

## **A CONCISE OVERVIEW**

HOW EU MEMBER STATES' NATIONAL  
AND REGIONAL PROGRAMMES SUPPORT  
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS' DEVELOPMENT  
ACTIVITIES IN PARTNER COUNTRIES



Coordinated by VNG International

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Dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure, as Director of VNG International and as active partner of PLATFORMA, to present to you this study on decentralised development cooperation in the European Union (EU).

Over the past decade, decentralised development cooperation has been recognised and institutionalised in many European countries, and stimulated through dedicated programmes and funds. To provide an overview, VNG International has carried out a study on which EU member states (and closely associated countries) have national or regional programmes that finance decentralised development cooperation.

The research was carried out in the context of the CONNECT mechanism, which was developed and successfully piloted in 2016-2019 by VNG International and PLATFORMA. This flexible and light mechanism was developed based on our strong feeling that while a lot of activity is taking place in some member states, others still have few or no programmes or funding instruments for decentralised development cooperation, or that the options are decreasing.

By means of this research, for the purpose of which we have surveyed local government associations (LGAs) and regional governments in 26 European countries, this assumption can now be supported. I invite you to read the study and see in which 7 countries national financing programmes for decentralised development cooperation exist and in which 5 countries local governments can sometimes apply to national financing programmes for NGOs (with a slim chance of getting selected due to the vast competition). Lastly, it is also interesting to note that in 12 countries there are no programmes of dedicated funds at all.

This underlines that in order to continue the important cooperation between local governments, the EU and the broader international community should further increase access to (EU) instruments for work with local governments. I hope that the negotiations on the upcoming Multi-annual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027 provide momentum for new ideas and innovation, and for prolonging successful pilots, which were co-financed by the EU. Nevertheless, I would like to express my appreciation of the fact that the EU, in dialogue with LGAs, regional governments and several larger cities, united in PLATFORMA, has developed policies, as well as frameworks (TALD notably), aimed at strengthening local and regional government in EU partner countries and is making use of the expertise and political involvement of decentralised governments in the EU member states.

It is of great importance that the EU takes into account how European development policy continues to be complementary to the activities of the individual member states. Therefore, it is instrumental that the policy-makers and civil servants of the European Commission and Parliament know about the various arrangements of cooperation between the national governments and the decentralised governments within the member states in the field of development cooperation, and have insight in how local and regional governments give shape to their involvement in development cooperation in different ways per country. This research offers a recent overview of this.

This study also is a token of appreciation to all those employees of LGAs, regions, individual cities, as well as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the member states that have over the years stood for the recognition of more attention for capacity-building in democratic decentralised governments as an aim of development assistance, and for the role that fellow governments in the EU member states can play in this. Still today, this attention remains fragile and is not embraced by all policy-makers and civil servants. Nevertheless, the importance of the role of decentralised governments for the sustainable development of communities becomes more and more recognised, also from the perspective of NGOs. Good development policy should always be aimed at this. The colleague-to-colleague approach and the employment of European expertise are important instruments towards this. For decentralised governments, this requires that political support is continuously secured. It is therefore indispensable to have good national and EU programmes that recognise and facilitate this work.

**Peter Knip**  
Director of VNG International



ACCD	Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
AFCCRE	The French Association for the Council of Municipalities and Regions of Europe
AFLRA	Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities
AICCRE	The Italian Association for the Council of Municipalities and Regions of Europe
AICS	Italian National Agency for cooperation to development
AIMF	International Association of French-speaking Mayors
ALAL	Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania
ANCI	Italian Associations of Municipalities
BMZ	German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
GIZ	German Development Agency
CAHE	Humanitarian and Emergency Aid Committee
CIC	Programme de Coopération internationale Communale
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
CPMA	Central Project Management Agency
CUF	Cités Unies France
CzDA	Czech Development Agency
Danida	Danish International Development Assistance
DAECT	Delegation for the external action of local authorities
DCDPP	Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Programme
DEALS	Governance of Inclusive Green Growth in Cities
DFID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
EEA	European Economic Area
ELL	Association Estonian Cities
EU	European Union
FEMP	Federation of Municipalities and Regions
FVS	Fons Valencia per la Solidaritat
GIS	Gemeentelijke Internationale Samenwerking
GNI	Gross National Income
ICEIDA	Icelandic International Development Agency

IDEAL	Inclusive Decisions At Local Level
ILCD	International Centre for Local Democracy
KDZ	Austrian Competence Centre and Knowledge Platform
KL	Local Government Denmark
KS	Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities
LALRG	Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments
Las	Local Authorities
LGA	Local Government Association
LGCP	Local Government Capacity Programme
LOGORep	Local Government Resilience Programme
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIC	Municipal International Cooperation
MPP	Municipal Partnership Programme
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities in Georgia
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of East Europe
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NSGCP	North-South Local Government Cooperation Programme
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SAIDC	Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SAMBAND	Icelandic Association of Local Authorities
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMO	Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic
SMP	Scotland Malawi Partnership
SYVICOL	Luxembourgish Association of Towns and Communities
UVCW	Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie
VNG International	Association of Netherlands Municipalities
VNG	Association of Netherlands Municipalities
VVSG	Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities
ZMOS	Association of Towns and Communities in Slovakia
ZMP	Association of Polish Cities





# CHAPTER 1

DECENTRALISED DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATION:  
LANDSCAPE AND AGENDA

# DECENTRALISED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: LANDSCAPE AND AGENDA

In the past decades, development cooperation of the European Union and its member states has undergone a process of rapid change that is still unfolding. Amongst many other influences, like new approaches, new analysis and developments in the partner countries, the field has changed due to new emerging donors such as the central and Eastern European countries, and an increasing activity of European local and regional governments in international cooperation. In several European countries, municipalities have been active in this field for over 25 years, and can therefore not be considered new actors. However, for national and supra-national governments it has not always been evident what role local and regional governments can play in development cooperation. It is only in the past decade that local governments have become further recognised as crucial stakeholders in the field of development cooperation.

The recognition of local governments' pivotal role in development cooperation is of great importance, because the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world – climate change, massive urbanisation, and challenges in sanitary and human security, food and water supply, education, social and economic turmoil – are felt most pressingly at the local level, placing a heavy burden and responsibility upon local and regional governments. Without action at this level, these challenges cannot be tackled. As the solutions to many of these transnational challenges rely on the implementation of international agendas by local and regional governments, local governments' profiles are more visible on the international agenda. This is increasingly being recognised by the international community. Successful implementation of key agendas such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris agreement (following COP 21 in Paris), and Habitat III are in large part dependent on local government implementation. This is confirmed by research by think-tank Adelphi and consultancy Urban Catalysts, which shows that implementation of 65% of SDG targets is at risk should local urban stakeholders not be assigned a clear mandate and role in the implementation process.<sup>1</sup>

In a 2013 Communication, the European Commission (EC) stated that centrally-led, top-down development policies and programmes cannot alone succeed in addressing the complexities of sustainable development and fighting poverty.<sup>2</sup>

It further concluded that although many central governments have attributed responsibilities to local governments in development processes, this political recognition has not always been accompanied by an adequate level of autonomy, capacity development and financial resources, leaving their empowerment incomplete. The EC affirmed that obstacles still need to be overcome in order to unlock the development potential of local governments. In this light, the EC wishes to invest more in empowering local and regional governments to play their part in contributing to the international agendas and in a territorial approach to development.<sup>3</sup> In line with the subsidiarity principle, in 2013 the EC recognised that local and regional governments, as the government tier closest to citizens, hold special institutional responsibilities in enhancing citizens' participation in decision-making, with the objectives of good governance and sustainable development at the local level.<sup>4</sup> The EC identified four priorities for EU support to local and regional governments and local and regional governments from partner countries:

- 1 Support to the decentralisation process;
- 2 Capacity development of local authorities;
- 3 Sustainable urbanisation;
- 4 Reinforcement of associations of local authorities.<sup>5</sup>

In EC's 2013 it was mentioned that the expertise and capacity of European local governments, as well as political and economic contacts between local governments, were insufficiently used to support the above-mentioned international agendas.<sup>6</sup> The New Consensus on Development, issued in 2017, spent less attention to local and regional governments but also repeated this point. The document also mentions, among many other things, that in order to achieve most of the Sustainable Development Goals and successfully implement the 2030 agenda, the EU and Member States need to also actively involve local and regional authorities and use decentralised cooperation as a tool to strengthen their cooperation with local and other sub-national authorities in EU partner countries.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that there is no need to start from scratch

in putting this expertise to use. There is already widespread activity among local and regional governments in the field called decentralised development cooperation, referring to partnerships between local governments in the field of official aid.<sup>8</sup>

The more traditional twinning partnerships which aimed at cultural exchanges to promote cultural understanding and peace, which have existed since the Second World War, have been followed up by multiple other types of cooperation in the past decades. Since the 1960s, a variety of solidarity partnerships that provide support after conflicts, crises or natural disasters were established. Since the 1980s, local and regional development partnerships with significant involvement of NGOs have emerged, as well as institutional development partnerships, aimed at capacity building in local governments, enabling them to deliver services effectively and transparently.<sup>9</sup> A solid network of activities in the field of decentralised development cooperation is thus already in place.

Many EU Member States have increasingly recognised and regulated these types of decentralised development cooperation as a part of their official cooperation framework, and have developed a myriad of programmes to support their local and regional governments in their efforts. In addition, the European Union in recent years has created several large-scale EU programmes and instruments to stimulate international cooperation of local and regional governments.<sup>10</sup> In the past years, instruments or programmes such as URBAL, CIUDAD and ARIAL were carried out and the

Covenant of Mayors initiative is still ongoing. However, a structural, innovative mechanism to address imminent requests and needs from local governments in partner countries and facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences between those and European local and regional governments, does not yet exist.

In order to support the coordinating role of the EC in decentralised development cooperation, it is essential to know which mechanisms that facilitate decentralised development cooperation already exist. The above-mentioned large-scale EU programmes and instruments are well known. Less known are the existing national and regional programmes that support such cooperation. It is therefore the aim of this study to provide an overview of the available national and regional programmes that stimulate, facilitate and finance decentralised development cooperation initiatives of local and regional governments in EU Member States and closely associated countries (Norway, Iceland and Switzerland). In providing this overview, it strives to showcase the possibilities offered to local and regional governments in these programmes as well as the challenges they pose. Ultimately, this overview will identify the opportunities for the EU to further stimulate decentralised development cooperation, and thereby create an enhanced impact in its overall development cooperation. In doing so, it will also show the added value of new EU programmes for decentralised development cooperation such as the CONNECT mechanism which was piloted between 2016-2019<sup>11</sup>.



CONNECT is a new and practical mechanism that was developed by VNG International and PLATFORMA, with the support of the European Commission. It provides practical and technical assistance for goal-oriented peer-to-peer partnerships, and captures and disseminates knowledge on specific challenges faced by local governments.

The main strength of CONNECT is its colleague-to-colleague

approach: it provides hands-on municipal employees with the possibility to hold exchanges with colleagues across the world and benefit from their experience, knowledge and skills. At the same time, he/ she can also offer her/his expertise to be put to good use in municipalities and regions around the world.

During the 2017-2018 pilot phase, CONNECT facilitated exchanges between municipal colleagues from Brazil, Cambodia, Colombia, Ghana, Iceland, Moldova, the Netherlands, and Spain.

<sup>1</sup> Adelphi, and Urban Catalyst. Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a successful New Urban Agenda. Brussels: Cities Alliance, 2015. <http://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/Opportunities%20for%20the%20New%20Urban%20Agenda.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, 'Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p2. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, 5

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, 'Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes', Communication from the Commission

to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p5. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> European Council, European Parliament, and European Commission, 'The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future'', Joint statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission (2017), (Brussels: General secretariat of the Council, 2017), p43. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, and K. Rebowska, Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences, (Business and Strategies Europe, 2013), <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/decentralised-cooperation/document/capitalisation-study-european-experiences-decentralised-cooperation>

<sup>9</sup> J. Bossuyt and R. Steenbergen, Development effectiveness at the local and regional level. Fostering synergies between local and regional governments and the EU in the post-Busan era, (Paris: PLATFORMA, 2013), <http://connectfordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Development-effectiveness-at-the-local-and-regional-level-PLATFORMA.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> I.e. DEAR (promoting development education and awareness raising), TAIEX (supporting supports public administrations with regard to the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation as well as facilitating the sharing of EU best practices), URBACT (an exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development).

<sup>11</sup> For more information: [www.connectfordevelopment.eu](http://www.connectfordevelopment.eu)





# CHAPTER 2

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY



## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

An important condition for developing the CONNECT<sup>11</sup> mechanism between 2016-2019, was to identify gaps and needs. Therefore an overview of which possibilities EU local and regional governments already have, with regard to receiving/finding financial support for their decentralised development activities, has been drawn up. Before entering into the findings of the study on this topic, this chapter will outline the definitions used for the purpose of this study. Consequently it will elaborate on the scope of the research and the methodology used.

### A. The concept of 'decentralised development cooperation'

It must be stated that there is no general consensus on the definition of 'decentralised development cooperation'. In the past decades, decentralised development cooperation has been defined as the practice of development cooperation managed by actors separate from central governments (such as civil society actors, local governments, universities).<sup>12</sup> In 2008, the European Commission used the concept of decentralised development cooperation 'to describe the publicly and privately funded aid provided by and through local authorities, networks and other local actors', thus using the term to refer to aid provided by local authorities and civil society actors.<sup>13</sup> In its 2007 Schapira Report, the European Parliament acknowledged that it is important 'to make a clear distinction between the specific role of local authorities and that of non-state actors, in terms of their sphere of competence, legitimacy and democratic control, experience in the management of local affairs and involvement in the implementation of public policies'.<sup>14</sup> This was underlined by the Committee of the Regions, which describes decentralised development cooperation as 'international cooperation led by European local authorities (as defined by the respective Member State's legislation) under the direction of their democratically elected executive and involving local stakeholders distinct from both central state government and civil society'.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years the focus has shifted from the wider definition, as the practice of development cooperation managed by actors different from central governments, to the more specific notion of partnership between local and regional governments in the field of

official aid.<sup>16</sup> In Agustí Fernández de Losada's 2013 'Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences', the European Commission defines decentralised development cooperation as the development cooperation between local authorities from Europe and local authorities from EU partner countries.<sup>17</sup> Fernández de Losada further defines it as the modality of cooperation in which local governments in European countries create cooperation relationships with their counterparts in EU partner countries, establishing partnership agreements focusing mainly on strengthening and enhancing their institutional and operational capacities.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this study this last definition shall be used.



### B. Scope

The definition of decentralised development cooperation as the development cooperation between local authorities from Europe and local authorities from EU partner countries, in which partnership agreements are established focusing mainly on strengthening and enhancing institutional and operational capacities of local government, fits the scope of this study. As stated above, the overview of available national and regional programmes given in this study is meant to define the field where the EU can provide valuable additional or complementary support in decentralised development cooperation with partners from outside the EU. The focus is on the support that national and regional governments offer to decentralised development cooperation, and as such this study does not take into account the many other actors (multilateral donors, NGOs)

that also work in the field of strengthening local governance and decentralisation processes. In the wide variety of available national and regional programmes that finance decentralised development cooperation, this study handles the perspective of local and regional governments that wish to engage in decentralised development cooperation with their foreign local government counterparts and maps the national financing opportunities they have. As such, intra-European programmes were not included in this study.<sup>19</sup> Thematically, this study is specifically aimed at the decentralised development cooperation activities of local and regional governments, rather than at development education, awareness raising, cultural exchanges or economic partnerships.

As stated above, although there are many well-known international and EU programmes and instruments that facilitate and finance the decentralised development cooperation initiatives of local and regional governments, the focus of this study is on national and, to a lesser extent, regional programmes that do so. In most of the surveyed countries, programmes for decentralised development cooperation are coordinated and financed on a national level. However, in some EU countries, no programmes exist on the national level. In those cases, a selection has been made of one or two regions that have regional programmes that facilitate and finance the decentralised development cooperation initiatives of local and regional governments. These cases should be seen as illustrations or examples. The overview of regional programmes is not meant to be exhaustive, but is meant to sketch the state of affairs of decentralised development cooperation in countries where no programmes exist on the national level.

In order to provide a comprehensive overview of the available national and regional programmes available in Europe, this study is focused on the EU Member States. Seeing as these are the countries able to make use of existing or future EU programmes and instruments, it was necessary to investigate the available programmes in these countries in order to define the niches for any future EU mechanisms. Additionally, the EEA countries Norway and Iceland have been included. These countries have exceptional and far-reaching partnership agreements with the EU that make them relevant partners to include in this study.<sup>20</sup>

### C. Methodology

In order to gather information on the national and regional programmes that stimulate, facilitate and finance the decentralised development cooperation initiatives of local or regional governments, the national associations of local governments in Europe have been contacted, as well as some regional governments. The associations have a unique position, as intermediary organisations between the local governments (their members) and the national governments. They are often well-informed and involved in programmes for decentralised development cooperation, as was also acknowledged by the EC in its 2013 Communication.<sup>21</sup> The EC recognises associations of local authorities as instrumental in achieving good governance and development outcomes at the local level. Associations of local authorities are in a unique position to link local concerns and priorities to national, regional and international debates, gaining prominence in the formulation and implementation of policies and agreements connected to the national and international development agenda.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, the local government associations were able to provide a wealth of information in response to the survey (for all case studies, and an overview of questions asked and interviews undertaken, please see the Annex: Case studies<sup>23</sup>). In total, national associations of local governments and/or regional governments of 26 countries responded to the survey. A total of eight interviews have taken place for additional information. Although case studies were written for the majority of the respondents, in cases where such information was not well-available (such as for Switzerland, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania), these countries were included only in the analysis.



<sup>12</sup> Fernández de Losada Passols, A. Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation for enhanced effectiveness and accountability. PLATFORMA, 2017. <http://plataforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PLATFORMA-CPMR-Study-New-generation-EN.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Local authorities: actors for development', Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2008), p3. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/lexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0626:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>14</sup> European Parliament Resolution of 15 March 2007 on local authorities and development cooperation.

<sup>15</sup> Committee of the Regions, Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Decentralised cooperation in the reform of the EU's development policy, (Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union, 2006), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52005IR0224>

<sup>16</sup> A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, and K. Rebowska, Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences, (Business and Strategies Europe, 2013), <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/decentralised-cooperation/document/capitalisation-study-european-experiences-decentralised-cooperation>.

A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, and K. Rebowska, Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences, (Business and Strategies Europe, 2013), <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/decentralised-cooperation/document/capitalisation-study-european-experiences-decentralised-cooperation>.

<sup>17</sup> A. Fernández de Losada, M. Barceló, and K. Rebowska, Study on capitalisation of European decentralised cooperation experiences, (Business and Strategies Europe, 2013), <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/decentralised-cooperation/document/capitalisation-study-european-experiences-decentralised-cooperation>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p7

<sup>19</sup> Therefore EU and inter-European programmes such as the Norway/EEA Grants programme shall not be included in this study, extensive though they may be.

<sup>20</sup> For purposes of clarity, the EU Member States and this group of countries will henceforth be referred to as the European countries.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p8. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> European Commission, Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p8. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Annex: case studies. How EU Member States' national and regional programmes support local governments' development activities in partner countries, VNG International and PLATFORMA, 2019. <https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/VNGI-PLATFORMA%20Annex%20case%20studies.%20How%20EU%20Member%20States%27%20national%20and%20regional%20programmes%20support%20local%20governments%27%20development%20activities%20in%20partner%20countries%20%2820.pdf>





# CHAPTER 3

AN ANALYSIS OF  
THE MAIN FINDINGS



## AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

In the context of the development of the CONNECT mechanism, VNG International conducted a survey among local government associations in the European countries to investigate the available national programmes, in the period from spring to winter 2017, that finance and facilitate the decentralised development cooperation activities of local governments. The specific findings of this survey, with detailed information on the available programmes, can be found in the individual case studies<sup>24</sup>. This present chapter opens with a concise overview of the motivations for and the types of decentralised development cooperation currently practised by European local and regional governments. Consequently, some overall results from the study will be presented.

### A. Motivation for involvement in decentralised development cooperation

In the majority of EU/EEA countries local and regional governments are involved in decentralised development cooperation. Their international partnerships and cooperation agreements were established and are being formed for various reasons: solidarity, historical, linguistic or cultural links; as a means to be involved in international relations or diplomacy; through the presence of migrant groups in European countries; through local governments' applications for partnerships in calls for proposals; and through participation in networks of local and regional governments. In addition, many new partnerships or cooperation agreements are for a large part economically motivated, as is exemplified by newly emerging links between European local and regional governments and their counterparts from emerging economic powers (such as Brazil, South Africa and China, as is notably the case for local governments in the United Kingdom). These partnerships often address development issues simultaneously, transferring experience from the European partner to the non-European partner.<sup>25</sup>

The reasons for local governments to become involved in decentralised development cooperation are manifold. Generally, many cooperation initiatives are based on mutual learning and exchange, aiming at true reciprocity which, especially during the recent economic depression which unfolded from 2008, has been an argument used to highlight the benefits of such cooperation to the European partner and its constituency. Reciprocity follows the idea that beside traditional arguments of reducing worldwide poverty and portraying solidarity, several benefits for the northern partner exist as well.<sup>26</sup>

Research by the University of Oslo has shown that on the individual local government staff level, themes such as awareness and global citizenship, cultural tolerance and understanding, international experience and competence, language proficiency and reflection on the own professional practice play an important role as well. On the organisational level, partnerships between local governments for development can contribute to strengthened human resources, access to other financial and technical cooperation sources, establishment of new institutional links, international visibility and a strengthened negotiating capacity. On the community level, it can lead to improved service delivery as a result of exchange of experiences/expertise; mutual understanding or the promotion of intercultural tolerance and understanding and strengthened social cohesion at the local level; and finally economic development, investment, trade and tourism.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>24</sup> Annex: case studies. How EU Member States' national and regional programmes support local governments' development activities in partner countries. VNG International and PLATFORMA, 2019. <https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/VNGI-PLATFORMA%20Annex%20case%20studies.%20How%20EU%20Member%20States%27%20national%20and%20regional%20programmes%20support%20local%20governments%27%20development%20activities%20in%20partner%20countries%20%2820.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> J. Bossuyt and R. Steenbergen, Development effectiveness at the local and regional level. Fostering synergies between local and regional governments and the EU in the post-Busan era. (Paris: PLATFORMA, 2013). <http://connectfordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Development-effectiveness-at-the-local-and-regional-level-PLATFORMA.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Data adapted from Tranberg Bjørndal, M. et al. (2012), as cited in J. Bossuyt and R. Steenbergen. Development effectiveness at the local and regional level. Fostering synergies between local and regional governments and the EU in the post-Busan era. (Paris: PLATFORMA, 2013). <http://connectfordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Development-effectiveness-at-the-local-and-regional-level-PLATFORMA.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem

### B. Types of decentralised development cooperation partnerships

Decentralised development cooperation has changed over the past few decades. From the results of the survey, several conclusions can be taken about the current types of decentralised development cooperation that European local and regional governments engage in. The most common types are twinning partnerships, solidarity partnerships, indirect cooperation through NGOs and institutional development partnerships.

Historically, twinning partnerships were very popular and, as many local government associations emphasised, they still are. However, the associations also emphasised that these are most often partnerships between EU partners rather than with partners outside of the EU. The study also showed that twinning partnerships usually have a strong traditional focus on cultural exchange rather than development cooperation. The Belgian (Flemish and Walloon) and Latvian cases deviate from this, as these countries have national programmes that support twinning partnerships to stimulate development cooperation.

Like twinning partnerships, solidarity partnerships that provide support after conflicts, crises or natural disasters have a long history. These partnerships can be ad hoc, or longer term in cases where the process of reconstruction and setting up of municipal services takes longer – for example when there is no effective or democratic central government in place. The Netherlands' LOGORep programme can be seen as an example of a partnership that provides support after crisis (see case study 'The Netherlands').

Local and regional governments can also be involved indirectly in decentralised development cooperation together with NGOs. In Spain, for example, the majority of mid- and large sized municipalities and regions have developed financial instruments to support their NGOs – and although this is not synonymous with the definition of decentralised development cooperation adopted above, local and regional governments do intend to improve the living conditions of citizens through these partnerships.<sup>28</sup> Similar partnerships can be found in Italy (see for example the Piedmont region, case study 'Italy') and in France. In Luxembourg, local governments can organise joint cooperation actions with NGOs, in which NGOs are the direct beneficiaries of the national government (see case study 'Luxembourg').

Finally, institutional development partnerships are aimed at capacity building in local governments, enabling them to deliver services effectively, accountably and transparently. This type of cooperation is based on a peer-to-peer (or colleague-to-colleague) approach in which technical advice is transferred between colleagues with a similar job. In the past few decades, this type of cooperation has become professionalised – in many countries these cooperation activities are coordinated on the national or regional level rather than by individual local authorities. The results of the survey have shown that these partnerships now exist all over Europe, in nearly all countries that were surveyed (Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Catalan Region and the Piedmont Region).

### C. Types of programmes for decentralised development cooperation within the scope of the study

Although this study focuses on the available national and regional programmes for decentralised development cooperation, it is important to emphasise that a large group of municipalities, towns, regions and cities carry out activities that are not supported by such programmes at all. Many local and regional governments finance their decentralised development cooperation activities from their own budgets – whichever of the above-mentioned types it may be. This is especially the case in Spain, Italy and France. Likewise, many European regions fund their own decentralised development cooperation activities in partner countries and sometimes even have their own development agencies, policies and budgets for international cooperation (as is the case in the German and Austrian Länder, the Spanish autonomous regions such as Valencia and Catalonia (see case study 'Spain') and the Flemish region (see case study 'Flanders')). In the same spirit, local and regional governments in Spain have created common funds (such as the Fons Català, described in case study 'Spain') in which they pool financial contributions from smaller and larger local governments in order to provide effective decentralised development cooperation.

Nonetheless, most programmes are coordinated nationally and financed by the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs. In several northern European countries the local government associations have a strong coordinating role in large-scale national programmes funded by the respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as is the case

<sup>28</sup> Fernández de Losada Passols, A. Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation for enhanced effectiveness and accountability. Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and PLATFORMA, 2017, p11. <http://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/PLATFORMA-CPMR-Study-New-generation-EN.pdf>





in Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium. In these countries local government associations negotiate with their national governments about funding for decentralised development cooperation programmes. Once these funds have been acquired, the local government associations will try to integrate individual municipalities and their expertise in the project design, where possible. The associations have a relatively substantial autonomy to develop their own programmes. They provide guidance to the local governments involved in their projects to make sure they achieve the best possible project results. A similar structure exists in Norway. Although the programmes, managed by the local government association for decentralised development cooperation with partners from outside the EU, is significantly smaller than the above-mentioned programmes and involves a very limited number of municipalities.

The large-scale Swedish, Dutch and Belgian programmes run by local government associations have been positively evaluated by external parties, showcasing the added value of local government participation in development cooperation. For example, the North-South study visits and the South-South exchanges under the Flemish Belgian GIS programme were deemed effective and valuable instruments of capacity building.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in VNG International's LGCP – the predecessor of the current IDEAL programme – the various approaches applied for capacity development (such as colleague-to-colleague approach and benchmarking) were consid-

ered to have advantages specific to the local context, were of high quality and were cost-effective.<sup>30</sup> The Swedish municipalities in the Municipal Partnership Programme were seen as having capabilities and experiences that are useful for municipalities and regions in cooperation countries, while at the same time, Swedish municipalities often found that partnerships with other countries build their own capacity.<sup>31</sup>

In France, Germany and Austria – where local and regional governments generally finance decentralised development cooperation initiatives from their own budgets – the programmes are generally smaller and the local government associations also play a smaller role. The associations usually spread the calls for participants in the programmes among their members and offer some assistance to participating local governments. However, they do not channel funds and are not the main coordinators of the programme – instead, programmes are primarily managed by agencies that are specialised in the capacity building of local governments, such as the Austrian KDZ Centre for Public Administration Research (KDZ) and the Deutscher Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Elsewhere, for example in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Catalan Region and the Piedmont region, local governments apply directly to calls for proposals issued by the

respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, without a large role for the local government associations as interlocutors. In the cases of Estonia, Slovakia and Poland, local government associations also apply to these programmes and involve local governments in them. In these countries and regions, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issues calls for proposals or projects to which local governments and/or their associations can answer. The role of the local government associations is limited in these programmes, except when they are the direct beneficiaries of the grants in which case they develop projects in which they involve local governments. Otherwise, the influence they have on the overall programme is limited.

A striking trend is that over the past decade, many local governments' activities in decentralised development cooperation have become pooled with the activities of civil society organisations such as NGOs in many countries. As a result, local governments and their associations often have to compete for funds with more experienced NGOs and associations in the field of development cooperation in tenders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Poland, a large majority of the available funds has been allocated to civil society actors in the past years.

In countries such as Norway and Finland, comprehensive international municipal cooperation programmes have recently been discontinued after negative evaluations, leaving municipalities with relatively little options to participate in decentralised development cooperation activities with non-EU partners unless they finance these from their own budgets. In the Norwegian case this was the case because the question of reciprocity between municipalities and the added value of bringing municipal equivalents together in specific activities were assessed to be problematic, and in the Finnish case because the evaluation ordered by the national government pointed at inefficient use of funds and the difficulty of measuring concrete results because of the fragmentation in the programme.<sup>32</sup> As stated above, the Norwegian local government association still manages a programme for decentralised development cooperation aimed at Eurasian countries, but this programme is much smaller than the earlier programme. In Finland, like in other countries mentioned above, local governments and their associations now have to compete with civil society actors in grant schemes. This reduces local government participation in decentralised development cooperation with non-EU partners to almost nil in the Finnish case, where the national government currently does not recognise the role of local governments in development cooperation. Because the chances for municipalities to attain funds are currently so small, Finland has been included as one of the countries with currently no programmes for decentralised development cooperation (see case study 'Finland').

## D. Volume and finances of the programmes

A large difference in terms of general volume and in what is financed for participating local governments can be witnessed from the results of the survey. The largest programmes in terms of volume that explicitly and uniquely involve local governments are the Swedish Municipal Partnership Programme (MPP) (€24.439.200, four years), the Netherlands' Inclusive Decisions At Local Level (IDEAL) (€17.500.000, five years), the Belgian Wallonia-Brussels Programme de Coopération internationale communale (CIC) (€13.327.010, five years), the Netherlands' Local Government Resilience Programme (LOGOReP) (€9.600.000, three years), the Belgian Flanders Programma voor Gemeentelijke Internationale Samenwerking (GIS) (€5.923.116, five years) and the Netherlands' Governance of Inclusive Green Growth in Cities (DEALS) (€4.900.000, five years). These are also the programmes that offer the largest grants to participating local governments and that ask for the least amount of co-financing. They also involve the largest numbers of local governments (i.e. 154 in the Swedish MPP, 48 and eighteen in the CIC and GIS programmes, and approximately 88 in the Flemish 'impulse subsidy', see below). The Czech programmes, which are also uniquely aimed at local and regional governments, and the Austrian BACID programme, that is aimed mostly at local and regional governments, have the most modest budgets of this category (BACID €180.000 for three years, the Czech programmes €58.700 and €125.900 annually) and involve fewer local governments (fourteen in the three-year course of BACID, three annually in both Czech programmes combined).

The national and regional programmes which work with calls for proposals and grant systems (i.e. co-financing), not uniquely directed at local governments but at civil society organisations as well, have much more limited budgets. These vary from an annual €5.800.000 and €2.000.000 to total volumes of €723.500, €300.000, €180.000 and €157.000 per year. It is important to note that because local and regional governments are not the only eligible organisations in these programmes, the large majority of funds either flows to other organisations than local and regional governments, resulting in low local and regional government participation (such as in Poland with an average of one local government and one association per year, three local governments in Estonia for the period 2016-2017, and Latvia with one local government association per year on average), and/or the grants available for local or regional governments have to be shared among many participating local governments (such as in Lithuania and the Piedmont region, with eighteen and twenty-five participants in the period 2016-2017).

For a detailed table of volumes, expenses and duration of the projects, see table 1 next page.

<sup>29</sup> E. Verhofstadt and L. Raeymaekers, *Eindevaluatie Federaal Programma Gemeentelijke Internationale Samenwerking (GIS) 2014 - 2016*, (Kessel: South Research, 2017), p7. <https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/Finale%20rapport%20-%20VVS%20-%20Eindevaluatie%20GIS%20Programma%202014%20-2016.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Dege Consult, *Mid-Term Evaluation Local Government Capacity Programme (LGCP) 2012-2016*. Final Synthesis Report October 2015, (Dege Consult, 2015), <http://www.vng-international.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/LGCP-MT-Eval-Executive-Summary-Final-Oct-23.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Oxford Research, *Evaluation of ICLD*, (Stockholm: Oxford Reserach, 2015), p1. <https://oxfordresearch.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Oxford-Research-Evaluation-of-ICLD-July-2015.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> J. Holm-Hansen, *Norway's Municipal International Cooperation. Results Achieved and Lessons Learnt*, (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, 2015), <http://www.cib-uclg.org/cib-library/content/norways-municipal-international-cooperation-results-achieved-and-lessons-learn-0>

H. Olsen et al., *Evaluation Report: Finnish Support to Development of Local Governance*, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, 2012), [https://um.fi/documents/384998/385866/evaluation\\_report\\_2012\\_5\\_finnish\\_support\\_to\\_development\\_of\\_local\\_governance](https://um.fi/documents/384998/385866/evaluation_report_2012_5_finnish_support_to_development_of_local_governance).



**Table 1: Volumes, expenses and duration of the project**

Country/Region	Current/ongoing programme	Local government only?	Duration of programme	Nr. of years	Total volume of the programme(€)	Maximum duration of Local Government participation	Maximum grant to Local Government (€)	Co-financing needed?	Participating Local Governments per programme round call	Participating partner Local Governments
Czech	Support programme	Yes	2016	1	58.700	4+ years	19550 (yearly)	Yes	2	N/A
Czech	Temporary expert programme	Yes	2016 (annual)	1	125.900	25 days	90% of project	Yes	1	N/A
Latvia	1 call	No	2017 (annual)	1	157.000	1 year	40000 (once)	Yes	1 Local Government Association (10 Local Governments)	10
Austria	BACID	Mostly	2018-2021	4	200.000 for the fund (total budget of 1.6 million)	1 week	6000 (once)	Yes	14	19
Piedmont (region)	2 calls	No	2016 (annual)	1	180.000	18 months	20000 (once)	Yes	25	15
Catalonia (region)	Open call line 1	No	2017 (annual)	1	300.000	1 year	30000 (yearly)	No	0	0
Flanders (region)	Support to VVSG	LGA only	2017-2019	2	520.145	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3 LGAs
Lithuania	1 call	No	2017 (annual)	1	723.500	1 year	80% of project	Yes	18	N/A
Estonia	1 call	Varies	2016 (annual)	1	2.000.000	3 years		Yes	3	3
Norway	Grant to KS	No	2014-2018	3	2.640.000	1 week	N/A	No	1 Local Government Association (3 Local Governments)	N/A
The Netherlands	DEALS	Yes	2017-2022	5	4.976.553	5	Actual costs & work abroad reimbursed	No	Pool of expertise from Dutch local governments – no min/ max	6
Poland	1 call	No	2018 (annual)	1	7.125.000	8-10 months	80% of project	Yes	one city, one regional association, one association of polish cities and one region	N/A
Belgium	GIS	Yes	2017-2021	5	5.923.116	5 years	70000 € yearly	Yes	18	18
Netherlands	LOGOReP	Yes	2015-2018	3	9.600.000	3 years	N/A	No	3	7
Belgium	Wallonia-Brussels CIC	Yes	2017-2021	5	13.327.010	5 years	70000 € yearly	Yes	48	48
Netherlands	IDEAL	Yes	2017-2021	5	17.500.000	5 years	N/A	No	7	45
Sweden	MPP	Yes	2016-2019	4	24.439.200	3 years	45823 € yearly	No	154	60
Flanders	Impulse subsidy	Yes	2014-2019 (impulse subsidy transformed to part of municipal fund in 2016)	3	2.797.771 euro (until 2016)	3 years	50.000 € yearly	No	+ 88	N/A
Germany	Connective Cities	Yes	2013-2018	5	-	single event	N/A	-	3	-
Valencia (region)	8 calls	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-



In some of the ongoing programmes no co-financing from local governments is required (Sweden, Norway, Catalan Region). In others, co-financing comes in the form of an in-kind contribution. Local governments contribute to the programme by making available their staff without receiving a salary compensation. This is the case in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia) and Estonia. In the Netherlands, local governments receive a partial compensation for staff salary. In addition, in Flanders local governments generally finance additional interventions from their own budgets although they are not obliged to do so – which is also the case in some Dutch and Walloon municipalities.

However, in the large majority of the surveyed programmes, local governments are required to provide an in-kind contribution and co-financing in the form of a percentage of the total budget of the project. The amount of co-funding needed differs per programme, but in general the amount of co-financing needed is highest in the programmes which work with a grant system (the higher the share contributed by the applicant, the higher the chances of receiving the grant). As a consequence, many local governments with smaller budgets are left out. Additionally, in many cases – especially in Latvia, but also in Lithuania and Poland – many of the applications by local governments cannot be funded because of the small national programme budget. (see table 2)

## E. Geographical and thematic focus of the programmes

The existing Belgian, Dutch, Swedish, French, German, Valencian and Catalan programmes that facilitate and finance decentralised development cooperation are mostly aimed at cooperation with partners in the global South (Latin America and Africa in particular) and recently the Middle East (such as the Netherlands' LOGOReP programme). The Austrian, Czech, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian and Polish programmes are mostly aimed at cooperation with Eastern European and Central Asian countries. Italian re-

gions such as Piedmont and France aim their efforts at Sub-Saharan Africa, the southern shores of the Mediterranean and the Balkan region.

In the thematic focus of the programmes there is a high degree of conformity. All programmes aim at strengthening local government structures and at supporting democratisation and decentralisation processes. Themes such as local economic development, transparent governance, effective administration, citizen participation, social stability and equality appear in nearly all programmes. Furthermore, most of the ongoing programmes have a strong focus on facilitating the implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This accentuates the unique position that local governments have in development cooperation projects, due to the specific expertise that they have to offer.

## F. Application and selection

Out of the twelve countries and four regions that were surveyed which have national programmes that finance decentralised development cooperation activities, local governments and their associations have to compete for funding with civil society organisations in seven cases. As stated above, this pooling with civil society organisations limits the chances for local governments to get selected for funding; this is especially the case for the local governments with less experience in tendering and/or in international cooperation. Generally, experienced organisations in the field of development cooperation – such as NGOs, larger cities or experienced national/regional local government associations – have a much larger chance at receiving the grants than lesser experienced newcomers.

In the other seven cases of national programmes, the programmes are specifically aimed at local governments (and, in the Czech Republic, local government associations). Below you will find an overview of which organisations can apply to the surveyed programmes.

Table 2: Overview of what organisations can apply to the surveyed programmes

Application open to	National/regional grants system	LGA programme funded by national/regional government
Local governments only	-	Belgium, Flanders, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, France, Austria <sup>33</sup>
Local governments and associations	Czech Republic	-
Local governments and associations and civil society organisations	Catalonia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Piedmont, Valencia	-

<sup>33</sup> Annex: case studies. How EU Member States' national and regional programmes support local governments' development activities in partner countries, VNG International and PLATFORMA, 2019. <https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/VNGI-PLATFORMA%20Annex%20case%20studies%20How%20EU%20Member%20States%27%20national%20and%20regional%20programmes%20support%20local%20governments%27%20development%20activities%20in%20partner%20countries%202820.pdf>

Table 3: Expenses covered by the surveyed programmes

Programme	Co-financing needed?	Direct costs of events related to the exchange	Travel and accommodation costs	Per diem/Daily Subsistence Allowance	Partial salary compensation	Full salary compensation
Austria	Yes	X	X	X	X	
Belgium (Flanders & Wallonia)	Yes	X	X			
Catalonia	No	X				X
Czech Support programme	Yes	X				
Czech Temporary expert programme	No	X	X	X		X
Estonia	Yes	X	X			
Flanders 'impulse subsidy'	Yes	X	X			
France	Yes					
Germany	Yes					
Latvia	Yes	X	X	X	X	
Lithuania	Yes	X				X
Norway	No	X	X			X
Piedmont	Yes	X	X			X
Poland	Yes	X	X			
Sweden	No	X	X			X
The Netherlands	Yes	X	X		X	

In the local government association-run programmes that receive direct funding from the national/regional government, another divide can be witnessed. The Dutch and Norwegian local governments do not need to establish a partnership or project proposal beforehand; they are invited to share their expertise in projects run by the association. Municipalities or their staff are selected from the association's network. In Belgium, Flanders, Sweden and Austria the situation is different, as local governments receive funds from the association to run their own projects. They receive strong guidance from the association in their application and potentially in finding a project partner, and are selected for funding when they meet all criteria. German applicants to the German Connective Cities programme also receive guidance from their association, which is part of the Connective Cities Steering Committee, which selects the participants. Usually three cities per year are selected for participation, but in the case that all cities meet the criteria for participation Connective Cities tries to facilitate participation of all of them.

## G. Contributions of the local governments

In all surveyed programmes, the participating local governments contribute by sharing the expertise of their staff. They commit to participation in and contribution to the programmes for varying durations. The maximum durations of local government participation in projects vary from five years in all three Belgian programmes, to one two-day event in the German Connective Cities programme. In the table below the maximum duration of local government participation in the available programmes can be found.

**Table 4: Overview of the maximum duration of local government participation per project in the surveyed programmes**

5 years	Belgium (programme financed by Flanders & Wallonia-Brussels)	Programme financed by Flanders (regional programme)	The Netherlands	
4(+) years	Czech Support Programme <sup>34</sup>			
3 years	Sweden <sup>35</sup>	Estonia		
1,5 year	Piedmont			
+ 1 year	Poland	Lithuania	Catalonia	Latvia
+ 1 month	Czech Temporary expert programme			
+ 1 week/single event	Norway	Austria	Germany	

<sup>34</sup> No maximum duration is specified in the Czech Support programme; participants need to provide yearly reports in order to continue for a second, third, fourth round and so on.

<sup>35</sup> Not including an inception phase of maximum 1 year.

## H. Modalities

Study visits, expert exchanges, seminars and conferences, workshops and trainings, mentoring and the publication of or assistance with background materials and analyses were mentioned as the most frequently used modalities. In all countries/regions, local governments try to work with a peer-to-peer approach. In the Regional Flemish programme, as well as in the Czech Republic, funds can also be used for cultural exchanges and activities aside from technical assistance.

In the large majority of the programmes the local governments are the actual implementers of the activities, responsible for managing, implementing and reporting of said activities. In the local government association-run programmes, local governments receive strong guidance from their association. Only in the Netherlands and in the Norwegian programmes, the management, implementation and reporting of the programme is done by the local government association itself. Local governments only have to contribute with their expertise within these programmes.

## I. No programmes for decentralised development cooperation

In some of the surveyed countries there have never been programmes that stimulate, finance and facilitate decentralised development cooperation. In others, there have been such programmes in the past, but these have recently been discontinued. Consequently, a significant amount of European local government expertise is currently not used in decentralised development cooperation.

Although local governments sometimes engage in international cooperation on their own, the comprehensive deployment of local government expertise in decentralised development cooperation hinges on the stimulation, financing and facilitation this practice gets from regional, national or supra-national governments. In all countries where no programmes for decentralised development cooperation are available to fulfil this role, it can be concluded that decentralise development cooperation is not high on the political agendas. This is most explicitly the case in the United Kingdom, Slovakia and Finland. In the United Kingdom and Finland, national programmes for decentralised development cooperation used to exist, but were recently discontinued. As stated above, after a negative evaluation ordered by the national government pointed at inefficient use of funds and the difficulty of measuring concrete results because of the fragmentation in the programme, the Finnish decentralised development cooperation programme was cut in 2015.<sup>36</sup> The Finnish national government has restricted local government participation in decentralised development cooperation so severely that local governments can only scarcely get involved in it now. After the economic crisis that started in 2008, the United Kingdom government has likewise stopped to encourage the start of new programmes for decentralised development cooperation. Currently British local governments are beginning to raise their international profiles again, but their focus has shifted to trade links rather than development cooperation.

Similarly, the Norwegian Municipal International Cooperation programme was discontinued in 2014 after a negative evaluation that assessed municipal cooperation as not reciprocal enough and that questioned the added value of bringing municipal equivalents together in specific activities.<sup>37</sup> In the Norwegian case, however, the local government association KS has managed to access funds via a Ministry of Foreign Affairs grant scheme that allows it to still carry out a limited amount of projects.

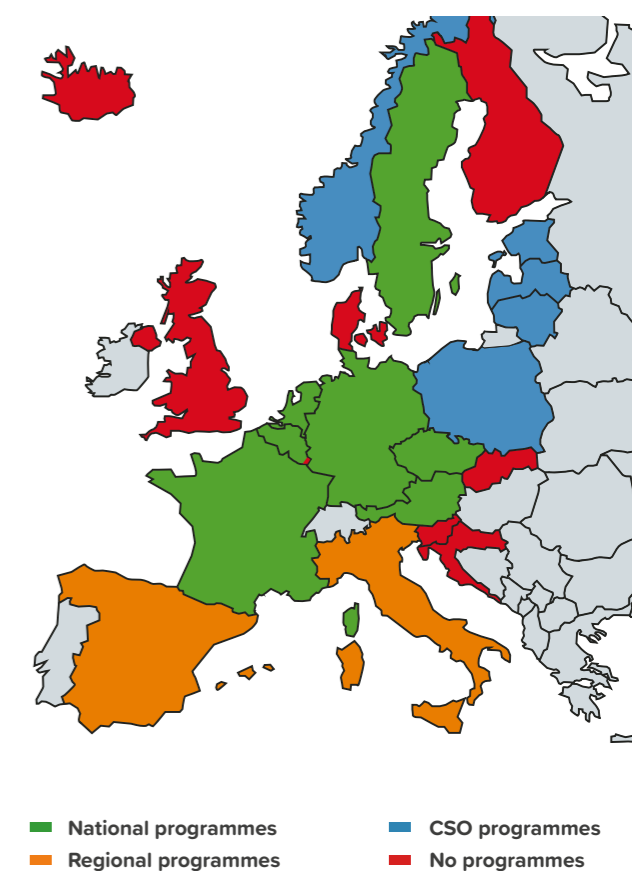
In Luxembourg, Denmark, Iceland, Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia there are no and have never been nationally funded decentralised development cooperation programmes. The local government associations have indicated that the size of municipalities is often an issue, as the limited human resources in the small-sized local governments checks the capacity to manage cooperation projects. In the cases of Slovenia, Slovakia and Croatia, the local government associations state that there are currently no national programmes that offer local or regional governments the possibility of engaging in development cooperation because of a combination of limited state budgets for foreign aid and limited human resources in the small-sized local governments. The latter applies to Iceland as well. In the small-sized country of Luxembourg, local governments usually cooperate with NGOs that receive state funding or are active in twinning activities within their own municipal budgets. The Luxembourgish local government association deems this system

to be working satisfactorily, which is why for the moment, no programme that facilitates and finances decentralised development cooperation initiatives of local governments directly is envisaged. In Denmark development cooperation remains a very centralised affair and Danish local governments have little possibilities to participate in it.

Most importantly, the local government associations from the countries where no programmes for decentralised development cooperation are currently available have indicated that local governments are enthusiastic to participate in international knowledge exchange activities more often. It is thus necessary to facilitate their participation in decentralised development cooperation, to unlock their development cooperation potential and thus answer to the development demand from the South.

For more information on the specific conditions in the countries without programmes, see the corresponding case studies in annex 1<sup>38</sup>.

**Figure 1: Programmes that facilitate and finance decentralised development cooperation**



<sup>36</sup> H. Olsen et al., Evaluation Report: Finnish Support to Development of Local Governance, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Finland, 2012), [https://um.fi/documents/384998/385866/evaluation\\_report\\_2012\\_5\\_finnish\\_support\\_to\\_development\\_of\\_local\\_governance](https://um.fi/documents/384998/385866/evaluation_report_2012_5_finnish_support_to_development_of_local_governance)

<sup>37</sup> H. Holm-Hansen, Norway's Municipal International Cooperation. Results Achieved and Lessons Learnt, (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, 2015), p4. <http://www.cib-uclg.org/cib-library/content/norways-municipal-international-cooperation-results-achieved-and-lessons-learn-0>

<sup>38</sup> Annex: case studies. How EU Member States' national and regional programmes support local governments' development activities in partner countries, VNG International and PLATFORMA, 2019. <https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/VNGI-PLATFORMA%20Annex%20case%20studies.%20How%20EU%20Member%20States%27%20national%20and%20regional%20programmes%20support%20local%20states%27%20development%20activities%20in%20partner%20countries%20%2820.pdf>





# CHAPTER 4

MAIN CONCLUSIONS  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS



# MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2013, the European Commission recognised that local and regional governments, as the public administration closest to citizens, hold special institutional responsibilities in enhancing citizens' participation in decision-making, with the objectives of good governance and sustainable development at the local level.<sup>39</sup> In line with this, the EC stated its wish to invest more in empowering local and regional governments to play their role in contributing to the international agendas and in a territorial approach to development. At the same time, it also concluded that the expertise and capacity of European local governments, as well as the political and economic contacts between local governments, are insufficiently used in international development issues – despite the number of programmes that finance and facilitate decentralised development cooperation that are currently available.<sup>40</sup> By outlining which national and regional decentralised cooperation mechanisms already exist that facilitate and finance decentralised development cooperation, this research has aimed to better define where and how the EU can build on existing experiences and mechanisms and where additional sources should be made available to unlock the existing European local and regional government expertise and successfully link it to concrete demands from local and regional governments in EU partner countries.

To outline which national and regional programmes and funding mechanisms already exist in the field, VNG International disseminated a survey in 2017 among local government associations across Europe. Below you will find the main conclusions and recommendations.

## Recognition, institutionalisation and widespread activities

The survey has showed that, despite setbacks during the economic depression that unfolded from 2008, decentralised development cooperation has become recognised and institutionalised in many national and regional programmes in European countries. There is widespread activity in the field, not only through twinning partnerships but also beyond, for example in programmes that stimulate institutional development partnerships. These

programmes aim at capacity building in local governments, enabling them to deliver services effectively, accountably and transparently. Programmes that stimulate such partnerships exist in nearly all surveyed countries, showcasing the potential activity of local governments in this field. In the countries without such programmes, most of the surveyed local government associations have underlined that there is enthusiasm among local governments to participate in international knowledge exchange activities more often.

## Enormous variation in volumes and participation of local governments

The most striking difference between the ongoing national and regional programmes is the enormous variation in volumes. The programmes that are aimed specifically at local governments' decentralised development cooperation differ from over €24 million for a period of three years to €180.000 for the same period. The programmes that are open to civil society organisations as well as local governments and their associations differ from an annual €5,8 million to an annual €157.000. However, only a very small share of these funds is channelled to local governments. The numbers of participating local governments differ as well. It should be noted that many programmes involve only one to five European local governments per programme period, which might be due to competitive selection procedures or to limitations of national funds that are available or due to the required co-financing in many programmes.



## Specific challenges in each of the four categories of programmes

In order to draw correct conclusions from the data gathered, it is necessary to analyse them per category. In the category of national programmes aimed explicitly at local governments, decentralised development cooperation is often strongly guided and institutionalised. The largest programmes generally run for a longer period and require an intense and long-term commitment of local governments, sometimes building on existing twinning partnerships. The administrative burden of these programmes is generally deemed heavy. Although this poses little challenges to local governments that have some experience in international cooperation, the administrative burden and the commitment to a long-term partnership has proven to be challenging for newcomers in the field. The threshold for becoming involved in these programmes can therefore be high. Participation of lesser experienced local governments is further limited in the cases where the local government associations directly approach experienced local governments or local governments with an existing twinning partnership for participation in projects and programmes. This creates a situation in which the same group of experienced local governments participate in projects for a long period or multiple times, and the bypassing of smaller or lesser experienced local governments.

There seems to be an emerging need among European local governments for 'lighter' programmes that stimulate and facilitate decentralised development cooperation and are easy to access. In several countries it has proven to be difficult to mobilise local governments to participate in the national programmes: municipalities deemed administrative burdens to be too high, had difficulties in meeting application deadlines and there was hesitance among municipal staff with regard to (English) language requirements. As a result, some countries have developed shorter-term programmes that put a smaller burden on participating local governments. The other side of the coin is that these offer no or limited financing and often have a limited geographical scope. We can observe that local governments are in need of lighter



and particularly more accessible programmes (i.e. without many reporting requirements). This will likely encourage a larger group or local and regional governments to become active in national programmes for decentralised cooperation.

Logically, the regional programmes aimed at local governments generally have smaller budgets than their national counterparts. Although only a handful of the available regional programmes have been outlined in this study, the cases explored give an insight into how decentralised development cooperation is organised on the regional level, throughout certain countries. Most importantly it must be concluded that in Spain, as is the case in Italy, local and regional governments often use their own budgets for development cooperation rather than national programmes.

In the third category of countries, the ones that do not have programmes aimed uniquely at local governments but that pool them with civil society organisations, other issues are at hand. Competition for funds with specialised NGOs and other civil society organisations, the need to provide co-financing in most cases and limited guidance from the local government association in the field of development cooperation (in developing proposals and finding a partner municipality abroad) can prove to be a challenge. This leads to a situation where participation in decentralised development cooperation is limited to a small group of local governments that have the experience and the financial means to do so, leaving the expertise from local governments that are smaller or lesser experienced in development cooperation untapped.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, this research has shown that a significant group of European local governments has no access to national or regional programmes that allow them to engage in decentralised development

<sup>39</sup> "European Commission, Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes", Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p3. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> European Commission, Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes", Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, (Brussels: European Commission, 2013), p2. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515\\_en\\_4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-local-authorities-in-partner-countries-com2013280-20130515_en_4.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> The case is different in the Norwegian case, where the local government association KS has access to one Ministry of Foreign affairs grant scheme. Although local governments cannot access this grant scheme, KS involves a limited number of local governments in the projects it carries out with these funds. KS offers strong guidance, but like in the Dutch system, only a limited number of local governments participate which are approached directly by KS.



cooperation at the moment, while local government associations indicate that there is enthusiasm to participate in such activities among their members. This is underlined by the fact that many local governments are engaged in other types of international cooperation – via EU mechanisms, twinning partnerships, through emerging economic partnerships, or through joint cooperation with NGOs. The contextual factors make that a large share of European local and regional expertise is currently not put to use in international development cooperation – while they have so much valuable and unique expertise to share.

### Exchange of local and regional expertise – to tackle international challenges and agendas

As described in the introduction, the EC has recently underlined the crucial importance of local governments in the implementation of international agendas. Not only are local governments the first level of government to experience the pressing consequences of the great challenges that the world is currently facing – climate change, massive urbanisation, and challenges in sanitary and human security, food and water supply, education, social and economic turmoil –, they are also essential actors for the implementation of international agendas, to tackle the aforementioned issues. In order to assist local governments to do so effectively it is essential that subnational governments exchange their expertise. Programmes to support such exchanges exist, but are currently not sufficient.

### Need to include all types and sizes of local governments

Moreover, as mentioned above, it seems to be difficult to involve local governments that are small-sized or new to international cooperation in decentralised development cooperation activities or programmes. Finding a cooperation partner, developing a project proposal and existing reporting duties can be daunting to newcomers in the field – especially in the programmes where they have to commit to longer-term partnerships directly. Consequently, more experienced local governments have a much greater chance of getting selected to participate in projects, because they have the capacity to deal with these projects within their organizations and because they know how to carry out effective projects abroad. All of this means that a large share of local expertise from EU Member States, especially from the ones that have no programmes for decentralised development cooperation, is not accessed at the moment. While a small group of local governments already provides very valuable expertise, it cannot answer the large demand from the South. To answer to the most pressing development issues, a larger group of subnational governments needs to be mobilized. It is unlikely that they will actively connect with their counterpart in the South without any incentive – they need to be stimulated to do so and be guided in the process.

### Final words

As this research has shown, local governments are in need for a shorter-term, light-weight ‘stepping stone’ into the practice of decentralised development cooperation before being able to commit to longer-term partnerships. This is mutually beneficial: many programmes and their evaluations show that both the EU local government and the non-EU counterpart benefit hugely from such exchange. Through a strongly guided, short-term exchange, local governments can exchange relevant expertise with their cooperation counterpart. The relevance of the exchanged expertise can be ensured by relying on a matchmaking mechanism that is demand-driven by the needs of the local and regional governments in partner countries. After a partnership is established and an intervention has taken place, local governments from both sides should be directed towards opportunities for longer term partnerships. Such a short-term, entry point programme can be a valuable addition to existing national and regional programmes for decentralised development cooperation. Most importantly, such a mechanism would enable local governments from Europe and from EU partner countries to become active in decentralised development cooperation and to jointly face global challenges that affect local governments worldwide.



## VNG International

VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). VNG International is committed to building better futures, by strengthening democratic local government worldwide.

We believe that local authorities all over the world profit from looking across borders. Through worldwide connections and networks, often in close cooperation with local organisations and businesses, they learn from each other and develop solutions together.

We are part of the worldwide family of local governments. We are an experienced international service provider. The combination of these two roles enables us to cross-fertilize and to provide services for clients which better suit the needs of the beneficiaries. It is part of our identity: we are of, for, and together with local governments.

[www.vng-international.nl](http://www.vng-international.nl)

## PLATFORMA

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments – and their associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation. Since its creation in 2008, PLATFORMA has been representing more than 100,000 local and regional governments. All are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.

The diversity of PLATFORMA's partners is what makes this network unique. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of local and regional governments' realities in Europe and across the world.

The aim of PLATFORMA is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and mutual learning, but also to strengthen the specific role of local and regional governments in development policies.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The Secretariat of PLATFORMA is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

[www.platforma-dev.eu](http://www.platforma-dev.eu)

The aim of this study, carried out by VNG International, is to provide an overview of the available national and regional programmes that stimulate, facilitate and finance decentralised development cooperation initiatives of EU local and regional governments and their partners in EU partner countries.

It also shows the need for new, innovative EU instruments and programmes for decentralised development cooperation such as CONNECT, developed by VNG International and PLATFORMA between 2016-2019.



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