



European Commission

[Partnerships for sustainable cities](#)

KEY INFORMATION

Programme budget: € 165 M

Number projects: 57

Overall objective:

Strengthening local authorities by promoting decentralised cooperation and promoting a “territorial approach” to local development as well as supporting one of the three dimensions of sustainability: social by ensuring social inclusiveness of cities, environmental by improving resilience and greening of cities, or economic by improving prosperity job creation and innovation in cities.

What do we do

During the last years, the EU has stepped up the efforts to foster horizontal and vertical partnerships for territorial development to create more policy space for a meaningful inclusion of subnational actors in partner countries. The urgency of the urban challenges created additional incentives for the EU to deepen relations with local authorities - as reflected in this flagship initiative. Thus, the programme “Partnerships for Sustainable Cities”, launched in 2018, allowed us to mobilise 165 M EUR to strengthen urban governance by supporting one of its three dimensions of sustainability: 1) social, by ensuring social inclusiveness of cities, 2) environmental, by improving resilience and greening of cities, or 3) economic, by improving prosperity job creation and innovation in cities.

With 57 city-to-city partnerships projects, this EU programme perfectly reflects our political engagement on city-to-city cooperation, offering a space for the development of demand-driven partnerships between municipalities from EU member states and partner countries to collaborate on areas of mutual interest.

How does the programme work

The funds available for this programme were channeled through three consecutive calls for proposals: In November 2018, February 2020 and March 2021. These calls aimed to promote peer-to-peer learning, exchanges of good practices and know-how and short-term deployment of public officials at subnational level towards twinning activities, including from Member States of the EU . All 57 actions will contribute

to the achievement of SDG 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” as well as SDG 17 “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

The actions are implemented by partners from EU and third countries in close collaboration with the respective EU Delegations, which are responsible for managing the contracts. These actions can consist of peer-to-peer activities or decentralised cooperation for:

- promoting urban governance (e.g. to develop urban planning, spatial planning and land use management),
- ensuring social inclusiveness of cities (e.g. projects promoting urban systems which address the ‘urban-planning gender gap’ by responding to women’s needs, including safety and security in urban public spaces),
- strengthening resilience and greening of cities (e.g. pilot projects to support the design and implementation of new environmental and climate resilient local public policies in line with the EU green deal), or d) prosperity and innovation in cities among the EU member state and the partner country (e.g. increasing job creation and entrepreneurship including through business incubator and supporting digital skills).

A technical coordination facility team has been set up to systematically monitor progress, capitalise on valuable experiences and good practices and favouring a cross-fertilisation across all the 57 different partnerships participating in the program. The experiences and the relation developed within the program will permit to continue and intensify the partnerships within the implementation of the programme cycle 2021-2027.

Why we need the programme

EU has a long successful story of promoting decentralised cooperation with third partners , as exemplified by past support programs at various levels to empower local authorities to fully play their role in integrated local development. In EU view, local authorities should assume a protagonist role in managing developmental challenges in close interaction with key stakeholders and the support of higher-level authorities. As the public authorities closest to citizens, they are the first point of contact in case of crises and emergencies. Local authorities are responsible for the provision of an extensive range of public services in a given territory and have a key role to play in the achievement of the 2030 agenda. In addition, they have a general mandate to promote the interests of local communities: democratically elected local governments is the representation of local communities, voicing local concerns at higher levels (national, regional and global level) through representative organizations.

More and more, local authorities demand to have a seat in major decision-making fora on matters that affect their territories and the lives of citizens. However, in many countries, local authorities are not in a position to address effectively urban challenges. They lack a conducive legal and institutional framework, which can guarantee the required levels of autonomy and accountability. They face political resistance from central government, amongst others reflected in unfunded mandates, top-down control-oriented approaches and ill-suited intergovernmental relations. All this contributes in many cases to systemic capacity shortages in terms of knowledge, human resources and skills.

The EU now seeks to foster more structured partnerships between local authorities not only to focus on peer-to-peer exchanges to jointly find innovative solutions for shared urban challenges but also, to help the EU refining its overall engagement strategies with local actors in all relevant policy areas. For doing so, the flagship “Partnerships for sustainable cities” initiative goes beyond traditional forms of decentralised cooperation:

- ✓ It offers a space for the development of more 57 partnerships between municipalities from Europe and the Global South (Africa, Asia/Pacific, Latin America/Caribbean and the Neighbourhood South and East, with a specific focus on fragile states) to collaborate on areas of mutual interest in relation to integrated urban development. The participating municipalities can determine their own priorities within a set of broad themes (i.e. urban governance, social inclusiveness, resilience to climate change and other shocks and greening of cities, prosperity and innovation). There is also a strong insistence on ensuring the participation of all relevant stakeholders and the adoption of territorial approaches to urban and local development.
- ✓ It puts in place “Coordination Support” facility to systematically monitor progress, capitalise on valuable experiences and good practices across all partnerships as the process moves on. This should allow to amplify the scope and impact of the peer-to-peer exchanges and foster mutual learning and to facilitate the engagement of the EU on a practice-based learning curve on how to strategically support cities.
- ✓ It attaches great importance to ensure that these partnerships -acting as “laboratories” for finding innovative solutions- also positively influence the overall EU policies and approaches to engaging with cities in external action and development cooperation. To this end, the effective “uptake” of lessons learnt by the various EU institutions will be actively promoted.