

Reaction to EU global response to fight the pandemic

PLATFORMA – a coalition of local and regional governments and representative associations active in development cooperation - seeks to provide policy input to EU institutions. It aims at ensuring that the priorities of local and regional governments, the challenges they face, and their added value as key partners in EU development policy, for policy-making and implementation in partner countries, are taken into account in upcoming actions.

The European Union (EU)'s global response to COVID-19 is just out! The EU is responding to the need to address the global pandemic together and will stand up with its partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods.

The EU will secure financial support to partner countries for a total of more than €15.6 billion, from existing external action resources. It will prioritise “on (i) emergency response to the immediate health crisis and the resulting humanitarian needs; (ii) strengthen health, water and sanitation systems, as well as partners’ research capacities to deal with the pandemic and their preparedness; and (iii) address the immediate social and economic consequences”¹.

The situation is now spread all over the world and some countries will be soon heavily impacted despite the youth of their population. This global challenge calls for solidarity to leave no one and no place behind. Collaboration is essential, and learning from each other’s approach is crucial: those who were struck first can share their experience in dealing with the crisis. It is of paramount importance to have a coordinated global response, at different levels, and at the different stages: the “emergency phase” and the “recovering phase”. We believe that the [2030 Agenda must be the leading reference](#) for any action developed in this context.

1. The EU confirms that it stands along with its partners and policy coherence for development will be crucial to walk the talk

With this Communication, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to global solidarity and leadership for multilateral solutions. EU Member States, the European External Action Service and the European Commission were able to agree on a proposal and proved that they can work together to find coordinated responses through Team Europe.

Solidarity, coherence and cooperation must be at the heart of EU external response to the COVID-19, alongside the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. This surge of solidarity and unity must go beyond the EU sole interest. The clear principles of coherence, subsidiarity and effectiveness in actions must be applied, and always with respect to the global urgency and consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

⇒ Coherence of responses will be crucial to avoid that measures taken in Europe have a negative impact on partner countries’ societal structures and economies. It is also positive that the focus on the green deal, poverty reduction and the fight against inequalities, gender equality, climate change and Sustainable Development Goals will not be put aside.

2. A seat at the table – an inclusive EU mechanism #TeamEurope

Beyond EU institutions, Member States and financial institutions, the main partners of the EU should be invited to contribute to the coordinated effort and approach: Team Europe. Representative associations of local and regional governments and civil society organisations should be actively involved in the process.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/joint_communication_global_eu_covid-19_response_en.pdf

As it has been put in place in many Member States, an inclusive coordination mechanism has to be set up by the EU to increase the efficiency of the support and find the right channels for the support to go rapidly and efficiently in the territories, to the people, including the most vulnerable ones.

The European institutions need to reaffirm and recognise the power of local governments' network and their capacity to exchange and organise at global level exchange of experiences, mobilise capacity and solidarity of local governments around the world as well as showing their expertise in dealing with the COVID-19. More than ever, we want to reassert the firm commitment that we also stand up with our partners.

- ⇒ Team Europe should include representatives of local and regional governments and civil society organisations, both strategic partners of the EU and members of the Policy Forum on Development.

3. *Indispensable coordination amongst levels of governments in partner countries*

Without any coordination with the local and regional governments, the response that the EU would like to provide will not have the same impact, with long term results. Many municipalities in Africa have already been confronted with dealing with sanitary crisis and Ebola for instance; they have developed their own responses which needs to be backed up.

An EU comprehensive response to COVID-19 should include need assessment, planning, responses coordination to be done hand in hand with all policy-makers and stakeholders, and on the frontline local and regional governments, mayors, councillors and elected representatives. Any response provided by international NGOs should also be done in coordination with the local governance system in place.

- ⇒ Any international action should be coordinated with the local governance system in place.

4. *Strong consequences at local level – 1st requirement: local needs' assessment*

The ongoing COVID-19 virus global pandemic has had immediate impact and repercussions on municipalities and regions, affecting people in their daily life, children and parents contained at home, distressing local healthcare infrastructures, schools and universities, transport and mobility, housing, companies and businesses.

Without any doubt, as the level of government closest to the citizens, local and regional governments are at the forefront of this crisis management on the ground. They must also ensure the necessary conditions for people to have a good consciousness of what is happening, enable and support solidarity actions from people to people, continue to provide essential services, identify vulnerable groups including women, migrants, caregivers, isolated people, elderly, disabled people, those at risk of domestic violence, workers in essential services, and others.

- ⇒ Any international action must target and be based on local need assessment and context.

5. *A call for more decentralised cooperation to build on each other's solutions*

European local and regional governments will keep their cooperation active to support each other in this crisis time, even if there is a high risk of financial pressure. Projects are now refocusing on awareness-raising, deadline of calls extended or with more flexibility, projects are more related to emergencies and risk assessment (water sanitation, health sector, human

rights, etc.), more technical advice targeting COVID-19 is dispensed, communication with the partners is strengthened, financing is pooled to respond in a more strategic way, and lessons learned are shared.

Fons Mallorqui will work with its partner municipalities in Tenado (Burkina Faso) and Pocona (Bolivia) on SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation. It will also develop some emergency projects related to sanitary material and prevention, with Afghanistan (Kabul), Niger (including prevention workshops), and Nicaragua.

Decentralised cooperation has a key added value as it focuses on knowledge transfer, experience exchange and mutual reinforcement based on horizontal relations. Decentralised cooperation allows European local governments and local governments from partner countries to work together and reinforce each other through the exchange of initiatives and the development of concrete projects that are anchored in local needs and capacities, while engaging other actors of their territories. The ultimate aim of decentralised cooperation being the reinforcement of the institutional capacities of local governments and the improvement of local public policies in order to make more resilient local governments and therefore more resilient local communities, economies and environment in the long run.

Through Elankidetza/Basque Government Cooperation Agency and Euskal Fondoa/ Basque Local Authorities Cooperation Fund, the Basque decentralised cooperation has the added value of articulating the actors and all the territorial levels and regional ecosystem (Cities, 3 Provincial Councils and Regional Government + NGOs) of the territory to respond to the global-concrete and common challenges, as well as guaranteeing coherence and specialisation.

It is therefore all the more important now for mayors and local and regional governments to discuss the respective situations and identify common expectations, to identify crisis management methodologies adapted to local contexts, to exchange experiences and to share advices on action plans, learn from what has been done right or wrong elsewhere - no need to repeat the same mistakes.

Inspiring solidarity actions of twinned cities: the Chinese City of Taizhou sent 20.000 respiratory masks to their German Partner City of Hanau.

City-to-city / region-to-region cooperation helps get to know different approaches to fight COVID-19 in different contexts (local, regional, urban, rural) and circumstances (stages and levels of alert) of virus spread in a given territory, the challenges faced, the resources mobilised and the measures applied for containment. Sharing of experience and expertise is all the more useful for peers to effectively adapt strategy and to choose operational options according to each particular situation.

It is also crucial to reinforce the advocacy work together with partner countries, for more decentralisation in the long run, and the transfer of competences and resources to the local level of government.

This situation is also new to Local Government Associations, so via decentralised cooperation they can learn from peers, motivate each other and adjust their approaches in supporting their members and advocating for their needs.

- ⇒ The EU must devote part of its response to financial support to decentralised cooperation between EU and partner countries' municipalities during the outbreak and for the recovery: the thematic line under the future Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) must be maintained to be able to work with municipalities in partner countries, including ODA graduated countries. Likewise,

part of the rapid response component must be dedicated to local governments where crisis occur.

6. Localising the EU support in partner countries – aid modalities

The EU proposes to use the budget support modality for measures targeting the COVID-19. As partners of territorial development, beyond calls for proposals, local and regional governments should benefit from similar support modalities, such as budget support, twinning, technical assistance, expertise targeting municipalities.

This would be an opportunity for local and regional governments to participate in the development of better fit-to-the-ground reforms, and to find more locally-led solutions to the COVID-19, adapted to each specific local context.

In addition, the Pre-Accession Funds, EU development policies and other support instruments should display flexibility to address the current needs, including in the Neighbourhoods, like it is currently done under Cohesion Policy in Europe.

The EU should also recognise and support international solidarity funds launched by associations of local and regional governments which can mutualise and bring a multiplier effect to the funds dedicated to support municipalities in partner countries.

- The International solidarity fund launched by Cités Unies France (CUF) aims at supporting municipalities in African countries (including in the Sahel Region) and in Haïti,
- The Cooperation Fund of the Association of French-speaking Mayors (AIMF)

7. Specific role for local government associations in partner countries

During this situation, the role of national associations of local and regional governments is instrumental, in order to assess the needs on the ground, to coordinate actions and communicate with the national government, to ensure the sharing of good practices and responses among municipalities, ensure the links with international donors and promote mutual learning with peers externally. They serve as focal point for exchange on provision of public services in times of confinement and social distancing, and for any related question or doubt municipalities may have, e.g. related to the security of public service workers who continue to guarantee effective and safe public services to users.

The Latvian Association of municipalities will discuss its experience with counterpart Associations of municipalities in the Eastern Partnership such as Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine. It will focus on topics of municipal responsibility, e.g. the support in educational provision, work of kindergartens, social services, support for local businesses, waste collection, etc.

However in some countries in the world, the national space for the voice of Local Governments and their associations is constrained, as national governments are not open to alternative views in the name of saving lives, and mandates of local leaders are being recentralised in the process.

- ⇒ The EU must ensure space for coordination and support the multi-level approach in its dialogue with partner countries.

8. The longer term perspective: building resilient societies and avoiding the territorial divide

In the short term, there is a need for emergency answers with need and risk assessment, as well as sharing responses and experiences that have been tested by those first struck in the world and which have proven themselves to work successfully.

In the long run, there will be a crucial need for investments in municipalities to create conditions for more resilient municipalities and territories in partner countries. There will be a need to improve local institutions, local health systems and initiatives towards the most vulnerable populations; it could also mean to develop specific projects to ensure access to water, food, housing and basic nutrition, mitigate climate change and improve access to technology so people can be better connected to get information about what to do and asking for help.

Both in the EU and in Africa, we are now in a “damage control” stage, with emergency measures but there is a need to already anticipate what will follow, leverage on how to strengthen the day after tomorrow, and focus development priorities on socioeconomic impacts of this pandemic.

Therefore, partners are already discussing staggered scenarios after the exit of the confinement. Reorienting action towards prevention and mitigation of the pandemic’s effects will be necessary.

For the **Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)**, a concrete action is to "redirect" their actions towards measures that prevent and mitigate the effects of health crises in the partner countries of Spanish cooperation and therefore, since the beginning of the crisis, it has been in permanent contact and dialogue with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and with the Secretary of State for Cooperation, to achieve this objective.

- ⇒ The 2030 Agenda should remain the backbone to create the sustainable society of tomorrow, also building economic recovery strategies around employment, poverty and inequalities reduction and sustainable business models.

9. Sustainable development must include massive investments in public services, including quality healthcare which is accessible and affordable for all

Most affected countries are those with a poor public health policy and infrastructures. In places where people face difficulties in accessing health services and emergency reliefs, the impact of the crisis is stronger.

Likewise, how to address the containment, when around half of the economy is informal, and when the population lacks social security, living from informal activities that provide them their daily income? Targeted support to the local level will be essential in order to reach those more in need, but also to maintain measures for local economic development backed up by public services.

- ⇒ Any international development action at all governance levels should focus on the strengthening of public services, and in particular on public health infrastructures as well as in ensuring conditions for sustainable local economic development.

10. Active citizenship - importance of awareness raising and reaching out to citizens and promote solidarity between people and generations

Awareness raising is a key element of the current crisis management: to citizens, but also to local governments about how to prevent COVID through sanitary measures (clean hands, stay at home...), sharing action protocols on specific actions: containment issues, health assistance, prioritise vulnerable population groups to be helped or isolated.

Women are currently very exposed, and gender-sensitive responses and solutions are crucial. The most vulnerable part of the population must be particularly targeted, as we can see an outbreak of domestic and intra-familial violence for instance. The COVID-19 also particularly affects older people. There is a need to support citizens' initiatives, enhancing cooperation and solidarity between generations as well as recognising the value of their respective identities and contributions to society.

Local governments also have a key role to play through decentralised cooperation and in partnership with civil society to promote global citizenship and solidarity, in order to avoid that in the aftermath of the outbreak, EU communities remain withdrawn into themselves and do not want to cooperate with international partners.

- ⇒ Decentralised cooperation can help sharing successful practices in working with inhabitants and communication campaign techniques, on how to identify and work with the most vulnerable, but also in highlighting to citizens the importance of openness and solidarity in the long term.

11. Innovation as part of the solution?

Technological means are a solution when municipalities are equipped and the population able to access technologies. Information can in this case reach people electronically and better communication can be developed.

Since the beginning of the crisis, national associations have also been developing many services such as e-courses in local languages & targeted webinars, awareness raising campaigns. For the moment the action is not about medical material distribution, but much more about soft measures related to containing the outbreak.

The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) has developed e-learning courses on disaster risk management and Disaster Risk Reduction in local language, targeting Western Balkans as well as local governments in the Eastern Partnership.

However in many countries, there is poor technology infrastructure which does not favour continued business at local level for instance and physical meetings are sometimes inevitable. The access is even more limited in rural areas. Investment in local innovation is necessary, beyond the use of technology, in order to promote innovative public policies.

- ⇒ Digital gap and limited capacity must be addressed by the EU and innovation in public policies also promoted. Decentralised cooperation is a means to innovate and experiment.

Recommendations for the EU

The management of the COVID outbreak confirms once again that local governments must have a role in the definition, implementation and delivery of EU policies. The capacity building of local governments to face such type of emergencies and be prepared must be a clear long-term expected result for EU action, and we are convinced that it goes through decentralised cooperation for mutual learning.

1. The EU confirms that it stands along with its partners and policy coherence for development will be crucial to walk the talk.
2. A seat at the table – an inclusive EU mechanism #TeamEurope which also includes representative associations of local and regional governments and civil society organisations.
3. Set up through the EU delegations, mechanisms at country level to coordinate with EU and partner countries' local governments and civil society organisations in order to bring coherence to EU action and avoid the missing link with local development plans.
4. EU support must target the territory where the consequences are felt most strongly: at local level.
5. Support decentralised cooperation: peer learning is mutually reinforcing. The EU must absolutely work in coordination with EU local and regional governments as well. The thematic line under the future NDICI must be maintained to be able to work with municipalities in partner countries, including ODA graduated countries. Likewise, part of the rapid response component must be earmarked to local governments when crisis occur.
6. Localising the EU support in partner countries – budget support at local level, twinning, TAIEX.
7. Reach out to the national local government associations for the first needs' assessment, reach out to municipalities, ensure best practice sharing among municipalities.
8. The longer term perspective: building resilient societies and avoiding the territorial divide – there is a need to guarantee the local sustainable economic development of partner countries, reduce inequalities, tackle climate change and address many other related challenges.
9. Sustainable development must include massive investments in public services, including quality healthcare which is accessible and affordable for all.
10. Active citizenship - importance of awareness raising and reaching out to citizens and promote solidarity between people and generations.
11. Solutions can be found through innovative public policies and technological means to reach out to citizens, for communication campaign, to provide e-learning support to municipalities. Targeted support measures can be taken to address the digital gap between people and territories.

Resources

Local and regional governments, and several networks of local and regional governments have started to compile what local and regional governments and their national associations are doing:

- Association International des Maires Francophones (AIMF) : <https://www.aimf.asso.fr/>
- Committee of the Regions: [exchange platform](#)
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR): [national associations in Europe](#) and the [response of the EU](#)
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG): [Live Learning Experience #BeyondTheOutbreak](#)
- UCLG, UN-Habitat & Metropolis: <https://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org/>
- UCLG CIB: [google drive](#)
- NALAS: [weekly digest](#)
- CLGF: <https://www.clgf.org.uk/whats-new/local-government-action-on-covid-19/>
- UCLG Africa: <https://www.uclga.org/news/in-the-press-african-local-governments-in-action-in-the-fight-against-coronavirus/>
- Basque public Cooperation Agency, Euskal Fundoa and Basque NGDO communications:
 - o Basque public Cooperation Agency /Elankidetza: <http://www.elankidetza.euskadi.eus/informacion-de-interes-covid-19/x63-contaysu/es/>
 - o Euskal Fundoa: <https://www.euskalfundoa.org/es/euskal-fundoa/noticias/se-aprueban-los-proyectos-de-cooperacion-2020-de-euskal-fundoa/0-1410875183/>
 - o Basque NGO Platform: https://www.ongdeuskadi.org/es/coordinadora/documentacion_view.php?id=233&categoria=6&pagina=1