PLATFORMA
LOCAL & REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Local and Regional Governments in Global Europe 2028–2034

Policy Position

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Preamble: local and regional governments are more relevant than ever to address the global multi-crisis

The state of play on the global stage has changed considerably in recent years. The world's political context is increasingly transactional and competitive, while cooperative multilateralism is in decline.

Global development is at a crossroads. Development **funding is being reduced** across government budgets in the EU and beyond. The OECD projects a **9 to 17% drop in official development assistance** (**ODA) in 2025**, following a 9% decline in 2024, and the outlook beyond 2025 remains highly uncertain.[1] After ten years of implementation efforts, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is still at a critical point, as "**only 35% of SDG targets are on track** or making modest gains. Nearly half are progressing too slowly, and alarmingly, **18% are in reverse**"[2]. Interlinked challenges of **pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss** are further endangering human development and have been described by the United Nations as the **Triple Planetary Crisis**.

As global tensions rise and global multilateral governance is questioned, the **EU is shifting priorities towards defence, competitiveness, and the energy transition**, opening a strategic discussion about its role in the new multipolar global context, where "states are prioritising security and intervening in the economy to safeguard their sovereignty, at the cost of some profit and prosperity", choosing the "**Global Gateway strategy** as a vehicle to serve the geoeconomic interest of Europe and its partners"[3]. Presented as a new modality for mutually beneficial partnerships, the Global Gateway strategy embodies this **shift in the EU approach, from aid to investment**, with the private sector at its core.

In this context, the European Commission unveiled in July 2025 its proposal for an "ambitious and dynamic" **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034**, aiming to "equip Europe with a long-term investment budget matching its ambitions"[4]. In the proposal presented by the European Commission, the budget for EU external action, **Global Europe**[5], presents a financial envelope of €200.309 billion (in current prices), representing a 75% increase compared to current levels[6]. This is certainly welcomed, but the allocation, in competition with other policy priorities, remains at risk of being cut. Further negotiations will confirm the final amount – and ambition – dedicated to EU external action.

In tune with the times, and envisaged in synergy with EU internal policies, **Global Europe simultaneously advances objectives of sustainable development and the EU's "strategic interests" and "competitiveness"**. As the instrument proposes new modalities aimed at increased flexibility and simplification, a much-needed feature in this fast-evolving context, the challenge is now to find the right balance with essential mechanisms for accountability and transparency, as well as longer-term programming, which remain necessary for partners in fragile contexts.

Yet **local and regional governments** (LRGs) across the world remain **public governance actors** in their own right and essential partners in addressing the pressing challenges of our times, with

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[1] OECD (2025), "*Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term*", OECD Policy Briefs, No. 26

[2] United Nations (2025), "*The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*", foreword by Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres.

[3] Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, Clingendael Institute and Egmont Institute (2025), "*Partnerships in a Geopolitical Era: time for a New Strategic Conversation*", background paper for the second Global Gateway Forum in October 2025.

[4] European Commission (16 July 2025), Press release, "*An ambitious budget for a stronger Europe: 2028–2034*".

[5] European Commission (16 July 2025), "*Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing Global Europe*" (COM(2025)551 final).

[6] ECDPM (July 2025), Alexei Jones, Briefing note No 198, "*A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal*"

the ambition of being active protagonists within the new paradigm of international development and cooperation.

Under this new paradigm, local and regional governments need to reaffirm the centrality of **multilevel governance and decentralised cooperation** in achieving EU objectives and ensuring local impact. Most importantly for local and regional governments, while they are mentioned in the Global Europe draft (under the umbrella term "local authorities"), **effective mechanisms for multilevel governance remain vague and inconsistent** across the document. The notable **absence of decentralised cooperation and Global Citizenship Education** constitutes additional shortcomings.

Achievement of the global development goals will also depend largely on local and regional initiatives: 65% of the 169 targets across the 17 SDGs cannot be reached without the involvement of, local and regional authorities[7]. LRGs remain crucial for **disaster resilience and recovery**, as frontline responders to **humanitarian crises and emergencies**, close to their communities. In **fragile contexts**, they maintain local diplomatic links, strengthen community resilience, and co-create an **enabling environment for civil society organisations**. LRGs are key to creating inclusive and participatory governance processes at local level, ensuring that **the voices of youth, women and disadvantaged or underrepresented groups** are heard. Last but not least, LRGs are essential players in accompanying the **EU enlargement process**.

The European Commission has in previous Communications recognised the **crucial role of local and regional governments in development policy**[8], and their role, together with their associations as policy and decision-makers, **contributing to enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes**. This recognition was endorsed by the 2017 *European Consensus for Development,* acknowledging the importance of LRGs in achieving the SDGs, taking part in the decision-making process, fostering transparency and inclusiveness as well as mobilising national and local financial resources[9].

Territorial solutions are more than ever crucial for EU external policy outcomes. The EU cannot invest in projects that remain detached from the local context, and a **territorial approach to development is essential**[10] to ensure local ownership, and to ensure long-term and sustainable impact on people's lives.

Through the following recommendations, PLATFORMA aims to improve the current proposal for the Global Europe instrument, so that it fully recognises, acknowledges, and supports the **contribution of local and regional governments to EU external action**, notably through **decentralised cooperation as development aid modality**.

In parallel, acknowledging that the global context has evolved since 2017, PLATFORMA calls on the European Commission to issue an updated **Communication on the structured involvement of local and regional governments and their associations in the new (geo)strategic approach to EU external action**, linked to their role in the implementation and governance of the Global Gateway strategy, and providing an updated narrative and guidance on concrete mechanisms of their engagement.

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[7] European Committee of the Regions, Commission for Economic Policy (2019), *"A territorial approach for the implementation of the SDGs in the EU – The role of the European Committee of the Regions"*

[8] European Commission (8 October 2008), Brussels, "*Local Authorities: Actors for Development*" (COM(2008)626 final).

[9] Joint statement by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the member states meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission (7 June 2017), "*The New European Consensus on Development. Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future*".

[10] GOPA Partners in Action for Change and Engagement (PACE) (November 2023), "*Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD) in EU's External Action 2020–2023*."

1. Strengthen multilevel governance in Global Europe and place local and regional governments in the driving seat of territorial development

In a nutshell

Local and regional governments are mentioned in the first draft of Global Europe 2028–2034, under the umbrella term of "local authorities" (encompassing the regional dimension as well). The draft is encouraging, as the EU foresees "close consultation of local authorities", ensuring that "local authorities [are] duly consulted" and "have timely access to information, allowing them to be adequately engaged" (Recital (46)).

While we welcome the mention of local and regional governments in the draft regulation, we note that **effective multi-level governance and partnership mechanisms** to ensure their recognition and their active engagement as development actors and strengthening their effective operations in line with their respective mandate **remain vague, or fully absent** for "Europe" and "Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf".

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- Reaffirms that as the **level of government closest to citizens**, and holder of a **democratic mandate, LRGs are the best placed** to implement sustainable policies and investments, **tailored to the local needs**, ensuring policy coherence and alignment at local and regional levels with larger investments policies such as the Global Gateway.

- Welcomes the references to local and regional governments (LRGs) but stresses that **mechanisms ensuring their effective recognition and engagement remain vague**.

- Calls on the European institutions to include in the upcoming Global Europe regulation **clear multilevel governance mechanisms**, support to decentralisation reforms, and targeted financial and technical support through **dedicated funding mechanisms** to lift the barriers LRGs face in engaging in EU development policies (i.e. institutional and legal restrictions, administrative and technical capacity constraints) and **fully recognise them as actors and co-implementors of EU external policies**.

2. Pair flexibility and simplification with ambitious official development assistance targets, and enhance accountability and transparency mechanisms

In a nutshell

One of the major changes with the new Global Europe instrument lies in its **geographical approach**. It **merges all previous instruments**, namely the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the Humanitarian Aid (HA) instrument, **into one single instrument**, articulated into 5 main geographical pillars and a global pillar, each provided with an indicative financing envelope. The amounts are however non-binding, which raises concern over a possible deprioritisation of "certain areas over time, making it difficult to ensure predictability" as pointed out by ECDPM[11]. A specific chapter for Ukraine of €100 billion is also provided, on top of MFF ceilings.

Flexibility is an important feature under this new programming period, each geographical pillar being composed of a programmable and a non-programmable component, the respective proportions of which are not yet defined. In addition, an "emerging challenges and priority cushion" shall be used in case of "unforeseen circumstances" and "crisis" – indeed an important feature in the multi-crisis and fast-evolving world we are currently navigating in. The **simplification of financing tools** through direct grants to be awarded without a call for proposal, opened to entities governed by private law from a Member State under certain conditions (Recital (70), Article 23.4) – therefore in theory opened to associations of LRGs based in the EU – is another positive step.

However, the possible use of the "Emerging challenges and priority cushion" for promoting "new Union-led or international initiatives and priorities" (Article 7), and a light accountability mechanism towards the European Parliament and the Council by the European Commission, which should "inform" and take into account their observations "where appropriate" (Article 7), **calls for improved monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure these funds are spent where they are most needed**.

Another important evolution to point out is the **removal of all spending targets except for the ODA target**, set at "at least 90% of the expenditure" (Article 6). However, the same article also foresees the possibility for the Commission to "adopt delegated acts to amend [this] percentage". As stressed by ECDPM and CONCORD[12], this "risks undermining the EU's poverty focus and credibility", while introducing "**unpredictability** for partner countries, particularly least developed countries (LDCs), which depend on stable aid."[13]

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[11] ECDPM (July 2025), Alexei Jones, Briefing Note No 198, "*A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal*"
[12] CONCORD (January 2025), *"Shaping International Partnerships: Budgeting our Common Future"*
[13] ECDPM (July 2025), Alexei Jones, Briefing Note No 198, "*A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal*"

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- Considers the introduction of **simplified funding mechanisms**, such as direct grant awards without calls for proposals, as a positive step and invites European Union institutions to fully acknowledge the limited administrative capacity of smaller stakeholders, by **dedicating a specific envelope to foster the involvement of local and regional governments and their associations**.

- Welcomes the **increased flexibility of the new financing and policy toolbox** to ensure responsiveness to crisis in a fast-evolving global context marked by multiple crises. We stress, however, that flexibility **should not come at the expense of longer-term development objectives** which provide essential visibility to partners in fragile contexts. Thus, we reaffirm the importance of long-term programming efforts and setting ambitious targets for ODA, in line with international commitments of the EU and Member States. In addition, we call for **increased multi-level governance, transparency and accountability** towards the European Parliament regarding the use of flexible envelopes to ensure that they are **used where they are most needed**.

3. Unlock Global Gateway's potential through involvement of local and regional governments

In a nutshell

Under the current programming period, **Global Gateway** – the EU flagship strategy for investment in partner countries – is envisaged as a modality for strategic and mutually benefitting partnerships, in a context of increasing criticism towards traditional schemes for aid, perceived as unbalanced and neocolonial.

As "a main pillar of the Union's economic foreign policy" (Recital (24)), Global Gateway is largely present in the new Global Europe instrument. However, its ability to respond to EU's development objectives, notably the eradication of poverty, as embedded in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union[14], remains in question, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected countries, low-income countries and least developed countries[15]. Since Global Europe aims to contribute "simultaneously to the sustainable development of partner countries and to the Union's strategic interests", addressing both global challenges (as the fight against climate change and the protection of biodiversity), and providing "increased economic and trade opportunities to the mutual benefit of the Union and partner countries" (Recital (15)), the question of the **political priorities and balance given to the investment and development objectives** will be essential.

Global Gateway stands out from its competitors by its "**values-based offer** that promotes high social, environmental, governance and financial standards, and upholds democracy, the rule of law and human rights" (Recital (24)). However, while the EU shows willingness to work together with the private sector, observers from LRGs and CSOs alike point out a lack of involvement and transparency on Global Gateway projects[16], emphasising a pressing need for cross-sectoral fora involving LRGs alongside other stakeholders as CSOs, fostering policy coherence at local level. **LRGs have a significant role to play** in consolidating this value-based offer, particularly from a governance point of view.

The Council conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)[17] underline that the "implementation of PCD rests on the shared ownership and responsibility of all EU actors including the Member States," as well as "the importance of **enhanced dialogue with all relevant stakeholders such as local and regional authorities**". This was stressed in Council conclusions on Mid-Term Evaluation of NDICI-Global Europe, highlighting "the importance of policy dialogue with partner countries (…) including local civil society and local and regional authorities, acknowledging the need for strengthened ownership and alignment".[18] Furthermore, in its Opinion titled "The Localisation of the EU's Global Gateway", the Committee of the Regions argues as well that the Global Gateway "**should reinforce governance and capacity beyond national governments and the private sector and further engage at subnational level**"[19].

LRGs provide specific public services in Global Gateway's priority sectors: digital, climate and clean energy, transport, health as well as education and research. Their involvement ensures the co-creation of a **conducive framework** and supports **long-term sustainability of investments**. They provide local solutions that can scale up to support EU external action and

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[14] Official Journal 115 (09 May 2008), Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 208.1 "Union development cooperation policy shall have as its primary objective the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty."
[15] CONCORD (January 2025), *"Shaping International Partnerships: Budgeting our Common Future"*
[16] EURODAD, COUNTER BALANCE, OXFAM (October 2024), "*Who profits from the Global Gateway? The EU's new strategy for development cooperation*"
[17] Council of the European Union (16 May 2019), Conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) 9132/19
[18] Council of the European Union (24 June 2024), Conclusions on Mid-Term Evaluation of the NDICI-Global Europe external financing instrument 11343/24
[19] European Committee of the Regions (December 2025), Opinion "*The Localisation of the EU's Global Gateway*", CDR-2518-2025

the delivery of its global strategic objectives. This is acknowledged by the Communication on an EU Agenda for Cities[20], which stresses that local authorities' "**involvement is essential to understand the details of the context where the Global Gateway is implemented**", emphasizing that "on the longer term, EU cities could have a greater role in defining partnership priorities in areas in which cities generally have significant responsibilities and can promote multilevel governance cooperation".

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- Strongly believes **that effective involvement of LRGs is key to ensure Policy Coherence for Development** (PCD) at territorial level, achieve local impact and **foster the sustainability of Global Gateway's projects and investments** in the long term, contributing to the 360-degree approach. LRGs can ensure that Global Gateway investments are effective, targeted to the needs of local populations, and aligned with local realities. We highlight that the **principles of subsidiarity, multilevel governance and partnerships are among EU core values** and should be extended to EU's external action as part of the Global Gateway's values-based offer. LRGs should be **recognised as co-creators of enabling environment** for sustainable investments.

- Expresses serious concerns regarding the **lack of meaningful involvement of LRGs in Global Gateway projects** developed in their own territories. We urge the European Commission to set up funding streams tailored to LRGs realities, and transparent multi-sectoral fora of governance for these projects, effectively involving LRGs in Teams National and in the Global Gateway Investment Hub.

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[20] European Commission (3 December 2025), "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - An EU Agenda for Cities: Driving Growth and Prosperity" COM (2025) 739/2

4. Foster EU delegations' engagement with local and regional governments

In a nutshell

PLATFORMA has long recognised the crucial importance of the **dialogue between LRGs and EU delegations**. Just as central state actors, **LRGs are also policymakers**, in charge of the design and implementation of local and regional public policies, which can increase the local impact of Global Europe through **territorial approach to development**. Their structural involvement is key to ensure **policy coherence**, ultimately increasing the **impact of EU external action on the ground**. LRGs are not only responsible for the planning, permitting, procurement and sometimes management of local infrastructure, but also for a **wide range of public policies** that need to be coherent (local economic development, climate policy, disaster resilience and recovery, education and vocational training, local transport, waste management, social services and policies, gender equality and inclusion, etc.). This policy coherence is also embedded in the objectives and principles of EU's external action, specifically in Article 21.3 of the TEU: "The Union shall ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies"[21].

As stated in the new (2017) European Consensus on Development, the **EU is committed to strengthen dialogue with partner countries on policy coherence**, and while this is mainly discussed in the framework of cooperation programming activities, it is less frequently addressed in the context of institutionalised political dialogue with partner governments[22]. Furthermore, the Council conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD)[23] underlined that the "role of EU delegations (…) remains pivotal in monitoring PCD efforts", and to "include PCD in their dialogue with partner countries".

Policy coherence for development could be further enhanced by including LRGs in the roll-out of Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives, from definition, through implementation, to monitoring and evaluation. To achieve this shift, PLATFORMA is engaged in structured geographic dialogues with EU delegations and can act as a facilitator and conduit through our partners' expertise and know-how in supporting EU delegations in their relationship with LRGs.

To reinforce capacities in this regard, a starting point is the systematization of **LRG focal points across all EU delegations** that can act as an ally and interlocutor for LRGs. Currently, there are dedicated focal points for CSOs as well as Civil Society Roadmaps, whilst LRGs are often not considered. This is a barrier to dialogue and should be considered as part of an organisational shift within EU delegations, to facilitate and support their engagement with local partners.

Furthermore, despite an ongoing uncertainty on a possible reorganisation of EU delegations into regional hubs, the current draft of Global Europe does not provide any substantial confirmation on this question.

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[21] Official Journal (15 March 2025), Treaty on European Union, Article 21.3 "The Union shall respect the principles and pursue the objectives set out in paragraphs 1 and 2 in the development and implementation of the different areas of the Union's external action covered by this Title and by Part Five of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and of the external aspects of its other policies."

[22] European Commission (28 January 2019), Staff Working Document, "*2019 EU report on Policy Coherence for Development*" (SWD(2019)20 final)

[23] Council of the European Union (16 May 2019), Conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) 9132/19

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- Considers that in the new paradigm of the EU development policy, with the Global Gateway strategy at its core, effective **coordination** between public and private actors along with **multi-level dialogue** involving the EU, national, and local levels is essential for achieving **policy coherence for development**, which is embedded in the objectives and principles of EU's external action. LRGs are playing an increasingly crucial role in fostering local impact as well as investment sustainability. Therefore, we call for the **recognition** of local and regional governments as **key policymakers**, on par with national entities, and as **providers of specific territorial expertise** and knowledge that **bridge the gap between private and public sectors**. We urge the recognition of their unique role to effectively address local needs and meaningfully engage with the broader EU development agenda and its objectives.

- Firmly believes in the **potential of decentralised cooperation** to be instrumental for achieving EU development objectives, including in the framework of the Global Gateway, through multi-stakeholder partnerships involving LRGs alongside other actors. We therefore call on the EU to **strengthen EU delegations' engagement with local and regional governments and their national associations** through **LRG focal points and local government roadmaps** in all EU delegations, **enhanced dialogue** and **mandatory consultation structures**, as well as **dedicated funding mechanisms**.

5. Recognise and empower local and regional governments as unique and effective development partners in fragile contexts

In a nutshell

Global fragility[24] remains at near-record high level, impacting regions which are home to 25% of the world's population and 72% of the world's extreme poor, also representing areas of concentrated global demographic growth[25]. These contexts generate and host the majority of world's forcibly displaced, counting over 100 million persons.

Progress on the 2030 Agenda is decisively off track in most high or extreme fragility contexts. At the same time, resources for peace and conflict prevention in these contexts are at their second lowest level since 2004. Defunding of USAID, which provided over 40% of global humanitarian funding, and cuts in external action budgets by several EU Member States exacerbate fragility and reinforce the **urgent need for a strong EU engagement**[26]. The current Global Europe 2028–2034 draft acknowledges the importance of EU action in fragile, crisis and post-crisis contexts, in which a "special emphasis should be placed on stepping up support and **coordination amongst all relevant actors** to help with the transition from an emergency situation to sustainable development and stable peace" (Article 9).

As underlined by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), the **local level is of crucial importance to fostering peace, building resilience and restore trust** in the legitimacy of national institutions in fragile settings[27]. While challenges and limitations of working with LRGs in fragile contexts should be acknowledged, **LRGs** present several assets that can **add value to development efforts** in these settings and **have much to offer to the EU in terms of delivering on its core external action priorities**.

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- Recalls that **LRGs, as closest level of government to the citizens, are often the only functioning public institutions in fragile and conflict-affected areas, and first responders in crisis situations**, providing essential services, humanitarian aid, and disaster response. In contexts where national governments struggle to act, LRGs ensure continuity of governance and social stability, acting as key partners in strengthening community resilience, peacebuilding, and crisis recovery. Through city-to-city diplomacy and local government associations, LRGs maintain open communication channels, fostering cooperation even in highly polarised political environments. Hence, **we call for a dedicated programming for LRGs**, empowering them and acknowledging their key role in providing ongoing support to populations in urgent need, **notably in fragile contexts**.

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[24] The OECD defines fragility as a combination of exposure to risk, and insufficient resilience of the state, system, and/or community to manage, absorb or mitigate such risks. The OECD analytical multidimensional fragility framework assesses risk and resilience across six dimensions: economic, environmental, political, security, societal and human.
[25] OECD (2025), States of Fragility 2025
[26] CONCORD, EPLO, VOICE (2025), A joint call for the EU to ensure no one is left behind in the next MFF
[27] ECDPM (2025), EU engagement in fragile settings: What role for cities and local/regional governments and how best to support them?

6. Advance the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve decarbonised societies and climate justice

In a nutshell

As a direct consequence of the unprecedented geopolitical instability affecting the EU and partner countries, the **implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) is being left aside as **less of 35% of the 17 SDGs are on track** or have shown moderate progress[28] placing the 2030 target year for the **full implementation of the SDGs at risk**. The draft Global Europe proposal notes in the Explanatory Memorandum, that "**EU non-action would widen the SDGs financing investment gap** and further deteriorate the situation of fragile countries while weakening the EU as a geopolitical and geoeconomic actor and as global player in multilateral fora".

As acknowledged by the European Parliament, local and regional authorities "hold a significant role (…) in defining, implementing and monitoring local actions and strategies that contribute to the global achievement of the SDGs."[29] The **localisation of the SDGs** is a way to frame these various actions.

Through the Global Europe proposal, the EU is adapting its external action financing to better serve its strategic interests and to address current and future crises, while simultaneously contributing to the "sustainable development of partner countries", including "the fight against climate change and biodiversity protection" (Recital (15)). Despite this commitment, the new **Global Europe does not explicitly set a climate external funding target**[30] and instead proposes mainstreaming fight against climate change and environmental protection (Article 10). As noted by ECDPM, "**without dedicated allocations or strengthened reporting, there is a real danger that climate objectives** (…) **could be sidelined**", which "may erode the EU credibility as a global climate leader".[31]

In 2019, LRGs accounted for **63% of climate-significant public expenditure** and **69% of climate-significant public investment**[32]. OECD underlines that, "relative to central governments, subnational governments are responsible for the majority of environmental and climate-related spending and investment".[33] Their unique positioning allows them to efficiently respond to local needs, implement **innovative climate strategies**, and foster community **resilience to climate change impacts**, such as storms and floods, erosion, droughts, wildfires, rising sea levels, decline of organic matter, biodiversity loss, landslides, heat waves, or desertification.

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[28] United Nations (2025), "*The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025*,", page 4

[29] European Parliament (9 July 2025), Resolution on *implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in view of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum* (2025/2014(INI))

[30] While this is not present in the Global Europe draft, the "*Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities*" precises the target for climate and environment. Article 4.2 of the sets a spending target of at least 35% of the total amount of the budget on climate action and environmental objectives (…) over the entire 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework, as well as 30% for Global Europe (as set in the Annex III).

[31] ECDPM (July 2025), Alexei Jones, Briefing note No 198, "*A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal*"

[32] In 33 OECD and European Union (EU) countries. OECD Regional Development Papers, No.32 (2022) OECD Publishing, "*Subnational government climate expenditure and revenue tracking in OECD and EU Countries*"

[33] OECD (2019), OECD Environment policy paper No. 17, "*Financing climate objectives in cities and regions to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth*"

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- Calls on the European Union institutions to **enhance multi-level governance regarding the implementation of SDGs** through structured dialogue, diplomacy efforts inclusive of LRGs, and accountability mechanisms, as local level engagement and public policies tailored to the local context are critical for accelerating progress on reaching the Sustainable Development Goals.

- Calls for **appropriate capacity building, cooperation, resources and support to LRGs, empowering them in SDG implementation** and ensuring that sustainable development policies are in line with the realities on the ground. We stress that **youth participation and leadership should be integral to local SDG action**, with programmes enabling young people to co-design and monitor local sustainability initiatives, ensuring they have a voice and a role in shaping their own future.

7. Involve citizens through Global Citizenship Education as a key component of decentralised development cooperation

In a nutshell

LRGs and their associations are key stakeholders in advancing **Global Citizenship Education** (GCE), equipping individuals with the values, knowledge and skills to understand complex global issues and become responsible and active global citizens, contributing to building more cohesive and peaceful societies. As the public institutions closest to citizens, LRGs hold a strategic role in fostering the **understanding, ownership, and active engagement of citizens** in global sustainable development, both in partner countries and in the EU. LRGs' deep knowledge of local realities guarantees that GCE initiatives are well-adapted to the local context, while reflecting on local-global interdependencies, ensuring Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), in alignment with SDG Target 17.14[34]. Through decentralised cooperation, EU LRGs have a unique role to localise global challenges and raise citizens' awareness, both in the EU and in partner countries. The **Global Gateway's 360-degree approach could boost its effectiveness** if it is supported by informed and engaged citizens.

The **absence of Global Citizenship Education and Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) in the current draft is an important shortcoming**. Reintegrating them and extending their modalities to partner countries would empower LRGs to contribute to the objective of the new Global Europe instrument of "[strengthening] democratic resilience in partner countries", including by "promoting citizens' engagement" (Recital (27)). Through community-driven and inclusive approaches, GCE local actions could contribute to the delivery of the Global Gateway's 360-degree approach. To this end, the sustention of funding for the DEAR programme and the enhancement of the sub-granting schemes for LRGs remain essential. Without adequate and accessible funding, GCE policies cannot be effectively developed or implemented.

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- Reiterates that **Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is a key modality of decentralised cooperation** and a **pillar of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development**. As development cooperation actors, LRGs ensure that GCE initiatives reflect local-global interdependences, in a context marked by growing disinformation and distrust.

- Calls on **maintaining the DEAR programme** and **promote GCE both in the EU and in partner countries**, fostering active citizen engagement and inclusive international cooperation to advance the Global Europe's objective of strengthening democratic resilience.

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[34] SDG Target 17.14 "Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development", contributing to SDG17 "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development".

8. Foster inclusive and participatory local governance: empower youth, women, and disadvantaged and underrepresented groups

In a nutshell

Effective **citizen participation** must be inclusive and concerns society at large, meeting the needs of those who can face particular obstacles in participation such as youth and women, as well as underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.[35] In that regard, the new Global Europe instrument shows the ambition of promoting "gender equality", supporting the "empowerment of the youth" and applying the principles of "leaving no one behind" (Article 9). However, concrete mechanisms to ensure inclusive participation of these groups at the local and regional levels remain limited and tracking mechanisms are unclear.

Global Europe introduces a new approach by **removing the former binding targets** under NDICI-Global Europe, to propose a **mainstreaming of gender equality** within the instrument (Article 10). As pointed out by ECDPM, this "represents a clear step back from the EU's previous commitments, raising the risk that gender objectives will be diluted within broader programmes (…) and being deprioritised within the EU's external agenda".[36]

LRGs can **create democratic and civic spaces** where citizens (especially young people, women, and underrepresented or marginalised communities) can shape public policies and development priorities. LRGs are **co-creators of an enabling environment for civil society** organisations, which can help reach disadvantaged people and complement state and private sector actions.[37] The current proposal focuses largely on national-level partnerships, with few guarantees that participatory governance, civic education, or youth engagement through LRGs will be systematically supported.

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- Strongly believes that building resilient societies in partner countries requires a bottom-up approach through LRGs, strengthening local democracy, gender equality and intergenerational dialogue, connecting civic participation to EU's values and fundamental-rights-based external agenda. We call on the EU to **make inclusive local governance a cross-cutting priority** of Global Europe, through financing and scaling up participatory mechanisms at local level, supporting **capacity-building for LRGs and associations** to engage all citizens in decision-making. Concrete measures, dedicated funding windows, indicators and monitoring mechanisms should ensure that **youth and gender equality actions** are systematically integrated in EU cooperation programmes with an intersectional approach, recognising their central role in advancing democracy, social cohesion and the 2030 Agenda.

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[35] Council of Europe (2016), <u>Toolkit on citizen participation</u>

[36] ECDPM (July 2025), Alexei Jones, Briefing note No 198, <u>"A companion guide to the Global Europe instrument proposal"</u> -.

[37] OECD (2024), <u>Development cooperation fundamentals: Enabling civil society</u>

9. Strengthen local governance through the EU Eastern neighbourhood and enlargement strategy

In a nutshell

The draft of the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) allocates €43.2 billion – representing 21% of the Global Europe Instrument – to the Europe region. This pillar supports the **EU's neighbours and future members** and forms the financial core for enlargement and neighbourhood policies.

EU enlargement is both a "**political priority and a geopolitical investment**"[38]. At the same time, it is also a cohesion challenge: it aims to integrate candidate countries into the single market, reinforce democratic governance, and support the green and digital transitions. However, a successful enlargement cannot be complete without local ownership. Empowering local and regional governments will ensure that EU integration is felt, understood and embraced by citizens, making enlargement not only a geostrategic success, but also a democratic one. Moreover, the Committee of the Regions often recalls that **around 70% of the EU *acquis communautaire* is implemented at the sub-national level**.[39]

Ukraine holds a special position in this context, being both a candidate country and a post-war recovery partner. It will receive the most substantial external financial support ever granted by the EU to a third country, with €100 billion in loan support that lies outside the formal MFF envelope. This exceptional measure allows the EU to scale up assistance to Ukraine without undermining its other priorities.

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- Regrets the **absence of reference to local and regional governments** from the draft **MFF regulation** in both the **enlargement and neighbourhood components**. This omission risks weakening the democratic ownership of the enlargement process. Furthermore, we see the risk of blurring the distinct purposes of enlargement, neighbourhood, and humanitarian aid policies. **Incorporating cities and regions into the accession and neighbourhood** processes, along with providing **clarity on the nature of the funding** programs, is not only a matter of subsidiarity but also essential for ensuring success.

- Calls for the **integration of local priorities into EU funding decisions,** through the establishment of advisory bodies within each EU member state's representation to ensure **early involvement of local and regional governments** (LRGs) in funding strategies, in close relation with the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and associations of local authorities. Therefore, we recommend that programme priorities should include essential components for guaranteeing **strong local democracy** systems, such as **decentralised cooperation, multilevel governance**, **gender equality**, fighting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), and **decentralisation** (including fiscal decentralisation) to enhance investment sustainability, service quality, and public trust.

- Recalls the need to build **local capacity** and **simplify access to funding**. The Europe pillar under the Global Europe instrument should incorporate stronger capacity-building measures for local officials. Expanding programs like Erasmus+ to include local and

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[38] Remarks by High Representative and Vice-President Kaja Kallas on the 2025 enlargement package, 4 November 2025

[39] European Committee of the Regions (2025), Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, Opinion No CDR-0262-2025, *"Opinion Enlargement package 2024 – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia"*

regional governments would enhance local skills, integrity, and effective implementation of decentralisation and public administration reforms, which are priorities for the EU. To achieve this, the EU should create a dedicated, user-friendly funding platform that offers higher co-financing rates, **simplified application processes**, and technical assistance for **smaller or disadvantaged municipalities**.

- Calls for a **strong role of local and regional governments in the reconstruction of Ukraine**. Dedicated funding for reconstruction must involve LRGs in rebuilding infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems to promote a democratic and stable recovery. It is essential to maintain **separate and clearly distinguished allocations for pre-accession and reconstruction**. This will help preserve the continuity of existing funds, avoid overlapping support, and ensure consistent assistance for both immediate crises and long-term development.

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of cities, regions, and their associations, active in the field of decentralised development cooperation.

It was established in 2008 and is a strategic partner of the European Union since 2015.

PLATFORMA gathers 26 partners: global and European networks, associations, and local and regional governments

It is a flagship initiative of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

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