

HOW LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS (LRGs) AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE 2021-2027 EU PROGRAMMING

PLATFORMA key messages

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The forthcoming new Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), still under negotiation, reinforces the geographical approach of EU development policy. This means that most EU funding opportunities for Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) will now be channelled through EU Delegations (EUD) across the world, at country level. The programming guidelines of the EC and EEAS mention that LRGs and their national associations have to be consulted by EUD in the policy dialogue during the programming and the implementation phases of the NDICI.

In line with these guidelines, PLATFORMA calls on EU Delegations to consider LRGs and their associations as key drivers for change in the development sector, and as partners in the programming of EU priorities. Through different modalities of action, LRGs and their national associations can effectively contribute to the five priorities of the European Commission for 2019-2024 and beyond, including on the green deal, digitalisation, an economy that works for people, the migration partnership, governance, peace and security.

1. Working with local and regional governments and using decentralised cooperation as a modality

Why work with local and regional governments (LRGs) in the first place?

- LRGs can ensure **tailor-made solutions and a territorial approach** in many areas: as public actors, they are central players of territorial governance and development. Given their legal competences, local and regional governments contribute to state reforms and sectoral policies¹. They are key to implementing the 2030 Agenda² and the 17 SDGs, together with their citizens, through active awareness-raising initiatives³. They also help to bring together and foster effective cooperation between different stakeholders on the ground, including local businesses, academia, civil society, and research. LRGs can also ensure a wider transferability of actions throughout their territory and in the local neighbourhood, creating a multiplier effect in neighbouring municipalities.
- LRGs are **policymakers and deliver essential public services** at local/regional levels: including these in the **structured policy dialogue** can help to ensure that the voice of all stakeholders is heard in the programming process. This ensures active involvement in order to systematise tools like “Roadmaps for local authorities”, which are a complementary, structured, and inclusive exercise.
- A **multi-stakeholder and multilevel approach** should be encouraged, according to the partnership principle, by including all levels of governments. **LRGs and their national associations** play a major role as a catalyser: they coordinate, raise concerns, advise, articulate, and manage the participation of local stakeholders, including academia, civil society organisations, the private sector, and other relevant actors, as called for by SDG 17 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Involve LRGs in all matters related to **local democracy, local autonomy, decentralisation**, as well as **public administration, public finance management, regional development and public service delivery**. Local and regional governments (LRGs, also called Local Authorities, or LAs, in EU legislative texts) are usually defined as a *“public institution with a legal identity; component of the state structure below the level of the central government*

¹ See the 2013 EU Communication [Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes](#)

² See PLATFORMA-CEMR study on [“The 2030 Agenda through the eyes of local and regional government associations”](#), (July 2020) as well as [PLATFORMA’s position paper on the SDGs](#) (October 2019)

³ Discover great examples of Development education and awareness raising, through the [European Days of Local Solidarity Campaign](#), coordinated by PLATFORMA

and accountable to its citizens. LAs are usually composed of a deliberative or policymaking body (council or assembly) and an executive body (mayor or other executive officer), directly or indirectly elected or selected at the local level⁴.

How to make the geographical programmes accessible to LRGs

- **Decentralise aid modalities** by encouraging national budget support for decentralisation reforms and for local government reforms as an integral part of public administration reforms and simplified calls for proposals, including LRG representative associations, city-to-city and region-to-region exchange of expertise (twinning & Taix), decentralised cooperation...
- Make sure to allow appropriate funding for all stakeholders, in particular **direct funding for LRGs** and their administrations in the geographical programmes at country and region/continent levels. Allocate earmarked support for LRGs to avoid any national political interference and have more flexibility in graduated countries⁵, for instance. Make sure investments are dedicated to infrastructure, to encourage economic development, jobs and employment, and ensure that health and education have appropriate infrastructure.
- **Promote and support peer-to-peer partnerships and decentralised cooperation** projects bringing together cities and regions from the EU and from partner countries. Reinforce EU partnerships aimed at exchanging and sharing expertise on various topics relating to their competence. Decentralised cooperation builds trust and solidarity among partners and can complement the strengthening of ties and knowledge of the EU Delegations' cooperation initiatives with regional and local levels, as well as ensuring a dialogue with these, without conflicting with the EUD's regular dialogue with national governments.

How to engage with local and regional governments and their associations?

In your EU Delegation's country or region, you can:

- Create **Framework Partnership Agreements**,
- Coordinate **Policy Forums on Development⁶**, and/or
- Implement the **partnership principle** with meetings every three months⁷.

⁴ Tools and Methods Series Reference Document No 23 "Supporting decentralisation, local governance and local development through a territorial approach", ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/mn-bb-16-005-en-n.pdf

⁵ According to the [Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (OECD), "Countries that have exceeded the high-income threshold for three consecutive years at the time of the review are removed" from the list of ODA recipients. It is called "graduation".

⁶ The [Policy Forum on Development](#) is a multi-stakeholder platform chaired by the European Commission and jointly co-chaired by Concord Europe, for civil society, and PLATFORMA, the local and regional governments.

⁷ For more concrete steps on this, please don't hesitate to look at our [Toolbox on how to work with local and regional governments](#)

2. LRGs contribution to the Commission's five priorities for the forthcoming programming phase

Working with LRGs on the Green Deal

The European Climate Pact is expected to bring together regional and local governments to make Europe the first climate neutral continent. Abroad, these are some recommendations on how LRGs can contribute to the implementation of the Green Deal objectives:

- In order to pursue an extension of the Green Deal elsewhere, cities and regions in Partner Countries must be involved in the design and implementation of **place-based greener waste management systems**, to implement the **circular economy** and recycling policies, to find ways to **preserve natural environments** through climate neutrality, or to adopt measures that, locally, would support **climate neutrality**, with the goal of making communities more resilient to future outbreaks.
- Local and regional governments, as first-hand experts on the territory, integrate green infrastructure and nature-based solutions into their **urban planning**, including in the design of **buildings, public spaces, infrastructure and services**. Local authorities can also reward those local businesses (including cooperatives, innovation, and social entrepreneurship) and initiatives that incorporate or rely on organic agriculture and other sustainable practices (through incentives and grants, for example).
- Local governments lead the process of **enabling clean and sustainable mobility, greening transport, and strengthening multimodal public transport for all**. Their role consists in shaping mobility services, introducing alternative modes of transport, raising awareness and guiding consumer choices.
- Partnerships will be key for LRGs in the countries that are most vulnerable to the **impact of climate change**, such as African countries or Small Island Developing States, where solutions are urgently needed. This also applies to partnerships with countries that lag behind with respect to the awareness and implementation of climate change mitigation measures, or in localising SDGs (e.g. enlargement candidates and potential candidates, as well as Eastern Partnership countries).
- Adapt priorities and means of implementation to the context: partner countries do not necessarily have funding available to ensure the implementation of comprehensive strategies or the high-quality maintenance of sophisticated systems. Ensure the implementation of simple projects on water, waste management, roads, schools, kindergartens, energy and economic infrastructure to cover as much as possible and to spread the efforts equally across the country's needs.

Contribution of decentralised cooperation projects to the Green Deal – illustrations

- Waste for employment: This project involves the Belgian city of Bornem and the Nigerian city of Nquthu. The vision of the programme is to realise greener and healthier living conditions in Nquthu by implementing awareness-raising campaigns on waste and environment and by collecting and processing amounts of waste in operational facilities. Assisted by the programme, Nquthu was able to construct a Buybackcenter.
- Strengthening of municipal management of waste in four cities of Burkina Faso: The towns of Châtelleraut (F), Herzogenaurach (D), and Kaya (BF) have been working in partnership on the management of solid household waste since 2016. The overall objective of the project is to help to improve the living conditions and health of the inhabitants of four secondary urban centres in Burkina Faso through the collection, disposal, and recycling of solid waste.
- Systemic approach to artisanal fishing: originating in the framework of a 27 year-long partnership in decentralised cooperation between the cities of Charente-Maritime (France) and Boffa (Guinea), the main objective of the project is to promote local economic growth through the sustainable development of the artisanal fisheries sector in the prefecture of Boffa.
- Decentralised Cooperation Project for a Durable Energy (PCD-ED): a three-year project spearheaded by the City of Lille (France) and the Municipality of Oujda (Morocco). The project has three main objectives: build the capacities of public officials in the field of sustainable energy, develop professional training in the field, promote this economic sector, and raise awareness of energy saving among local populations.

Working with LRGs on digital & data technologies

- LRG policies, just as with the upper levels of governance, are designed based on data. Digitalisation provides great opportunities to create, share and analyse more and better, more accurate, data for more **tailor-made and gender-sensitive policies and solutions** to complex problems. These range, for example, from mobility or housing to disaster reduction. Governments at all levels will need to ensure that data collection and the development of big data is **used for the common good** and that rights are guaranteed with the involvement of communities, and at the service of democratic societies. It is essential to ensure that the recovery is carried out with the more vulnerable populations. The future of many traditional public services is digital, and LRGs play a key role in **co-creating digital services, infrastructure, tools, and capacities**.
- **Digital divide and broadband deployment:** an enabling environment is necessary to ensure that the potential of the much needed digital technologies is fully utilised in cooperation processes (post-COVID-19 recovery, lower travel and climate impact, improved citizen participation, local democracy, gender gap, etc.). LRGs can play an instrumental role in limiting/fighting against inequalities between citizens as a result of unequal access to digitalisation⁸.
- Provide inclusive, transparent and available data to monitor progress at all levels of governance. Local and regional data are also an important **driver of monitoring and reporting**, especially the implementation of the 2030 Agenda's SDGs. EU Delegations can work more closely with national statistical offices and observatories in the country, as well as with LRGs and related research institutes, to ensure the collection of accessible, up-to-date and disaggregated data for towns, cities and regions. It is also essential to promote research and studies/reports on the impact of local and regional policies on global development and on the development of countries in particular.
- LRGs need an enabling environment to be able to deliver on their mandate and competences. Promoting a comprehensive decentralisation framework, with clear core powers and responsibilities and a transfer of corresponding financial resources, is a prerequisite for local and regional governments in partner countries to carry out their responsibilities effectively. These include the delivery of good quality basic services. Qualitative and effective decentralisation and local government reform can also be an important instrument to **fight corruption and increase the accountability** of local governments to their citizens.
- New technologies and digitalisation represent a new opportunity to create new types of jobs, to fight unemployment, and to try to achieve gender equality in the labour market

Working with LRGs on building/sustaining an economy that works for people

- Cities are engines of growth and LRGs are key actors when it comes to promoting the local **business environment, local economic development**, as well as **agriculture and rural development**. The transition for all towards a green social market economy has its roots at the local level
- Build capacity of local and regional governments in economic development, the national and local business climate, local economics and fiscal policy, investment attractiveness, and the promotion of exports. Facilitate and attract private investments, including via the EU External Investment Plan and guarantees for private investments in developing countries. Economic development would be most essential in the post-pandemic world.
- Make sure LRGs are involved **in cooperation between the EU and the private sector**. Support for the private sector and the social economic sector is essential to allow local economic development. Encouraging LRGs to understand their strategies of development is key, especially if a **Territorial Approach to Local Development** is implemented.
- The fight against poverty cannot be successful without **regional development**, to which small and medium enterprises, the social economy, and cooperatives contribute a great deal. The territory, the regions and cities and their policies are key to enable a truly country-wide economy that works for people.
- **An economy that protects public servants.** It is up to local and regional governments to take care of those who work day-to-day to provide basic services to our communities, to value their contributions to society, to ensure decent work, and to foster a model of production that is people-centred and that puts service provision, and

⁸ See [PLATFORMA Reaction](#) to the EU Global Response to COVID-19, April 2020.

providers, at the forefront. It is a further imperative to acknowledge the jobs, mostly done by women in the care sector, that are often underpaid or even unpaid

- In the preparation and implementation of the Gender Action Plan III for 2021-2025, make sure to recognise the essential role of LRGs as levers for action and the **promotion of equality between women and men “in the country”**, based on the content of the [European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life](#), and by establishing a multi-stakeholder group that explicitly includes local and regional governments and their representative associations as key partners/stakeholders within GAP III.
- Empower people through education and skills: **Development Education and Awareness Raising**. Ensure that resources for DEAR correspond at least to current levels of financing. Future DEAR EC programmes need to be suitable for the specificities of LRGs active in DEAR. LRGs as implementers and beneficiaries of EU funding programmes should have the freedom to define the priorities and thematic focus of DEAR projects. LRGs should also be enabled to independently choose the most efficient and effective ways of partnering with private sector and social economy actors to implement DEAR projects. While options to engage with local micro and small actors are welcome, the ultimate decisions relating both to sub-contracting and/or to sub-granting should be left to beneficiaries. For a greater impact of DEAR projects, resources of the future programme should make more use of the policy infrastructure and policy dialogue that LRGs structure, in cooperation with the education sector, at all levels. This could easily help to institutionalise the integration of SDGs into educational curricula.

Contribution of decentralised cooperation projects to a sustainable economy – illustrations

- [Quelimane Agricola and Quelimane Limpa](#): these projects arose from the cooperation of the municipality of Quelimane with the city of Milan. They aim, respectively, to foster sustainable rural development by strengthening local agricultural markets, and to promote the use of compost to improve the quality and quantity of urban agriculture harvests.
- [“Bridge”, “The Melody of Water”, “Road to the Future” and “The Kaleidoscope of Summer”](#): all these projects were developed under the framework of the cooperation between the Akmene District Municipality (Lithuania) and several partners in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, the city of Avdiivka, and the city of Shostka. In 2017, “Bridge” was established to help young people with mental issues. In 2018, “Way to the future” tried to foster the entrepreneurship of young women with social problems. In 2019 the “Summer Kaleidoscope” goal was to help teachers from Shostka city to increase their competencies working with non-formal education.
- [The project for the Tourism Promotion and Requalification of Maio Island](#): a project originating in the cooperation of the municipality of Loures (Portugal) and the municipality of Maio (Cape Verde) to promote local entrepreneurship and urban requalification as factors of sustainable socioeconomic, tourist and cultural development in Ilha do Maio.
- [AYLLUS Empowerment of indigenous communities of Bolivia](#): a cooperation project between the Veneto Region in Italy and the Bolivian municipalities of San Javier (Dipartimento del Beni), Baures (Dipartimento del Beni), Puerto Gonzalo Moreno (Dipartimento del Pando), and Puerto Rico (Dipartimento del Pando) to promote sustainable socio-economic development and the creation of employment opportunities, especially for young people and women, in the agro-forestry sector of the Bolivian Amazon.

Working with LRGs on migration partnerships

The priority is to ensure the human rights of the most vulnerable, according to the 'Leave no one behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda's SDGs.

- As most migrants live in **urban areas**, the challenges of governance, local development and multi-stakeholder engagement in an urban context are relevant to be addressed when working on migration partnerships. LRGs see migration flows as an opportunity to also repopulate rural areas
- LRG competences are particularly relevant when addressing issues that are at the root of today's migration flow, also in countries of origin: **local economic development, local resilience to crises and public administration reform, as well as transparency, and open government.**
- LRGs are key to **reducing the vulnerability of crisis-affected populations** and promoting their self-reliance, by improving the delivery of services such as education and health, upgrading slums and deprived urban areas, and designing participatory and integrated urban strategies, by including migrants and minority groups in decision making and **participatory processes**. They are key to enhancing the quality of life that is decisive for the success or failure of the integration of newcomers
- It is at the local level, under the responsibility of local and regional governments, that the integration of newcomers will fail or succeed, through guaranteeing access to basic services and fostering policies that will make newcomers welcome. Therefore, decentralised cooperation can help to gain a better understanding of the needs and cultures of newcomers and to raise the awareness of the local population about the challenges faced by migrants in their countries of origin. Partnerships with cities and towns of migrants' countries of origin could take several forms, including cultural exchanges, the technical sharing of expertise, etc. **Promoting a welcome culture** is as important as the willingness to integrate in a new cultural environment. Everything else will place a burden on integration
- Support the countries of origin, where local and regional governments find solutions for vulnerable groups of people left behind, the families of migrants, older people, children, the lack of people and entrepreneurs of working age, vanishing local markets, etc.

Contribution of decentralised cooperation projects to migration partnerships – illustrations

- **Health for all: a multi-stakeholder project co-funded by the Tuscany region** to improve social and sanitary conditions in the Kasserine region in Tunisia and **to reinforce partnerships between public authorities and civil societies in Italy and Tunisia**. Specifically, the project aims to educate and inform women and young people from Tunisian communities in Tuscany on the right to health in Italy and Tunisia. The project also aims to reinforce competencies and the knowledge of the health sector's professionals in Tunisia through exchanges between both regions.
- **Project between Villes de Bouilly (Mauritania) and Aubervilliers (France)**. This project, funded by the city of Aubervilliers, supports local development initiatives in Bouilly with the support of the association of Bouilly migrants in France (ABDI) and other actors. The project notably focuses on water infrastructure, and cultural initiatives. One of the components of the project is the organisation of exchanges between the population in Bouilly and the migrants' community in Aubervilliers.
- **SUPA Project** (Successful Paths, Supporting Human and Economic Capital of Migrants): SUPA is a project co-financed by the EU to manage migration flows through greater collaboration with third countries, and remittance facilitation. In this context, **the Venetia region is part of a PPP project** in collaboration with an Italian bank to create a financial instrument for the **creation of companies by migrants in their countries of origin**.

Working with LRGs on governance, peace and security

Stability is a pre-condition for sustainable and inclusive development, and stability starts at local and regional levels.

- LRGs play a key role in the promotion of social inclusion and **protection of human rights by ensuring the public service delivery** that addresses local needs related to the implementation of human rights at local and regional levels. Seconding national governments in the promotion of a human rights culture at the local level contributes to promoting respect for human rights in communities. Local and Regional Governments contribute to this through human rights education, awareness-raising, and capacity-building for their civil servants, for instance.
- Competences of local and regional governments are particularly relevant when addressing issues of the **rule of law and accountability**, notably when it comes to ensuring the implementation of the rule of law and **human rights culture**, along with other principles of **democratic governance**. Competences and resources should be in line with the legal mandate.
- Factors like more transparency and better scrutiny of the public authorities must start with the closest level to the citizens, which are regional and local levels. Regions and cities can be a decisive factor in the consolidation of, and transition to, democratic regimes. A functioning local democracy is the very foundation upon which a democratic structure and culture of a nation state can be built.
- Support and encourage participation of local and regional levels in capacity-building projects, to enhance and ensure the **ownership and sustainability** of their own development model, to make local and regional institutions stronger, more resilient and more capable of addressing citizens' needs with more autonomy by actively fostering citizen participation in the decision-making process.
- Support and strengthen institutions at local level, **build managerial, administrative, as well as functional and operational capacity**, for local and regional governments and their national associations, notably through decentralised cooperation. **Empower national associations** to make sure they fulfil their pivotal role of coordination of LRGs, and of managerial support of LRGs.
- Make sure the European Charter of local self-government⁹ and the Council of Europe Recommendations to consolidate¹⁰ national justice systems are implemented, to avoid political pressures on LRGs.
- Make use of partnerships of LRGs in partner countries who are in a conflict situation. Based on long term relationships of 20 or more years there are all kind of contacts and trust relations between LRGs and their partners which can support (a beginning of) a way out of the conflict by bringing together local representatives of different sides of the conflict. In these conflict situations LRGs and EU delegations should work together more on conflict prevention.

Contribution of decentralised cooperation projects to governance – illustrations

- Support for local and participatory democracy in Morocco: the project developed through the partnership between six municipalities in the province of Barcelona and six municipalities in the Marrakech-Safi region. The general objective of the project is to reinforce local participatory democracy in Morocco through the creation and operation of a platform for the exchange of experiences between the different municipalities.
- Shaping Fair Cities: this project was developed in a multi-stakeholder arrangement with partners coming from the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna and the Pemba municipality in Mozambique. The main objective of the project is in fact the localisation of SDGs (in particular five of them) in 14 local plans, including work plans and roadmaps. The aim is to strengthen local governments to engage in the localising Agenda 2030 process, both in terms of planning and implementation capacity.

⁹ Read the full charter [here](#).

¹⁰ See the [recommendations](#) of the Council of Europe.

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PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of towns and regions – and their national, European and global associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation.

We are a hub of expertise on European local and regional governments' international action and aim to boost European local and regional governments' contribution to EU development cooperation policies and international frameworks.

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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