



Mindcraft

Bridging and Mapping Knowledge
Gaps in Decentralised Cooperation

Country Profile on decentralised development cooperation

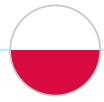


#1

POLAND

Abbreviations

CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DDC	Decentralised development cooperation
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross national income
LRGs	Local and regional governments
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Multiannual Programme	Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2021–2030 – Solidarity for Development
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PLN	Polish zloty
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
ZMP	Association of Polish Cities
ZPP	Association of Polish Counties



Data

Form of state structure **Unitary state**



Territorial-administrative division¹

2,479
municipalities

314
counties

66 municipalities
with special status

16
regions

Population² **36,620,970**
(2024)

Geographical size² **311,928 km²**

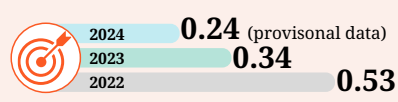
GDP per Capita² **€30,100** (2024)
EU average: €37,600

EU membership **since 2004**

OECD DAC membership³ **since 2013**

0.33
(UN target: 0.7)

ODA target as % GNI³



ODA target as % GNI in the last three years³

decreased
in 2023

Trends in total ODA

21

Seats in the European Committee of the Regions⁴

2 (Association of Polish Cities – ZMP, Association of Polish Counties – ZPP)

CEMR members⁵ in Poland

¹ Polish Government website
² Eurostat
³ OECD website
⁴ Poland | European Committee of the Regions
⁵ CEMR website



1. Decentralised development cooperation (DDC) framework in Poland

1.1. Framework defining engagement in DDC

The 2011 Development Cooperation Act (Journal of Laws 2011, item 1386, as amended) provides a legal basis of the Polish development cooperation, including its definition, forms of cooperation, key actors as well as management and implementation related rules. According to its Article 2, development cooperation refers to the sum of activities by government agencies aimed at providing developmental and/or humanitarian aid to developing countries. Additionally, promotion of democracy and civil society, support to human rights, global education activities and awareness raising are also considered part of development cooperation.

The implementation of development cooperation in Poland is further elaborated in a multiannual development cooperation programme, including specification of geographical and thematic priorities. This is currently provided for in the Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2021–2030 – Solidarity for Development (hereafter: **Multiannual Programme**). The Programme takes into consideration relevant goals and targets of international agendas and strategies (such as those of the United Nations (UN) Agenda 2030) as well as of the Polish Foreign Policy.

The goals and objectives of the Multiannual Programme are then being implemented through the annual development cooperation plan. This plan outlines and elaborates forms of development cooperation activities with allocated funds in a more detail. **The 2025 Development Cooperation Plan** is the current reference document.

Overall, according to the Polish legal framework, development cooperation refers to all activities undertaken by government agencies (2011 Development Cooperation Act, Article 2) with a list of entities (Article 3) which can engage by implementing activities in the field of development cooperation (Article 10). The Multiannual Programme (p. 44), as the document guiding the implementation of Polish development cooperation, mentions local and regional governments (LRGs) along with the civil society, the private sector, and others as partners in the Polish development cooperation.

Although there is no specific definition nor policies or guidelines regarding the decentralised development cooperation (DDC) in the framework of development cooperation in Poland, the **Polish Constitution** (Journal of Laws 1997, item 483, as amended) states that *‘units of local self-government shall have right to join international associations of local and regional communities as well as cooperate with local and regional communities of other states’* (Article 172, para. 2). This constitutional provision, along with other relevant provisions of the various Acts concerning LRGs (the Act on Municipal Self-Government, the Act on County Self-Government, the Act on Regional Self-Government, and the Act on the Principles of Accession of Territorial Self-Government Units to International Associations of Local and Regional Communities) provide the basis for LRGs to decide on their engagement and cooperation internationally. Considering that in the Polish case there are no specific DDC policies and guidelines in place, sections that follow outline the overarching framework for development cooperation, indicating possible roles and activities of LRGs.

1.2. Key actors involved in DDC

According to the 2011 Development Cooperation Act, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is the lead actor in the field of Polish development cooperation. Specifically, the MFA is responsible for defining, planning, coordinating and implementing development cooperation (see Article 13 and 14 for the detailed list of competencies). The National Coordinator for International Development Cooperation within the MFA is tasked with the overall coordination (Article 14), while the Development Cooperation Programme Board serves as a consultative and advisory body to the MFA (Article 15). The MFA’s Department of Development Cooperation carries out the work and supports both the National Coordinator and the Board.

Apart from the MFA, the 2011 Development Cooperation Act gives an important role to the Ministry of Finance, concerning the funding of development cooperation (Articles 4.3. and 4.4.). Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, the Ministry of Interior and Administration, are relevant as well, as they have budget lines for projects implemented by government authorities within the programme *Polska pomoc* (the Polish Aid), which are reported in the Polish Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The **Solidarity Fund** is another actor in the field of development cooperation (Article 10.3). It is a governmental foundation headquartered in Warsaw with country offices in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. The activities of the Solidarity Fund mostly revolve around the support of democracy in mentioned countries, including strengthening of the civil society and LRGs.

Finally, the above-mentioned Development Cooperation Programme Board, as an advisory body of the MFA, brings together representatives of various ministries as well as members of the Polish parliament and representatives of NGOs, employer organisations and academia (Article 17). Representatives of local and regional governments (LRGs), however, are not included. In this regard, LRGs predominantly have a role of implementing actors rather than participators in creating policies and consulting (Interview, 20 March 2025; Interview, 26 March 2025). Moreover, while the Multiannual Programme (p. 45) mentions the acknowledged role and engagement of Polish LRGs with international partners, it does not provide further details on how exactly the cooperation will be organised or supported.

1.3. Coordination of DDC activities

The coordination of development cooperation in Poland is centrally managed by the MFA, specifically the Minister and the National Development Cooperation Coordinator as described above. *Polska pomoc* (the Polish Aid) is the only available national development cooperation programme. LRGs along other eligible entities (for example, NGOs, universities) can apply to the grant procedure of the MFA and implement projects co-financed by the Polish Aid (Vermeer 2019, p. 64; Ksenicz 2014, p.82).

It should be mentioned that the Polish legal act considers and reports development cooperation activities by governmental agencies in the official development assistance (ODA). LRGs' DDC activities are mostly not reported within the Polish ODA. However, there have been recent efforts by the MFA in this regard, particularly concerning DDC projects and activities of Polish regions with Ukraine. Still, as reporting is voluntary, there is no exhaustive list or established monitoring system of DDC partnerships, projects, and activities at the systematic level yet. For most part, DDC activities of Polish LRGs financed from their own resources are not included in Polish ODA (Interview, 20 March 2025).

Overall, concerning the existing coordination between actors in the field of development cooperation in Poland, the OECD (2023) recommends clarifying coordination and reporting schemes to increase implementation effectiveness of defined priorities as well as strengthening of human resources of the key actor, the MFA. The current Multiannual Programme (p. 44) mentions potential benefits of establishing a development cooperation agency, or alternatively, to strengthen capacities of the current structure for more effective implementation of activities in this policy field.

1.4. Specific programmes supporting DDC activities

Polska pomoc (the Polish Aid or the Polish Assistance) is the only available national programme for development cooperation. The eligible entities are listed in Article 3 of the 2011 Development Cooperation Act. The MFA is organising annual calls for proposals, published on the [website](#).

Several changes concerning the procedure and requirements for the Polish aid grants were introduced in the 2010-2012 period with implications for the LRGs (see for example Ksenicz I., 2014). First, instead of previous separate grant procedure for LRGs, since 2010/2011 onwards there is a joint grant procedure for all eligible entities/applicants. Second, a co-financing requirement of projects was introduced (20% value of the project). Third, a minimum amount of grant was defined at PLN 100,000 (around [EUR 23,415](#)⁶). Finally, a modular, two-year implementation of projects was introduced, provided that the implementation report and funding after the first module are approved by the MFA (Ksenicz 2014, p. 82-84; Vermeer 2019). Overall, these changes seem to have an impact on LRGs, evidenced by their decreasing participation over time (Ksenicz I., 2014). An overview of projects selected in the Polish Development Assistance 2024 call for proposals shows that only one municipality was awarded grant (2025 Development Cooperation Plan, p. 35).

Apart from implementing development cooperation projects within the Polish Aid, Polish LRGs participate in other available programmes (mostly EU funded) which support cooperation with international partners.

⁶ Source: European Commission, InforEuro Exchange rate PLN to EUR, accessed 26 May 2025

For example, the Polish LRGs participate(d) in INTERREG, Horizon, and LIFE projects as well as projects co-financed by the Swiss and Norwegian funds (Interview, 18 March 2025).

Additional potential opportunities include grants provided by the Solidarity Fund based in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Still, the Solidarity Fund provides grants mostly intended for LRGs in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Besides, the Solidarity Fund oftentimes supports activities of centrally managed projects (between respective Polish and partner country's Ministries) co-financed by the Polish Aid. In projects such as *“Support for the Moldovan administration in the implementation of the National Strategy for Regional Development in Moldova 2016–2020 in the field of urban policy and urban development”* or *“Support to public administration in Ukraine in the implementation of the State Regional Development Strategy 2021-2027 in the area of urban development and revitalisation”*, several Moldavian and Ukrainian LRGs were/are involved as pilot-cases (Interview, 26 March 2025; Interview, 17 April 2025). Moreover, in the mentioned project with Moldova, some Polish LRGs participated as well by hosting Moldovan delegation and showcasing their implemented revitalisation projects. Yet the participation of Polish LRGs was voluntary, and they did not receive financial compensation for their activities (Interview, 17 April 2025).

Also, the **RITA programme** supports partnership projects between eligible Polish entities and those from Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and Central Asia. The programme is mostly intended for NGOs. The co-financed projects should help contribute to long term positive changes (social, economic, democratic, environmental) in the partner countries.

Furthermore, programmes and initiatives, such as the **Bridges of Trust** (implemented by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in cooperation with its member associations and with the support of the U-LEAD with Europe programme) facilitate new partnerships between LRGs and support their cooperation through joint projects. The Association of Polish Cities participates in the Bridges of Trust initiative and has mobilised Polish municipalities to establish partnerships with their Ukrainian counterparts for reconstruction projects in Ukraine.

1.5. Modalities, activities, and focus areas of DDC

In line with the Multiannual Programme (p. 9), Polish development cooperation focuses on thematic priorities linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically these eight: Goal 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions, 4. Quality education, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 10. Reduced inequalities, 3. Good health and well-being, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 11. Sustainable cities and communities and 13. Climate action. Additionally, there are two horizontal priorities (climate change and equal opportunities for men and women), which should be incorporated and considered in all actions and measures.

Concerning the geographical focus, the Multiannual Programme provides underlying reasoning as well as selection criteria for priority partner countries for Poland. Generally, partnerships are established with the long-term perspective to ensure the effectiveness of support. The list of priority partner countries is provided in the annual Plan (see 2025 Development Cooperation Plan, p.4) and currently includes: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Belarus as well as Palestine, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal. The type of support and the scope of activities vary depending on the circumstances in each priority partner country. Among the 10 selected, actions supporting local governments and/or regional and municipal development strategies are emphasised in cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

Besides bilateral, Poland is engaged in multilateral development cooperation, following priorities of its Multiannual Programme via the international organisations such as the EU, UN, and OECD. Majority of Polish ODA is delivered multilaterally, with the EU being the top recipient (OECD 2023).

Regarding development cooperation projects implemented by the Polish LRGs specifically, they tend to focus geographically on EaP countries, especially Ukraine. Thematically, LRGs development cooperation projects cover a wide area with a tendency to emphasise local government support and capacity building (Ksenicz 2014). The activities usually include exchange of knowledge and expertise, sharing of good practices, study visits, as well as activities supporting creation of the well-developed strategies (Interview, 18 March 2025; also, Vermeer 2019). Information about LRGs' development cooperation projects co-financed by the Polish Aid can be found on the dedicated [website](#).

With the current specific emphasis on cooperation with Ukraine due to the ongoing war, there are also other examples of Polish LRGs' cooperation. A recent study on the support provided by 11 Polish cities to their Ukrainian counterparts (Kaminski & Matiaszczyk 2025, p.14-16) offers insights into different types of assistance provided, including humanitarian aid, financial support, technical assistance and knowledge sharing. In addition to providing direct support, Polish cities increasingly acted as aid hubs, facilitating organisation and provision of assistance from international partners to Ukraine, and as intermediaries helping to establish connections between international and Ukrainian actors (ibid., p.12). Other examples can be also found within the first phase of the Bridges of Trust initiative. For example, the Polish partner Polanica-Zdroj provided financial aid to their Ukrainian partner Polyanytsya (Ivano-Frankivsk region) and organised a study visit to share good practices concerning investment projects in the area of [waste management](#).



1.6. Financial scheme for DDC

As already mentioned, the Polish Aid is the only national programme for development cooperation. Although other ministries, besides the MFA, include their expenses as Polish ODA that are not part of the Polish Aid programme, these funds are usually not available for DDC actors. The 2025 Development Cooperation Plan (p. 21) indicates that the financing for Polish development cooperation is secured from various sources, including the budgets of government administration bodies, the National Bank, and a special-purpose reserve in the state budget.

For cooperation with NGOs and LRGs specifically, a total of 51,5 million PLN (around [12.06](#)⁷ million EUR) is allocated in 2025 (2025 Development Cooperation Plan, p. 4). Importantly, however, there will be no new call for proposals of Polish Aid in 2025. Instead, the indicated allocated funds will be used for co-financing of already accepted projects under calls for proposals announced in 2023 and 2024 (ibid., pp. 4, 20). This is a first record of such circumstance within the Polish Aid programme (Interview, 26 March 2025).

⁷ Source: European Commission, InforEuro Exchange rate PLN to EUR, accessed 26 May 2025

2. Enabling factors for DDC and future developments

Some of the key enabling factors facilitating involvement of LRGs in DDC include Polish experiences with programmes and funding opportunities for cooperation. Over the years, there were numerous successful examples of implementing EU programmes and projects as well as of other donors (such as Norwegian and Swiss funds) that included cooperation between Polish LRGs and their international counterparts in sharing knowledge and good practices in areas such as local development, investments, energy efficiency, and revitalisation in its boarder sense (Interview, 18 March 2025; Interview, 17 April 2025). Therefore, the experiences that Polish LRGs gained through successful project applications and implementation are often used and shared with their DDC partners in providing support.

Moreover, in cooperation with EaP countries, historical and cultural ties play a role. These factors facilitate cooperation and mutual understanding, with activities such as in person meetings and study visits contribute building the trust and strengthening of the partnerships (Interview, 17 April 2025). Importantly, existing established direct contacts with Ukrainian partners played an important role concerning the prompt provision of humanitarian aid and other forms of assistance by Polish LRGs following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (Kaminski & Matiaszczyk 2025, p.6).

Other factors that should be mentioned include the Polish EU membership, which acted as an enabling factor in terms of importance of the multi-level governance as well as the flexibility of institutions, a factor that became relevant in the context of the war in Ukraine, as Poland showed that it can provide assistance quickly and engage a wide range of actors, including LRGs (Interview, 20 March 2025; also OECD 2023).

Regarding the obstacles for DDC, the Polish Aid application requirements concerning the co-financing and minimum amount of grants might be demanding for LRGs, especially the smaller ones. Also, the availability of national funding might be a challenge if the circumstances that occurred within the Polish Aid in 2025 (no funds for new call for proposals) repeat in the upcoming years (Interview, 26 March 2025). Moreover, further effort is needed to increase the level of priority of DDC for Polish LRGs. In this regard, including representatives of LRGs or their associations in the advisory and consultative Development Cooperation Programme Board of the MFA could serve as an important incentive. Finally, on a more systematic level, further improvements of reporting and monitoring of DDC projects would contribute to a clear and updated overview of LRGs DDC activities. While currently it is plausible that LRGs are implementing DDC projects (either financed from their own resources or external funds), there is no established system for collecting such data. The effort by the MFA in last years to collect data on a voluntary basis should be strengthened. The creation of a unified system would also enable reporting of DDC in the Polish ODA to the OECD.

3. Conclusions

Overall, Poland demonstrates a path of successful transition from receiving to providing aid assistance. Two elements of the Polish framework stand out. First, the accumulated Polish experience with external funding programmes and successful application for and implementation of the projects, which allows actors across levels of the Polish system to share knowledge and good practices with their counterparts in partner countries. Following Poland's own economic development, and currently internationally recognised role in providing assistance to Ukraine, could place development cooperation as a political priority and support decentralised development cooperation growing in the future. In this regard, continuous efforts from both sides are needed: at the central level to include and recognise the role of LRGs as development actors, and at the local and regional level to actively seek participation and report their DDC activities.

Second, the flexibility and adaptability of Polish institutions, shown through the processes related to the EU membership, and ultimately the ability to quickly engage a wide range of actors in times of crisis as demonstrated in its response to the war in Ukraine (see also OECD 2023). The latter might incentivise Polish actors to expand on their activities in the development cooperation, particularly the crisis-context, around the world. The Polish Presidency of the EU Council 2025 announced that *'development cooperation will prioritise strengthening resilience to crisis situations of states and communities by combining development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and peace building'* (2025 Development Cooperation Plan, p. 15).

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