



Mindcraft

Bridging and Mapping Knowledge
Gaps in Decentralised Cooperation

Country Profile on decentralised development cooperation

#4

BELGIUM

Abbreviations

BIO	Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries
BCR	Brussels-Capital Region
BNGA	Belgian Non-Governmental Actors
Brulocalis	Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region
CNCD	National Centre for Cooperation and Development 11.11.11
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
DDC	Decentralised development cooperation
DGD	Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EU	European Union
JSF	Joint Strategic Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
LRGs	Local and Regional Governments
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VVSG	Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities
UVCB	Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities
UVCW	Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia
VVP	Association of Flemish Provinces



Data

Form of state structure



Federal state



0.48 in 2024
(UN target: 0.7)

ODA target as % of GNI⁶



2024 preliminary **0.48**
2023 **0.47**
2022 **0.45**

ODA target as % of GNI in the last three years⁷



increasing
(until 2024)

Trends in total ODA



12

Seats⁸ in the European Committee of the Regions

Population²

11,900,123



4 (with **Union of Belgian Cities and Municipalities¹⁰** being an umbrella organisation of the Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region – **Brulocalis¹¹**, Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities – **VVSG¹²**, Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia – **UVCW¹³**)

CEMR members⁹ in Belgium

Geographical size³

30,667 km²



Brussels-Capital Region, VVSG

PLATFORMA partners in Belgium

GDP per Capita⁴

€44,800 (2023)
EU average: €38,100



EU membership⁵

since 1958



OECD DAC membership

since 1960



¹ Belgium
² Belgium – EU country | European Union
³ Belgium – EU country | European Union
⁴ Belgium – EU country | European Union
⁵ Belgium – EU country | European Union
⁶ OECD Data Explorer • DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private)
⁷ OECD Data Explorer • DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private)
⁸ Belgium | European Committee of the Regions
⁹ National Associations – CEMR CCRE
¹⁰ UVCB – VVSG
¹¹ Accueil | Brulocalis
¹² VVSG
¹³ Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie asbl



1. Decentralised development cooperation (DDC) framework in Belgium

1.1. Framework defining engagement in DDC

The **2013 Law on Development Cooperation** defines objectives and principles of Belgian development cooperation and arranges its governmental, non-governmental, and multilateral channels of cooperation. The Art. 3 of the Law sets out sustainable human development as the general objective of development cooperation, whose actions should contribute to eradicate poverty, exclusion and inequalities and strengthen the development capacities of partners at all levels. The Law further elaborates on relevant aspects contributing to the achievement of these objectives (see Art. 4 – 8).

In addition to the support for development in partner countries, the Law highlights the importance of awareness-raising of Belgian citizens about international solidarity, informing them about development cooperation objectives, including challenges it aims to address (Art. 7). Moreover, a commitment to the long-term and continuous partnerships is emphasised (Art. 15), focusing on a limited number of priority countries and the set of thematic priorities (Art. 10) to ensure effectiveness and added value of cooperation (see Chapter 2.5). The concertation with regions and communities for achieving complementarities of development actions is also indicated as competences are distributed between the federal and federated levels (Art. 13).

The Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation further elaborates on Belgian development cooperation policy in the Policy Orientation Statement, providing a multi-annual strategic policy framework, and in annual General Policy Notes, outlining priority guidelines. Currently, the **Policy Orientation Statement of 10 March 2025** defines a strategic vision and direction of Belgian international (development) cooperation. Engagement at the local level is also mentioned in the document, with decentralised cooperation indicated as one of the modalities to achieve sustainable local development (ibid., pp. 34-35).

In Belgium, regions and communities are federated entities that have a constitutional right (Art. 167 of the **Belgian Constitution**) to conduct their own international cooperation and conclude treaties provided that the matters fall within their own constitutional competences. Development cooperation falls within these

rights. The structure, scope, priorities and implementation of development cooperation at the federated level are defined and arranged either by decrees or ordinances, and cooperation agreements. Specifically, for the Brussels-Capital Region (BCR), the legal framework for development cooperation policy is arranged and defined by the **Framework Ordinance of 2017** and the **five thematic implementing decrees**. The **Decree on Development Cooperation of 2007** arranges the legal framework for Flanders, while the **Decree of 2008 ratifying cooperation agreement between the Walloon Region, the French Community and the French Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region** provides a basis for arranging international relations and development cooperation of the three entities.

Due to the space and scope limitations of this publication, it is not possible to present in detail each respective region and community. Instead, in the following chapters, some illustrative and non-exhaustive examples are provided.

1.2. Key actors involved in DDC

At the federal level, the **Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD)** of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is the key actor for formulating, managing, and monitoring governmental development cooperation policy. The DGD is also responsible for granting development cooperation funding by the federal state and monitoring implementation of the funded programmes.

The main implementer of the Belgian development cooperation policy is **Enabel**, the Belgian development agency. Enabel plays an important role in coordinating different development cooperation instruments, implementing interventions as well as in contributing to awareness-raising in Belgium and abroad (Enabel n.d., p5.). Moreover, Enabel is striving to leverage different channels in international cooperation. Municipal partnerships are recognised as an effective modality of cooperation, and there are some examples where Enabel and Belgian municipal associations have cooperated in some countries where both entities are present (Interview 26 February 2026). Also, Enabel and the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) signed the **cooperation agreement** in 2021 to leverage the exchange of expertise and knowledge in their international activities. In bilateral cooperation, some Enabel programmes might apply territorial approach or include activities aimed at strengthening partner country LRGs (ibid.).

Another important actor is the **Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO)**. Created in 2001, BIO provides financing to support private sector growth in developing economies as well as grants for technical assistance and feasibility studies. BIO invests directly and indirectly in projects with the sustainable development impact and strives to mobilise private entities to invest in development.

At the federated level, federated entities in Belgium autonomously decide on their international relations, including development cooperation. The governance structure (as well as the scope, priorities, and funding schemes) for development cooperation varies across federated entities. Generally, in Flanders, **the Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office** is the key actor responsible for development cooperation of the Flemish Government. The **Brussels International** (one of the administrations of the Brussels Regional Public Service) is the main implementing and coordinating actor of the development policy of the BCR. The key actor for international relations and development cooperation of Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation is **Wallonia-Brussels International**.

Municipal associations play an important role in international development cooperation. In Belgium, they have a regional scope¹⁴ with Brulocalis in the BCR, VVSG in the Flemish Region, and the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia (UVCW) in the Walloon Region. Municipal associations provide information and

¹⁴ See more (point 347 – 349): <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/congress-reports>

support to municipalities in various aspects concerning the DDC activities and international partnerships. Importantly, they are leading the preparation process and management of federally funded five-year programmes supporting municipal partnerships. VVSG designs and manages its own programme, while Brulocalis and UVCW prepare a common programme and jointly manage its components in similar countries of intervention (Interview 11 February 2026).

Many civil society organisations and their federations for example, the **National Centre for Cooperation and Development (CNCD)**, play an important and active role in development cooperation through project activities and awareness-raising campaigns.

1.3. Coordination mechanisms of DDC activities

In Belgium, all accredited non-governmental actors (NGOs, municipal associations and others) coordinate their development cooperation activities within geographic and thematic Joint Strategic Frameworks (JSFs), which are the largest and most important mechanisms of coordination (see Chapter 2.4). Their aim is to create complementarities and synergies between activities implemented by different actors to achieve a greater impact on the ground. Their actions should also be rendered more effective via this collaboration.

The **Sustainable Cities platform** should be mentioned, which, as a thematic JSF is dedicated to the topic of the ‘sustainable city’ and implementation of SDGs in the period of 2022-2026. The platform enables three municipal associations (Brulocalis, VVSG and UVCW) and two NGOs (Echos Communication and Rikolto) to discuss and collaborate on different aspects related to these topics for example, by organising webinars and jointly participating at the international summits (Interview 11 March 2026). Besides five mentioned members, other actors (such as Enabel) are also involved in the platform. This platform/JSF, however, will not continue to operate in the post-2026 period (Interviews 26 February 2026, 11 March 2026).

At the federated level, the **Soliris** platform is an example of the coordination mechanism specific to the BCR (Interviews 11 February 2026, 17 February 2026). The platform is dedicated to development cooperation, bringing together different actors (region, associations, municipalities, NGOs). It is financed by the BCR and managed by the CNCD and Echos Communication. The Soliris platform has two aims: to connect 19 BCR municipalities (municipal focal points for development policy) and facilitate their exchanges as well as to gather the BCR-based diaspora organisations and associations and support their work and capacities for example, in applying to the call for proposals (Interview 17 February 2026).

Finally, the **Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP)** for example, also organises meetings and information exchange about the (development cooperation) projects and the target groups between five Provinces in Flanders. In addition, VVSG holds biennial consultations with these provinces on the DDC. However, there is no platform that connects Provinces in Wallonia and Flanders (Interview 19 February 2026).



1.4. Specific programmes supporting DDC activities

The federal government has a **specific budget for non-governmental cooperation actors** to engage in international development cooperation, managed by the DGD. These actors are usually called Belgian Non-Governmental Actors (BNGA). Municipal associations are eligible for this funding and are part of BNGA. The actors have the right of initiative. Thus, municipal associations prepare and introduce programmes for municipal partnerships and cooperation in the name of their members (Interview 26 February 2026). To obtain the funding, each actor needs to be approved through the **process of accreditation**, as only accredited actors can introduce five-year programmes for the federal funding.

For each five-year cycle, the BNGA active in one specific country convene and elaborate the JSF. These are called geographic JSF. There are also thematic JSFs, one of which currently focuses on the ‘Sustainable Cities’. As mentioned, the JSFs aim to create opportunities for synergies and complementarities of the activities of accredited actors in one specific country or around one relevant topic. This helps to avoid duplication (Interview 26 February 2026). During consultations, all accredited actors indicate JSFs they want to engage in and define strategic targets to ensure alignment of priorities. Once JSFs are approved, the accredited actors prepare five-year programmes and submit them to the DGD for assessment and approval, based on which funding is allocated (ibid.). The current programmes cover the 2022-2026 period.

Municipal associations play a crucial role in developing and submitting the five-year programmes for the federal funding. The programmes are prepared in close cooperation and coordination with their members as well as partners in partner countries, reflecting their needs and priorities (Interview 11 February 2026). Currently, VVSG implements the federally funded programme **2022-2026 GLoBe** (Goed Lokaal Bestuur or good local governance), while Brulocalis and UVCW implement the federally funded **2022-2026 Municipal International Cooperation Programme (PCIC)**. The objectives of these programmes are achieved through municipal cooperation and associations’ partnerships. In the VVSG’s case, the third strategy is also pursued, namely strengthening of sustainability of Flemish local policies by translating the Agenda 2030 and SDGs into local practices (Interview, 11 March 2026).

Apart from the federal level, federated entities in Belgium have their own programmes for international solidarity and development cooperation. For example, each year, the BCR organises two calls for proposals (Interview 17 February 2026) intended for civil society organisations (CSOs) and other non-profit organisations, including associations. The call for proposals ‘South’ is a component that focuses on cooperation with three partners of the BCR, the City-Province Kinshasa in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra Region in Morocco, and the governorates of Ramallah and Al-Bireh in Gaza. The objective is to support projects and activities contributing to addressing issues in areas such as climate resilience, access to healthcare and housing. The call for proposals ‘North’ is a component that focuses on citizens’ education and international solidarity in the BCR. The aim is to raise awareness about the specific topic, especially among young people (Brussels International 2024).

DDC activities can be supported by Provinces as well. For example, the Province of East Flanders has a **subsidy line for projects in developing countries (DAC)** to which East Flemish municipalities can apply. The objective is to support strengthening of identified target groups (including LRGs) and contribute to international solidarity and cooperation with partner countries. The project application is valid for one year and can be supported for up to three years, provided there is a positive annual evaluation. Currently, a new subsidy Regulation (to be approved by the East Flanders Provincial Council) will introduce changes to the existing scheme and accentuate municipal policy (Interview 19 February 2026).

1.5. Modalities, activities, and focus areas of DDC

According to the 2013 Law on Development Cooperation, Belgian governmental development cooperation can be established with a maximum of 18 partner countries, following selection criteria (Art. 16), and should focus on a maximum of three sectors per country (Art. 18) with the prioritisation of healthcare, education, agriculture, and basic infrastructure (Art. 19). Additionally, the Law specifies gender equality and environmental protection as horizontal dimensions of all development cooperation interventions (Art. 19).

Currently, the **Belgian development cooperation** prioritises 14 partner countries: Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, DRC, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda. With the degree of poverty and inequalities and/or the degree of fragility being one of the selection criteria indicated by the Law of 2013 (Art. 16), Belgian development cooperation especially focuses on the least developed countries and fragile contexts. This work is also internationally recognised (OECD 2025, p.1; CONCORD 2025; CNCDC 2025). Current thematic **priorities** of Belgian development cooperation include climate resilience, health and stability.

Furthermore, federally funded five-year programmes of the BNGA, have geographic and thematic focus as well. The VVSG 2022-2026 GLoBe programme focuses on six partner countries (Benin, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa) with the objective of supporting good local governance. The programme with South Africa, however, was implemented only in 2022-2023 since fragile settings should be prioritised. The programme with Rwanda is closed following the Rwandan government's decision to stop all cooperation with Belgium. The 2022-2026 PCIC programme of Brulocalis and UVCW focuses on five partner countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Morocco, DRC and Senegal), with the aim to strengthen capacities of partner country LRGs and support inclusive, participatory and transparent governance and sustainable local development.

Overall, supported DDC activities usually include capacity building, knowledge sharing, and technical expertise. In some cases, where partnerships are more mature and long-term capacity building has been effective, cooperation activities might include scaling up of administrative organisation or services of the partner municipality (Interview 11 February 2026). Across all partner countries, workshops and trainings on the municipal financial management are usually organised. There are also efforts to promote South-South cooperation and mutual learning (ibid.). Moreover, the VVSG 2022-2026 GLoBe programme included **activities** exploring different forms and practices of municipal cooperation and experimenting with municipal SDGs implementation (Interview 11 March 2026).

As an illustrative example of supported municipal cooperation, **the partnership between Merelbeke-Melle (Belgium) and Toucountouna (Benin)** can be provided. This municipal partnership has been active since 2014. It is supported through VVSG federally funded programme. There are many different cooperation activities taking place. For example, the two municipal administrations collaborate in digitalisation and developing archives. Additionally, municipal CSOs cooperate on specific topics, such as the benefits of health insurance. Youth services also cooperate, including through study visits (Interview 19 February 2026).

Federated entities decide on their own international partnerships and areas of cooperation. As mentioned, the BCR for example, focuses on three partners (City-Province Kinshasa, the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra Region, and since 2014 the governorates of Ramallah and Al-Bireh). The objective is to maintain long-term partnerships and use available budget allocations for partnerships in the most effective way (Interview 17 February 2026). The thematic focus of calls for proposals over past years has been sustainable and inclusive economic development. The calls for proposals are organised together with the **Brussels Agency for Entrepreneurship**

([hub.brussels](#)), thus bringing the economic aspect. Other projects outside of the priority scope might be financed, but this is seldom the case in practice (*ibid.*).

Provinces can also form and support international partnerships. The Province of East Flanders for example, has a long-term cooperation with [Cordillera region in the Philippines](#), [Rwandan Province du Sud](#), and [Ecuadorian province of Esmeraldas](#) (in the phasing out stage). Considering that municipal partnerships are already supported by the federal and federated levels, the Province of East Flanders focuses on other instruments to avoid duplication. The cooperation with three partner regions follows an integrated approach, tackling interconnected issues, and partners decide on their development needs. Different actors (CSOs, educational institutions, private sector) on both sides are involved in cooperation. The cooperation mostly begins with partner regions' CSOs, who are encouraged to work with their local governments. Moreover, partners are encouraged to explore multiple funding sources to strengthen their local financial autonomy. The objective is to support long-term cooperation and contribute to local autonomy and sustainable development (Interview 19 February 2026).

1.6. Financial scheme for DDC

Funding for DDC activities is mostly provided by the federal level. This is done through development cooperation dimension intended for non-governmental cooperation. The funding allocation for this dimension totals 1.262 billion EUR for the period 2022-2026, according to the [DGD](#). A detailed yearly overview of allocations for non-governmental cooperation in 2022, 2023, and 2024 is provided in the [DGD 2024 Annual Report \(DGD 2025, p. 54\)](#).

This federal scheme is an important funding source for supporting existing municipal partnerships and cooperation in selected partner countries through the mentioned five-year programmes (see Chapter 2.5). According to [available data](#), the federally funded 2022-2026 PCIC programme, managed by Brulocalis and UVCW has a total budget of 14.941 million EUR. This budget covers a whole five-year period for all five partner countries, supporting 44 partnerships (of 17 Brussels municipalities and 27 Walloon municipalities) and 55 partner country municipalities. The total budget of the VVSG federally funded GLoBe programme 2022-2026 is 6.7 million EUR and supports 17 partnerships, including 14 municipal partnerships and three associations' partnerships (Interview 11 March 2026).

At the federated level, funding schemes for international solidarity and development cooperation have a smaller budget and usually shorter programming compared to the federal scheme (Interview 11 February 2026). In the BCR example, a total of 881,242 EUR was allocated for development cooperation actions in 2024 (Brussels International 2024, pg. 2). Specifically, 10 projects were financed within the South component with 625,346 EUR (*ibid.*, p.3), while 11 projects were financed within the North component, having an overarching theme of inter-cultural dialogue, with 200,000 EUR (*ibid.*, p.11). Additionally, activities of two NGOs (CNCD and Echos Communication) related to coordination of the Soliris platform were supported with 26,500 EUR in 2024 (*ibid.*, p.11). Overall, the BCR 2024 budget allocation for development cooperation decreased compared to previous years (with 1,385,783 EUR in 2023 and 1,437,344 EUR in 2022, respectively). The main reason is linked to the government formation challenges following the regional elections in 2024 (*ibid.*, p. 2).

Some Provinces also financially support international solidarity and cooperation activities. For example, through the mentioned [subsidy line for projects in developing countries \(DAC\)](#), the Province of East Flanders provides financial support of between 3 – 7 thousand EUR to individual projects. According to [available data](#), the Province of East Flanders supported 73 projects of East Flemish organisations in partner countries with 418,768 EUR in 2025.

Finally, cities and municipalities can dedicate their own budget to international partnerships and cooperation and/or support municipal NGOs as implementors in the partner country. These activities largely depend on the municipal size and financial resources (Interview 11 February 2026). Due to the Russian war of aggression, there is a focus on Ukraine, with new municipal partnerships being established with the Ukrainian counterparts. These partnerships are currently being supported by municipalities' own resources (Interview 19 February 2026). An example is the [partnership between Merelbeke-Melle \(Belgium\) and Kalush \(Ukraine\)](#), which offers various opportunities for cooperation, mutual learning and exchange at the local level with the aim to achieve sustainable local development.

2. Enabling factors of the country's DDC framework and future developments

In Belgium, municipal partnerships and DDC activities are primarily financially supported by the federal level through the DGD. The funding is channelled through municipal associations, which play a crucial role in the overall process from designing the programmes and coordinating with relevant actors to managing and reporting. Considering that federal allocations cover a period of five years, selected projects are well-planned with high relevance for local realities. Moreover, a five-year programming allows for maintaining solid partnerships as well as implementing project activities in a paced manner. Smaller projects are also easier to manage by municipalities in both the partner country and Belgium. Added to this is the underlying idea that these projects should function as a 'seed money', leading to later scaling up (Interview 11 February 2026). Finally, support to exploring different forms of municipal cooperation and their effects is considered beneficial (Interview 11 March 2026).

Furthermore, the established structure of the JSFs, underpinning the programming of the federal fund for BNGA in international cooperation is also considered an enabling factor. Specifically, such organisation of work allows for dialogue and knowledge sharing between different actors (Interview 26 February 2026). JSF Sustainable Cities, especially, served as an enabling factor, as it facilitated good contacts and coordination of all relevant actors working on good governance. It remains to be seen how this cooperation will evolve in the next programming period (Interview 11 March 2026).

Two specific enabling factors for DDC in the BCR should also be mentioned. First, as one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, Brussels has different diaspora organisations and associations that play an important role, especially in the North-South cooperation. These organisations have good insights into local needs and contacts in their homeland and are motivated to implement projects with impactful local outcomes (Interview 17 February 2026). The second specificity of the BCR is the proximity of its 19 municipalities, which makes it easier to meet and discuss, and facilitates information sharing in the programming stage as well as during the implementation. The Soliris platform further supports cooperation of relevant actors (Interview 11 February 2026).

Turning to challenges, the federal government decision to decrease the development cooperation budget is currently the major challenge for the sector and all actors involved (Interviews 26 February 2026, 11 February 2026, 11 March 2026) with implications for the overall Belgian development cooperation (CONCORD 2025; CNCD 2025, pp. 34-37). Consequently, there will be even greater selectivity in terms of the quality of the programmes/projects submitted for the federal funding as well as their contribution to the achievement of objectives, since it will not be possible to support all existing partnerships and DDC activities (Interviews 26 February 2026, 11 March 2026).

Funding-related challenges exist at the federated level as well. For example, the new Flemish government **decided** to discontinue cooperation programmes with partner countries and terminate support to DDC activities, focusing on the provision of humanitarian aid in urgent cases instead. For a long time, the Flemish government was financially supporting VVSG through the project with two components (one focusing on SDGs implementation and the other supporting municipal international cooperation). However, this support stopped completely last year. There is still a small subsidy for sustainable development to VVSG, which exists since 2018 with annual applications, but it is not intended for international cooperation (Interview 11 March 2026).

There are some obstacles related to programming of the federal funding for BNGA in international cooperation identified as well. In terms of the overall design, local priorities could be included more, based on greater consultations with Belgian and partner country actors (Interviews 11 February 2026, 11 March 2026). There is a contextual dependence on the DGD priority countries and objectives whereas, in practice, municipalities might be active in other countries, addressing similar challenges with their counterparts, thus having reciprocal partnerships and opportunities to learn. Prioritising different contexts brings to the fore different set of challenges, with implications on municipal cooperation (Interview 11 March 2026). However, 20% of the federally allocated funding to a BNGA can be devoted to activities in a country that is not among 14 official partners for Belgium (bilateral cooperation) or a JSF country (*ibid.*). Furthermore, some management elements of the programmes pose an obstacle. This refers to the reporting process and its rules and forms that partners need to comply with, but which are not necessarily adapted to the beneficiaries' systems (Interview 11 February 2026).

Another set of challenges is related to realities of many municipalities in Belgium. Many of them are rather small with limited (or none) human resources capacity to engage in DDC (Interview 26 February 2026). Also, since municipal partnerships and DDC activities are not a core municipal task, they are more likely to be decreased or discontinued (Interview 19 February 2026). Related to this is the issue of continuity and sustainability of municipal partnerships, as they require commitment and resources (Interview 26 February 2026). Still, in Flanders for example, despite the fact that DDC budgets are being under pressure and decreasing, this is not yet reflected in declining number of partnerships (Interview 11 March 2026).

3. Conclusions

Belgium has an internationally recognised role in focusing its development cooperation efforts on least developed countries and fragile contexts. With human sustainable development being the legally defined objective of its international development cooperation, Belgian activities are particularly directed towards reducing poverty and inequalities.

There are three elements that stand out in the Belgian framework. First, the important role that the three municipal associations (Brulocalis, VVSG and UVCW) play in designing, coordinating and managing federally funded programmes for municipal partnerships and DDC activities. They are, therefore, key intermediaries in structuring activities and channelling funding for municipal international cooperation. Besides, they are

the main venue for providing information, support and advice related to international engagement of their members. Second, the DDC framework in Belgium is characterised by various approaches, modalities, and geographic and thematic priorities across relevant actors, which tend to focus on long-term cooperation with selected partners to achieve greater effectiveness and contribute to sustainable local development. Maintaining sufficient funding as well as exploring complementarities of activities will be important for the future effectiveness of the framework. Finally, relevant Belgian actors across levels pay attention to awareness-raising and education of their own population about topics related to international solidarity and development cooperation, usually in cooperation with NGOs.

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