



**Bridging and Mapping Knowledge
Gaps in Decentralised Cooperation**



The work of EU Delegations with local and regional governments



Table of Contents

Foreword	4
List of abbreviations and acronyms	6
Executive Summary	7
1. Introduction	11
2. European development cooperation: state of play	14
NDICI-Global Europe	15
European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)	16
Global Gateway	17
Team Europe approach	18
Multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2028-2034 and the Global Europe Instrument	19
3. EU Delegations' work with local and regional governments	20
3.1. How do EU Delegations support local and regional governments and their associations in partner countries?	21
Support for decentralisation as the key enabler for LRGs' involvement	21
Working with LRGs and LRGAs under the NDICI-Global Europe	23
Working with LRGs and LRGAs under the Global Gateway strategy	24
Working with LRGs and LRGAs in fragile contexts	25

3.2. Opportunities and constraints for EU Delegations in working with LRGs 28

Adaptation of EUDs to EU international cooperation instruments and initiatives	28
EUD engagement with European LRGs and LRGAs for strengthened development cooperation at the local level	30
Engagement with EU Member States' development cooperation agencies	32
Support and training opportunities for EUDs in working with LRGs	34

4. Exemplary practices and approaches of EU Delegations' work with local and regional governments 36

Chad	37
Nepal	39
Zambia	40
Guatemala	42
Madagascar	44

5. Conclusion and recommendations 46

References 52

List of Figures 55

Foreword



We are living through a period of profound change in international cooperation. Geopolitical competition is intensifying, multilateral cooperation is losing ground, and funding for development is becoming harder to secure. At the same time, territorial inequalities are deepening and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals remains far too slow.

Since 2021, the European Union (EU) has progressively reshaped how it engages beyond its borders. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, together with the Global Gateway strategy and the Team Europe approach, mark a shift towards external action that is more strategic and more geopolitical, while also aiming to be simpler and more flexible on the ground. The role and work of EU Delegations is emphasised and enhanced, from programming and funding allocations to identifying investment opportunities.

Local and regional governments have a vital role to play in turning these ambitions into tangible results for citizens. As the level of government closest to the people, they deliver essential public services, drive local development, foster democratic participation and build partnerships across sectors. They are uniquely positioned to connect European priorities with local realities and to ensure that investments create lasting benefits within communities. The territorial approach promoted by the Global Gateway can only succeed if it reaches not only national institutions, but also the cities, regions and local communities where development ultimately takes place.

The current EU programming period has created opportunities for local and regional governments, and recognition of their contribution to international cooperation is growing. Yet this publication demonstrates that significant challenges remain.

Engagement between EU Delegations and local and regional governments, as well as their representative associations in partner countries, continues to vary considerably. While good practices exist, consultation mechanisms are not yet systematic and meaningful participation in programming and implementation remains uneven. At the same time, decentralised cooperation between European and partner-country territories, and between their associations, remains an underutilised asset, despite its proven potential to strengthen local governance, build institutional capacity and improve the delivery of public services.

This study comes at an important moment. As discussions on the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework are underway, there is a valuable opportunity to translate the lessons of the current programming period into a more effective framework for international partnerships. This includes strengthening structured dialogue with local and regional governments, embedding multi-level governance more systematically across EU external action, and providing dedicated funding mechanisms to support decentralised cooperation. Ultimately, the success of European international cooperation will depend not only on the scale of its ambitions, but also on its ability to reach every partner country and every territory and engage every level of government. By fully recognising local and regional governments as partners in development, the European Union can build stronger, more resilient and more inclusive partnerships that deliver lasting results for citizens and communities alike.

We look forward to advancing this work together with the EU, ensuring that every territory has a voice, and every level of government has a place in this partnership.

Fabrizio Rossi,
Secretary General of the Council of European
Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is Europe's first and broadest association of local and regional governments. It is the only organisation that brings together 60 national associations of local and regional governments from 41 countries.

CEMR empowers cities, towns and regions to build peaceful, inclusive, just and resilient communities by amplifying their voices at European and international levels. CEMR's aim is to ensure that local leaders are fully equipped to drive the sustainable transition of their territories to effectively respond to global challenges.

CEMR also serves as the European section of the global organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

About PLATFORMA

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of towns and regions and their associations, active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation at the national, European and global levels. All the partners are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development. PLATFORMA provides a hub of expertise for European local and regional governments' international actions and works to boost European local and regional governments' contributions to EU development cooperation policies and international frameworks. PLATFORMA is a flagship initiative of CEMR and is co-funded by the European Union through the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA).

About the Mindcraft project

The project Bridging and Mapping Knowledge Gaps in Decentralised Cooperation – Mindcraft (June 2024 – December 2026) aims to strengthen knowledge and understanding of decentralised development cooperation (DDC) by gathering, mapping and analysing the DDC activities of European local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations. The project produces reports and country profiles on DDC and examines cooperation between EU Delegations and LRGs and their associations to help identify major challenges and opportunities for more effective cooperation. Alongside its analytical activities, the Mindcraft project also supports dialogue and coordination with DDC stakeholders, programmes and initiatives. The Mindcraft project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

List of abbreviations and acronyms

AECID	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation	HDI	Human Development Index
AFD	French Development Agency	KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (German Development Bank)
AIMF	International Association of Francophone Mayors	LGAZ	Local Government Association of Zambia
ANCT	National Association of Municipalities of Chad	LRGs	Local and Regional Governments
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	LRGAs	Local and Regional Government Associations
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions	MAC programme	Madeira, Azores, Canary Islands programme
CITIIS	City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain	MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum	MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
CoR	European Committee of the Regions	NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations	NEWZA	Nexus Energy and Water Programme for Zambia
DDC	Decentralised Development Cooperation	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission	ODA	Official Development Aid
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ECA	Ethiopian Cities Association	PAG	Governance Support Programme in Chad
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management	PFD	Policy Forum for Development
EEAS	European Union External Action Service	PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
EIB	European Investment Bank	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	TALD	Territorial Approach to Local Development
EFSD	European Fund for Sustainable Development	TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus	TEIs	Team Europe Initiatives
EU	European Union	UDTF	Urban Development Technical Facility
EUDs	EU Delegations	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
FAMSI	Andalusian Municipality Fund for International Solidarity	UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
FDL	Local Development Fund	UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	UCLG-ASPAC	United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	VNG-I	International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities

Executive Summary

The European Union (EU) external action framework for 2021-2027 has introduced significant changes to EU international development cooperation, with implications for key development actors and stakeholders at the various levels. Under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe and the Global Gateway strategy, the EU's international cooperation policy emphasises a geographic approach and investment-related initiatives alongside localisation of development cooperation. While the role of local and regional governments (LRGs) is recognised, the removal of LRGs' direct access to EU funding in the 2021-2027 programming period, as well as insufficiently defined pathways for their involvement in the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy, underscore the importance of finding mechanisms for their effective and meaningful engagement and for adapting decentralised development cooperation (DDC) practices to address global challenges.

These developments highlight the need to better understand how EU Delegations (EUDs), as the main actors responsible for programming and funding allocation at partner-country level, engage with LRGs and their associations (LRGAs), as well as with DDC partnerships and actors active in the respective partner countries. LRGs and LRGAs remain key actors for achieving sustainable development outcomes with local ownership and impact on local communities.

This study therefore assesses to what extent and how EUDs cooperate with LRGs and LRGAs in the context of NDICI-Global Europe, the Global Gateway strategy and increasingly fragile settings. It also identifies challenges and opportunities for strengthening this cooperation. The assessment is based on responses from 40 EUDs worldwide to a survey conducted in 2025 and on follow-up interviews with five EUDs (Chad, Guatemala, Madagascar, Nepal and Zambia), as well as on additional exchanges with EU Member States' development cooperation agencies.

The study confirms that an enabling environment, and specifically the level of decentralisation and LRGs and LRGAs capacity building, are key for effective engagement of partner-country LRGs and LRGAs. Although the context varies significantly across partner countries, a majority of the 40 EUDs surveyed (62.5%) assessed the decentralisation in the partner country they are based in as favourable, while 57.5% actively support decentralisation efforts. Examples from Chad, Guatemala, Nepal and Zambia demonstrate that support for local governance, public finance management and LRGAs empowers LRGs to participate more actively in territorial development processes and (future) EU-funded investment initiatives. Some significant challenges remain, especially access to finance, preparation of local development plans, and development of bankable projects. Therefore, further targeted support for LRGs and LRGAs would be beneficial.

The study also shows that despite the recognition of the role of LRGs in EU international cooperation by EU institutions, their involvement remains uneven and still rather limited. While more than half of the 40 EUDs surveyed (57.5%) said they are working with LRGs and LRGAs under the NDICI-Global Europe, 20% stated they are working with them under the Global Gateway strategy and 25% reported that they are planning to do so. One of the obstacles identified from EUDs' survey responses is that they lack an adequate framework for structured and systematic cooperation with LRGs and LRGAs. The removal of the budget line for LRGs in the previous compound thematic budget line for 'Civil Society Organisations – Local Authorities (CSOs-LAs)' has reduced opportunities for direct engagement with LRGs and made it more difficult for EUDs to support them in EU programmes and initiatives. Moreover, 69.2% of EUDs (27 out of 39 that responded to this survey question) said that a specific budget line for LRGs would facilitate stronger engagement. Other obstacles or reasons identified include limited EUD human resource and administrative capacity, and the

limited (or lack of) prioritisation of decentralisation and engagement with LRGs and LRGAs and the specific characteristics of the partner-country context.

The study also highlights the added value of working with LRGs and LRGAs in fragile contexts. The majority of EUDs surveyed that operate in fragile settings (76.4%) consider that engaging with LRGs would facilitate their work. Examples from Guatemala and Madagascar offer practical insights, with the former emphasising the added value of close cooperation with LRGAs and the latter highlighting the territorial approach as an efficient way of working and achieving results in a fragile context.

Furthermore, the study points to the generally underused potential of DDC as a modality for achieving local development priorities and EU international cooperation objectives. Illustrative examples across partner countries show how partnerships between LRGs in Europe and the partner country (Cabo Verde, Indonesia, The Gambia), as well as cooperation through LRGAs and their international cooperation entities or networks (Ethiopia, Mauritania, Zambia) and water utility companies (Zambia), can strengthen local governance and capacities, improve local service delivery and contribute to the localisation of EU initiatives, including the Global Gateway strategy. Notwithstanding these benefits, awareness among EUDs of existing DDC partnerships and actors, as well as their active support for and engagement with them, remains relatively limited. DDC partnerships and projects thus require greater emphasis and visibility through awareness-raising among EUDs, the mapping of existing successful initiatives to assess their replication potential and facilitate collaboration with LRGs and LRGAs in partner countries, and the strengthening of links between EU-funded programmes and LRG partnerships. The exploration of potential synergies between EU Member States' development cooperation agencies,

LRGs, LRGAs and their international cooperation entities represents an opportunity to enhance the coherence, reach and impact of EU development cooperation and the Global Gateway.

Finally, the study identifies an ongoing need to strengthen the capacities of EUDs to engage with LRGs and LRGAs and to support DDC. Only 30% of EUDs surveyed reported having received specialised support or training on working with LRGs. Existing training opportunities have proven useful in helping EUDs understand territorial approaches to local development (TALD) and identify appropriate tools for local engagement. Alongside capacity-building efforts through training, providing EUDs with clearer policy guidelines, stronger programming requirements and dedicated resources to integrate territorial dimensions into EU cooperation policies and initiatives would be beneficial.

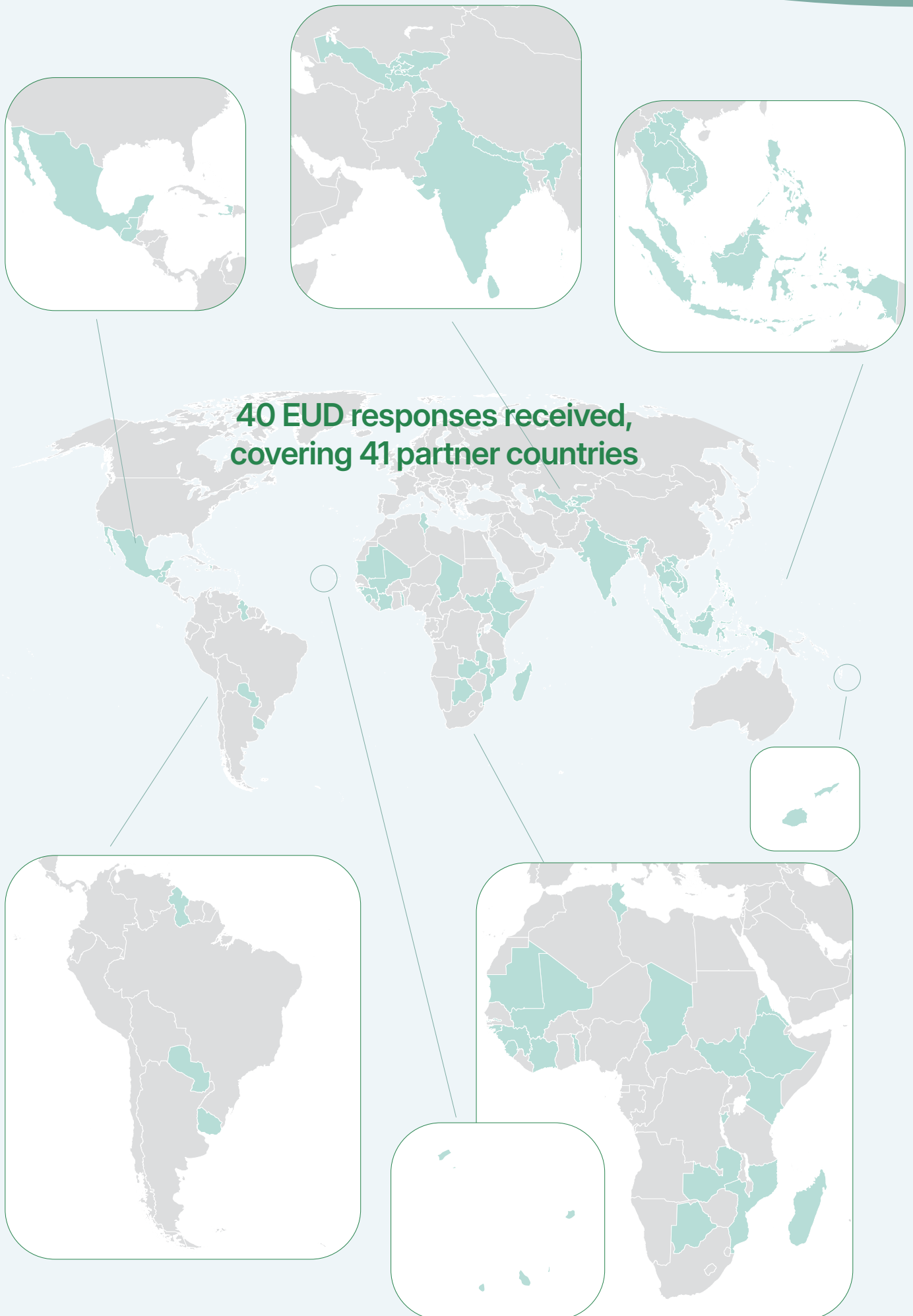
This study shows that LRGs and LRGAs remain crucial partners in achieving sustainable local development outcomes within the evolving EU international cooperation priorities and approaches. Overall, however, the extent to which and the ways in which EUDs work with LRGs continue to vary considerably across partner countries. Significant challenges in terms of effective cooperation between EUDs and LRGs as well as the meaningful participation of LRGs in the EU international cooperation framework remain. Ensuring systematic involvement of LRGs and LRGAs in EU initiatives and approaches, including through stronger EUD engagement with them, would contribute to greater development effectiveness and meaningful impact on the ground.

The findings of this study are timely and can contribute to the ongoing discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028-2034, and more specifically on its proposed Global Europe Instrument.



RECOMMENDATIONS IN A NUTSHELL

- **Continuing support for decentralisation in partner countries and providing targeted financial and technical support to LRGs and LRGAs** to address obstacles to their engagement in EU international cooperation
- **Establishing a clear engagement framework as well as appropriate funding schemes for LRGs** to support their effective involvement in EU external action, including the Global Gateway strategy
- **Promoting context-specific development approaches to strengthen and support LRGs and LRGAs in fragile contexts**
- **Strengthening EUDs' engagement with LRGs and LRGAs, including through stronger links between EU-funded programmes and initiatives and DDC partnerships**
- **Exploring potential synergies among EU Member States' development cooperation agencies, LRGs, LRGAs and their international cooperation entities**
- **Further strengthening the capacities and expertise of EUDs to engage effectively with LRGs and LRGAs**



1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) external action framework for 2021-2027 has introduced strategic, structural and operational changes to EU international and development cooperation, with implications for key development actors and stakeholders at the different levels. Compared with the pre-2021 programming period, the EU's international cooperation policy has become more integrated, flexible and geopolitical under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe and the Global Gateway strategy (see Section 2). There is renewed focus on geographic programmes and approaches, and the role of EU Delegations (EUDs) has been reinforced, especially in programming and funding allocations at the partner-country level.

These developments present both opportunities and challenges for engagement with local and regional governments (LRGs). On the one hand, greater focus on the partner-country level creates opportunities to strengthen territorial approaches and partnerships between EUDs and LRGs in development cooperation policy (PLATFORMA 2021, 2024). On the other hand, the thematic budget line for LRGs has been removed from the NDICI-Global Europe, leaving LRGs without direct access to funding. This has an impact on the capacities and opportunities for LRGs to engage with the EU external action framework in general, and with EUDs in particular. Additionally, stronger EU emphasis on strategic interests, investment-related approaches and the implementation role of the EU Member States, without a clear definition as yet of the entry points for LRGs, can weaken their role and influence (PLATFORMA, 2024; OECD 2025a pp. 45-47). This especially applies to the Global Gateway strategy. Still, the empirical evidence on the impact of this context on EUD engagement with European and partner-country LRGs and their associations (LRGAs) as actors for development remains limited.

So far, the available assessments have highlighted several limitations of the current EU framework for international cooperation in general, and engagement with LRGs in particular. Some assessments have raised questions about the Global Gateway's focus (development versus investment agenda) and the transparency of its management structure (Olivie and O'Shea, 2023; Counterbalance et al. 2024), including the selection and implementation process for Global Gateway projects (OECD, 2025a). Moreover, the need for inclusive and multi-stakeholder participation (Olivie and O'Shea, 2023; Counterbalance et al. 2024; OECD 2025a), as well as clearer and more systematic application of the 360-degree approach (OECD, 2025a), has been emphasised.

Concerning the role of and engagement with LRGs, the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2021/947) describes LRGs as development actors and expresses the intention to support them with an indicative allocation of EUR 500 million during the 2021-2027 period. However, LRGs are not explicitly mentioned in the Global Gateway (Bossuyt and Sabourin, 2024). Still, stronger LRG involvement in Global Gateway implementation is called for (see European Committee of the Regions, 2025) and acknowledged (for example, European Commission, 2025a) by EU institutions.

How exactly LRGs can get involved and contribute to EU international cooperation objectives under the 2021-2027 framework is still rather unclear (see PLATFORMA, 2024). One of the first assessments of LRG engagement in the Global Gateway revealed their limited involvement in both the preparation and implementation stages (Bossuyt and Sabourin, 2024). A subsequent assessment (Sabourin, 2025) showed some improvements regarding overall LRG engagement, but cases in which they take on a leading and an active role in designing and implementing Global Gateway interventions remain limited.

Against this backdrop, and building on [previous PLATFORMA work¹](#), this study provides an updated assessment of EUDs' work with LRGs and LRGAs, taking into account policy and operational changes introduced by the NDICI-Global Europe and the Global Gateway strategy. The study contributes new evidence and insights to better understand development cooperation between EUDs, as the main contact points and channels of EU funding allocation, and European and partner-country LRGs and LRGAs. In the process, it will identify challenges and venues for enhanced cooperation. In this regard, the study also aims to contribute to a better understanding of the context, capacities and constraints of EUDs in engaging with LRGs and LRGAs. Finally, by offering comparative insights of the EUDs' work with LRGs and LRGAs worldwide, the study sheds light on the practical implementation of EU international cooperation instruments and initiatives at the local level during the 2021-2027 period. The study is timely in its contribution to reflection on the planning of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028-2034 and the ongoing reorganisation of the EUDs (on this topic, see OECD, 2025a).



The results and insights presented in this study are based on the EUDs' responses to a survey conducted in 2025 and follow-up interviews with selected EUDs, as well as contributions during relevant meetings and exchanges². Drawing on the 2021 PLATFORMA survey of the EUDs, the 2025 survey was created and updated to include relevant aspects of the 2021-2027 framework (the NDICI-Global Europe, Global Gateway strategy and fragility context). The 2025 survey was prepared with support from the G2 Unit Team of the European Commission's Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA).

¹ <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-work-of-EU-delegations-with-local-and-regional-governments-for-development-EN.pdf>

² This study builds on the participation of EUDs at the PLATFORMA Geographic Dialogue online cluster meetings held on 4 June 2025 and 21 January 2026. Additional exchanges with EU Member States' development cooperation agencies took place on 17 and 24 April 2026.

The 2025 survey was sent to 103 EUDs worldwide. In total, responses from 40 EUDs³ were received. Most responses were received from EUDs based in partner countries in Africa (20 contributions) and Asia (13 contributions). Compared with the 2021 survey (53 responses), there was a lower response rate from EUDs to the 2025 survey.

Based on the preliminary results of the 2025 survey, follow-up interviews were conducted with five EUDs (Chad, Guatemala, Madagascar, Nepal and Zambia) to obtain further insight and additional information. These EUDs were selected with the intention of offering a variety of illustrative examples regarding geographic coverage, the decentralisation process in the partner country as a key enabler for LRG engagement and different approaches EUDs can take to work with LRGs and LRGAs and help strengthen their role. The selected case studies offer examples of EUD support for capacity building of the partner country's LRGs (Chad, Guatemala, Nepal, Zambia) and their LRGAs (Guatemala, Zambia), as well as EUD engagement and consultations with LRGs/LRGAs (Guatemala, Nepal, Zambia) or their consideration (Chad, Madagascar) in programming or implementing projects and initiatives in the partner country. Finally, each case study provides insights into the practical or potential engagement of EUDs with LRGs and LRGAs as part of the Global Gateway strategy.

The study proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the main EU instruments, initiatives and strategies introduced during the 2021-2027 period which reshaped the EU international cooperation framework, focusing on the role envisaged for LRGs in this context. It also outlines potential further steps and changes to this framework, based on the ongoing preparatory phase of the MFF for 2028-2034. Section 3 presents the 2025 survey results and discusses how the EUDs support and engage with LRGs and LRGAs in partner countries, including identified opportunities and constraints for cooperation. Section 4 provides five case study vignettes (Chad, Zambia, Guatemala, Nepal and Madagascar), showcasing different EUD experiences, approaches and practices in engaging with LRGs and LRGAs. The final section summarises the key findings and includes a set of recommendations from CEMR and PLATFORMA on the role and work of LRGs in development cooperation and their integration in EU financing schemes.

³ The following EUDs responded to the 2025 survey: Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Chad, Laos, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea (Republic), Guinea Bissau, Guayana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Paraguay, Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tunisia, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Vietnam and Zambia.





2. European development cooperation: state of play

This section provides a brief overview of the main EU instruments and initiatives that have reshaped EU international cooperation during the 2021-2027 period. These include the NDICI-Global Europe as the main EU international cooperation instrument, and the revamped EU financial and investment instrument, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+). Furthermore, the Global Gateway strategy, which guides EU investment interventions in partner countries based on mutual interests, is presented. This is followed by a description of EU approaches and initiatives aimed at enhancing coordination, coherence, sustainability and inclusivity of EU actions, namely the Team Europe approach and Initiatives (TEIs) and the 360-degree approach. Finally, the section outlines some of the main changes envisaged in the framework described thus far, in the light of the ongoing negotiations of the MFF for 2028-2034. Throughout this section, the focus will be on the role envisaged for LRGs and LRGAs.

NDICI-Global Europe

NDICI-Global Europe	
	<i>About: the main EU international cooperation instrument for the period 2021-2027, led by the European Commission's DG INTPA. It merges several former EU external action instruments</i>
	<i>Entered into force: 14 June 2021</i>
	<i>Budget: EUR 79.5 billion for the period 2021-2027</i>
	<i>Three pillars: geographic (EUR 60.39 billion for dialogue and cooperation with third countries), thematic (EUR 6.36 billion for support for human rights and democracy, civil society, stability and peace) and rapid response (EUR 3.18 billion for effective intervention in situations of crisis and instability)</i>
	<i>Source: European Commission</i>

Established in 2021 (Regulation (EU) 2021/947), the **NDICI-Global Europe**⁴ aims to make EU external action and its financing more flexible, simple and effective. It merges various EU external action instruments that were previously separate, such as the Development Cooperation Instrument and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (for a detailed overview, see PLATFORMA, 2021), into a single framework to ensure coherence and better geopolitical steering of

EU external action (see Olivie and Santillán O'Shea, 2023). The NDICI-Global Europe is centred around three pillars: geographic, thematic and rapid response, with an additional 'flexibility reserve' for emerging challenges and priorities (Regulation (EU) 2021/947).

The geographic pillar receives the largest share of the overall NDICI-Global Europe budget of EUR 79.5 billion for the 2021-2027 period. The aim of this EU geographic approach is to better align EU international cooperation with partner countries' priorities through geographic programmes (for an overview, see Bilquin, 2022).

The EU's increased geographic approach, which prioritises programming and funding allocation at the partner-country level, underlines and reinforces the key role of EUDs in programming, political dialogue and the identification of investment opportunities in partner countries. The OECD Peer Review of the EU's external action (OECD 2025a, p. 36) emphasised the EUDs' presence in partner countries as an asset, especially in facilitating political dialogue and building and maintaining relationships with key actors in the partner country. Moreover, with increased investment-oriented approaches, the EUDs have a key position in ensuring that programmes and projects correspond to partner-country realities, needs and priorities.

In this context, it is vital that LRGs play a key part. The NDICI-Global Europe Regulation (recital 36) emphasises the EU's commitment to support LRGs and recognises their multiple roles in territorial development, decentralisation and accountability (Regulation (EU)

⁴ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-global-europe-ndici-global-europe_en

2021/947). The regulation also includes a minimum indicative benchmark of EUR 500 million to support ‘local authorities’ under the geographic programmes (ibid.). The support is to be channelled by the EUDs through the Multi-annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs), which are the key documents outlining specific objectives to be achieved through EU interventions in the partner country or region, including financial allocations (see PLATFORMA, 2024).

However, despite the EU’s acknowledgment of the LRGs’ role, several challenges remain to their greater and more meaningful involvement. LRG engagement and influence in EU external action have been impacted owing to the removal of a budget line for LRGs in the previous compound thematic budget line for ‘Civil Society Organisations – Local Authorities (CSOs-LAs)’ (PLATFORMA, 2024). Also, the EU’s 2021-2027 framework for development cooperation remains rather unclear regarding concrete multi-level governance mechanisms, thus complicating venues for LRG involvement (ibid.). These challenges make effective engagement between LRGs and EUDs even more important, including in identifying entry points for LRG involvement.

European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)

European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)	
	<i>About: EU financing tool with different risk-sharing instruments</i>
	<i>Entered into force: 14 June 2021</i>
	<i>Budget: EUR 40 billion in guarantees and EUR 135 billion in investments by 2027</i>
	<i>Principles: Policy first and country-driven approaches</i>
	<i>Source: European Commission</i>

The main financing tool of the NDICI-Global Europe (and the Global Gateway strategy, see below) is the **European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)**⁵. Established in 2021, the EFSD+ consolidates previous financial instruments and mechanisms (such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development – EFSD) providing guarantees, loans, blending and technical assistance to incentivise sustainable investment and private-sector engagement. Through these mechanisms, EFSD+ aims to mobilise up to EUR 135 billion of public and private financing to support achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (European Commission, n.d.). The aim is to facilitate high-risk investments that can have a strong sustainable development impact (see OECD, 2025b).

The EFSD+ has EUR 40 billion in guarantees and EUR 18 billion in blending. The guarantees are distributed through an open architecture of implementing partners (eligible European, international and regional financial institutions), while blending operations are supported by investment grants or technical assistance, for example (see OECD, 2025a, pp. 55-58). To help identify and select investment projects with a high development impact, there is an EFSD+ focal point in each EUD (ibid., p. 48). In this way, the EUDs can facilitate links and cooperation between partner-country and European actors and financial institutions, ensuring that investments are aligned with EU priorities.

Overall, the EFSD+ is intended for financial institutions (OECD, 2025a, p. 60). To be eligible, the financial institutions need to be ‘pillar-assessed’ by the European Commission, meaning that they have sufficiently strong and adequate administrative and financial capacities to be able to ‘indirectly manage the implementation of EU funds or budgetary guarantees’ (OECD, 2025b, p. 2). While the EFSD+ instrument goes beyond LRGs’ capacities, they could potentially contribute their valuable local insights to the design and rollout of projects through the EUDs’ EFSD+ focal points.

⁵ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/european-fund-sustainable-development-plus_en

Global Gateway

Global Gateway	
	<i>About: EU investment strategy</i>
	<i>Launched: 1 December 2021</i>
	<i>Budget: initially, mobilising up to EUR 300 billion in investments by 2027 (in 2025, updated to EUR 400 billion by 2027)</i>
	<i>Principles: democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean, security-focused, catalysing the private sector</i>
	<i>Focus/areas of partnership: digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research</i>
	<i>List of projects: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/12/10/global-gateway-council-endorses-flagship-project-list-for-2026/</i>
	<i>Source: European Commission</i>

The launch of the **Global Gateway**⁶ as the EU's main investment strategy is another significant change to the 2021-2027 framework. The Global Gateway emphasises sustainable infrastructure investments and partnerships with greater engagement of the private sector. Through this strategy, the original aim was to mobilise up to EUR 300 billion (European Commission, 2025b) in sectors such as climate and energy, transport, education and health, and digital transformation by 2027. Importantly, **the President of the European Commission announced**⁷ in October 2025 that this investment target had been reached already, thus setting a new target of mobilising EUR 400 billion in investments by 2027 through the Global Gateway.

The Global Gateway as an investment strategy is the EU's 'positive and values-based' offer (European Commission, 2021, 2025b) to the partner countries, with interventions based on six core principles

(specifically, democratic values, good governance, equal partnerships, green and clean, security focused, private sector catalysation). To ensure that investment-oriented approaches follow these core principles, the 360-degree approach was adopted in 2024. This approach offers a holistic model for implementing the Global Gateway strategy, emphasising the application of the six core principles, the creation of an enabling environment (for example, regulatory framework, technology transfer) and the combination of modalities and tools (see Council of the European Union, 2025; also Sabourin, 2025, pp. 5-10). Implementing infrastructure investments and projects via the 360-degree approach would thus contribute to their sustainability (OECD, 2025a). Yet as pointed out by the OECD peer review, what the 360-degree approach actually entails and how concretely it can be implemented within the Global Gateway strategy requires further clarification (ibid., pp. 51-52).

The Global Gateway functions through projects (digital, transport, energy, health, education) and largely relies on EFSD+ as it has no funding of its own (European Commission, 2025b, p.15). Investments and projects are selected after being submitted to the Global Gateway Investment Hub, which acts as the main entry point. The Team Nationals of EU Member States receive projects submitted by actors from their country, from which they compile a shortlist. The EUDs do the same for projects in the partner countries in which they are based. The European Commission then makes a final selection and guides the applicants through the different EU support modalities (see PLATFORMA, 2025).

The LRG's position and contribution to the Global Gateway initiatives are facilitated through exchanges in the **Policy Forum for Development (PFD)**⁸ and especially the **Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform**⁹. The PFD is a European Commission consultation platform with 79 members across 175 countries, including LRG associations, networks of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business and other associations, and representatives of the EU and EU Member States' institutions. Its objective is to support exchanges of best practice for the implementation of sustainable development projects in **partner countries**¹⁰.

⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_25_2346

⁸ <https://pfddialogue.eu/?page=about>

⁹ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/governance/global-gateway-civil-society-and-local-authorities-advisory-platform_en

¹⁰ For a complete list of the policy priorities of PFD's dialogue and its members see: PFD brochure 2025, available at: <https://pfddialogue.eu/?page=about>

The Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform is a working group of the PFD that provides feedback to the European Commission on implementation-related aspects of the Global Gateway strategy. The Platform has 57 members (42 from CSO networks and platforms, 4 from social partners, professional and business associations, and 11 from associations and networks of LRGs, including CEMR-PLATFORMA) which offer a broad representation of perspectives. The Platform meets with the European Commission (DG INTPA and the Commissioner) once a year. The Steering Group, composed of 15 members, guides the Platform's work and prepares the annual meeting with the European Commission.

While LRG involvement in the Global Gateway is important and highly relevant, given the impact and implications of Global Gateway projects on local territories, economies and societies (see PLATFORMA, 2024, 2025, 2026), LRGs still face numerous obstacles to their active participation in this strategy. This is especially the case with LRGs' access to funding. For example, in the sample of 46 cases of LRG involvement in Global Gateway projects, mapped and analysed by the ECDPM, only 17 included some form of direct funding for LRGs (see European Commission, 2026a, p. 7). PLATFORMA attributes these outcomes to the significant amount of investment required from European entities to submit eligible projects (typically above EUR 10 million), which automatically excludes most LRGs. Moreover, LRG involvement is not one of the evaluation criteria, thus missing an opportunity to incentivise LRG involvement and foster ownership of the projects (see PLATFORMA, 2024, 2025).

Additionally, several other obstacles to more active engagement of LRGs in the Global Gateway were highlighted during the 2025 Forum Cities and Regions for International Partnerships, organised by the European Commission's DG INTPA and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). The obstacles identified concern LRGs' limited administrative capacities, their limited autonomy in highly centralised partner countries, and gaps in communication on the Global Gateway among the actors involved (see European Commission, 2026a).

Team Europe approach

Team Europe approach	
	About: : coordinated action of the EU and EU Member States in the partner country that can bring transformative, effective and visible impact. Members jointly design Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) based on the Council Conclusions of 23 April 2021.
	Launched: April 2020 as a coordinated EU response to COVID-19, later used as a cooperative model for EU initiatives
	Members: EU, EU Member States (including their implementing agencies and public development banks), financial institutions (European Investment Bank (EIB), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)), the private sector, non-governmental organisations
	List of TEIs: https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/_en
	Source: European Commission

Furthermore, the EU's 2021-2027 framework for international cooperation emphasises the **Team Europe approach**¹¹. This approach consists of three types of coordinated action by a range of relevant European actors, including joint programming, joint implementation and Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) (for an overview, see OECD, 2025a, pp. 39-40).

TEIs are action frameworks for coordinated and mostly independent interventions by a variety of actors (including EU institutions, EU Member States and their agencies and development banks, financial institutions, and others) around shared strategic objectives (OECD, 2025a, pp. 38-39). TEIs complement existing development cooperation programmes and mechanisms, enhancing the visibility of strategies such as the Global Gateway (Keijzer et al., 2023, p. 5). The TEI governance model varies depending on the actors

¹¹ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/team-europe-initiatives_en

involved in implementation in the specific partner country or region. The EUDs play an important role in implementing TEIs in the partner countries, ensuring alignment with realities and actors on the ground as well as ownership of the projects (Keijzer et al., 2023, p.16). The EUDs can also initiate projects, exploring synergies between EU Member States and other actors.

While TEIs contribute to greater alignment and coordination of development cooperation actions, several aspects have been identified for further improvement. The analysis of five selected TEIs showed that they enhance visibility of EU actions and facilitate prospects of collective contribution to the impact of EU external action (Keijzer et al., 2023). Yet there is still limited direct participation of local partners (especially in the initiatives' design) with implications for ownership (ibid., pp. 6 and 44). Also, thus far, the TEIs tend to rely on Europe-driven initiatives/projects (ibid.). Additionally, the OECD peer review underlined limited transparency of the processes underpinning TEIs, including the selection of priorities and partners and the design of initiatives (OECD, 2025a, p. 43). Moreover, the monitoring procedures require strengthening, since monitoring of the results is currently voluntary and not publicly available (ibid.).

Multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2028-2034 and the Global Europe Instrument

As the current 2021-2027 framework is nearing an end, the European Commission presented its proposal for the MFF for 2028-2034 in July 2025, following the standard procedure for MFF preparations. In the European Commission's proposal for a total budget of EUR 1.98 trillion, EU external action under the new **Global Europe Instrument**¹² would amount to EUR 200.309 billion (European Commission, 2025c). This is yet to be negotiated with the European Parliament and the Council, where some analysts (see, for example, Jones, 2025, p. 2) expect a reduction in the proposed envelope.

As presented in the European Commission's proposal, the Global Europe Instrument would simultaneously pursue sustainable development objectives and the EU's strategic interests and competitiveness. The Global Europe is supposed to cover separate instruments under the 2021-2027 framework (the NDICI-Global Europe, Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance – IPA, and others) and to be divided into geographic pillars (see Jones, 2025, p. 10), with indicative financial allocations. Moreover, all concrete spending targets for EU funds that should contribute to climate objectives or gender equality, for example, are currently due to be removed, apart from a requirement that a minimum of 90% of the EU funding should be reportable as Official Development Assistance (ODA) (see Bilquin et al., 2026). While such an approach would allow for more flexibility, it could affect democratic oversight by the European Parliament and create challenges for long-term programming, with implications for partners at the different levels (Jones, 2025, p. 5).

PLATFORMA is actively following developments in the new MFF negotiations. In the Policy Position on Local and Regional Governments in Global Europe 2028-2034 (PLATFORMA, 2026, p. 3), PLATFORMA underlined that the key challenge for the final design of this instrument will be to find a balance between flexibility, accountability and transparency mechanisms, as well as long-term programming approaches. PLATFORMA (2026, p. 5) emphasised that engagement with LRGs and capacity building in line with their respective mandates in the current Global Europe draft is either vague or completely absent in the Europe and Middle East, North Africa and Gulf regions, while there is a general absence of DDC. It thus calls on the EU institutions to fully acknowledge LRGs as development actors and co-implementers of EU external policies.

¹² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0551>

An aerial photograph of a village in a tropical setting. The image shows several traditional huts with conical thatched roofs scattered across a landscape of green vegetation and palm trees. A dirt path or clearing runs through the center, where a small group of people is gathered. The background features more modern buildings and dense foliage. The entire image is framed within a large, light green circular shape that has a white border.

3. EU Delegations' work with local and regional governments

The LRGs' role and their meaningful involvement in international and development cooperation policies is essential in contributing to more sustainable, targeted and impactful outcomes of development cooperation actions, both for their territories and the local economy and society. Not only that, but they can also foster ownership of these actions. This section discusses the extent to which and exactly how the EUDs, as key EU actors in partner countries, engage with LRGs and LRGAs under the EU's 2021-2027 framework for international cooperation.

This section is primarily based on the EUDs' responses to the 2025 survey. It begins by providing insights into decentralisation status in partner countries, which is the key prerequisite for engagement with LRGs in international cooperation. Additionally, empirical evidence is presented on whether, and if so how, the EUDs support the decentralisation process. Next, the section provides insights into the EUDs' engagement with LRGs under the NDICI-Global Europe and Global Gateway strategy, offering illustrative examples of cooperation as well as reasons why some EUDs do not cooperate with LRGs. The section then examines EUDs' views on the main opportunities and constraints in working with LRGs under the 2021-2027 framework, including potential venues that could facilitate or strengthen their engagement, whether through cooperation with other actors or additional training and support. The section outlines some potentially useful measures that could enhance the current framework for cooperation, based on the EUDs' responses and explanations provided to the 2025 survey.

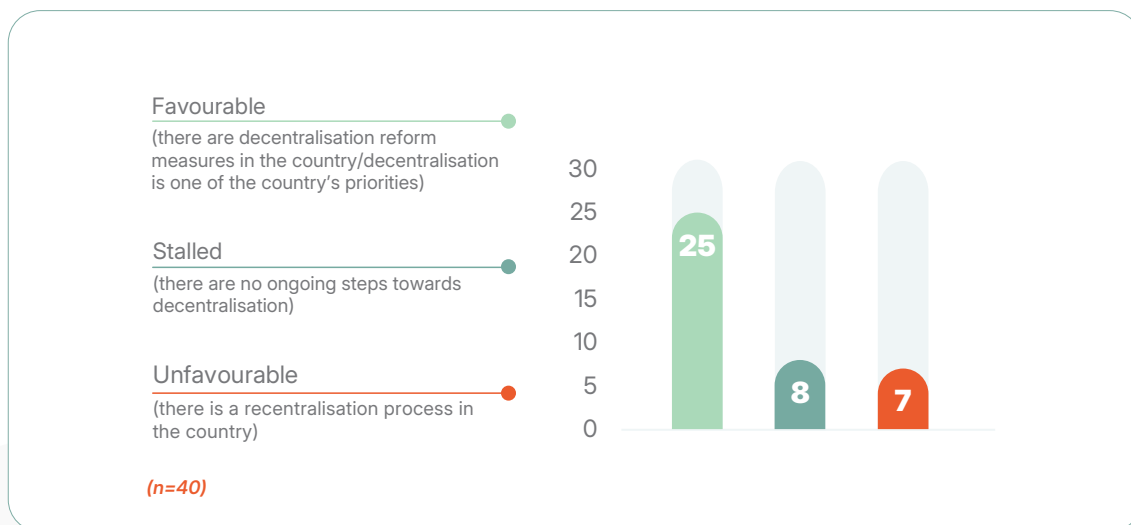
3.1. How do EU Delegations support local and regional governments and their associations in partner countries?

Support for decentralisation as the key enabler for LRGs' involvement

The effective level of decentralisation in the partner country is one of the key enablers of LRGs' meaningful and active engagement in development cooperation programmes and projects, as well as for the formation of partnerships with European actors. While decentralisation processes in each partner country are linked to specific political, historical, economic and other contexts, different stages of decentralisation imply different levels of autonomy/competences and capacities of LRGs (see PLATFORMA, 2021, p. 20).

Responses to the 2025 survey offer valuable insights into the state of decentralisation processes in partner countries covered in the study's sample. Most EUDs surveyed in 2025 (25 out of 40, or 62.5%) assessed decentralisation in the partner country they are based in as favourable. This suggests either that there are ongoing decentralisation measures or that decentralisation is one of the partner country's priorities. Eight EUDs stated that there are no ongoing steps towards decentralisation – that is, the decentralisation process has stalled. Finally, according to seven EUDs, a reverse process (centralisation) is taking place in the partner country in which they are based (see Figure 1). It is worth mentioning that in the PLATFORMA 2021 study, the majority of EUDs (34 out of 53) surveyed in 2021 indicated an ongoing decentralisation process in partner countries (see PLATFORMA, 2021, p. 21).

1.

Figure 1:**How would the EU Delegation assess the decentralisation process in the partner country?**

Beyond their overall assessment of the decentralisation process, the EUDs surveyed in 2025 were asked if they support decentralisation in the partner country. In total, 23 out of 40 (57.5%) EUDs stated that they provide support for decentralisation efforts (see Figure 2). In several examples, such as Cabo Verde, Chad, India, Mali, Nepal and the Philippines, support for decentralisation is provided over the long term and often as part of broader objectives related to strengthening democracy and good governance and promoting sustainable development.

Specifically, support for decentralisation efforts in Cabo Verde is consistently included in the overall development cooperation strategy. The EUD has a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach (engaging with the national government, LRGs and their associations in the partner country as well as European partners). The EUD engages with the Cabo Verdean government via policy dialogue to support the inclusion of decentralisation in national strategies and via budget support for implementation of these strategies at the local level. Moreover, the EUD facilitates cooperation between the partner country's LRGs and their European counterparts in projects involving the sharing of technical expertise and best practice. These collaborative projects contribute to LRGs' capacity building in territorial development as well as nature-based tourism. Also, the EUD provides support to the partner country's national association of LRGs, strengthening LRGs' organisational and advocacy capabilities so that they can effectively fulfil their roles. Cooperation with European partners is mostly organised within the Team Europe initiatives (TEIs)

and through implementation of joint projects with the EU Member States' development cooperation agencies, with a view to strengthening local governance, LRGs' capacities and infrastructure.

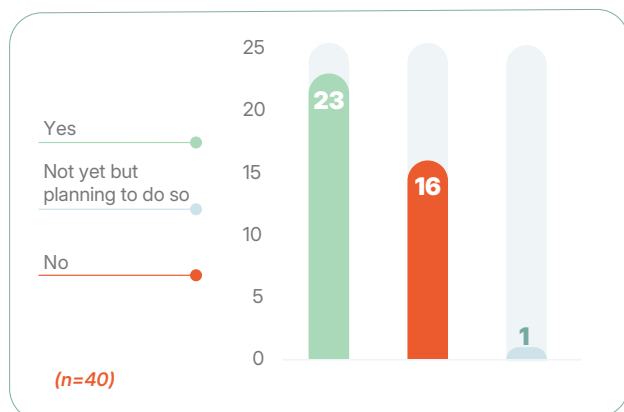
Furthermore, support for decentralisation and strengthening of the effectiveness of local governance structures in The Gambia is currently provided through the **EU-UNDP GREAT project**¹³. This project covers several important areas, including enhancing the capacities of line ministries and LRGs to perform decentralised functions, strengthening the participatory framework for local governance issues (civil society, social partners, etc.) and boosting women's political participation.

Decentralisation efforts in the Philippines are supported in various ways. Support for the devolution process is provided through capacity building of selected Local Government Units in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. This includes inclusive planning and budgeting processes, while further support is envisaged for public finance management. Additional examples include support for implementation of the Women, Peace and Security action plans at local, sub-regional and regional government level. The aim is to create an enabling environment for gender and disability sensitivity and social inclusion through partnership instruments with LRGs and civil society grants.

¹³ <https://www.undp.org/gambia/press-releases/unveiling-eu-funded-project-responsive-and-accountable-democratic-transition-eu-undp-great-initiative>

2.

Figure 2:
Is the EU Delegation supporting decentralisation in the partner country?



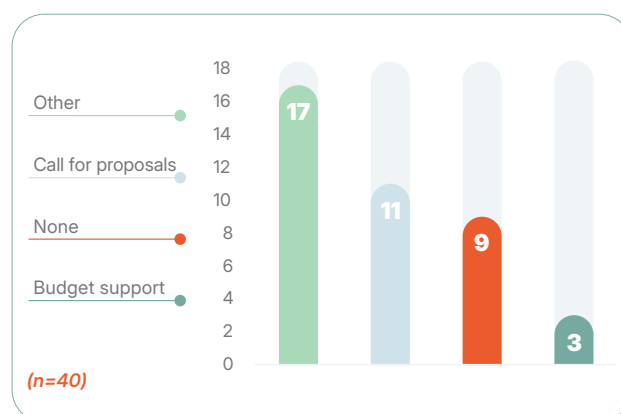
In total, 16 out of 40 EUDs that do not support decentralisation processes in the partner country (see Figure 2 above) provided different explanations. Some EUDs are based in a highly centralised partner country, which makes the work on decentralisation difficult. Sometimes, the EUDs have limited administrative resources to engage in tasks related to decentralisation support. The EUDs might also have only limited interaction with LRGs in the partner country or might engage with LRGs, but not specifically on decentralisation. Moreover, in some cases, decentralisation reform is no longer a policy priority for the EUD, and LRGs are not involved in a strategic partnership. Finally, one EUD stated that, given the upcoming local elections in the partner country, they are planning to provide support for decentralisation afterwards.

Looking at how decentralisation efforts in the partner country are supported, many EUDs surveyed in 2025 stated that they use different forms of assistance. Specifically, 42.5% (17 out of 40) EUDs answered 'other' to this survey question (see Figure 3 below), explaining that they tend to use a combination of several means of support (budget support and calls for proposals, as well as direct awards, project-based support, contribution agreements and blending actions). Furthermore, 27.5% (11 out of 40) EUDs use calls for proposals, while 7.5% (3 out of 40) use budget support to work on decentralisation with LRGs in the partner country. Lastly, 27.5% EUDs (9 out of 40) do not use any type of support for decentralisation efforts in the partner country.

It is worth noting that the PLATFORMA 2021 study showed similar trends, in so far as most EUDs surveyed in 2021 stated that they use various forms of assistance to support decentralisation efforts in the partner country (PLATFORMA 2021, p. 23).

3.

Figure 3:
What forms of assistance does the EU Delegation use to work on decentralisation with LRGs in the partner country?



Working with LRGs and LRGAs under the NDICI-Global Europe

Besides working with the partner country's LRGs to support decentralisation efforts in the partner country, proper EUD engagement with them under the NDICI-Global Europe and Global Gateway strategy is important as it can ensure sustainable and effective actions and foster local ownership. The LRGs hold a democratic mandate for policies and interventions in their territory and are responsible for local public services delivery. Thus, their engagement as partners and implementers of EU actions on the ground remains crucial. Moreover, LRGs' involvement in both designing and implementing EU-supported projects and interventions ensures that these are aligned with the local context and needs and contribute to targeted support and achievement of development goals (see PLATFORMA, 2026).

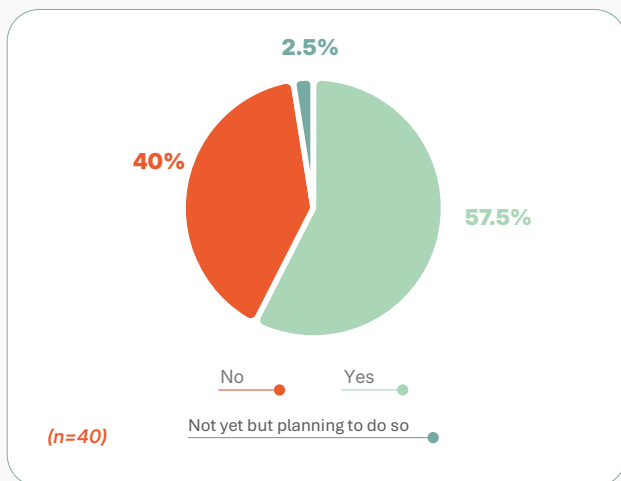
To what extent do the EUDs engage with the partner country's LRGs and their associations (LRGAs) under the EU's 2021-2027 framework for international

cooperation? According to the 2025 survey results, 23 out of 40 EUDs (or 57.5%) are working with LRGs or LRGAs in the partner country under the NDICI-Global Europe, while 1 EUD stated that it is planning to do so (see Figure 4 below). At the same time, 16 EUDs (or 40%) stated that they do not work with LRGs and LRGAs in the partner country.

Three different reasons emerged as explanations as to why some EUDs do not engage with LRGs under the NDICI-Global Europe. First, considering that there is no available thematic budget line for LRGs (since the country allocation under the NDICI-Global Europe is for the CSO thematic programme), it is difficult for EUDs to cooperate with LRGs and LRGAs. Second, some EUDs rely on bilateral cooperation with the national government and have no interaction with LRGs and LRGAs. Finally, engagement with the partner country's LRGs and LRGAs is not always defined as a cooperation priority in the EUD's programmes and strategies. Therefore, rather than challenges, there are other priorities for the EUD in the partner country in which it is based.

4.

Figure 4:
Is the EU Delegation working with LRGs or LRGAs in the partner country under the NDICI-Global Europe?

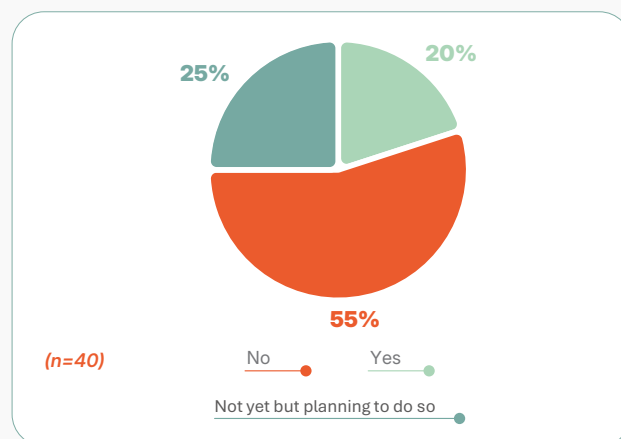


Working with LRGs and LRGAs under the Global Gateway strategy

Focusing on the Global Gateway strategy, 8 out of 40 surveyed EUDs stated they are working with the partner country's LRGs and LRGAs (20%), 22 do not (55%), and 10 (25%) stated they are planning to do so (see Figure 5).

5.

Figure 5:
Is the EU Delegation working with LRGs or LRGAs in the partner country under the Global Gateway?



Another similar assessment, the ECDPM (Sabourin, 2025) analysis of LRG involvement in the Global Gateway projects, commissioned by the European Commission's DG INTPA, mapped 46 case studies across 40 countries from 264 Global Gateway flagship projects where LRGs play various roles (by being informed or consulted or as beneficiaries, implementing partners or in the driving seat).

Some illustrative cases of Global Gateway projects and initiatives involving the partner country's LRGs or LRGAs provided by the EUDs surveyed in 2025 in this study cover different sectors and are at different stages of implementation. For example, within the **Green Economy Partnership**¹⁴ programme in the Philippines, which is part of EU's Global Gateway initiative, comprehensive support has been provided for the circular economy and the green transition of the various participating Local Government Units since 2023. Another example is India, where more than 40 cities and municipalities are supported in their urban transformation efforts under the **City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS)**¹⁵ programme, as part of the Global Gateway strategy. The CITIIS 1.0 phase was launched in 2018, while CITIIS 2.0 has been implemented since 2023.

Some EUDs that stated they are planning to involve the partner country's LRGs or LRGAs in Global Gateway projects provided further details of the potential venues for such engagement. These include initiatives on climate adaptation (Cabo Verde) and solid waste management (The Gambia), for example. In Madagascar, engagement with LRGs is envisaged within the 'All accountable' technical assistance programme (see Section 4).

¹⁴ <https://www.greeneconomy.ph/about/about-gepp>

¹⁵ <https://citiis.niua.in/ourwork>

There are various reasons why some EUDs do not work with the partner country's LRGs or LRGAs under the Global Gateway strategy. Several EUDs said that they lack the right framework for engagement with LRGs under the Global Gateway strategy. It was also mentioned that the Global Gateway priorities, as well as its delivery approach based on flagship projects, tend to reduce the focus on engagement with LRGs, despite acknowledging the importance of their proper and meaningful involvement. Besides, complex political context, the smaller budget and lack of personnel devoted to decentralisation and engagement with LRGs pose an obstacle for one EUD. Furthermore, in some cases, the EUDs reported that there are currently no Global Gateway projects, or its interventions have not yet started in the respective partner country. Finally, one EUD stated that they are based in the partner country where promotion and rollout of the Global Gateway is rather inadequate due to a fragile context.

Working with LRGs and LRGAs in fragile contexts

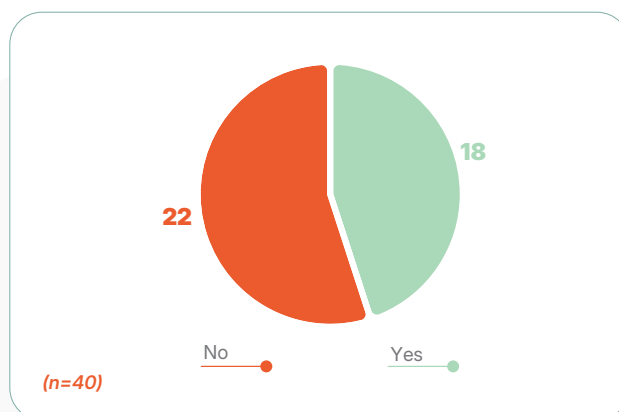
With an ever-greater level of fragility worldwide and a multitude of fragility contexts, as demonstrated by the **OECD States of Fragility Report**¹⁶ (2025c), many partner countries face different degrees of fragility and instability. As many as 45% of EUDs (18 out of 40) surveyed in 2025 stated they are operating in a fragile context (see Figure 6 below), characterised by different types of fragility (see Figure 7 below). These different types of fragility reflect the six dimensions (economic, environmental, human, political, security and societal) developed by the OECD to assess and monitor fragility (see OECD, 2025c).

¹⁶ https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf



6.

Figure 6:
Is the EU Delegation operating in a fragile context?



7.

Figure 7:
Please indicate which fragile context the EU Delegation is operating in.
(multiple answers possible)



There is growing consideration and recognition of the important role that LRGs can play in addressing fragility. Recent studies on EU approaches in fragile settings emphasise both the need for and benefits of engaging with LRGs and leveraging DDC (Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025; Maj et al., 2026). The ECDPM Discussion Paper (Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025) summarises the lessons learned regarding engagement with LRGs in fragile contexts over time, including guiding principles for practical implementation. While operationalisation is highly context-specific, the study commissioned

by the CoR (Maj et al., 2026) demonstrated potential transferability of DDC and highlighted its added value in fragile settings.

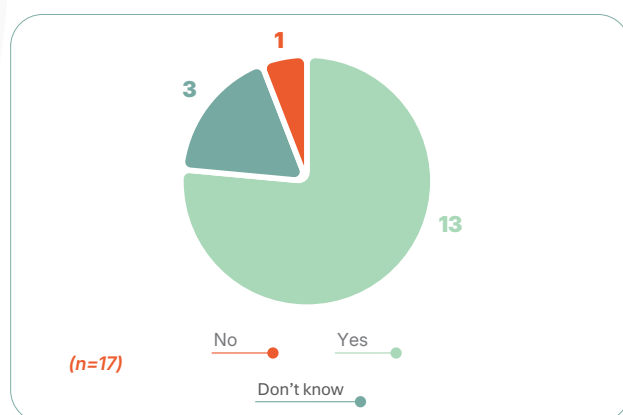
Although rollout and implementation of Global Gateway investment projects might be particularly challenging in fragile contexts (see European Commission, 2026a), not least because investors tend to be more inclined towards stable settings (Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025; Maj et al., 2026), the LRGs' role remains essential for sustainable and effective

implementation (European Commission, 2026a, pp. 14-15). The advantages of cooperation with LRGs in fragile settings include LRGs' understanding of the local context and dynamics, their mandate and competences to design and provide public policies and services, plan local development and respond to the crisis (Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025). Added to this, DDC can further support capacity building, improve service delivery and help establish trust between actors (see Maj et al., 2026). Finally, in fragile settings, LRGs are often trustworthy operational partners, contributing to stabilisation and the strengthening of resilience (European Commission, 2026a).

The EUDs surveyed in 2025 seem to recognise these advantages, as the majority of those operating in a fragile context (13 out of 17¹⁷, or 76.4%) stated that engaging with the partner country's LRGs would facilitate their work (see Figure 8 below).

¹⁷ One EUD did not respond to this survey question.

8. Figure 8:
Would engagement with LRGs in the partner country facilitate the EU Delegation work in the fragile context?



To summarise, stronger engagement with LRGs in EU development cooperation can bring added value in supporting efforts in the partner country and in achieving EU objectives (for more details, see PLATFORMA, 2021; Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025). Among the opportunities identified (PLATFORMA, 2021, pp. 26-27; Bossuyt and Sainaghi, 2025), the LRGs' proximity to citizens needs to be underlined. Thus, effective engagement with LRGs can contribute to the

local appropriation of EU initiatives implemented in their territories, as well as citizens' representation and participation, ensuring alignment with local needs. In this regard, LRGs are an important link for engagement with local (territorial) actors (local private sector, service providers supporting infrastructure operations, NGOs/CSOs, associations) and can facilitate a multi-stakeholder approach, as well as the formation of new partnerships. Moreover, LRGs are responsible for delivery of local public services, and their timely and meaningful involvement in planning, designing and implementing any actions related to those services is crucial (ibid.).

The 2025 survey results suggest that many EUDs tend to recognise the importance of working with LRGs. Specifically, when asked about their experiences of working with LRGs, the EUDs mentioned several effective aspects and outcomes of such cooperation. According to the EUDs, engagement with LRGs facilitates cooperation between different levels (regions and municipalities), supports peer-to-peer learning and promotes exchanges of experiences with the EU. The EUDs also emphasised the positive effects of capacity building for LRGs, especially in project management, which helps to enhance overall cooperation. Finally, some EUDs appreciated the TALD training they received on how to work with LRGs.

Some obstacles to cooperation and greater engagement with LRGs remain. Similar to the findings of the PLATFORMA 2021 study (p. 32), LRGs' limited capacities (human resources, financial, technical, operational) were frequently cited by the EUDs surveyed in 2025 as being among the main challenges. Another major obstacle highlighted by the EUDs surveyed is the lack of predictable funding for LRGs, especially since the thematic budget line for LRGs was discontinued. Moreover, LRGs in partner countries sometimes face challenges in complying with EU rules or in implementing EU projects, with some EUDs indicating the need for follow-up actions on the ground. Finally, the importance and relevance of involving all levels of government in the partner country (whenever possible) in the implementation of EU projects and initiatives was also highlighted, since they do not necessarily share information or cooperate with each other.

3.2. Opportunities and constraints for EU Delegations in working with LRGs

This section explores the main opportunities and constraints for EUDs in working with LRGs under the EU's 2021-2027 framework for international cooperation, according to the views and assessments provided by the EUDs in the 2025 survey. First, the EUDs' overall adaptation to changes introduced in the 2021-2027 framework is presented, based on their responses to the 2025 survey. This is followed by consideration of potential venues for enhanced cooperation with LRGs (including for example, re-introduction of the thematic budget line for LRGs and specialised training). Finally, opportunities stemming from engagement with other actors, such as European LRGs and LRGAs, and specifically their international cooperation agencies/departments/branches, or with the EU Member States' development cooperation agencies, are presented and considered.

Adaptation of EUDs to EU international cooperation instruments and initiatives

As mentioned, the NDICI-Global Europe has introduced significant changes to the programming and financing of EU international and development cooperation (see Bilquin, 2022). As a result of those changes, EUDs have gained more flexibility, responsibility and influence (see OECD, 2025a, p. 36). In this regard, it is important that EUDs, as the main points of contact and key actors in programming and channelling EU financial support in partner countries, are well adapted and supported under that framework. The adaptation of EUDs to EU international cooperation instruments and initiatives will shape cooperation effectiveness and the achievement of EU development objectives.

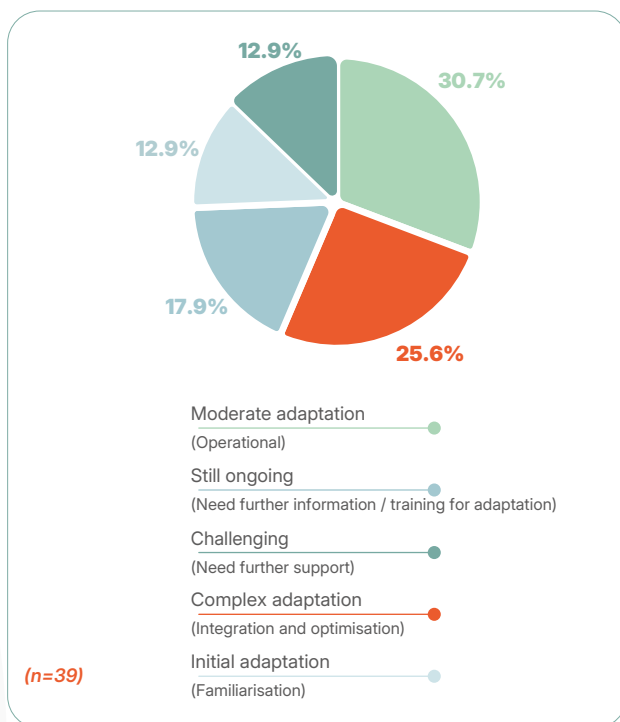
In the 2025 survey (see Figure 9 below), 22 out of 39¹⁸ EUDs stated that they have adapted well to the 2021-2027 framework, either fully (10 out of 39, or 25.6%), meaning that they have successfully integrated all new elements into their work, or moderately (12 out of 39, or 30.7%), meaning that they operate well in this framework. Seven EUDs (17.9%) said that they are still going through the adaptation process and might need further information or training, while five EUDs (12.8%) indicated that they are at the initial stages of adaptation. Another five EUDs (12.8%) stated that the adaptation process is challenging and would require further support.

¹⁸ One EUD did not respond to this survey question.



9.

Figure 9:
How did the EU Delegation adapt to the European development cooperation instruments and initiatives (NDICI-Global Europe, Global Gateway, Team Europe Initiatives)?



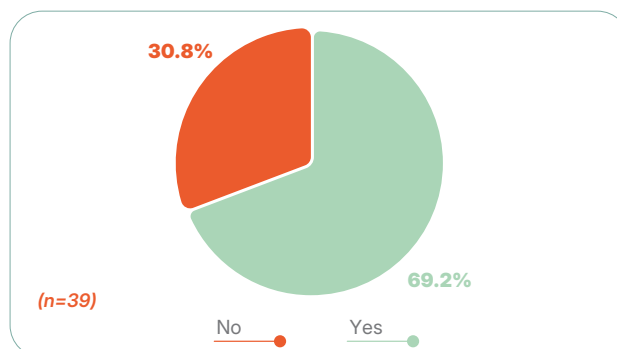
Overall, several important aspects were highlighted by the EUDs concerning how they work under the 2021-2027 framework. With the aforementioned international cooperation instruments and initiatives, especially the Global Gateway strategy, some EUDs revealed that their work has changed and continues to evolve significantly. The Global Gateway is becoming central to any EUD-led initiative and they are striving to align cooperation activities around its priorities and flagship projects. Yet it has been also pointed out that in some cases, these initiatives are not well suited to the country-specific context (fragile settings) and might require a rethink of existing approaches. Moreover, the national government predominantly relies on loans to finance infrastructure investments. Therefore, some EUDs pointed out that complementary measures are required to ensure capacity building at the sub-national levels and access to financing. When it comes to EUDs' work with LRGs, some said that they are trying to identify entry points for their involvement, including by embedding LRG engagement within implementation plans via the 360-degree approach.

The EU's approach to international cooperation is increasingly focused on programming and financing at the partner-country level. This highlights an even greater need to create partnerships and opportunities for the relevant actors, especially LRGs, to strategically engage at the partner-country level. As mentioned in Section 3 above, the lack of a thematic budget line for LRGs was listed by EUDs as one of the obstacles to engaging with the partner country's LRGs and LRGAs. Importantly, the 2025 survey results show that 69.2% of EUDs surveyed (27 out of 39¹⁹) consider that such a specific thematic budget would be helpful (see Figure 10 below). The majority of these EUDs cited technical assistance, followed by grants and flexible financing instruments (see Figure 11), as valuable forms of support that they would use to engage more with LRGs in partner countries. Public-private partnerships were less frequently selected as a preferred option.

¹⁹ One EUD did not respond to this survey question.

10.

Figure 10:
Does the EU Delegation consider that a specific budget line would further help to engage with LRGs in the partner country?



11.

Figure 11:**What kind of support would encourage the EU Delegation to engage with LRGs in the partner country?***(multiple answers possible)*

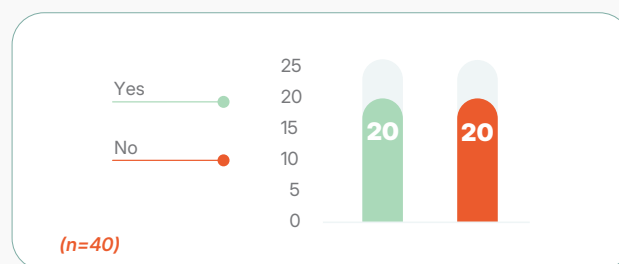
EUD engagement with European LRGs and LRGAs for strengthened development cooperation at the local level

Additional opportunities for engagement between EUDs and LRGs stem from established cooperation between European and partner-country LRGs and their associations. EUD involvement in or support for such cooperation can facilitate and enhance localisation of EU support and projects in the partner country. Decentralised development cooperation (DDC) partnerships and projects can offer various advantages, such as peer-to-peer sharing of knowledge and expertise, capacity building and improvements in local public service delivery, and thus complement EUDs' activities in the partner country.

To what extent do EUDs support or leverage opportunities stemming from such partnerships? According to the 2025 survey results (see Figure 12 below), not all EUDs seem to be aware of cooperation between European and partner-country LRGs and LRGAs. The results are equally split in fact, with 20 EUDs claiming to be aware and the other 20 EUDs stating that they are unaware of such cooperation. By contrast, it is

worth mentioning that a majority of the EUDs (41 out of 53) surveyed in 2021 stated that they are aware of cooperation between LRGs in the partner country and Europe, although most were not engaged, nor did they provide support (PLATFORMA, 2021, p. 28).

12.

Figure 12:**Is the EU Delegation aware of any European LRGs or their entities having already cooperated with partner country LRGs and/or LRGAs?**

Some EUDs surveyed in 2025 provided concrete examples of European and the partner country's LRGs and how they effectively cooperate. For example, the City Council of Madrid (Spain), the Municipality of Mertola (Spain) and the Municipality of Lisbon (Portugal) have partnerships with LRGs in Cabo Verde, providing support by sharing their extensive local governance expertise. Thus, implemented

collaborative projects benefit from exchanges of expertise. The EUD is also actively involved in these initiatives in several important ways. The EUD supports the process of defining their objectives and outcomes, so that projects address specific local needs and are aligned with broader development goals. Also, the EUD provides strategic guidance to ensure that the projects correspond to evolving realities on the ground, and it facilitates the alignment of local projects with national policies and programmes to enhance their contribution.

Another example is The Gambia, where there is long-term cooperation between the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (Spain) and the Greater Banjul Area (The Gambia). Meanwhile, the Canary Islands (Spain) implement projects as part of the Interreg **Madeira, Azores, Canary Islands (MAC) programme**²⁰ of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), which complements the NDICI-Global Europe. Previously, the EUD had grant contracts with the City of Ostend, Belgium (which ended in November 2024) and the City of Peterborough, UK (which ended in June 2025).

Finally, in Indonesia, local authorities of the North Halmahera Regency (Indonesia) have cooperated with the Municipality of Góra Kalwaria (Poland) in urban development and participatory urban governance as part of the **Sustainable Urban Marketplace project**²¹. This project was implemented during the 2021-2023 period by the Development Policy Foundation in cooperation with the aforementioned municipalities and funded by the EuropeAid grant scheme of the European Commission's DG INTPA.

These illustrative examples show how DDC between European and partner country's LRGs can contribute to successful implementation of various initiatives and EU programmes, with projects benefitting from the collaborative exchange of expertise and experiences.

Regarding the EUDs' awareness of and/or cooperation with the European LRGAs, as well as their international cooperation agencies/branches/departments and networks, only some EUDs responded affirmatively. These EUDs mentioned the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities

– VNG-International (EUD Ethiopia and EUD Vietnam), the Andalusian Municipality Fund for International Solidarity – FAMSI (EUD Mauritania) and other Spanish associations of municipalities/their funds within the **Adelante Window**²² initiative (EUD Paraguay). In addition, two international networks, the AIMF (EUD Chad, EUD Ivory Coast and EUD Vietnam) and the CLGF (EUD Zambia), along with the regional section of the United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific (UCLG-ASPAC) (EUD Indonesia) were also mentioned.

The project **Uniting Local Governments in Ethiopia**²³ is one of the concrete examples provided. This illustrates effective cooperation between European and the partner country's LRGs in strengthening decentralisation and sustainable development. The project was implemented by VNG-International during the period December 2020 to December 2024 and was financed by the EUD Ethiopia. Through this project, the Ethiopian Cities Association (ECA) was strengthened as a local government representative and advocacy organisation, interactions between different levels of government in selected pilot areas were supported, and the LRGs' capacities in budgeting and public finance management were enhanced.

Another illustrative example is the **FLEURIR project**²⁴, which emphasises triangular cooperation between European LRGs and LRGs in two partner countries. The project was implemented during the period February 2021 to April 2026 as part of the **EU Programme Partnerships for Sustainable Cities**²⁵. This project involved the cooperation of FAMSI (Spain), the Municipality of Rosso (Mauritania) and the Municipality of Podor (Senegal). The focus of the cooperation was on strengthening urban governance and promoting circular and green economic activities that can create employment and support the greening of public spaces.

Overall, while still limited, the EUDs surveyed in 2025 were nevertheless aware of and/or cooperated with a wider variety of European LRGAs and their

²⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/in-your-country/programmes/2021-2027/pt/2021tc16ffor001_en

²¹ <https://fpr.org.pl/project/a-sustainable-urban-marketplace-participatory-urban-governance-for-safe-green-and-inclusive-fresh-market-management-in-indonesia/>

²² https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/projects/promoting-sustainable-urban-development-through-associations-municipalities_en

²³ <https://www.vng-international.nl/project/ethiopia-uniting-local-governments-in-ethiopia/>

²⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/fleurir-favoriser-l%C3%A9cosyst%C3%A8me-urbain-environnemental-%C3%A9conomique-et-social-int%C3%A9gr%C3%A9-de-rosso_en?s=109

²⁵ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/partnerships-sustainable-cities_en

international cooperation agencies/branches/departments and international networks. By contrast, in the 2021 survey, the EUDs mentioned only AIMF and VNG-International (PLATFORMA 2021, p. 28). Moreover, the illustrative examples given point to the important role that the European LRGs and their international cooperation agencies/branches/departments can play as effective intermediaries in DDC initiatives.

Engagement with EU Member States' development cooperation agencies

EUDs' cooperation with EU Member States' development cooperation agencies, as important actors in the field, appears more frequent and active overall. Almost all EUDs (36 out of 40) surveyed in 2025 stated that they are cooperating with them. The EUDs most frequently mentioned cooperation with the German Agency (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ) and the French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement – AFD), followed by the Belgian Agency for International Cooperation (Enabel) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo – AECID). In many cases, the EUDs surveyed said that they cooperate with multiple development cooperation agencies, usually as part of Team Europe initiatives (TEIs).

Development cooperation agencies can provide additional opportunities to strengthen support for decentralisation efforts and engagement with LRGs in partner countries, including in Global Gateway initiatives. Some illustrative examples include the GIZ (Germany) and Enabel (Belgium) with their expertise and the long-term focus on and engagement in decentralisation and local governance in partner countries²⁶.

Besides accompanying major decentralisation reform measures in partner countries, the focus of cooperation between the two selected development cooperation agencies includes integrated support for LRGs (interviews of 17 April 2026 and 24 April 2026). The

GIZ has an **integrated approach**²⁷ towards multi-level governance, aimed at strengthening good governance in partner countries' LRGs. This includes local public service delivery, citizens' participation, sound local public financial and administrative management and the advancement of national reforms (for example, fiscal frameworks), which help LRGs to fulfil their responsibilities. Additionally, the facilitation of peer learning between LRGs in the partner country, and broader cooperative regional exchange among LRGs in different partner countries with similar systems, is vital in advancing local governance and ensuring quality service delivery, while leveraging successful pilots and best practice (interview of 17 April 2026). Enabel focuses on an integrated **territorial approach**²⁸ towards working with partner countries' LRGs, emphasising civic engagement and co-creation of local public services and local economic development. The **Tadafor project**²⁹ in Morocco is an illustrative example of this approach (interview of 24 April 2026).

Under the Global Gateway initiative, enabling decentralisation frameworks and LRG capacities in financial and investment planning as well as project management remain crucial for successful localisation. GIZ's experience in several partner countries shows that long-term cooperation with LRGs can lead to enhanced capacities at the local level and enabling national frameworks that allow LRGs to engage in EU initiatives, including the Global Gateway (interview of 17 April 2026). Continuing to empower sub-national levels in preparing bankable projects and gaining access to financing is vital for their involvement in the Global Gateway. GIZ, on behalf of various German ministries and international donors, supports municipalities in this regard, together with international partners such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the World Bank. In many partner countries, GIZ projects are also aimed at strengthening LRGs, who as the voice of municipalities are considered suitable partners for Global Gateway localisation. Some obstacles to cooperation might remain in this respect, particularly when there are differences in political alignment between central and local authorities, notably in larger cities (interview of 17 April 2026).

²⁷ <https://www.giz.de/en/expertise/democracy-rule-of-law/city-municipality>

²⁸ https://www.enabel.be/app/uploads/2025/01/PP03_Activating-the-potential-of-territories-to-achieve-inclusive-and-equitable-development-1.pdf

²⁹ <https://open.enabel.be/en/MAR/2467/p/programme-d-appui-a-la-participation-citoyenne.html>

²⁶ This selection is illustrative and does not suggest that other development cooperation agencies are not active in this field in partner countries.

Enabel is striving to embed the urban dimension in Global Gateway projects. For example, in strategic transport corridors, port management is considered one of the entry points for engagement with LRGs. Enabel's approach is therefore directed towards supporting the development of a sustainable ecosystem around and beyond the port, focusing on the 'port-city' interface.

Port management projects in Benin³⁰ are illustrative examples of this approach. Overall, as infrastructure development projects touch upon different dimensions (such as land use and management and environmental, social and economic aspects), it is important to ensure adequate engagement of LRGs in co-designing and planning these projects based on the territorial diagnosis, while developing instruments for financing the 360-degree approach. Another entry point for LRG involvement is Global Gateway projects linked to the circular economy and green transition, since LRGs have competences in this area. Also, these projects offer considerable potential for private sector involvement (interview of 24 April 2026).

Fragile settings underscore the role of LRGs, considering that cooperation with the national government often becomes difficult. GIZ's approach focuses on integrated support for LRGs in ensuring continued delivery of basic services to citizens, building resilience across the board and contributing to stabilisation. **Cooperation in Mali³¹** is one example of an effective holistic approach, including support for the functioning of the local level and citizen engagement in a fragile context (interview of 17 April 2026). Enabel's approach focuses on building resilience in the multi-dimensional crisis context. Engagement with local communities and the adoption of a territorial approach are important factors in supporting LRGs in their long-term planning perspectives, even in the current crisis (interview of 24 April 2026). An illustrative example of such work is the **RESIL-KAYA project³²** in Burkina Faso.



³⁰ <https://open.enabel.be/en/projects/204/benin.html>

³¹ <https://www.giz.de/en/projects/decentralization-and-good-governance-mali>

³² <https://open.enabel.be/en/BFA/2741/p/appui-a-la-resilience-au-centre-nord-et-plateau-central.html>

Support and training opportunities for EUDs in working with LRGs

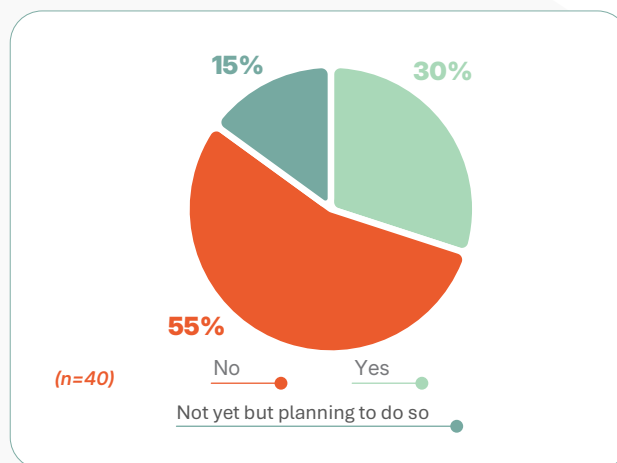
Finally, the Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD) Facility offers training and support for local development in partner countries, including on the various instruments that could be used in this regard. According to the [TALD Report](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fbd8f103-7bf9-417c-bb92-8c896136ebe4_en?filename=TALD%20in%20Practice%202020-2023_en.pdf)³³ (European Commission, 2023), most EUDs that have benefited from TALD training and support consider this approach relevant for EU development policies (ibid, p. 45) and plan to work more with LRGs (ibid, p. 47).

In this study's 2025 survey, 22 out of 40 EUDs (or 55%) stated that they did not require support or training on how to work with LRGs. The explanations provided are wide-ranging and include the EUD's lack of training budget, no perceived need for such training, or working with LRGs not being a priority for EUD cooperation in the partner country. Sometimes, EUDs are also unaware of the training opportunities. Similar results emerged from the 2021 survey (PLATFORMA, 2021, p. 34), where 60% of EUDs said that they had not received training on working with LRGs or considered the training they had received to be insufficient.

³³ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fbd8f103-7bf9-417c-bb92-8c896136ebe4_en?filename=TALD%20in%20Practice%202020-2023_en.pdf

13.

Figure 13: Did the EU Delegation seek support/training of the personnel on how to work with LRGs (such as from the TALD – Territorial Approach to Local Development Facility support)?



The EUDs that have benefited from available training or support (12 out of 40, or 30%) welcomed the opportunity for several reasons. The TALD training, in particular, provided a solid basis for understanding the decentralisation process and cooperating with LRGs and other actors (EUD Kenya, EUD Mozambique). For example, in Kenya, this included support in designing the programme on devolution in the partner country (see European Commission, 2023, pp. 36-37). Additionally, the TALD training enhanced EUDs' knowledge about the different instruments available for engaging with LRGs and the methods that can be applied (EUD Ethiopia, EUD India). The training also facilitated discussion between EUDs about the opportunities and challenges they face in promoting the territorial approach in the partner country in which they are based (EUD Indonesia), while opening up perspectives for reflection (EUD Madagascar). Lastly, six EUDs (15%) stated they had not sought support or participated in training yet but are planning to do so.



Finally, the EUDs surveyed in 2025 expressed an interest in receiving support or training to engage more with LRGs, including the TALD, the **Technical Assistance and Information Exchange**³⁴ (TAIEX), followed by the **Urban Development Technical Facility**³⁵ (UDTF) (see Figure 14 below). TAIEX is an EU instrument that provides short-term support to public administrations in advancing institutional reforms and aligning policies. UDTF provides support in tackling urban development challenges across government levels through technical assistance and policy advice. Most EUDs interested in receiving training support opted for a combination of the different training opportunities available (see Figure 14). Apart from their interest in receiving training support, these results might also reflect the multifaceted issues that EUDs face in their work in partner countries.

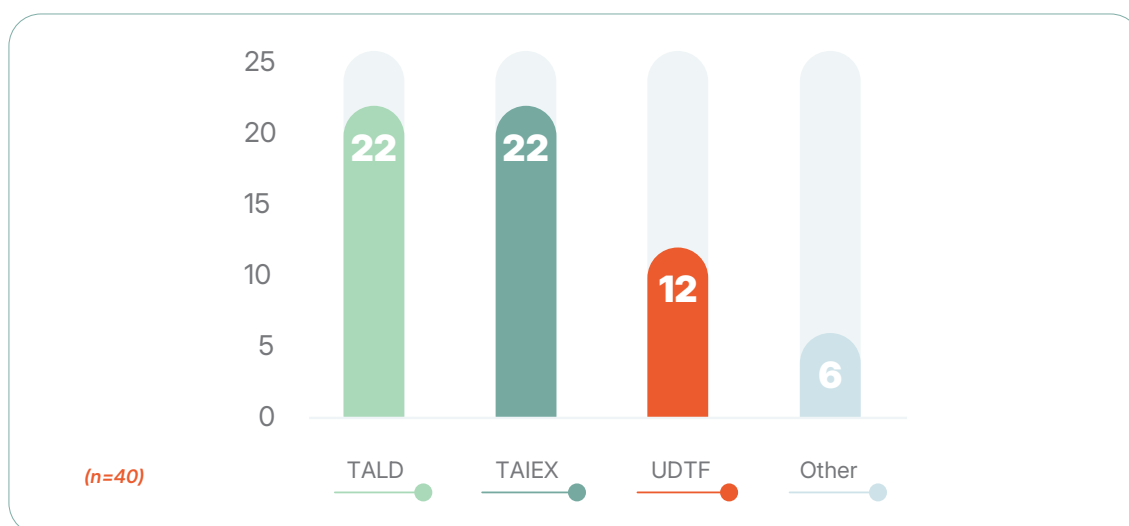


³⁴ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/taieux_en
³⁵ https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/members/urban-development-technical-facility_en

14.

Figure 14:

Which existing types of support would the EU Delegation be interested in to work more with LRGs?
(multiple answers possible)



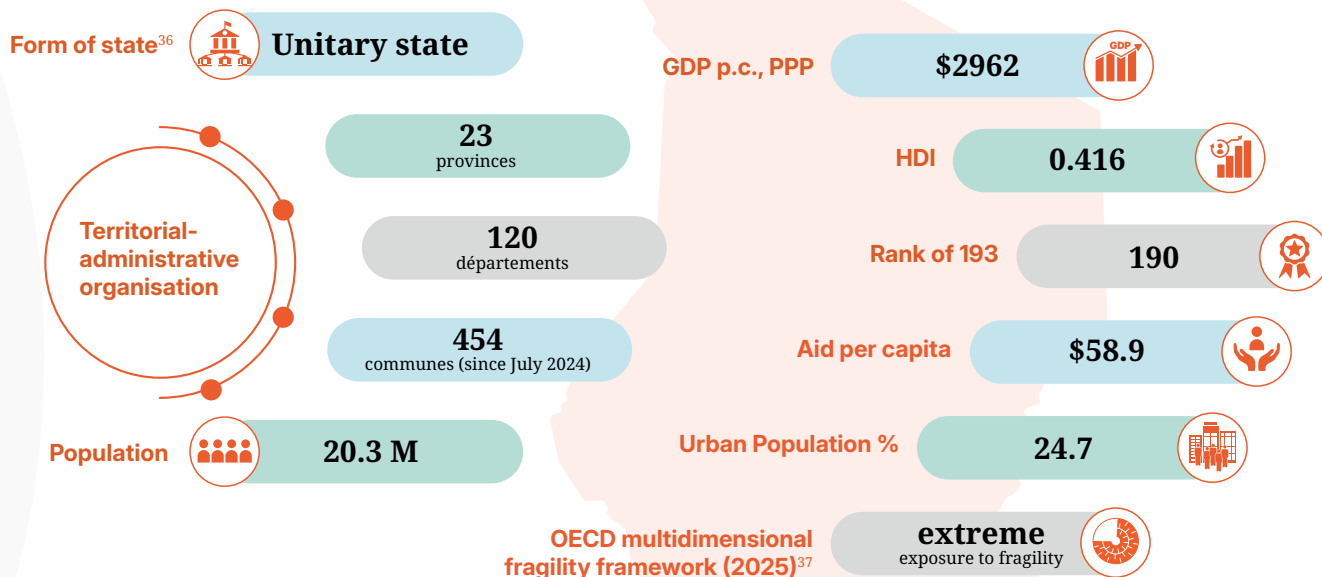


4. Exemplary practices and approaches of EU Delegations' work with local and regional governments

To illustrate some of the effective practices and approaches of EUDs' work with LRGs, this section presents case study vignettes on Chad, Guatemala, Nepal, Madagascar and Zambia. These are based on interviews with the EUDs concerned, conducted during the period December 2025 to January 2026. Each case study vignette first provides a brief assessment of the current decentralisation status in the partner country. This is a key prerequisite for LRGs' engagement, since it defines their competences and has an impact on their capacities. Next, the EUDs' experiences and approaches in working with LRGs are presented, exploring how exactly the EUDs engage with them and how they help strengthen their role and involvement (whether through capacity building and consultations, or by considering LRGs in the programming and project planning). Finally, case study vignettes provide insights into the current or planned involvement of LRGs in the Global Gateway projects.



Chad



³⁶ all data source above: BTI Country profile Chad (based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators as of December 2025) https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_TCD.pdf

³⁷ last data source above: OECD 2025c p. 51: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf

and later approved, reflecting the general political will to continue with decentralisation reform. However, these efforts require effective implementation of the decentralisation agenda, especially concerning the transfer of competences and resources to municipalities.

The decentralisation process in Chad can be assessed as favourable overall, considering the following factors. Decentralisation is part of the institutional design provided in the new Constitution (2023), which also gives municipalities a new status. Additionally, a roadmap for decentralisation was prepared in 2025

Since 2012, EU support for decentralisation efforts in Chad has been provided through 'The Governance Support Programme in Chad (PAG)'. The first phase of the programme (PAG 1) was implemented during the 2012-2017 period. The main components of this programme included public finances as well as a civil

status system and decentralisation. Through the public finance component, PAG 1 provided support to financial administrations and external audit institutions, which now have professional-quality equipment, studies and management tools. To support decentralisation efforts in Chad, PAG 1 focused on capacity building. This included training (of around 700 officials, responsible for managing different decentralisation-related aspects, from local governments, decentralisation services and relevant ministerial departments), the organisation of study visits and international seminars on the topic of decentralisation, and IT equipment supplied to local governments. Support was also provided for conducting the relevant studies (for example, on the costs of the transfer of competences and on the mechanisms for monitoring performance and good governance practices at the local level) and for formulating local development plans. Moreover, through the PAG1 decentralisation component, there was also institutional support for the Directorate-General for Decentralisation, along with the introduction of tools to ensure the implementation of decentralisation.

During PAG1, three pilot municipalities from three different regions (Bitkine in the Guera Region, Hadjer in the Batha region, and Koumra in the Manoul Oriental region), as well as the National Association of Municipalities of Chad (Association Nationale des Communes du Tchad – ANCT) were supported. The targeted work with pilot municipalities revealed that human resources capacity was still limited at the local level, with limited capacity to mobilise financial resources. Further efforts are therefore needed

to reorganise municipal services, improve local governance and explore opportunities for external financing to ensure community development. Thus, the current programme ‘The Governance Support Programme in Chad – Phase 2 (PAG2)’, which has been implemented since 2021, includes continuous support for local government capacities.

Moreover, in the EU’s 2021-2027 framework for international cooperation, there are **initiatives under the Global Gateway**³⁸ in Chad, such as the **modernisation of the N’Djamena-Douala corridor**³⁹, which includes the construction of a bridge connecting Bongor (Chad) to Yagoua (Cameroon). Another major project is the upgrading of the corridor between Koutéré, Moundou and N’Djamena. The EUD’s priorities under the Global Gateway include infrastructure, agriculture and digitalisation. As Global Gateway projects are implemented in specific local areas, the EUD recognises the need to involve local elected representatives responsible for managing and steering local public policies. In this regard, consultations with mayors and provincial and municipal councillors are crucial for economic and territorial diplomacy. The EUD will focus on secondary cities with economic potential, engaging with local representatives through consultations.

³⁸ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/chad_en

³⁹ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/modernisation-ndjamena-douala-corridor-and-construction-bridge-chad_en





Nepal

Form of state⁴⁰



federal state

GDP p.c., PPP

\$5737



HDI

0.622



Rank of 193

145



Aid per capita

\$39.5



Urban Population %

22.4



OECD multidimensional
fragility framework (2025)⁴¹

not available



**Territorial-
administrative
organisation**

7 provinces
(established in 2015)

753
local units

Population



29.7 M

Urban Population %

22.4



⁴⁰ all data source above, BTI Country profile Nepal (based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators as of December 2025): https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_NPL.pdf

⁴¹ last data source above, OECD 2025c p. 51 https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf

In Nepal, the decentralisation process can be also assessed as favourable in general, based on the following developments. Federalisation was included in the 2015 constitutional reform, followed by practical implementation since 2017. There has been an increased transfer of competences to the local level, although LRGs still face funding challenges. While some steps towards fiscal decentralisation are being taken, a significant portion of LRG resources is provided by the federal level through conditional grants, thus curtailing LRGs' planning and decision-making powers. At the same time, LRGs' abilities to mobilise their own revenues are still rather limited, and further capacity building is needed. In addition, the role and mandate of the provincial level should be further clarified.

EU budget support in Nepal during the period 2019-2025 was directed towards supporting the federal system and advancements in implementation, assisting

the government's capacity-building efforts at the provincial and local levels. Alongside budget support in education, the programme includes support for local planning and budgeting and the strengthening of public finance management systems. In the next programming, budget support in education will continue, with a focus on digitalisation. Education and energy will remain priority sectors of EU development cooperation in Nepal.

The EUD engages with Nepalese LRGs through different sectoral programmes. For example, in dialogue on a sector-wide approach to education, the EUD is cooperating with actors at various levels. There are local education partnership groups with representation of two LRGs (the association of urban municipalities and the association of rural municipalities). Also, as part of the annual review with the Nepalese Ministry of Education, representatives of LRGs are invited as speakers and the EUD engages with municipalities on coordination and organisation. Overall, in the field of education, the EUD focuses on soft skills and capacity building, including the strengthening of local governments in planning and budgeting and use of an education management system, as well as quality of education, inclusion and teacher training with support from the government and partners.

Importantly, **Quality education for all**⁴² is labelled as a Global Gateway flagship project in Nepal. Activities are implemented via the 360-degree approach and the EUD provides support by various available means (blending being the only type of support that is not used). There is also a technical assistance project with Finland, providing support to the education sector at the provincial level that complements the EUD's

⁴² https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/quality-education-all-nepal_en

work related to teacher training, as well as a project with UNICEF providing technical assistance to 120 municipalities in planning, budgeting and governance. In the new programming, the EUD plans to continue working with all levels of government in Nepal. In the education sector, the focus will be on strengthening the link between education and local labour market needs.



Zambia

Form of state⁴³



unitary state

10

provinces

116

districts

156

constituencies

over **1800**

wards (as of 2026)

Territorial-administrative organisation⁴⁴

Population



21.3 M

GDP p.c., PPP

\$4224



HDI

0.595



Rank of 193

154



Aid per capita

\$68.6



Urban Population %

46.9



OECD multidimensional fragility framework (2025)⁴⁵

improvement



⁴³ 6th to 11th data source above, BTI Country profile Zambia (based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators as of December 2025) https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_ZMB.pdf

⁴⁴ 2nd to 5th data source above: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ZMB>

⁴⁵ OECD 2025c p. 51 https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf

In Zambia, the decentralisation process can be assessed as favourable. Overall, the central level recognises decentralisation and there has been a transfer of competences to the local level. However, this transfer of responsibilities has not yet been followed by the transfer of resources for LRGs. Moreover, a stand-alone programme for decentralisation would be appropriate. While the government considers the **Constituency Development Fund**⁴⁶ as the plan for decentralisation, this is a broader plan covering other

⁴⁶ <https://www.pdu.gov.zm/cdf>

aspects (for example, health and youth) with a ‘one size fits all’ approach, with decentralisation being only one aspect of it. Also, the Constituency Development Fund allocation is rather small, representing only about 3% of the overall national budget.

There were several stages of support and cooperation with LRGs in Zambia, involving various partners and different funding. Within the previous thematic budget line for LRGs, there were calls for proposals to which they could apply directly. At that time, however, Zambian LRGs were facing numerous obstacles (such as limited capacities, difficulties with reporting or upholding transparency/anti-corruption rules), with implications for effective cooperation. In the next stage, cooperation with the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) as part of the **Enhancing Local Government Capacity for Development Project**⁴⁷ proved effective and facilitated advancement of decentralisation. This project supported the decentralisation (devolution) process by providing training to selected LRGs, strengthening their institutional and operational capacities, and developing their skillset in leadership, public finance management and planning and implementation of inclusive services and local economic development. The project also supported capacity building for the LGAZ.

Currently, there are different programmes in which LRGs are (or should be) involved, whether directly or indirectly. For example, the **Equal Chances for Human Development programme**⁴⁸ is a EUR 50 million initiative, launched by the Government of Zambia, UNICEF and the EU. The programme is targeting the Solwezi District, Northwestern Province and aims to provide support and create an enabling environment for children and adolescents in underserved areas. In practical terms, the programme supports government activities in education and skills development, health and social care, as well as engagement with LRGs in the area as one of the interventions.

Another example is the **Nexus Energy and Water Programme for Zambia – NEWZA**⁴⁹, which is a EUR 118.1 million Global Gateway initiative. Part of this Global Gateway initiative includes partnerships and cooperation between Zambian and German water utility companies. The partnerships revolve around technical and expert exchanges in different areas, including maintenance, monitoring of water reservoirs and dams, and laboratory analysis and sampling. Through this cooperation, LRGs benefit from improved water and sanitation service delivery. Moreover, the LRGs’ role is crucial in ensuring access to clean water and sanitation for vulnerable populations (see Sabourin, 2025).

Other projects are being undertaken in the infrastructure sector which require adequate engagement with LRGs. The Lobito corridor initiative is particularly significant. Here, as in other cases, the EUD initiates engagement with LRGs to facilitate alignment between local and EU goals and initiatives. Specifically, the EUD conducted a survey seeking feedback from the LRGs and districts on the development of the Lobito corridor to understand the local context and needs and gather LRGs’ views. The survey results revealed that LRGs are neither fully aware of nor involved in the processes concerning the Lobito corridor. Moreover, the LRGs surveyed shared their impressions that programmes are designed at the national level and there is little consideration of how these programmes will benefit local communities. At the same time, LRGs are increasingly interested in becoming involved in EU projects and initiatives, requesting more information about the programmes being implemented.

Going forward, the EUD will continue to seek feedback and validation from LRGs, emphasising LRGs’ involvement as a key aspect of cooperation initiatives. The EUD also strives to engage with LRGs by organising workshops and training. The EUD is trying to reach out to LRGs through missions in their area, since many LRGs lack the financial resources to attend training courses in the capital, Lusaka. Moreover, the EUD recognises that cooperation with the LGAZ has been successful, and that its role and engagement continue to be important.

⁴⁷ <https://www.clgf.org.uk/whats-new/news/enhancing-local-government-capacity-for-development/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/zambia/press-releases/grz-eu-and-unicef-launch-50-million-human-development-programme-uplift-children-and>

⁴⁹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/zambia/newza-nexus-energy-and-water-programme-zambia_en



Guatemala

Form of state⁵⁰



Unitary state

GDP p.c., PPP

\$14,369



HDI

0.662



Rank of 193

137



Aid per capita

\$24.7



Urban Population %

53.5



OECD multidimensional
fragility framework (2025)⁵¹

deterioration



**Territorial-
administrative
organisation**

8

regions

22

departments

340

municipalities

Population



18.4 M

⁵⁰ all data source above: BTI Country profile Chad (based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators as of December 2025) https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_GTM.pdf

⁵¹ last data source above: OECD 2025c p. 51: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf

The decentralisation process in Guatemala has currently stalled as there are no ongoing steps towards decentralisation. The EU previously supported decentralisation efforts, but decentralisation is not a priority of the current Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) and there is no support provided in this area.

The EUD has long-term experience in working with the Guatemalan LRGs and their associations ('mancomunidades'). Under the previous compound thematic budget line for CSOs – LAs, the EUD had specific programmes to support LRGs and their associations. These programmes included capacity building in good governance, financial planning and spatial planning, as well as technical assistance in areas within LRGs' remit, such as waste and wastewater management, climate change and biodiversity, food security and nutrition. Support was also provided for establishing specialised offices for gender equality

and care for children and young people. Moreover, the EUD supported the Council for Development Cooperation, which brings together various relevant actors. Specifically, the EUD supported the creation of an enabling environment for different local actors (communities, local authorities, departments and local school staff, medical staff and technicians) to join in the dialogue on different aspects of the local agenda for the development of their regions.

Overall, some of the main results achieved with LRGs' projects include, for example, improved local planning systems, implementation of sectoral plans in key areas of LRG management (such as open government, water, sanitation, climate change), and greater awareness of and establishment of specialised offices for gender equality, children and young people, as well as conflict management and resolution. Moreover, the institutional capacities of LRGs have been strengthened, especially for those organised in associations

(‘mancomunidades’). Meanwhile, transitional effects due to electoral and political party-related changes have been mitigated by adopting a work strategy with an association (a ‘mancomunidades’-based approach). Finally, there have been targeted investments at the local level in areas such as water, sanitation and geographic information, as well as LRGs’ revenue collection and basic services.

The EU’s 2021-2027 framework for international cooperation introduced structural and operational changes for engagement with LRGs. With the discontinuation of the thematic budget line for LRGs, specific calls for proposals or grants are no longer directly available for LRGs. Additionally, the focus of cooperation with LRGs in the areas where EU projects and interventions are taking place has shifted towards investments, with an emphasis on identification of bankable projects and private sector involvement.

The EUD continues to engage with LRGs, especially in projects and initiatives in the Petén region and the Motagua river basin. Specifically, ‘Petén más sostenible’⁵² is a Global Gateway Team Europe Initiative involving different EU Member States, which focuses on the green transition of the Petén region. LRGs in this region are involved, as many sectors covered by the initiative (for example, waste system management) fall under their competences. The projects implemented therefore include a territorial approach to development, as well as local governance. The EUD has also received support from the TALD Facility under this initiative.

With regard to initiatives for the restoration of the Motagua river basin, an area that covers 96 municipalities, the EUD is currently setting up the programme, including the territorial diagnosis and action plan. Crucially, a new Motagua river municipal association (‘mancomunidad’) has been created at the instigation of the municipal authority. This association involves 20 municipalities that will be affected by the planned interventions. Many projects in the basin will cover the sectors of water, sanitation and wastewater management, all competences of LRGs. The EUD

engages with the municipalities of the Motagua river association in the coordination process for developing the plan for the Motagua basin programme. Technical assistance in the preparation of investment projects for LRGs is also being considered. Finally, the role of LRGs and CSOs in addressing the challenges facing the Motagua river basin was discussed at the **Motagua Investment Forum**⁵³, aimed at creating a platform for dialogue and partnerships between key strategic actors in the circular economy.

Overall, through the capacity building in local governance previously provided, LRGs in Guatemala are better placed to engage in EU initiatives. Additionally, the LRGs have gained valuable experience through their participation in different programmes and projects, as well as through the effective work of their associations (‘mancomunidades’). To further enhance the role and involvement of LRGs, especially in the Global Gateway strategy, targeted support is needed for investment-related capacity building and the preparation of local development plans. Efforts to facilitate cooperation between Guatemalan LRGs and European actors (for example, European companies, universities and LRGs and their associations) are also important.

The EUD recognises the strategic relevance of the Guatemalan LRGs as politically influential actors with local knowledge and highlights the importance of working with ‘mancomunidades’. Going forward, it will be important to identify possible entry points for greater engagement with LRGs in EU projects and initiatives. This includes exploring in greater detail the 360-degree approach as an opportunity to engage more with LRGs, as well as public-private partnerships as a way of linking the national and local levels within the Global Gateway framework.

⁵² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/guatemala/pet%C3%A9n-m%C3%A1s-sostenible-promoting-ecological-transition-pet%C3%A9n-global-gateway-initiative_en?s=187

⁵³ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/eu-business-fora/motagua-investment-forum-circular-economy-2025-05-27_en



Madagascar

Form of state⁵⁴



Unitary state

**Territorial-
administrative
organisation**

6

provinces

24

regions (as of 2023)

1695

communes

Population



32.0 M

GDP p.c., PPP

\$1884



HDI

0.487



Rank of 193

183



Aid per capita

\$40.2



Urban Population %

41.2



**OECD multidimensional
fragility framework (2025)⁵⁵**

extreme
exposure to fragility



⁵⁴ 1st to 10th data source above: BTI Country profile Chad (based on The World Bank, World Development Indicators as of December 2025) https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2026_MDG.pdf

⁵⁵ last data source above: OECD 2025c p. 51: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/states-of-fragility-2025_c9080496/81982370-en.pdf



In Madagascar, where the context is extremely fragile (see also OECD, 2025c), the decentralisation process is assessed as unfavourable. For many years, there was a process of centralisation in the country, and the EU programme supporting decentralisation and LRGs was discontinued in 2009. Following the recent change in government (and the consequent reorganisation), the opportunities for cooperation and partnerships are still to be assessed. The territorial approach currently aligns with government priorities, and it is possible to support the development of LRG competences.

Overall, the programme ‘All accountable’ (‘Tous redevables’), which is essentially a package of technical assistance, is also relevant for decentralisation support. This project started by supporting public finance management and then developed into three reform components, including: (i) public finance management, (ii) transparency and anti-money laundering, and (iii) territorial approach and decentralisation. The ‘territorial approach and decentralisation’ component has a budget of EUR 5 million. It will involve 15 selected local authorities (including urban authorities) which will be supported in developing their territorial diagnosis, followed by the next stage focusing on investment. This is a pilot project which will span a five-year period.

To prepare the territorial approach and decentralisation component of the ‘All accountable’ project, the EUD has requested support from the TALD Facility. The TALD session for EUD personnel provided support in defining the project roadmap and developing actions for the 15 municipalities that will be selected. It also helped the EUD to envisage processes related to identifying the lessons learned from the implementation and results of the pilot project so that they can be used in the next programming. Another TALD session was organised with the relevant ministries and Local Development Fund (FDL). This session facilitated the identification of actors for the pilot project prepared under this component.

The EUD acknowledges that the TALD support received was both necessary and useful. TALD training has contributed to a better understanding of decentralisation and the territorial approach, including the implementation of the 360-degree approach. Moreover, the training proved useful in developing the territorial strategy and in deciding on how the programming can best be used.

Finally, the territorial approach and TALD support proved to be efficient ways of obtaining concrete results in a fragile context. While ‘All accountable’ is not a Global Gateway initiative, its next stages involving the territorial approach and investments will be implemented as part of the 360-degree approach. The project could therefore be linked to the Global Gateway.



5. Conclusion and recommendations

This final section presents the key findings of the study and sets out the CEMR-PLATFORMA recommendations. It emphasises the role and importance of working with LRGs and LRGAs in development cooperation and their integration into the EU international development cooperation framework and financing schemes. LRGs are crucial actors in implementing sustainable policies embedded in local realities and needs, as the level of government closest to citizens and holding a democratic mandate. Hence, their practical involvement as co-creators and co-implementers of EU policy and investment-related measures concerning their territories can contribute to more effective and targeted EU actions and to the achievement of EU development cooperation objectives with a meaningful impact (PLATFORMA, 2026).

Support for decentralisation efforts and capacity building of LRGs is essential for their effective role in territorial development

The build-out of an enabling decentralisation framework and multi-level governance mechanisms is and remains a key prerequisite for LRGs to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as drivers of territorial development. While the context varies significantly across partner countries in this regard, the findings of this study show that 62.5% of the EUDs surveyed in 2025 (or 25 out of 40 EUDs) assessed the decentralisation process as favourable. This tends to suggest that either decentralisation measures are being implemented or that decentralisation is identified as one of the priorities in the partner country. Moreover, 57.5% of EUDs surveyed in 2025 (or 23 out of 40) support decentralisation in the partner country, through a combination of various means of assistance.

Along with advancements in decentralisation, resulting in the legal and practical transfer of competences and resources to sub-national levels, the strengthening of LRGs' capacities to exercise their powers and responsibilities remains vital. The case study vignettes of Chad and Nepal offer concrete examples of capacity building and technical assistance for LRGs, especially in public finance management. The case study vignettes of Guatemala and Zambia highlight the benefits of strengthening and working more closely with LRGAs in partner countries in this regard. Overall, case study vignettes, along with other illustrative examples provided in the study (Cabo Verde, The Gambia, the Philippines), show how EU support for decentralisation efforts and for LRG

capacity building can help pave the way for their active involvement, including in (future) Global Gateway projects and initiatives, thereby strengthening their role and mandate.

Several obstacles remain and require further targeted support for LRGs to effectively engage in the EU's international cooperation policy framework and Global Gateway strategy. The 2025 survey results and additional explanations provided by the EUDs, together with the case study vignettes (Chad, Guatemala, Madagascar), highlight the need for further LRG capacity building in investment-related topics, local governance preparation of local development plans and access to finance. These findings reflect the conclusions of the Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum 2025 (European Commission, 2026a, pp. 8-9), which highlighted the challenges regarding LRGs' access to finance.

Continuous support for decentralisation reform efforts and targeted financial and technical assistance for LRGs in partner countries can create an enabling environment and address obstacles to their engagement in EU international cooperation policies and the Global Gateway strategy. This would contribute to their effective involvement under the upcoming Global Europe Instrument. Moreover, targeted capacity building for and stronger engagement with LRGAs in partner countries, as key intermediaries, represents an opportunity and added value for broader, more effective LRG engagement within the EU framework and initiatives.



Involvement of LRGs and LRGAs in the EU international cooperation framework, and especially in the Global Gateway strategy, is still uneven and rather limited

Greater engagement with the partner country's LRGs and LRGAs within the EU's international cooperation policy framework, including the Global Gateway strategy, can contribute to sustainable and coherent localisation of policy actions and investments (PLATFORMA, 2024, 2025, 2026). The findings of this study show that 57.5% of EUDs surveyed in 2025 (or 23 out of 40) engage with the partner country's LRGs and/or LRGAs under the NDICI-Global Europe. Furthermore, 20% of EUDs (or 8 out of 40) work with LRGs and LRGAs in some way under the Global Gateway strategy, while 25% (or 10 out of 40) EUDs stated that they are planning to do so.

The EUDs pointed out that the discontinuation of a thematic budget line for LRGs has reduced opportunities for engagement. Without having an adequate framework for working with LRGs, it is increasingly difficult for EUDs to find ways of stepping up their involvement. Importantly, as many as 69.2% of the EUDs covered in this study (or 27 out of 39) consider that having a specific budget line for working with LRGs would be helpful. In this regard, the EUDs would welcome support in the form of technical assistance and grants, followed by flexible financing instruments.



Other reasons or obstacles for engaging with LRGs mentioned by the EUDs surveyed in 2025 largely correspond to those identified in the 2021 survey (PLATFORMA, 2021). These include low (or a lack of) prioritisation of cooperation with LRGs in practice, no reference to decentralisation in the MIPs, insufficient or limited EUD human resources and administrative capacities to engage with LRGs and in the decentralisation process, and the specific characteristics of the partner-country context (for example, a high degree of centralisation or complex political situation).

Overall, a clear multi-level governance framework and funding streams for LRGs would facilitate EUDs' work with them, as well as their effective and systematic involvement in the EU international cooperation framework and Global Gateway strategy, thus contributing to the localisation and sustainability of EU initiatives in partner countries. Moreover, the strengthening of EUDs' capacities and awareness on engaging with LRGs and LRGAs is a relevant prerequisite for meaningful and systematic involvement and consultations with LRGs/LRGAs. Providing EUDs with clearer policy guidelines, stronger programming requirements and dedicated resources to integrate territorial dimensions into EU cooperation policies and initiatives would be beneficial.

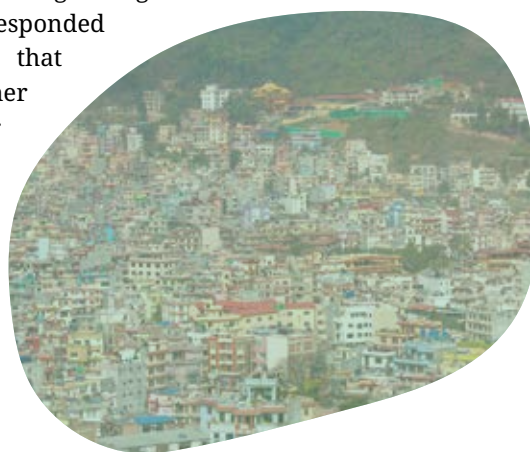
Greater engagement of LRGs and LRGAs can be advantageous in a fragile context

With growing fragility and instability challenges worldwide (see OECD, 2025c), many EUDs (18 out of 40, or 45%) surveyed in this study operate in fragile settings. The majority of these EUDs pointed to a multi-faceted fragility status in the partner country, involving a combination of several aspects of fragility. This frequently involves political, security and social fragility, followed by economic and environmental fragility. In line with the OECD (2025a, pp. 72-75) peer review and recommendations, it is important that the EU remains engaged in such a context, including through EUDs, and that it use the instruments, programmes and expertise available to pave the way for sustainable development. Some EUDs surveyed in this study pointed to the importance of adapting Global Gateway approaches in cases with complex settings and high exposure to fragility.

76.4% of EUDs that said they are operating in fragile contexts (13 out of the 17 that responded to this survey question) consider that engagement with LRGs in the partner country would facilitate their work. The case study vignettes on Guatemala and Madagascar offer practical insights in this regard, with the former emphasising the added value of close cooperation with LRGAs ('mancomunidades')

and the latter highlighting the territorial approach as an efficient way of working and achieving results in a fragile context.

Considering that, in a fragile setting, cooperation with national governance structures is often difficult, opportunities for working through and with LRGs are essential. LRGs often play a key role in identifying priorities, addressing urgent needs and ensuring the continuation of local public service delivery in fragile settings, as highlighted in the conclusions of the Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum 2025 (European Commission, 2026a, pp. 14-15). In some contexts, LRGs are therefore among the most resilient institutions that can provide continuity and help build trust and social cohesion. Programmes and engagement strategies for strengthening and supporting LRGs in fragile settings, including through greater EUD engagement with them, require context-specific approaches and flexible instruments.



DDC contributes to the achievement of both local and EU international cooperation objectives, yet it remains largely underused

Leveraging DDC as a modality can promote alignment of both local development goals and EU international cooperation objectives (European Commission, 2026b; PLATFORMA 2026). The conclusions of the Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum 2025 (European Commission, 2026a, pp. 11-12) highlighted DDC as an effective modality which can contribute to the scaling up of EU initiatives.

The Zambia case study vignette provides two concrete examples of effective utilisation of DDC. The first involves cooperation between the international network CLGF and the Zambian national association of LRGs (LAGZ), which focused on supporting local governance and sustainable local development strategies and plans through capacity building and peer-learning activities. This cooperation has contributed to the successful advancement of decentralisation efforts in Zambia. The second example is cooperation between Zambian and German water utility companies as part of the NEWZA Global Gateway project. This demonstrates one of the effective ways of leveraging DDC for localising Global Gateway investments, with citizens as the beneficiaries of an improved local public service delivery by LRGs in the partner country.

While infrastructure financing is a key component, peer-to-peer partnership and cooperation between the Zambian and German water utility companies strengthen the institutional and managerial capacities of local service providers, thus creating effects beyond individual project output. This can serve as a model for other LRGs and water utility companies scaled up under the NEWZA programme.

Other examples of DDC provided in this study demonstrate the vital role of partnerships between LRGs (as illustrated by examples in Cabo Verde, The Gambia and Indonesia) and with LRGAs and

their international cooperation branches/agencies/departments as key intermediaries (as illustrated by examples in Ethiopia and Mauritania). These provide effective ways of developing structures for cooperation that build on EU-funded projects and other initiatives.

Notwithstanding these examples of the added value of DDC, just 20 out of the 40 EUDs surveyed in 2025 stated that they are aware of cooperation between European and partner-country LRGs and LRGAs. These results are significantly lower than the 2021 survey, when 41 out of the 53 EUDs surveyed stated that they were aware of such cooperation, although they were not actively involved or informed (PLATFORMA, 2021).

Successful examples of DDC partnerships and projects thus require stronger emphasis and better visibility. Along with greater awareness raising for EUDs, mapping of existing successful DDC partnerships and initiatives would allow further exploration of their potential for replication, facilitating LRGs' participation in and their contribution to the localisation of EU initiatives (such as the Global Gateway). It could also facilitate the exploration of collaboration with LRGs and LRGAs in partner countries. Exploring potential synergies and complementarities between EU Member States' development cooperation agencies, LRGs, LRGAs and their international cooperation entities represents an opportunity to enhance the coherence, reach and

impact of EU development cooperation and the Global Gateway. Further strengthening of links between and engagement of EUDs and LRGs and LRGAs would help to effectively leverage these opportunities in practice. Moreover, greater awareness raising and targeted capacity building for European LRGs and LRGAs related to effective localisation of the Global Gateway and its components (such as the 360-degree approach), as well as opportunities

to link their own activities with EU initiatives, would be beneficial.



Targeted training and support for EUDs can contribute to their effective work with LRGs and LRGAs

Finally, working with LRGs in partner countries requires thorough context-specific knowledge, as well as skills and awareness of the instruments available for implementing the territorial approach towards development. To support EUDs in international development cooperation projects and initiatives, the EU offers a wide range of training packages and support instruments, such as the TALD Facility, TAIEX and UDTF.

The findings of this study show that just 12 out of 40 EUDs (or 30%) received support or training on how to work with LRGs. Six other EUDs indicated they are planning to seek such support. These results are similar to those of the 2021 survey, which showed that 32% of the EUDs surveyed received such training (PLATFORMA 2021).

The EUDs that received support or training welcomed the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the decentralisation process and effective ways of collaborating with LRGs, including by applying the different approaches and tools available, which are adapted to the context they operate in. The Madagascar case study vignette illustrates the concrete benefits of TALD support.

Going forward, the EUDs surveyed in this study expressed an interest in receiving support from TALD, TAIEX and UDTF to strengthen their engagement with LRGs. Access to specialised training, guidance and support could enable EUDs to give greater consideration to and include the local dimension and perspectives in programming, as well as in initiatives such as the Global Gateway. The conclusions of the Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum 2025 (European Commission, 2026a, p. 21) also underlined the need for enhanced operational support for EUDs, including through capacity building and practical guidance on engaging in territorial development.

Further strengthening of EUDs' capacities and expertise in working with LRGs and LRGAs, accompanied by clear guidance on how to involve LRGs and LRGAs and incorporate the territorial aspect in development actions, would contribute to more effective and sustainable development cooperation, making full use of people-centred and place-based approaches at the local level.



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List of Figures

Figure 1: How would the EU Delegation assess the decentralisation process in the partner country?	22
Figure 2: Is the EU Delegation supporting decentralisation in the partner country?	23
Figure 3: What forms of assistance does the EU Delegation use to work on decentralisation with LRGs in the partner country?	23
Figure 4: Is the EU Delegation working with LRGs or LRGAs in the partner country under the NDICI-Global Europe?	24
Figure 5: Is the EU Delegation working with LRGs or LRGAs in the partner country under the Global Gateway?	24
Figure 6: Is the EU Delegation operating in a fragile context?	26
Figure 7: Please indicate which fragile context the EU Delegation is operating in.	26
Figure 8: Would engagement with LRGs in the partner country facilitate the EU Delegation work in the fragile context?	27
Figure 9: How did the EU Delegation adapt to the European development cooperation instruments and initiatives (NDICI-Global Europe, Global Gateway, Team Europe Initiatives)?	29
Figure 10: Does the EU Delegation consider that a specific budget line would further help to engage with LRGs in the partner country?	29
Figure 11: What kind of support would encourage the EU Delegation to engage with LRGs in the partner country?	30
Figure 12: Is the EU Delegation aware of any European LRGs or their entities having already cooperated with partner country LRGs and/or any LRGAs?	30
Figure 13: Did the EU Delegation seek support/training of the personnel on how to work with LRGs (such as from the TALD – Territorial Approach to Local Development Facility support)?	34
Figure 14: Which existing types of support would the EU Delegation be interested in to work more with LRGs?	35



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