

PLATFORMA POSITION PAPER ON THE FUTURE NEIGHBOURHOOD, DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION INSTRUMENT (NDICI)

On the 14th of June, the European Commission' release its [proposal](#) for the “Neighbourhood and the World” heading of the future Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF). [PLATFORMA](#), the network of European local and regional governments (LRGs), and their associations, active in the field of development cooperation between Europe and partner countries, addresses key recommendations to EU policy-makers for the upcoming negotiations.

Introduction

In the past months, [we have been calling](#) for an ambitious budget for development cooperation with a strong role of local and regional governments as key partners of the EU to ensure the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at local level in Europe and in / with partner countries. The localisation of the SDGs requires an inclusive territorial approach which mobilises stakeholders and citizens in the territory with the subnational government in a coordinator role and encourage to work in partnership with other levels of government. In addition, it is crucial to invest in sustainable urban development, in articulation with rural development, in cities and territories of all sizes, by mobilising the experiences and expertise rooted in European towns and regions.

Reaction to the EC proposal

PLATFORMA is concerned that despite the crucial role of local governments as partners recognised in the [2013 Communication](#) “Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes” and especially in the implementation of the SDGs, notably acknowledged in the 2017 [New European Consensus on Development](#), they are marginalised in the EC financial proposal. The proposal doesn't foresee to empower local governments with financial support, neither does it encourage decentralised cooperation with European local and regional governments as a mean to ensure decentralisation in partner countries and to contribute to the localisation of the SDGs through exchanges of experiences and know how. On the other side, we are satisfied that many topics related to LRGs competences are under the spotlight: education, migration, health, climate, environment, gender in the future EU policy and the importance of local actors in general in the narrative and local governments association in particular in various chapters:

Geographic programmes

For the geographic programmes, the European Commission's proposal calls to:

1. “Promoting inclusive, balanced and integrated territorial and urban policies through strengthening public institutions and bodies at the national and sub-national levels and supporting efficient decentralisation and state restructuring processes.”
2. “Support local authorities to improve at city level the delivery of basic services and equitable access to food security, accessible, decent and affordable housing and the quality of life, in particular for those living in informal settlements and slums.”
3. “Supporting actions of capacity building, learning mobility to, from or between partner countries, as well as of cooperation and policy dialogue with institutions, organisations, local implementing bodies and authorities, from those countries”.

4. “Boosting the potential of cities as hubs for sustainable and inclusive growth and innovation.”
 5. “Engaging with local authorities and support their role as policy and decision-makers to boost local development and improved governance.”
- ⇒ The recognition of the roles of local and regional governments in the geographic programmes, is a positive step. However, the modalities of local and regional governments’ involvement in European programmes beyond programming phase, where they will be consulted on geographic programmes priorities, will need to be clarified.

Thematic programme “Global Challenges”

In the thematic programme “Global Challenges”, the European Commission calls to:

1. “Increasing the capacity of European and Southern **local authority networks, platforms and alliances** to ensure a substantive and continued policy dialogue in the field of development and to promote democratic governance, notably through the Territorial Approach to Local Development.”
 2. “**Increasing interactions with European citizens on development issues** (awareness raising, knowledge sharing, engagement), notably in relation to the related to the Sustainable Development Goals, including in the Union and candidate countries and potential candidate countries.”
- ⇒ Despite those positive mentions, PLATFORMA is seriously concerned by the lack of clarity regarding how local governments will be financially supported by the European Union between 2021 and 2027. While during the last MFF, local governments were eligible for funding through a specific programme, the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities programme (CSO-LA), this is no longer the case. This means that local governments won’t have secured funding and might end up without the sufficient financial resources to localise the Sustainable Development Goals.

PLATFORMA's recommendations

In reaction to the European Commission's proposal, PLATFORMA calls Members of the European Parliament and European Union's Member States to make adjustments to the regulation and in particular:

1) Recognise and support the role of local governments in the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

The EC proposal doesn't mention precisely the crucial role local governments play in the design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. This role was however mentioned in the Agenda 2030 itself as all 17 goals have local components and are related to the daily work of local and regional governments. This is why the future MFF should:

- Explicitly mention and support local and regional governments in the SDGs' localisation in Europe and with their partners abroad.
- The political dialogue with local governments should not only relate to specific programmes on decentralisation in a specific country or local governments' capacity-building, but extend it across all relevant sectors of development and related to SDGs, such as decision-making on major economic or infrastructure investments in both urban and rural communities.
- While most SDGs are related to the responsibilities and activities of local and regional governments, their specific role on gender, climate change and environmental protection, and migration as well as on the protection of human rights and the promotion of democracy should be further acknowledged.

2) Provide specific financing modalities to support decentralisation reforms and international partnerships between local governments

While the EC proposal recognises that local governments are important actors, it doesn't provide earmarked financing to support them. This is a step-back compared to the previous MFF, as it included an instrument to fund specifically Civil Society Organisations and Local Governments: the CSO-LA programme. Considering the importance of local governments for the SDGs' localisation and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the lack of secured funding to local governments in Europe to work in partnership with their partners in the world is worrying.

The EU should therefore provide a specific financing modality for local governments, which could either take place within the geographic programmes or within the thematic programmes. This financing modality should include the following items:

- In most circumstances, LRGs represented by their national LRG Association, occupies a 'monopoly position' as defined in EC legal terminology, and should therefore qualify for direct EU grants and not be subject to Calls for Proposals or tendering.
- While the article 11 of the regulation states that local governments will be involved in the programming phase discussion, we would like to understand better the mechanisms that the EU will put in place to ensure this real involvement. Local governments associations should be supported worldwide to play their role in the programming phase.
- During the programming phase, it is crucial not only to involve local governments and their associations in the discussion but also to plan budgetary envelopes dedicated to decentralisation processes and supporting decentralised cooperation between European LRGs and their counterparts in the world. In addition, National indicative programmes, in the context of the article 11 of the present regulation, should be formulated, implemented

and monitored through the assistance of multi-stakeholder forum, bringing together local authorities, Parliament, CSOs and the private sector and other potential partners. This would notably support multi-stakeholders dialogue and approach which are at risk, now that the CSO-LA programme no longer exists.

3) Support local governments of all sizes: deepening the territorial approach

The EC proposal, in the geographic programmes, suggests to support local governments to improve the delivery of basic services at city level. While it is important to support cities to face the challenges of the New Urban Agenda, the European Union should support urban areas of all sizes rather than focussing on “mega cities”. It is important to remember that around half of the world’s population lives in intermediary cities, where most of demographic growth is taking place, notably in Africa. The European Unions should also support local governments from rural areas as they are often neglected. In addition, the EU should support regions, which can play a crucial coordination role in the development of the territories.

4) Recognise and support international partnerships between local governments

International partnerships between local and regional governments, or decentralised cooperation, is an efficient tool to increase the capacities of local governments from partner countries to develop plans and deliver services and to improve the quality of decentralisation reforms. This type of international cooperation has existed for decades and involves many European local governments. It should be explicitly mentioned and supported by the future MFF. European local governments and their associations must be actively supported in undertaking decentralised development cooperation, involving technical cooperation and exchanges of expertise between local governments to work with their peers in building the necessary capabilities to localise the SDGs in Europe and in partner countries. Decentralised cooperation should not be understood as partnerships with limited thematic scope (e.g. urban planning) as there is potential for decentralised cooperation to strengthen the wider governance framework. This requires an equal focus on building the capacity of political leaders and strategic staff to deepen democracy and making local government systems work.

5) The partnership approach should be reinforced in EU development policy

We hope that the clear separation between CSO programme and local governments potential support will not hamper the multi-stakeholder policy dialogue started 10 years ago in Europe. Coordination between civil society, local governments and EU institutions is pivotal to ensure the achievement of EU development policy and the SDGs. In particular all should be involved in a policy dialogue with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Member States about the design, implementation and monitoring of the SDGs in Europe and their global dimension.

6) A recognition of the role of LRGs in specific topics:

Migration

Local governments recognise the importance of migration issues. They are on the frontline as they are the ones responsible for providing services to migrants arriving on their territories. This is why the EU should support local governments in addressing the root causes of migration, migration management and governance, including the provision of basic services and the protection of migrants’ human rights. In addition, the EU should support the role European local governments play in mobilising the diaspora communities in their territories to engage with their territories of origin through their cooperation with partner countries.

Business environment

The EC proposal suggests to work on improving the business environment of partner countries. However, national reforms related to business environment are not automatically implemented at the local level and do not automatically lead to improvement of business conditions at the local level. This is why it is essential to support the role of local governments in the improvement of business environment at local level, in a partnership approach.

Climate

Local and regional governments have many levers for action due to their competences in matters of mobility, urbanisation, energy efficiency, managing and recycling waste, risk management, etc. Local and regional governments also play a critical leadership role for all economic, scientific, associative, educational, etc., actors of the territory, and for the population in general. Local and regional governments' ability to act is also boosted thanks to the partnerships and cooperation that they develop with their counterparts in Europe and around the world. In the face of common issues, those partnerships allow exchanges to take place, practices to be compared, innovation to take place, and peer support to be provided for improving local authorities' skills on local policies relating to the fight against greenhouse-gas emissions and adapting to the consequences of climate change. Accordingly, they form an essential tool for an accelerated implementation of international objectives in climate matters, and they must take their rightful place in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Gender

Local and regional authorities are now recognised as important players in development action in the context of decentralised cooperation. Many of them are committed to gender mainstreaming and are signatories to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life which invites signatories to mainstream gender in all their policies and more specifically, under Article 30, in their decentralised cooperation actions. As part of this cross-cutting approach, many policies are intended to determine the impact on each gender and, based on these potentially differentiated impacts, ensure that they contribute to reducing gender inequalities.

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PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments – and their associations – active in town-to-town and region-to-region development cooperation. Since its creation in 2008, PLATFORMA has been representing more than 100,000 local and regional governments. All are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.

The diversity of PLATFORMA's partners is what makes the network unique. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of local and regional governments' realities in Europe and across the world.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of local and regional governments in development policies.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The Secretariat of PLATFORMA is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

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