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NRRP Funding and Rural Development: A Rural–Urban Comparative Analysis of Galați County, Romania

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

European funding represents an important source of investment for reducing territorial disparities and supporting local development. The paper analyses the territorial distribution of funding provided through Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), with particular emphasis on the rural–urban differences observed in Galați County. The study uses a quantitative, descriptive and comparative approach based on data from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects, complemented by demographic data from the Galați County Directorate of Statistics. The analysis considers absolute funding values, funding per capita and territorial concentration indicators. The results show a strong concentration of NRRP resources in urban areas, which account for approximately 82.8% of total county-level funding, compared with 17.2% in rural areas. Galați Municipality alone concentrates more than 73% of the analysed resources. The CR5 concentration ratio reaches approximately 87.12%, indicating a very high level of territorial concentration. Population-adjusted indicators do not eliminate the rural–urban disparity, as urban areas record substantially higher funding per inhabitant. However, several rural communes, particularly Băneasa and Tulucești, show high per capita values. The findings suggest that NRRP funding contributes to local development, but its territorial distribution within Galați County remains uneven.

1. Introduction

Financing investment projects through European funds can represent an important source of socio-economic development and contribute to reducing economic and territorial disparities across the European Union. For rural areas, access to these funds may have a stronger impact than in urban areas, given that rural communities are frequently affected by limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient access to certain public services.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought renewed attention to the need to strengthen economic resilience, reduce dependence on imports and provide greater protection for the population and for the functioning of the economy in times of crisis. The effects of the pandemic highlighted important vulnerabilities in supply chains, consumer behaviour and the operation of several economic sectors, while also creating opportunities for reconsidering policies and development priorities (Stanciu et al., 2020; Stanciu, 2022).

In response to the economic and social effects of the pandemic, the European Union developed the NextGenerationEU instrument, with the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) as its main component.

In Romania, the RRF is implemented through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP, in Romanian PNRR), which includes reforms and investments financed through both non-repayable and repayable support in areas such as the green transition, digitalisation, education, health, infrastructure and territorial cohesion.

The territorial distribution of NRRP funding at national level shows important differences between counties, as well as between urban and rural areas. The amount of funding accessed may be influenced by the size of the locality, investment needs, administrative capacity and the ability of local authorities to prepare and implement eligible projects.

For this reason, an analysis based only on absolute values does not always provide a complete picture, particularly in the case of rural communities with smaller populations.

Galați County includes municipalities, towns and a significant number of communes in its territorial structure, making it an appropriate framework for highlighting rural–urban differences in access to NRRP funding.

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2. Literature review

European funds represent an important instrument for supporting rural development, modernising infrastructure and reducing economic disparities between territories. However, the capacity to access available resources varies considerably across communities and is influenced by economic, institutional and administrative factors.

Opria (2025), analysing the absorption of European funding for sustainable rural development in Romania, identifies significant differences among rural communities and shows that funding performance is associated with factors such as governance, education, development level and local economic resources.

In the Romanian context, Gaina et al. (2025) also underline the relationship between managerial practices, institutional factors and the use of European funds in rural areas.

Territorial differences in access to funding are also highlighted by regional-level studies. Popescu et al. (2025), examining agricultural investments financed through rural development programmes in Romania's Western Region, analyse the factors influencing fund absorption and the differences observed among beneficiaries and territories.

Other studies conducted in the same region reveal county-level disparities in access to European financing, suggesting that the availability of common funding sources does not automatically result in an even territorial distribution of resources. From this perspective, an assessment based only on absolute funding values may be insufficient, and such values should also be considered in relation to population size or other territorial characteristics.

The effects of investments on rural communities also depend on the type of projects financed and on local implementation conditions. Pavel and Ibănescu (2026) show that infrastructure investments may improve connectivity and quality of life in left-behind rural areas, although their effects remain uneven across territories.

The importance of rural–urban relations is also emphasised by Incaltarau et al. (2024), who highlight the role of access to public services, economic opportunities and housing conditions in increasing the attractiveness of rural areas. In the case of Romania, Petrovici and Poenaru (2025) argue that territorial differences are more complex than a simple rural–urban divide, as they are also shaped by peri-urban development processes and functional relationships between settlements.

Another strand of the literature focuses on the relationship between public policies, available financial resources and the capacity of rural communities to take advantage of development opportunities. Mutafov (2025), examining rural areas in Bulgaria, points to the dependence of many rural municipalities on financial transfers and to the need for a more efficient use of available resources in support of local development. In Romania, research on funding schemes for young farmers also identifies territorial differences in access to rural development measures, while financial support may contribute to new investments and to strengthening the rural economy (Chereji et al., 2026). These findings suggest that the effects of European funding should be assessed not only in terms of allocated amounts, but also through the capacity of these resources to generate investment and respond to the specific needs of rural communities.

Rural development also requires an integrated approach to infrastructure, services, economic activities and quality of life. Ciampa et al. (2025) describe village regeneration as a process in which interventions in the built environment should be linked to social cohesion, local economic development and heritage valorisation. The authors propose a rural regeneration model that also considers the restoration of functional links between villages and urban centres.

In the Romanian agricultural sector, Manolache et al. (2023) analyse the absorption and impact of European structural funds, highlighting their role in supporting agricultural investment and sectoral development, while also drawing attention to differences in the capacity to access and use available financial resources.

In Romania, Alexa (2025) examines the contribution of LEADER funding to the development of well-being-related services in the North-East Region, confirming the importance of interventions adapted to local characteristics.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility introduced a different approach compared with traditional structural funds, as financing is linked to the implementation of reforms and investments established through national recovery plans. In Romania, the NRRP is structured around the six RRF pillars, one of which explicitly addresses social and territorial cohesion (Trofin, 2023).

Antonescu and Florescu (2024) regard the NRRP as an instrument supporting reforms and investments and emphasise the role of public authorities in the implementation process. The authors also associate investments in digitalisation and the green transition with the reduction of territorial, economic, social and infrastructure inequalities.

Recent literature increasingly focuses on administrative capacity and territorial governance in the implementation of recovery plans. Germano and Lizzi (2024) show, in the case of Italy, that implementing NRRP projects may prove more difficult than designing the plan itself, highlighting the need to strengthen administrative capacity, particularly at subnational level.

Rizzuto et al. (2024) identify difficulties faced by metropolitan administrations in coordinating, monitoring and implementing projects, as well as the emergence of different local models for managing available resources.

From a broader perspective on European cohesion policy, Kölling (2025) argues that the evolution of EU financial mechanisms, including the introduction of NextGenerationEU and the RRF, has altered relationships between supranational, national and subnational levels. The author identifies a tendency towards greater centralisation of authority and more limited participation of subnational actors in decision-making. This issue is relevant for the analysis of territorial funding patterns, since the capacity of local authorities to participate in implementation may influence the outcomes achieved at territorial level.

The NRRP is also examined as an instrument supporting structural transformation. Marinaș et al. (2025), analysing the digital transformation component of Romania's NRRP, consider the plan both a financing instrument and a mechanism for structuring a national digitalisation strategy.

Parziale (2025) examines the relationship between NRRP investments, innovation and economic and social transition, while Piras et al. (2024) show that the distribution of financial resources may reflect different territorial priorities and generate distinct regional development strategies.

The evaluation of funding outcomes also requires indicators capable of capturing differences between territories. Baratta et al. (2023), analysing urban regeneration programmes financed through the Italian NRRP, emphasise the role of indicators in measuring performance and assessing the effects of funded interventions. This approach supports the use of relative indicators alongside absolute values when comparing territorial units with different demographic sizes.

Against this background, analysing the territorial distribution of NRRP funding can contribute to identifying differences between urban and rural communities and the degree of concentration of available resources. In Galați County, comparing absolute funding values with indicators calculated in relation to population can provide a clearer picture of the access of rural localities to NRRP financing and of their position relative to urban centres.

3. Materials and Methods

The study employs a quantitative, descriptive, and comparative approach based on secondary data concerning funding provided through Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

The analysis is conducted at three territorial levels: European, national, and local. At the European level, publicly available data on the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the implementation of national recovery and resilience plans are considered. For Romania, the analysis focuses on the territorial and sectoral distribution of NRRP funding, while the local-level analysis examines differences between urban and rural areas in Galați County.

The main source of data for Romania is the official NRRP monitoring platform managed by the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (Ministry of Investments and European Projects, n.d.). The database provides information on non-repayable financial support, repayable financial support, and total European funding received.

At EU level, the comparative analysis uses information published by the European Commission through the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard (European Commission, n.d.-a).

At national level, the county represents the main territorial unit of analysis. For Galați County, the assessment is carried out at the level of administrative-territorial units. Localities are classified into two groups, urban and rural, according to their administrative status.

To avoid fragmentation and possible duplication of observations, funding values reported for villages belonging to a commune are aggregated at commune level. Consequently, each administrative-territorial unit is included only once in the analysis.

The main indicators used in the study are total NRRP funding received, non-repayable financial support, repayable financial support, the share of each financing component in total funding, and funding per capita. The per capita funding indicator is calculated as follows:

$$NRRP_{pc}=F_{NRRP}/P_{op}$$

where F_{NRRP} represents the total NRRP funding received by the territorial unit under analysis, while P_{op} represents its population.

To assess the territorial concentration of funding, the study considers the shares held by the main territorial units in total NRRP funding and calculates the CR5 concentration ratio. The indicator is defined as the cumulative share of the five largest territorial beneficiaries:

$$CR_5 = S_1+ S_2+ S_3+ S_4+ S_5$$

where S_i represents the share of each of the five largest territorial units in total funding. A higher CR_5 value indicates that a larger proportion of NRRP resources is concentrated in a relatively small number of territorial units.

The rural–urban comparison for Galați County examines both differences in total funding values and differences observed after adjusting funding for population size. Urban and rural administrative-territorial units are analysed separately, together with the main local beneficiaries of NRRP resources. Population data were obtained from Direcția Județeană de Statistică Galați (n.d.) and National Institute of Statistics. (n.d.).

The results are presented using descriptive statistics, shares, average values, per capita indicators, concentration measures, and graphical representations. The study has several methodological limitations. The analysis captures the territorial distribution of NRRP funding rather than the final economic or social impact of the financed projects, as part of the investments are still under implementation.

Consequently, the findings should primarily be interpreted in terms of territorial allocation, access to funding, and differences between urban and rural areas, rather than as a direct assessment of the long-term effects of NRRP investments.

The literature review was based primarily on open-access scientific articles indexed in Web of Science and available through ResearchGate. When full-text versions were not openly accessible, the authors were contacted via ResearchGate and requested to provide the complete papers.

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used as a support tool for checking the English translation, reviewing reference consistency, systematising data, and performing a final language and structure check of the manuscript. The authors retained full responsibility for the interpretation of the results, the content of the paper, and all final decisions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Recovery and Resilience Facility at European Union level

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) represents the main component of NextGenerationEU and is one of the main instruments used by the European Union to support reforms and investments in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period.

According to European Commission data, by mid-2026, the total financial envelope available through the RRF amounted to approximately EUR 575 billion, of which EUR 360 billion was provided in grants and EUR 215 billion in loans (European Commission, n.d.-a).

The distribution of RRF resources across EU Member States is presented in Table 1

Table 1. RRF allocation by EU Member State

Rank	Member state	Grants (Eur bln)	Loans (Eur, bln)	Rank	Member state	Grants (Eur bln)	Loans (Eur, bln)
1.	Italy	71.800	122.600	15.	Belgium	5.034	0.230
2.	Spain	79.00	23.000	16.	Austria	3.961	0.000
3.	Poland	25.300	29.400	17.	Lithuania	2.300	1.550
4.	France	40.300	0.000	18.	Sweden	3.400	0.000
5.	Greece	18.220	17.730	19.	Slovenia	1.610	0.469
6.	Germany	30.300	0.000	20.	Latvia	1.970	0.000
7.	Portugal	16.300	5.900	21.	Finland	1.950	0.000
8.	Romania	13.570	7.840	22.	Denmark	1.626	0.000
9.	Hungary	6.512	3.918	23.	Cyprus	1.020	0.200
10.	Croatia	5.800	4.200	24.	Ireland	1.154	0.000
11.	Czechia	8.400	0.353	25.	Estonia	0.953	0.000
12.	Slovakia	6.4080	0.000	26.	Malta	0.328	0.000
13.	Bulgaria	6.174	0.000	27.	Luxembourg	0.241	0.000
14.	Netherlands	5.400	0.000	Total	EU 27	359.061	217.340

Source: Authors' processing based on European Commission (n.d.-a). Values are rounded.

The allocation of RRF resources among Member States was not uniform. For 70% of the initial grant allocation, the distribution key considered the population of each Member State, the inverse of GDP per capita, and the relative unemployment rate. For the remaining 30%, the unemployment criterion was replaced by the change in real GDP in 2020 and the cumulative change in real GDP over 2020–2021. The mechanism therefore combined pre-existing differences in economic development with the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021).

The loan component followed a different mechanism. Loans were not automatically allocated to Member States but were available upon request to finance additional reforms and investments included in the national recovery and resilience plans.

Consequently, the absence of loans for some countries in Table 1 does not indicate a lack of eligibility for RRF support but rather reflects national decisions regarding the use of repayable financing. This distinction is important when comparing national plans, since grants represent non-repayable EU support, while loans generate repayment obligations for the beneficiary Member State (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021).

Following the revision of the national plan and the reduction of the loan component, Romania's NRRP is financed with approximately EUR 21.41 billion, consisting of EUR 13.57 billion in grants and EUR 7.84 billion in loans. The revised loan amount was set at approximately EUR 7.84 billion following the 2025 amendment of Romania's recovery and resilience plan (Council of the European Union, 2025).

This structure places Romania among the Member States receiving substantial RRF support and justifies analysing grants and loans separately when assessing the territorial distribution of NRRP resources.
Another defining characteristic of the RRF is its performance-based financing mechanism. Payments to Member States are conditional on the satisfactory fulfilment of milestones and targets established in the national recovery and resilience plans.

Each plan must also contribute to the EU's green and digital priorities, with at least 37% of expenditure allocated to climate objectives and at least 20% to digital objectives. At EU level, the approved plans exceed these minimum thresholds, with approximately 41% of estimated expenditure contributing to climate objectives and around 25% to digital objectives (European Commission, n.d.-a).

The temporary nature of the Facility imposes a strict implementation timetable. Member States must complete all milestones and targets by 31 August 2026, while the Commission must make the final payments by 31 December 2026 (European Commission, n.d.-b).

During the final implementation stage, differences in administrative capacity and project progress may therefore influence the effective use of available resources.

The territorial dimension of the RRF is particularly relevant for the present study because resources are allocated to Member States through national plans rather than through a uniform mechanism of distribution among regions or local communities. As a result, a substantial national financial envelope does not necessarily imply an even distribution of resources among regions, counties, or urban and rural localities. This provides the basis for examining the territorial distribution of NRRP funding in Romania and, subsequently, the rural–urban differences observed in Galați County.

4.2. Territorial and Sectoral Distribution of NRRP Funding in Romania

At national level, the distribution of NRRP funding highlights important differences among counties (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of NRRP funding by Romanian counties

Rank	County	Grants (EUR mil.)	Loans (EUR mil.)	Rank	County	Grants (EUR mil.)	Loans (EUR mil.)
1.	Bucharest	3,352.2	3,461.8	22.	Dâmbovița	42.0	85.1
2.	Cluj	123.1	259.6	23.	Harghita	44.7	82.1
3.	Iași	154.1	159.0	24.	Prahova	38.9	80.9
4.	Bihor	127.7	184.1	25.	Satu Mare	38.4	80.8
5.	Mureș	116.9	136.1	26.	Olt	67.3	50.4
6.	Timiș	90.5	155.0	27.	Caraș-Severin	67.7	49.4
7.	Constanța	115.8	121.7	28.	Sălaj	38.3	77.5
8.	Suceava	95.4	132.5	29.	Neamț	40.4	71.1
9.	Dolj	69.7	133.8	30.	Buzău	47.5	58.0
10.	Sibiu	60.7	136.9	31.	Vaslui	15.3	89.0
11.	**Galați**	**61.3**	**132.1**	32.	Ilfov	44.0	57.4
12.	Maramureș	79.6	103.4	33.	Gorj	51.8	48.4
13.	Arad	101.8	80.7	34.	Covasna	46.8	48.2
14.	Bistrița-Năsăud	45.4	126.1	35.	Brașov	30.8	61.7
15.	Botoșani	81.7	89.2	36.	Mehedinți	33.3	57.6
16.	Alba	58.8	102.1	37.	Călărași	34.6	51.1
17.	Hunedoara	72.9	75.7	38.	Tulcea	28.4	55.6
18.	Argeș	56.2	81.8	39.	Teleorman	43.3	34.6
19.	Vâlcea	58.9	73.1	40.	Ialomița	22.7	30.0
20.	Vrancea	30.1	98.3	41.	Brăila	6.6	36.9
21.	Bacău	37.4	90.4	42.	Giurgiu	12.5	23.4

Source: Authors' processing based on data from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (n.d.); Values are expressed in EUR million and rounded.

Bucharest Municipality stands out clearly from the other territorial units, with a total amount of funding received of approximately EUR 6.83 billion. Due to its distinct economic, administrative and demographic size, as well as the concentration of many institutions and beneficiaries, Bucharest can be considered an atypical case in the national comparative analysis and should therefore be interpreted separately.

Among the counties, the highest values of NRRP funding are recorded in Cluj, with approximately EUR 380.6 million, followed by Iași, with EUR 312.7 million, and Bihor, with EUR 310.1 million. Significant amounts are also recorded in Mureș, Timiș, Constanța and Suceava.

Galați County records approximately EUR 193.4 million, of which around EUR 61.3 million represents non-repayable financial support and approximately EUR 132.1 million repayable financial support. In terms of total value, Galați is included among the counties with a relatively high level of NRRP funding.

The territorial distribution of NRRP funding also shows a high degree of concentration, largely determined by the position of Bucharest Municipality. The capital accounts for approximately 52.6% of the total NRRP funding recorded across the 42 territorial units analysed.

Based on the CR5 concentration ratio, the five largest territorial beneficiaries — Bucharest, Cluj, Iași, Bihor and Mureș — account for approximately 62.4% of the total funding analysed. When Bucharest is excluded, the five counties with the highest funding values — Cluj, Iași, Bihor, Mureș and Timiș — account for approximately 24.6% of total county-level funding, while the ten largest counties account for around 41.8%.

These results highlight the uneven territorial distribution of NRRP resources and the significant influence of Bucharest on the overall level of concentration.

The absolute values of NRRP funding should nevertheless be interpreted with caution, as they are influenced by population size, the number and value of approved projects, the type of beneficiaries and the structure of investments. For this reason, in the local-level analysis, absolute funding values are complemented by indicators adjusted for population.

From a sectoral perspective, a significant share of NRRP funding is concentrated in activities related to public administration, infrastructure and construction (Table 3).

Table 3. Sectoral distribution of NRRP funding in Romania

CAEN code	Economic activity	NRRP funding (EUR mil.)
84	Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	1,570.12
52	Warehousing and support activities for transportation	1,386.19
43	Specialised construction activities	409.79
41	Construction of buildings	202.05
49	Land transport and transport via pipelines	187.46
71	Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis	123.06
46	Wholesale trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles	116.17
35	Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	94.70
61	Telecommunications	88.76
01	Agriculture, hunting and related service activities	15.87

Source: Authors' processing based on data from the Ministry of Investments and European Projects (n.d.); Values are expressed in EUR million and rounded.

Compared with these sectors, funding directly associated with agriculture is considerably lower. Agriculture, hunting and related service activities account for approximately EUR 15.9 million, mainly in the form of repayable support. When agriculture, forestry, fishing, and the food and beverage industries are considered together, the cumulative value amounts to approximately EUR 59.2 million.

This structure shows that the NRRP is not primarily an instrument for financing agriculture, while its contribution to rural development is largely achieved through investments in infrastructure, public services, digitalisation, energy and other areas with indirect effects on rural communities.

The territorial and sectoral distribution of funding at national level therefore provides the necessary framework for the analysis of Galați County.

However, the county's position in the national distribution does not show how resources are allocated within the county itself. For this reason, the following section examines the distribution of NRRP funding among the administrative-territorial units of Galați County, with particular emphasis on differences between rural and urban areas.

4.3. Rural–Urban Distribution of NRRP Funding in Galați County

The distribution of NRRP funding within Galați County highlights significant disparities among administrative-territorial units and a pronounced concentration of resources in the county's main urban centre (Table 4).

In rural areas, the highest value is recorded by Tulucești commune, with approximately EUR 5.76 million, followed by Băneasa, with approximately EUR 3.13 million. Funding exceeding EUR 1 million is also recorded in Matca, Cudalbi, Brăhășești, Liești, Gohor and Valea Mărului.

These differences indicate that NRRP resources are not uniformly distributed within rural areas either, with a relatively small number of communes attracting considerably higher amounts than the remaining rural localities.

Table 4. Main beneficiaries of NRRP funding in Galați County

Rank	Administrative-territorial unit	Area	NRRP funding (EUR mil.)
1.	Galați	Urban	141.35
2.	Tecuci	Urban	16.23
3.	Tulucești (including Șivița)	Rural	5.76
4.	Băneasa	Rural	3.13
5.	Berești	Urban	2.09
6.	Matca	Rural	1.24
7.	Cudalbi	Rural	1.19
8.	Brăhășești	Rural	1.09
9.	Liești	Rural	1.07
10.	Gohor	Rural	1.03
11.	Valea Mărului	Rural	1.03

Source: Authors' processing based on Ministry of Investments and European Projects (n.d.); Values are expressed in EUR million and rounded.

The distribution presented in Table 4 confirms the strong concentration of NRRP funding in Galați Municipality, while also highlighting the relatively limited number of rural communes that attract comparatively high funding amounts.

The rural–urban comparison confirms a substantial difference in absolute funding values (table 5).

Table 5. Rural–urban comparison of NRRP funding in Galați County

Indicator	Urban	Rural	Galați County
Population	259,071	237,821	496,892
Share of population (%)	52.10	47.90	100.00
NRRP funding (EUR mil.)	160.24	33.24	193.48
Share of NRRP funding (%)	82.80	17.20	100.00
NRRP funding per capita (EUR/inhabitant)	618.50	139.80	389.40

Source: Authors' processing based on Ministry of Investments and European Projects (n.d.) and demographic data from Direcția Județeană de Statistică Galați (n.d.). Values are rounded.

The four urban administrative-territorial units of Galați County — Galați, Tecuci, Berești and Târgu Bujor — account for approximately EUR 160.24 million, representing around 82.8% of the funding recorded at county level. Rural UATs account for approximately EUR 33.24 million, or 17.2% of the total.

These results support the first research hypothesis, according to which urban areas receive higher absolute NRRP funding than rural areas. Adjusting the funding values for population size does not eliminate the rural–urban disparity. Urban UATs record approximately EUR 618.5 per inhabitant, compared with around EUR 139.8 per inhabitant in rural areas.

Thus, NRRP funding per capita is approximately 4.4 times higher in urban areas. Consequently, the second hypothesis, according to which rural–urban disparities decrease substantially when funding is expressed per capita, is not confirmed at aggregate level. However, the analysis at individual UAT level reveals a more differentiated picture. Some rural communes record relatively high funding values in relation to their population. Băneasa and Tulucești perform considerably better in per capita terms than the rural average. This indicates that the overall rural disadvantage does not apply uniformly to all communes and that individual investment projects may significantly influence the relative position of smaller localities.

The territorial distribution also reveals a very high level of concentration. The five largest beneficiaries — Galați, Tecuci, Tulucești, Băneasa and Berești — account for approximately 87.12% of the total NRRP funding recorded in the county. The CR5 concentration ratio therefore reaches about 87.12%, confirming that a large share of resources is concentrated in a limited number of administrative-territorial units. The ten largest beneficiaries account for approximately 90.0% of total funding. These results support the third hypothesis regarding the territorial concentration of NRRP resources within Galați County.

The analysis of individual projects provides additional explanations for these territorial differences. In Galați Municipality, high-value projects are concentrated in areas such as non-polluting public transport, energy renovation, education, healthcare and digitalisation.

For example, several large projects concern the acquisition of electric trams and buses, while other major investments target educational infrastructure and energy efficiency. In rural areas, projects are generally smaller in absolute value but frequently address basic infrastructure and local public services. Examples include the extension of the wastewater network in Tulucești and the development of alternative wastewater treatment systems in Băneasa.

These findings suggest that the contribution of NRRP funding to rural development cannot be assessed exclusively through aggregate financial values. Although rural areas receive a considerably smaller share of total funding, individual investments may have substantial local relevance, particularly when they address infrastructure deficits, public services, environmental investments or energy transition.

At the same time, the strong concentration of resources in Galați Municipality indicates that territorial access to NRRP funding remains highly uneven within the county.

Although the aggregate rural–urban comparison shows a clear advantage for urban areas, the analysis at individual UAT level provides a more differentiated picture (Table 6).

Table 6. Administrative-territorial units with the highest NRRP funding per capita in Galați County

Rank	Administrative-territorial unit	Area	NRRP funding (EUR mil.)	Population	NRRP funding per capita (EUR/inhabitant)
1.	Băneasa	Rural	3.13	1,992	**1,570**
2.	Tulucești	Rural	5.76	6,407	**899**
3.	Berești	Urban	2.09	2,473	**845**
4.	Galați	Urban	141.35	217,851	**649**
5.	Tecuci	Urban	16.23	32,801	**495**
6.	Rediu	Rural	0.79	1,610	**490**
7.	Suceveni	Rural	0.70	1,491	**469**
8.	Smulți	Rural	0.51	1,296	**391**
9.	Gohor	Rural	1.03	3,154	**327**
10.	Poiana	Rural	0.50	1,592	**312**

Source: Authors' processing based on Ministry of Investments and European Projects (n.d.) and Direcția Județeană de Statistică Galați (n.d.). Values are rounded.

Several rural communes record high levels of NRRP funding when the amounts are adjusted for population size. Băneasa records the highest value in the county, at approximately EUR 1,570 per inhabitant, followed by Tulucești, with around EUR 899 per inhabitant. Both values exceed those recorded by the main urban centres.

Among urban UATs, Berești records approximately EUR 845 per inhabitant, followed by Galați Municipality with around EUR 649 per inhabitant and Tecuci with approximately EUR 495 per inhabitant. Rural communes such as Rediu, Suceveni, Smulți, Gohor and Poiana also appear among the UATs with the highest per capita funding values.

These results show that the lower level of funding observed for rural areas at aggregate level does not apply uniformly to all rural communities. In some smaller communes, the implementation of one or more relatively large investment projects generates high per capita values.

Consequently, population-adjusted indicators provide an important complementary perspective to absolute funding values and reveal substantial differences within both rural and urban areas. However, at aggregate level, the rural–urban disparity remains substantial. Urban UATs receive approximately EUR 618 per inhabitant, compared with around EUR 140 per inhabitant in rural areas. Therefore, although some rural communes perform particularly well in per capita terms, the second hypothesis is not confirmed for Galați County as a whole.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis of NRRP funding in Galați County highlights substantial territorial differences between urban and rural areas, as well as a high degree of concentration of available resources. At county level, urban administrative-territorial units account for approximately 82.8% of total NRRP funding, while rural areas receive around 17.2%. This confirms the first hypothesis, according to which urban areas attract higher absolute funding values than rural areas.

The comparison based on population-adjusted indicators does not substantially reduce this disparity. Urban UATs record approximately EUR 618 per inhabitant, compared with around EUR 140 per inhabitant in rural areas. Therefore, the second hypothesis is not confirmed at aggregate level. However, the analysis also shows that several rural communes perform considerably better when funding is expressed per capita. Băneasa and Tulucești record values above those of the main urban centres, which indicates that the rural disadvantage observed at aggregate level is not uniform across all communes.

The territorial distribution of resources is also strongly concentrated. Galați Municipality alone accounts for more than 73% of county-level funding, while the five largest beneficiaries account for approximately 87.12% of the total. These results confirm the third hypothesis and show that a relatively small number of administrative-territorial units concentrate most of the NRRP resources available in the county.

The structure of funded projects helps explain these differences. Urban areas, especially Galați Municipality, concentrate large-scale investments in public transport, energy renovation, healthcare, education and digitalisation. In rural areas, projects are generally smaller in absolute value, but often address basic infrastructure, waste management, energy efficiency, water and wastewater systems, educational facilities and renewable energy. Consequently, the relevance of NRRP funding for rural development cannot be assessed only through total financial values, because relatively smaller projects may have a significant local impact in communities with limited infrastructure and financial resources.

Overall, the results suggest that NRRP funding contributes to local development in Galați County, but its territorial distribution remains highly uneven. The concentration of resources in urban centres may reinforce existing differences if rural communities do not have sufficient administrative and institutional capacity to prepare and implement competitive projects. At the same time, the high per capita values recorded by several rural communes show that smaller localities can successfully access significant funding when suitable projects are identified and implemented.

The study is limited by the fact that it analyses the territorial distribution of funding rather than the final socio-economic impact of completed investments. Since many NRRP projects are still under implementation, future research could examine the extent to which funded investments generate measurable improvements in infrastructure, public services, local economic activity and quality of life, particularly in rural areas.

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