielkopolska Region including the Spatial Development Plan for the Poznań Functional Urban Area	from 2019
44.	Strategy Toward Climate Neutrality for Eastern Wielkopolska 2040 "After Coal"	2021-2040
45.	Development Strategy for Eastern Wielkopolska 2040	2022-2040
46.	Regional Transport Plan for the Wielkopolska Region in the perspective of 2030	2022-2030 [3]
47.	Cycling Policy of the Wielkopolska Region	from 2024
48.	Employment Action Plan for the Wielkopolska Region for 2025 (adopted in April 2025)	2025