

# Mindcraft

Bridging and Mapping Knowledge  
Gaps in Decentralised Cooperation

## Country Profile on decentralised development cooperation



**#5 FRANCE**

# Abbreviations

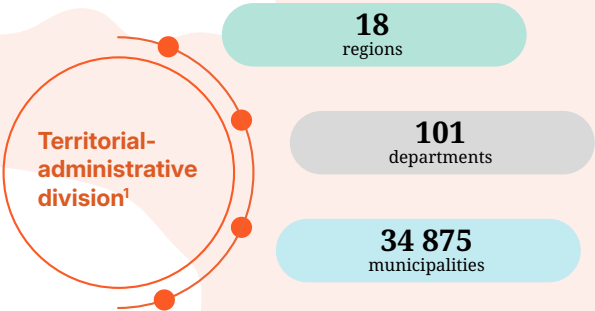
AFCCRE  
AFD  
AIMF  
CEMR  
CICID  
CIRMA  
CGCT  
CNCD  
CUF  
DAC  
DCTCIV  
D(D)C  
FICOL  
GDP  
LRGs  
MEAE  
ODA  
OECD  
RRMAs  
SDGs

French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions  
French Development Agency  
International Association of Francophone Mayors  
Council of European Municipalities and Regions  
Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development  
Inter-Regional Conference of Multi-Stakeholder Regional Networks  
General Code for Local Authorities  
National Commission for Decentralised Cooperation  
United Cities France  
Development Assistance Committee of the OECD  
Delegation for Local Authorities and Civil Society of the MEAE  
Decentralised (development) cooperation  
Local Authorities Financing Facility of the AFD  
Gross Domestic Product  
Local and Regional Governments  
Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs  
Official Development Assistance  
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  
Multi-Stakeholder Regional Networks  
Sustainable Development Goals



## Data

Form of state structure  **Unitary state**



Population<sup>2</sup> **68 635 943** 

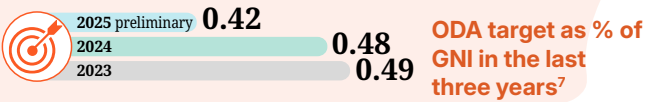
Geographical size<sup>3</sup> **638 475 km<sup>2</sup>** 

GDP per Capita<sup>4</sup> **€37 800**  
EU average: €38 100 

EU membership<sup>5</sup> **since 1958** 

OECD DAC membership **since 1960** 

 **0.7**  
(UN target: 0.7) **ODA target as % of GNI<sup>6</sup>**



 **decreasing** **Trends in total ODA**

 **24** **Seats<sup>8</sup> in the European Committee of the Regions**

 **1** (French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – AFCCRE) **CEMR members<sup>9</sup> in France**

 **4** (AFCCRE, Cités Unies France – CUF<sup>10</sup>, City of Paris, International Association of French-speaking Mayors – AIMF<sup>11</sup>) **PLATFORMA partners in France**

<sup>1</sup> CodeGeo – Official Geographic Code 2026  
<sup>2</sup> France – EU country | European Union  
<sup>3</sup> France – EU country | European Union  
<sup>4</sup> France – EU country | European Union  
<sup>5</sup> France – EU country | European Union  
<sup>6</sup> OECD Data Explorer • DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private)  
<sup>7</sup> France (EN)  
<sup>8</sup> France | European Committee of the Regions  
<sup>9</sup> <https://afccre.org/fr>  
<sup>10</sup> [www.cites-unies-france.org](http://www.cites-unies-france.org)  
<sup>11</sup> [www.aimf.asso.fr](http://www.aimf.asso.fr)

# 1. Decentralised development cooperation (DDC) framework in France

## 1.1. Framework defining engagement in DDC

France's development policy, as a pillar of foreign policy, is defined by the [Programming Law No. 2021-1031 of 4 August 2021 on Inclusive Development and Combating Global Inequalities](#) and strategically guided by the [2025 Decisions by the Presidential Council for International Partnerships](#), reaffirming 10 political objectives of France's international partnerships defined in 2023 (OECD 2026a, p.1).

The mentioned Law has also further strengthened LRGs' role in development cooperation (for an overview of legal developments see OECD 2026b, pp.109-110). Art. L. 1115-1 to L.1115-7 of the [General Code for Local Authorities \(CGCT\)](#), as amended, provide a legal basis for LRGs external action. The Art. L. 1115-1 stipulates that in line with France's international commitments, French LRGs and their associations *"can implement or support any annual or multi-year international cooperation, development aid or humanitarian action"*. Where appropriate, such cooperation or activities are formalised through an agreement with the partner LRG, specifying the purpose of planned actions and the estimated financial contributions. This is then submitted to the State representative for review (Art. L. 1115-1). Besides their own general budget, French LRGs may dedicate up to 1% of resources allocated to the budgets for services of water and sanitation and distribution of electricity and gas (Art. L. 1115-1-1), waste management (Art. L. 1115-2) and transport (Art. L. 1115-3) to finance international cooperation activities in those respective sectors. French LRGs and their associations are required to report<sup>12</sup> on their international development cooperation activities in line with the Art. L. 1115-6. This reporting is also a condition for obtaining co-financing by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE).

Overall, France's model tends to take a comprehensive view of decentralised cooperation by LRGs. While the Programming Law of 4 August 2021 requires quantification of the LRGs' contribution to the official development assistance (ODA) of France, the Art. L. 1115-1 of the CGCT encompasses all relationships between French and partner LRGs (Interview 26 January 2026). According to MEAE, LRGs [external activities](#) include cooperation projects between French and partner LRGs of any nature, and can take the form of twinning, cooperation agreement or project-based cooperation.

<sup>12</sup> For more details on ODA reporting by French LRGs see: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-en-action/contribuer-a-une-mondialisation-durable-et-equilibree/mener-des-actions-de-cooperation-decentralisee/aide-publique-au-developpement-apd-des-collectivites/rapports-annuels-sur-l-aide-publique-au-developpement-des-collectivites>

## 1.2. Key actors involved in DDC

Development cooperation policy in France involves different actors (see OECD 2026a, p. 26). It is steered by the Presidential Development Council, while the **Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID)** sets the overall framework for development cooperation. The MEAE and the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty have responsibilities in the domain of development policy. The main implementer of French development policy is the **AFD Group**, consisting of French Development Agency (AFD), Expertise France, and Proparco (ibid.).

Within MEAE, the **Delegation for Local Authorities and Civil Society (DCTCIV)** is dedicated to supporting LRGs in their international cooperation. It is doing so in various ways, from organising calls for proposals and programmes to promote territorial expertise, providing advice, to contributing to the drafting of legal texts and improving the procedures for D(D)C. Moreover, DCTCIV promotes networking and LRGs' connection to the major international events, such as the United Nations Climate Change Conference and a side event dedicated to LRGs during G7 meetings<sup>13</sup>, and it facilitates connection between LRGs (and their D(D)C activities) with French Embassies, forums of parliamentary diplomats, and bilateral forums (Interview 26 January 2026). DCTCIV has also published an **Operational Guide for Decentralised Cooperation** in 2020, with practical information for the French LRGs international engagement.

Regions in France have an important role regarding internationalisation of territorial economies. There are diplomatic advisers assigned to regional prefectures, who act as a link between regional affairs and MEAE, including hosting foreign delegations (Interview 26 January 2026). Since 2016, they assist the prefects in international matters and support LRGs in their international efforts (Pougnaud 2020, p.28).

French LRGs have legally recognised mandate to engage internationally, while coordination within the established forums (see Section 2.3) facilitates agreement on priorities between the central Government and LRGs (Pougnaud 2020, pp. 20, 41). According to **MEAE data**, French decentralised cooperation involved more than 4,700 LRGs with nearly 4,000 D(D)C projects and 6,700 twinnings across 138 countries in 2020. A study by CIRMA (2024) about French LRGs<sup>14</sup> external action highlighted their active and diverse engagement, which tends to be long-term, driven by international solidarity, and frequently carried out through D(D)C.

LRGs networks and associations are important actors in D(D)C. For example, the **Cités Unies France (CUF)** is a network of French LRGs that are active internationally and engaged in D(D)C. CUF's work is organised around geographic<sup>15</sup> and thematic<sup>16</sup> areas of French LRGs presence and their D(D)C activities to avoid duplication as well as to raise awareness of LRGs and explore potential complementarities. CUF's cooperation with MEAE is considered important for facilitating reporting and monitoring, sharing of good practices related to D(D)C, and for providing MEAE with more context on the ground based on LRGs feedback (Interview 22 May 2025). Moreover, **The French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE)**, a national association of the French LRGs, supports its members in navigating the procedures, activities, and events within the European dimension. AFCCRE's work is organised around 15 **fields of activity**, enabling members to participate in dedicated commissions and established bilateral working groups with other national LRGs in Europe. AFCCRE also provides training on different EU-related topics relevant for LRGs.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, see the latest meeting of mayors and local leaders in Nancy, France (2-4 June 2026) ahead of the G7 leaders meeting, which was the first meeting since the cities' recognition as an official G7 engagement group, the Urban 7: **Urban7 2026: Cities Enter the G7 Process – City Diplomacy Lab**. See the Nancy Declaration for details on how cities plan to use their new G7 status: **The Nancy Declaration: Cities as the Foundation of Global Resilience – City Diplomacy Lab**

<sup>14</sup> The study is based on survey responses from 122 LRGs across 8 regions in France and 50 interviews

<sup>15</sup> There are following country-groups: Sub Saharan Africa (Madagascar, Mauritania, Senegal), Latin America and the Caribbean, North America (Argentina, Haiti, United States), Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam), Europe (Armenia), Mediterranean (Algeria, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia)

<sup>16</sup> Gender, climate and environment, youth and education for citizens and international solidarity, crises and rehabilitation, economic development and international and European action of local authorities

**Regional multi-stakeholder networks** (RRMA) are platforms that gather LRGs, civil society actors, and relevant stakeholders in education, health and research as well as private sector. Related to D(D)C, they provide support in different aspects or stages of cooperation projects between LRGs in France and partner countries. In the CIRMA study (2024, p.23), most of the surveyed LRGs indicated their RRMA and CUF as main venues for obtaining support related to their international engagement.

Finally, public operators and public bodies responsible for water, energy, waste and transport services can play a role through '1% schemes' for international cooperation. For example, **water agencies** can provide technical or financial support to projects for improving access to drinking water and sanitation. Cooperation on water resource management and adaptation to climate change, awareness-raising and training can be also included. The emergency assistance can be exceptionally provided in the event of a major natural disaster (see **the Activity Report 2019-2024**).

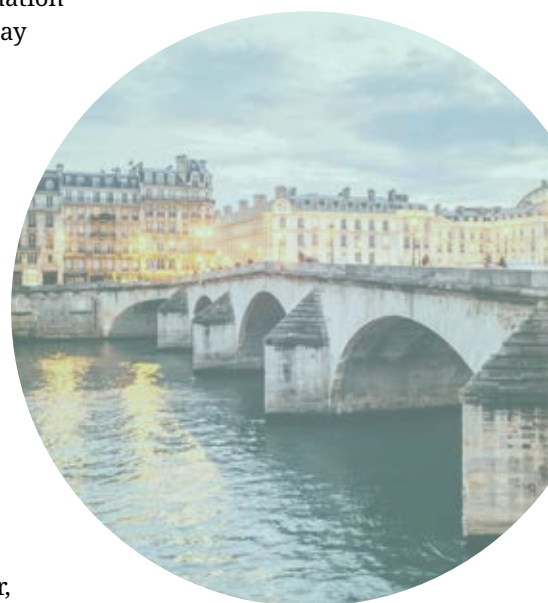
## 1.3. Coordination mechanisms of DDC activities

The main coordination mechanism of D(D)C activities is the **National Commission for Decentralised Cooperation (CNCD)**. This is a platform for dialogue and consultation between representatives of the relevant Ministries and LRGs and their associations (including CUF and AFCCRE), as well as relevant stakeholders whose activities are linked to LRGs' external actions or the French-speaking world<sup>17</sup>. The CNCD coordination allows for sharing information on D(D)C and identifying complementarities and synergies (Interview 22 May 2025). Through the CNCD coordination, relevant Ministries also receive feedback to gauge the situation on the ground (Interview 26 January 2026). The CNCD has developed the French Atlas of Decentralised Cooperation, an online database of the French LRGs' D(D)C projects.

Furthermore, the **National Council for Development and International Solidarity** is a consultation and deliberation forum of a wide range of stakeholders active in development cooperation and international solidarity, including representatives of LRGs and their associations, RRMA, NGOs, academia, and trade unions<sup>18</sup>. The consultation and discussion within this forum cover various aspects of development cooperation and the orientation of French development policy.

RRMA provide mechanisms for exchange among various actors and stakeholders at the regional level who are engaged internationally. Moreover, RRMA have their joint platform, the **network of regional multi-stakeholder networks (CIRMA)**, which facilitates and promotes cooperation between RRMA.

CUF provides venues for coordination through its country groups. Their regular meetings allow for greater visibility and organisation of D(D)C initiatives as well as for strengthening the complementarity of international cooperation efforts between LRGs and MEAE. Also, the events called 'Assises' are bilateral meetings on D(D)C between French and specific partner country LRGs aimed at defining common strategic orientations, thereby contributing to stronger coordination.



<sup>17</sup> See a complete list of members: [composition\\_cncd-sept\\_2025.pdf](#)

<sup>18</sup> See a complete list of members: [membres-du-cndsi\\_avril-2026.pdf](#)

## 1.4. Specific programmes supporting DDC activities

MEAE via DCTCIV financially supports international cooperation projects of French LRGs of all sizes and of their associations through calls for proposals (see Section 2.6). There are various calls for proposals, which can be general, thematic, geographic or bilateral. Moreover, through the **EX-PECT programme**, the DCTCIV funds short territorial expertise missions, following the initial shared interest between French and partner country LRGs.

CUF has a scheme **Support System for Local Authorities' International Action (DCOL)**, which facilitates provision of technical expertise to French LRGs related to their international engagement since 2018. Through DCOL calls for expression of interest, LRGs can request support in preparing their international action strategy, international cooperation projects or for integrating climate dimension into their international activities. According to available data, 12 DCOL calls were organised so far, with 56 French LRGs receiving consultants' support in developing or updating 42 international action strategies and 19 cooperation projects.

Additionally, CUF supports LRGs engaged in D(D)C through training programmes. For example, the immersion training programme on the topic of **territorial diplomacy** aims to strengthen the capacities of local representatives in international relations, especially the newly elected ones (Interview 22 May 2025).

At the regional level, many RRMAAs offer trainings and provide support to LRGs related to different aspects of their international cooperation (Pognaud 2020). These can include a tailor-made technical or strategic assistance to LRGs, but also disseminating information about the funding opportunities, and facilitating exchange between LRGs (see CIRMA 2024, p. 25).

The **'Territoires Volontaires'** programme, launched by the French platform for international volunteering and solidarity – **France Volontaires** and supported by MEAE, should be mentioned. This programme helps French LRGs to mobilise volunteers, especially young people, in support of their international actions thus reinforcing international mobility and involvement in D(D)C projects.

In case of crisis, specific schemes aimed at facilitating French LRG action abroad exist as well. For example, CUF can open the **Solidarity Fund** to help partner country LRGs affected by the crisis. Through this scheme, French LRGs that have responded to the call for donations jointly decide on intervention activities and follow their implementation. Furthermore, MEAE has a dedicated **External Action Fund for Local Authorities (Faceco)** through which French LRGs can provide emergency financial assistance in response to humanitarian crises abroad.

## 1.5. Modalities, activities, and focus areas of DDC

Development cooperation efforts in France were previously oriented towards **priority partner countries**<sup>19</sup> but following **the CICIP conclusions of 2023** such listing has been discontinued, focusing instead on the target to allocate 50% of the bilateral financial effort towards the least developed countries. 10 policy objectives of French development cooperation as defined by the Presidential Development Council (see Section 1) cover main areas of cooperation. The OECD report (2026a, p.11, 17) showed that France's bilateral ODA in 2024 focused on partner countries in Africa, with the largest part directed towards social infrastructure and services.

According to MEAE (2025, p.11), 84 partner countries benefited from French LRGs' ODA in 2024. Geographically, French LRGs cooperation focuses on Africa, with Senegal, Madagascar and Benin being top recipients of the French LRGs' ODA in 2024 (ibid., p.2). While there was a long-term cooperation focus on West Africa, due to the challenges in relations between France and Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, many French LRGs are no longer able to maintain their partnerships in these countries. Some LRGs are orienting towards other partners, for example in Senegal, Benin, Togo or Cameroon and there might be more established partnerships in the future (Interview 22 May 2025). Besides, French LRGs cooperate with partners in Morocco, Lebanon and Palestine (ibid.; CIRRMA 2024).

Following Russia's war of aggression, cooperation with Ukraine is also emphasised (Interviews 22 May 2026; 27 May 2026). MEAE data (2025, p.2) indicated Ukraine among top 10 recipients of the French LRGs' ODA in 2024.

Finally, cooperation with partners in Europe, and the Global North more broadly, is prominent. The CIRRMA study (2024) revealed a high number of French LRGs partnerships with their German, Italian and British counterparts. Also, French LRGs are increasingly turning towards economic collaboration with partners in Japan, US and Canada (Interview 26 January 2026).

Regarding areas of cooperation, water and sanitation are particularly in focus. MEAE data (2025) show that the highest share of the French LRGs' ODA in 2024 was directed to this sector, followed by agriculture and governance and civil society. According to the Operational Guide (Pougnaud 2020, p. 42) water and sanitation projects tend to be emphasised as the mentioned '1% scheme' facilitates mobilisation of funds through the sectoral budget for water and through the involvement of water agencies as well as given the importance of access to water and sanitation for quality of life. Additionally, activities related to culture and heritage, citizens education and international solidarity frequently form part of D(D)C of the French LRGs (CIRRMA 2024).

Turning to modalities of cooperation, the CIRRMA study (2024) highlighted a diversity of approaches among French LRGs. It developed a typology of five models of their international cooperation, including humanitarian and solidarity-oriented cooperation, social cohesion initiatives and cultural cooperation, youth and mobility, technical cooperation for achieving the SDGs, and cooperation promoting economic activities and territorial attractiveness (for an overview see CIRRMA 2024, p. 86).

Overall, the following developments in cooperation approaches of the French LRGs are noted from a practical perspective. In the beginning, decentralised cooperation in France largely followed a classic

<sup>19</sup> For example, the CICIP conclusions of 2018 defined 19 priority countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, Chad, Togo

twinning style approach, where the political aspect featured prominently (Interview 22 May 2025). Over time, technical aspects, including capacity building, exchange of expertise, and implementation of projects, have been increasingly integrated and emphasised. Due to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the changing geopolitical context, the political aspect tends to come to the fore again as local elected representatives increasingly articulate their position related to peace, dialogue, and democracy in their international actions. This creates opportunities to emphasise both political and technical aspects in cooperation and project implementation with partners (ibid.).

## 1.6. Financial scheme for DDC

France is among OECD countries **decreasing their ODA**. According to the OECD report (2026a, p.6), France's ODA decreased in 2025 and represents 0.42% of GNI.

French LRGs contribute to the overall ODA of France. According to MEAE data (2025, p.2), the French LRGs' ODA in 2024 amounted EUR 199.6 million, which is an increase compared to 2023. The refugee costs are the main factor of such development. The amount of French LRGs' ODA excluding refugee costs was EUR 50.2 million in 2024, which represents a decline of 20% compared to 2023 (amounting EUR 62.8 million). Overall, the main contributors to French LRGs' ODA are regions with EUR 18.4 million, excluding refugee costs (ibid.).

Generally, international cooperation projects and activities of French LRGs are primarily financed by their own general budget and the mentioned '1% schemes' through which they can dedicate up to 1% of their sectoral budgets for water and sanitation, energy, waste management and transport for international cooperation related to those sectors. Since only LRGs can initiate the process, mobilisation of any other funding sources, regardless of their amount, is considered as complementary (Pougnaud 2020, p. 22).

Several co-financing schemes for international cooperation of French LRGs exist. The DCTCIV financially supports LRGs implementation of international cooperation projects through calls for proposals, which are the main financial tool. These calls for proposals align with priorities of France. They are open to LRGs of all sizes (municipalities, inter-municipal bodies, departments, regions), LRGs associations, and RRMAAs. The financing of D(D)C projects can range between EUR 5,000 and EUR 200,000 per year (for projects of one to three years). To be eligible for co-financing through this scheme, it is important that LRGs have sound public finances and the prefect gives an opinion on the local finances (Interview 26 January 2026). Besides, the EXPE-CT programme supports exchange and sharing of expertise of accredited French LRGs and their partner LRGs through the short-term mission.

For large scale, multiannual projects with substantial investments, AFD grant schemes are available. Through **the Local Authorities Financing Facility (FICOL)**, AFD is supporting DDC initiatives of French LRGs since 2014. LRGs of all sizes and their associations can apply to the call for ideas. Proposed projects need to take place in the partner country included on the OECD DAC list of ODA recipients. The financing of the projects ranges from EUR 200,000 to EUR 1.5 million, with the contribution of at least 30% from the French and partner country LRGs and any other project partners or donors (Pougnaud 2020, p. 24). So far, 101 projects have been co-funded through FICOL, supporting 64 French LRGs with EUR 72 million, according to **available data**. Accompanying the project-based FICOL scheme, the 'programmatic FICOL' exists since 2019 (Pougnaud 2020, p. 25). It is intended for LRGs that have already benefited from the FICOL funding and follow a programme-based approach to their DDC with partner LRGs in multiple countries or across multiple regions within the same partner country. The financing of projects within this component ranges from EUR 600,000 to EUR 1.5 million (ibid.).

## 2. Enabling factors for DDC and future developments

Enabling legal framework, different available tools for supporting D(D)C activities and support from the central Government/MEAE are some of the enabling factors for D(D)C in France's model. French LRGs' competence is recognised, and the established legal framework enables them to conduct international cooperation and assume the role of actors for development (Interviews 22 May 2026, 27 May 2026). Moreover, there is a range of tools to support D(D)C and French LRGs' international engagement, from technical support, training and knowledge sharing, strategic advising and networking to financial support. Apart from the big cities, here it is necessary to consider small municipalities as well as those that do not yet have experiences in D(D)C but would like to engage. Raising awareness about the opportunities for international activities among those LRGs remains important (Interview 22 May 2026). Finally, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of LRGs and D(D)C by MEAE (Interviews 22 May 2026, 27 May 2026). The emphasis of the LRGs' role as partners in France's overall international engagement as well as maintaining a high-level dialogue with MEAE is important (Interview 22 May 2026).

Several obstacles can be also identified. The changing geopolitical context and developments pose a challenge, notably cooperation constraints between France and Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. These developments are also affecting previously active D(D)C (Interviews 22 May 2026, 27 May 2026). The contestation of solidarity and international cooperation in the political discourse represents another obstacle (ibid.). The financial situation also plays a role. LRGs need to pay attention to their budgetary spending, and international partnerships and solidarity tend to be affected since they are not mandatory tasks (Interview 22 May 2025). At the same time, the project-based funding is becoming increasingly competitive with more requirements concerning the elaboration of D(D)C projects (Interview 27 May 2026). Finally, administrative procedures could be streamlined and IT tools and solutions for monitoring D(D)C as well as for partner search (to facilitate the process of finding and linking LRGs with similar characteristics) would be beneficial (Interview 26 January 2026). More broadly, reinforcement of the European perspective on D(D)C would be beneficial. This could potentially include greater connection between EU Member States and finding the ways of pooling resources with associations and organisations working on LRGs' international activities or eventually have a common search platform for partners or calls for proposals (ibid.).

# 3. Conclusions

Three features stand out in France's DDC model. First, an elaborated legal framework, which recognises the role and competences of LRGs in international cooperation and sets out obligations. French LRGs can engage in or support activities internationally, with their general budget and '1% schemes' providing ways to finance activities relating to international solidarity and cooperation. LRGs international engagement needs to be aligned with France's international commitments. Moreover, LRGs and their associations are required to report on their DDC, contributing to overall ODA of France. Second, the DCTCIV a special delegation within MEAE, is dedicated to supporting LRGs and D(D)C. It financially supports LRGs' international engagement through calls for proposals, collects and monitors data on co-financed DDC activities which are reported in France's ODA, provides advice and information and facilitates French LRGs' international presence and outreach through connection to major events and by liaising with the French embassies. Finally, LRG networks and associations as well as regional platforms (RRMAs) play an important role in supporting LRGs' international engagement whether through training, information and advice, or by providing venues for coordination. They also facilitate bringing LRGs' feedback to national and international arenas. Maintaining sufficient funding for these intermediary actors will be important for their operation and their effective contribution to the French D(D)C framework.

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