

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

The future NDICI will bring important changes to the architecture of EU external aid. The increasing importance of geographic programmes and the absence of a specific programme and related budget line to support Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) will undermine their capacity to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To avoid this outcome, PLATFORMA, the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments and their national, European and global associations active in the field of development cooperation, presents a series of recommendations to empower local and regional governments as key players of EU development cooperation. This document completes [PLATFORMA 1st position paper](#) developed last summer, following the proposal of the European Commission in June 2018.

PLATFORMA is concerned that despite the crucial role of local governments as EU 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 as acknowledged in the 2017 [New European Consensus on Development](#), they will face significant challenges to access EU funding after 2020. While the EC proposal recognises that local governments are important actors, it doesn’t provide earmarked financing to support them. 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, towards capacity- and institution-building, also to work in partnership with their peers in the world, is worrying.

The challenges of NDICI for local and regional governments

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) proposal, currently discussed at the EU Council and the European Parliament, will be the main external action instrument of the European Union during the financial period 2021-2027. One of the main changes compared with the existing approach is the increased allocation of funds to geographic programmes by opposition to thematic programmes under which the 2014-2020 ‘Local Authorities’ programme was allocated. This notably impacts local and regional governments which will have to rely on geographic programmes to receive EU funding and thus on partner countries’ national governments’ willingness to work on decentralisation and with LRGs.

In the absence of a dedicated thematic programme to support decentralisation reforms and the role of local and regional governments in localising the SDGs, their funding will depend on the content of the future National Indicative Programmes and Regional Programmes. This means that without an agreement from partner countries’ central governments, local and regional governments won’t be able to access EU funding. As leader on Regional Programmes, **the EU must secure in the Regional Programmes an earmarked budget for Local and Regional Governments.**

In partner countries where there will be some openness from central governments to accept EU priority for decentralisation and empowerment of local and regional governments, the

programming process and related budget will depend mainly on the political dialogue. Therefore, as suggested by the European Commission, it should include representatives of local and regional governments, something PLATFORMA strongly supports, but modalities need to be clearly and transparently defined. Moreover, in many partner countries, national associations of local and regional governments need capacity development to engage effectively in the political and technical dialogue with EU Delegations, Member States and central authorities. This is why EU support to build and strengthen institutions at local level, as well as capacity-building for local and regional governments and their representative national associations, notably through decentralised cooperation, remain crucial. To ensure this support, an earmarked budget for local and regional governments is essential, with an earmarked percentage of the regional envelopes and a dedicated thematic programme.

PLATFORMA seven recommendations

1) Include the strengthening of institutions and decentralisation as transversal and mandatory sectors for Regional Indicative Programmes

To ensure that local and regional governments are not left out from geographic programmes by national authorities, and in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, PLATFORMA recommends to include a **mandatory decentralisation priority sector** in Regional Indicative Programmes, when national governments refuse to include it as a priority in the national programmes. This will allow the EU to support LRGs in delivering basic services and in developing policies to address local development challenges related to the Sustainable Development Goals, even in regions where central governments are reluctant to support local and regional governments. As recognised in the 2030 Agenda, local democracy, policy dialogue at all levels and enabling environment for LRGs are key factors to achieve the SDGs.

In addition, PLATFORMA recommends to involve local and regional governments, through their representative national associations, in the design, implementation and monitoring of National and Regional Indicative Programmes. This will ensure the mainstreaming of the Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD).

2) Explicitly recognise and support the role of LRGs 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 regulation should:

- Explicitly acknowledge and support local and regional governments in the SDGs localisation and awareness-raising in Europe and with partners abroad, through decentralised cooperation.
- Mention that the political dialogue with local governments should not only relate to specific programmes on decentralisation in a specific country, but include all relevant sectors of development and related to SDGs, such as major economic or infrastructure investments in both urban and rural communities, gender equality, climate change and environmental protection, migration as well as protection of human rights and promotion of democracy.
- Describe the governance schemes to include LRGs in the national and EU reporting processes and support the development of disaggregated data at local level.

- Support a seat for LRGs and representative associations at the decision table in UN arena.

3) EU Country Roadmaps for engagement with Local and Regional Governments

The EU, its Delegations and the Member States should develop Country Roadmaps for engagement with Local and Regional Governments, as they do with Civil Society since 2012, in order to ensure an efficient policy dialogue. They should take into account the views and specificities of LRGs in each country about the key development and governance issues, and share them with national authorities, in order to contribute to the development of a joint vision and common framework to engage with LRGs. Thus in line with the 2030 Agenda and the 2019 EU Report on Policy Coherence for Development and the recognition of a joint responsibility, Country Roadmaps will help identify long-term objectives of EU cooperation with LRGs, in order to:

- improve understanding of EU institutions about LRGs' competencies and actions, including decentralised cooperation;
- set up a permanent scheme for dialogue with LRGs where relevant issues are discussed in a more innovative way, and new alliances and partnerships built up, notably for achieving Sustainable Development Goals;
- reinforce EU commitment to promote an enabling environment for LRGs and decentralisation processes, according to the principle of subsidiarity;
- support capacity development of LRGs and their representative national associations to participate in the joint programming with the national state and with the EU, to raise awareness of citizens, to improve their internal capacities respecting the principles of good governance;
- provide training opportunities to LRGs on EU functioning, funding and rules, in order to strengthen their legitimacy, credibility, project delivery, evidence-based advocacy;
- propose innovative funding modalities to ensure a more strategic and long-term approach including avoiding fragmentation in funding and integration of a whole new array of support modalities that go beyond project support based on calls for proposals as in most circumstances, LRGs and their representative national associations occupy a 'monopoly position' as defined in EC legal terminology (delegated management of the funds, direct EU grant, etc.).

4) Design a thematic programme to support LRGs to engage in decentralised cooperation

International partnerships between local and regional governments, or decentralised cooperation, is an efficient tool to increase the institutional and personal capacities of local governments from partner countries to develop plans and deliver services, to tackle common challenges and to improve the quality of decentralisation reforms. These types of international, transnational or cross-border territorial cooperation have existed for decades and involve many European local and regional governments, and their representative national associations. It should be explicitly mentioned and supported by the NDICI proposal in its Article 22. European local and regional governments 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 answering together common challenges and in building the necessary capabilities to localise the SDGs in Europe and in partner countries, and even in playing a diplomatic role. 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 also requires an equal focus on building the capacity of political leaders and strategic staff to deepen democracy and making local government systems work.

5) Need to reinforce national association of LRGs

The participation of local and regional governments to the political dialogue in national context needs to be ensured and strengthened thanks to resources and improved capacities, notably of their representative national associations. To ensure effective involvement of sub-national governments in the political and technical dialogue with EU delegations and national governments, the EU should provide specific support to representative national associations of LRGs in partner countries, and a financing modality for local governments within the thematic programmes.

Finally, as the recent success of the EU programme “Partnerships for sustainable cities” shows, the level of co-financing from the EU is a key factor to ensure LRGs’ access to EU funding. This is why PLATFORMA recommends that future EU programmes for LRGs and their associations include higher levels of co-financing, up to 95%.

6) 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”, rural areas and regional governments. 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. Thus the European Union should also support local governments from rural areas and regions, which can play a crucial coordination role in the development of the territories, with a Territorial Approach to local Development (TALD).

7) 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 and regional governments and EU institutions, both in Brussels, in international fora and at country level, 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 a strong European strategy to implement the SDGs in Europe and their global dimension. As recently highlighted in the European Commission’s reflection paper “*Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030*”, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is required to fully achieve the implementation of the SDGs. For the scenario 1 to be fulfilled, it is necessary to give space for sub-national governments within the European and international decision-making process.

PLATFORMA'S PARTNERS



Contact

Marlène Siméon

Director

Phone: +32 2 842 67 76

Marlene.simeon@ccre-cemr.org

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](#)).

PLATFORMA website: platforma-dev.eu

Follow PLATFORMA on Twitter [@Platforma4Dev](#)

Subscribe to [PLATFORMA newsletter](#)