

Open Spending EU
COALITION

EU OVERVIEW:

How much
do we know
about RRF
final recipients?

2023

Open Spending EU Coalition is a collaboration of non-government organisations and professionals working to ensure that government spending is fair, open and efficient and creates the best outcomes for Europe. We work at the national and EU levels to advance openness in EU funds spending, procurement, and company ownership.

More information: www.open-spending.eu.

All information was believed to be correct as of the 15th of December, 2023. Nevertheless, the Open Spending EU Coalition cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or contexts.

The report was prepared by Open Contracting Partnership.

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Summary

EU countries are legally obligated to publish information about 100 final recipients receiving the highest amounts of RRF funding, but many have done so with considerable delay, and Luxembourg has not fulfilled this obligation at all. The rest of the EU countries publish the required information, generally, as open data (mostly spreadsheets).

This is a positive situation. However, the published information scope and formats vary widely, impeding the usability of data and transparency of the EU funding.

We offer the following recommendations:

- I The government of Luxembourg should immediately publish complete, up-to-date, open data about the top 100 recipients of Recovery Funds.
- II The Commission should better enforce the obligation to publish data about the 100 largest final recipients in the future. Past the deadline for publishing, the absence of data about spending in some major EU economies negatively affects the levels of transparency of RRF.
- III The EU legislators should review and amend the RRF regulation to extend the obligation to publish the 100 largest recipients to all recipients of the RRF funding to boost transparency and strengthen the trust in the EU Recovery agenda.
- IV The EU legislators should amend the definition of final recipient to include contractors and sub-contractors. European taxpayers deserve to know exactly where their money goes.

Background

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) regulation adopted in February 2021 did not include an obligation to publish data on who gets the money and for what. Since then, we at the [Open Spending EU Coalition have been drawing attention to the need for transparency in the RRF spending](#). Some countries committed to a higher standard of transparency in their National Recovery Plans or Open Government Partnership Action Plans. In [2022, we offered recommendations on how to publish RRF spending data](#).

Early in 2023, [we looked at how some EU governments dealt with the challenge](#). We found large differences in how countries published relevant information, with only a few countries presenting data on the entire spending cycle in one central database; some published names of final recipients, and some only reported on overall amounts spent on programmes.

Later, there was some positive news. In February 2023, the [Commission introduced an obligation](#) to publish a list of the 100 largest final recipients of RRF funding twice a year. This was a good start, but most in the public space agreed that this is only scratching the surface of the transparency levels needed to increase trust in the RRF agenda meaningfully.

According to the [guidelines provided by the Commission](#), final recipients within Article 25a “*should be understood as the last entity receiving funds that is not a contractor or sub-contractor.*” *It should include the legal name of the final recipient, including the first and last names if the final recipient is a natural person, the amount of funds received, and the associated measure(s) under the RRF for which the funding has been received. To determine the 100 largest recipients, only funds from the RRF should be considered as some investments may also be financed in part through other public financing.*”

This definition is challenging as it might include, for example, local governments but not necessarily the specific companies or individuals who perform contractual tasks. This seriously impedes the transparency objective declared by the Commission.

The Commission is supposed to centralise the published information immediately and present it on the Recovery and Resilience [Scoreboard](#) and the interactive map of RRF [projects](#).

We checked which countries published data and in what form (especially whether it is re-usable open data).

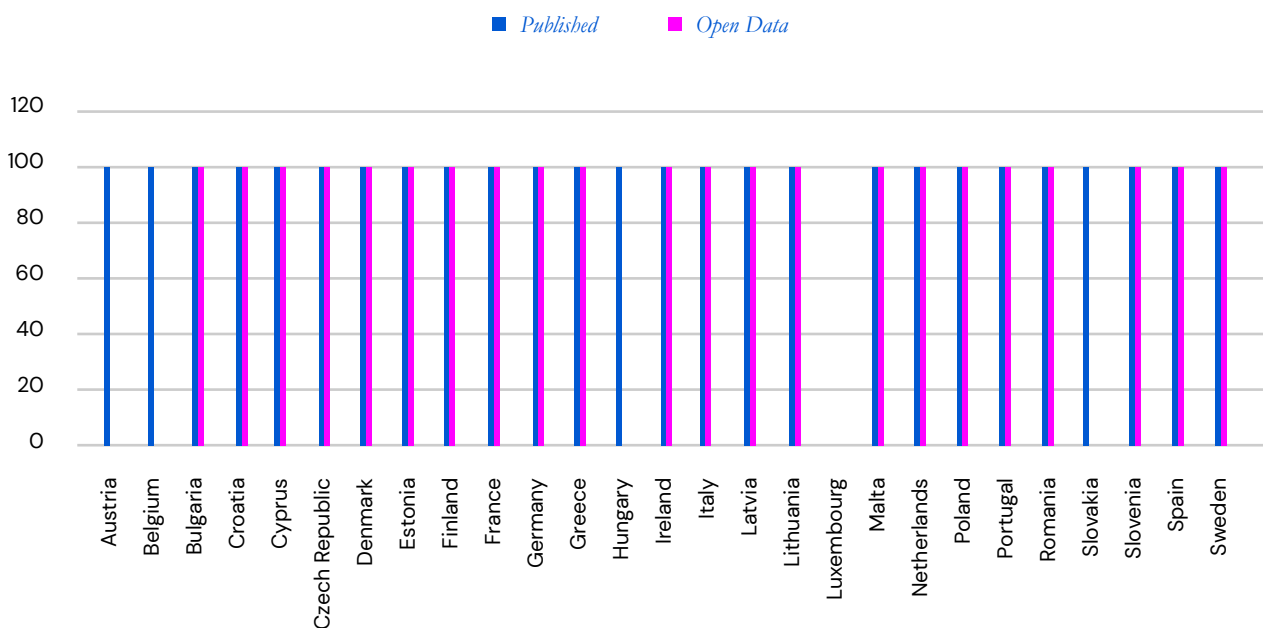
Results

Member States have generally complied with their obligation to provide information. The only country that has not done so is Luxembourg. However, we have to note the significant delays in providing information. France's data were published in November and Spain submitted its data in December. This is a staggering eight months after the scheduled publication date.

The [European Commission has been seeking to obtain this data from countries](#), but in view of such delays, it is questionable whether it has the effective instruments to do so.

Five countries ([Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Hungary](#), [Slovakia](#), and [Sweden](#)) do not provide data in open formats. The others present it in editable spreadsheets or allow the data downloads.

Published/Open Data



Despite a general lack of open RRF data, the Commission integrated the data published in its RRF [scoreboard](#), allowing the download of a full list of final recipients in spreadsheet form. It is, however, incomplete, as information from Poland and Romania still needs to be included – even though both countries publish data.

Data publication differs across borders – some countries, for example, [Bulgaria](#), publish the bare minimum required by the Commission. Some others, including [Latvia](#), [Slovenia](#), or [Belgium](#), publish more data – e.g. the environmental impact of investments or the names and numbers of specific projects. It helps link it to data in other registers – e.g. public procurement portals.

[Hungary](#), for example, publishes the data in a few PDF files, separating information about project names and final recipients. This makes connecting the dots between recipients and reasons for fund reception difficult. The same applies to [Malta](#); it publishes open data, but to link recipients and projects, one has to click through several forms.

Some countries – such as [Lithuania](#), for example – go beyond the 100 largest recipients, publishing a list of all ongoing projects by amount and name of recipients.

Timeliness and synchronisation of publication are also problematic. Cyprus provided data from April 2023, while other countries released or updated the information in September or October. This limits the ability to analyse RRF spending comprehensively.

Recommendations

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- IV The EU legislators should amend the definition of final recipient to include contractors and sub-contractors. European taxpayers deserve to know exactly where their money goes.
- V The EU legislators should create a uniform policy to publish EU budget spending data. It would help unify disclosure standards and clarify the minimum data to be published by each Member State and EU institution. This could be achieved by, among others:
 - Including the Public Spending & Public Procurement category as a High-Value Dataset within the meaning of Article 14 of Directive 2019/1024 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on Open Data and the Reuse of Public Sector Information.
 - Amending the EU Financial Regulation, most importantly, reducing the required monetary value thresholds for information that should be published.
 - The EU legislators should introduce higher personal data disclosure standards (including beneficiary ownership) linked to EU spending. There is also a need for more guidance in balancing the public interest to know about taxpayers' money use and the right to privacy.
 - The European Commission should encourage cooperation between authorities responsible for publishing data on public spending to share experiences and inspire innovative solutions.
 - Member States should establish central portals containing as much data as possible on public spending, with uniform interoperability and data standards.



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