

# Stories of Democratic Resilience

Handbook by ALDA





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# Foreword

In a time of deep transformation and uncertainty—marked by conflict, inequality, climate emergencies and shrinking civic space—the strength of democracy is being tested in ways that call for renewed engagement and imagination. And yet, as this handbook shows, democratic resilience often begins not in parliaments or press conferences, but in neighbourhoods, villages, and cities. It begins locally.

For over two decades, the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) has worked to promote citizen participation and good local governance in Europe and beyond. Rooted in the conviction that democracy is best strengthened through dialogue and proximity, ALDA has developed a network of partnerships that span continents and contexts—from post-conflict reconstruction to civic innovation in fragile or repressive environments.

This handbook gathers stories from some of those contexts. From the wartime cities of Ukraine to youth-led initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa, from Eastern Partnership countries navigating democratic pressure, to European institutions supporting solidarity across borders—each contribution reflects a specific moment where democratic values were not only defended, but put into practice.

These stories are not comprehensive. Rather, they are fragments of a much wider mosaic of engagement, shaped by the people who inhabit and animate democratic life. What they share is a deep commitment to participation, inclusion, and community-driven transformation.

*We hope this publication will serve as a source of insight and encouragement to all those working to protect and renew democracy—wherever they are, and under whatever circumstances they may find themselves.*

# Introduction

In a world increasingly shaped by crises—be they political, environmental, or humanitarian—the resilience of democracy is being put to the test. Yet, in the face of adversity, citizens, communities, and local institutions continue to rise to the challenge, proving that democracy is not only a system of governance, but a lived experience rooted in participation, dialogue, and solidarity.

This handbook brings together a collection of stories from diverse regions where ALDA—the European Association for Local Democracy—has been working to foster democratic resilience. From the war-affected cities of Ukraine, to the civic spaces of Sub-Saharan Africa, and the pressured environments of the Eastern Partnership, these accounts offer a grounded and hopeful perspective on the power of local democracy.

Each story is unique, shaped by its history, geography, and socio-political context. Yet, they are bound by a common thread: the enduring will of people and institutions to build and defend democratic values—sometimes against the odds.

The contributions gathered here have been made possible thanks to ALDA's long-standing partnerships with local authorities, civil society organisations, and international institutions. In particular, the experiences from Tanzania, Uganda, Benin, Cameroon and Chad reflect the work carried out through the WYDE Civic Engagement programme, a strategic initiative aimed at empowering youth and fostering civic participation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The section on Ukraine captures the extraordinary efforts to maintain democratic governance amid full-scale war, highlighting how local democracy is not suspended in times of conflict, but instead becomes a vehicle for resilience and hope.

Other stories, such as those from Georgia and Belarus, highlight the complex dynamics at play in the Eastern Partnership region. Meanwhile, the experience of the Diputació de Barcelona illustrates how European solidarity, through decentralised cooperation, can play a vital role in supporting democratic resilience beyond borders.

This handbook does not pretend to be exhaustive. Rather, it seeks to offer a cross-section of experiences that illustrate what democratic resilience can look like—on the ground, in communities, and through everyday action.

*In doing so, it hopes to inspire, inform, and connect actors who believe in the transformative potential of local democracy. These are the voices from the frontlines: courageous, committed, and deeply relevant to the democratic future we share.*





# How to read this Handbook

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In a world increasingly shaped by crises—be they political, environmental, or humanitarian—the resilience of democracy is being put to the test. Yet, in the face of adversity, citizens, communities, and local institutions continue to rise to the challenge, proving that democracy is not only a system of governance, but a lived experience rooted in participation, dialogue, and solidarity.

Each chapter includes:

- **Context** – a short background on the political or social situation;
- **ALDA's engagement** – how ALDA and its partners have contributed;
- **A story of resilience** – a concrete example from the field;

Outcomes and reflections – what we learn from this experience.

The handbook includes four regional sections:

1. Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, Benin, Cameroon, Chad)
2. Ukraine
3. Eastern Partnership (Georgia and Belarus)
4. Latin America (Diputació de Barcelona)

It is intended as both a **source of inspiration** and a **tool for reflection**—for civil society actors, institutions, and all those who believe that democracy begins at the local level.

# Section I – Africa: Empowering Participation through **WYDE** Civic Engagement

## Introduction to the section

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, young people are driving new forms of democratic participation—from grassroots organising to digital mobilisation. Yet, civic spaces remain constrained, and democratic institutions often lack the mechanisms to include youth meaningfully in political processes.

Through the **WYDE** Civic Engagement programme, funded by the European Union, ALDA is supporting initiatives led by local civil society organisations in Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Tanzania, and Uganda. These initiatives promote youth leadership, civic education, participatory governance, and the strengthening of local democratic cultures. This section of the handbook presents five local stories—each grounded in a different national context, yet united by a shared ambition: to make democracy more inclusive, more resilient, and more reflective of Africa's youngest generation.

**WYDE**  
Civic Engagement



## Community Dialogues for Inclusive Youth Participation



### Context

Tanzania has seen both democratic advances and backslides in recent years. While multiparty elections are held regularly, civil society often operates under close scrutiny. Youth participation in local governance remains low, particularly in rural areas.



### ALDA's Engagement

ALDA partnered with a Tanzanian civil society organisation (organisation name redacted in available document) under the WYDE Civic Engagement programme to promote participatory governance through community dialogue.



### A Story of Resilience

The initiative launched local forums in which young people could voice concerns about development priorities, governance issues, and social inclusion. These forums also involved local government representatives, allowing for a constructive exchange between authorities and youth.

Workshops on democratic values and civic skills further equipped participants to take active roles in local decision-making.



### Reflections & Outlook

The Tanzanian story highlights the power of dialogue as a democratic tool. It shows that when young people are given the space and skills to participate meaningfully, they become powerful advocates for inclusive governance.



## Hope4Life: Empowering Civic Voices in Rural Communities



### Context

Uganda's political landscape remains deeply centralised, with limited civic space and regular constraints on freedom of expression. For youth in rural areas, access to civic education or participatory channels is especially scarce.



### ALDA's Engagement

Through WYDE Civic Engagement, ALDA partnered with Hope4Life, a grassroots organisation active in rural Uganda. With the support of a €20,000 subgrant, Hope4Life sought to promote democratic participation through a community-based approach, engaging young people in civic education, local planning, and awareness-raising activities.



### A Story of Resilience

Hope4Life mobilised youth through village dialogues, storytelling sessions, and workshops on citizen rights and responsibilities. The project placed a strong emphasis on inclusion, ensuring gender balance and representation of marginalised groups.

Despite limited internet access and logistical challenges, the organisation managed to create safe spaces for discussion and helped young people articulate concerns to local councillors. In doing so, it bridged the gap between policy and lived experience.



### Reflections & Outlook

Hope4Life's success lies in its rootedness in the local context. It demonstrates how small-scale civic actions, when led by trusted community actors, can foster a sense of agency among youth—and gradually rebuild trust in democratic institutions.



## Building Democratic Culture through Constitutional Dialogue



### Context

Benin has long been seen as a relatively stable democracy in West Africa. However, in recent years, civic actors have raised concerns over the restriction of civil liberties and reduced political pluralism. For young people in particular, opportunities to engage meaningfully in democratic life remain limited.



### ALDA's Engagement

In 2024, ALDA established a partnership with the **Association Béninoise de Droit Constitutionnel (ABDC)** under the WYDE Civic Engagement programme. With a grant of €20,000, the project aimed to strengthen the capacity of young people to understand, debate, and shape constitutional and democratic norms in their local contexts.



### A Story of Resilience

ABDC organised workshops and roundtables on constitutional rights and governance, targeting youth aged 18–30 in both urban and semi-rural areas. These sessions demystified constitutional law and connected it with everyday issues such as elections, justice, and public accountability. Participants were encouraged to initiate dialogue with local officials and reflect on their own roles in sustaining democracy.



### Reflections & Outlook

By combining legal expertise with participatory education, the project helped build a culture of democratic awareness. In a time of institutional tension, ABDC's work underscores the value of fostering constitutional literacy as a foundation for youth-led democratic renewal.



## Youth Participation in Focus: The HUMANEES Initiative



### Context

In Cameroon, young people under 35 represent more than 75% of the population. Despite this demographic weight, their access to civic space and political decision-making remains limited. A complex sociopolitical environment—marked by regional tensions, economic challenges, and shrinking civic freedoms—makes democratic engagement both urgent and difficult.



### ALDA's Engagement

In 2024, ALDA partnered with Association HUMANEES, a civil society organisation based in Cameroon, as part of the WYDE Civic Engagement programme's first cluster. This partnership aims to amplify youth voices in public life through locally led actions that encourage dialogue, civic education, and democratic participation.

The programme provided a €20,000 subgrant to support activities engaging young people aged 15–35 in inclusive democratic processes. HUMANEES is responsible for both implementing the project and reporting on its progress in coordination with ALDA and the WYDE Civic Engagement consortium.



### A Story of Resilience

Despite operating in a challenging environment, HUMANEES launched a series of workshops, local debates, and civic initiatives across various communities. These initiatives focused on informing young people about their rights, encouraging constructive dialogue with local authorities, and building a culture of participatory governance.

While concrete data from the implementation phase will be available in final reports, early feedback from participants suggests growing interest and confidence in taking part in democratic processes—particularly among youth who had previously felt excluded or disillusioned.



### Reflections & Outlook

HUMANEES' work highlights how even modest financial and institutional support can empower youth-led civil society organisations to act as multipliers of democratic engagement. In a country where civic freedoms are increasingly at risk, such initiatives contribute to sustaining the democratic fabric from the bottom up.



## Advancing Youth Leadership in Fragile Political Settings



### Context

Chad faces numerous governance challenges, including political instability, repression of dissent, and limited civic freedoms. Young people, while forming the majority of the population, are often sidelined from decision-making processes.



### ALDA's Engagement

In partnership with Association pour la Démocratie et la Gouvernance (A4DG), ALDA provided a WYDE Civic Engagement grant to support local democratic initiatives in 2024. The project focused on empowering youth through leadership training, civic awareness, and active engagement with local governance structures.



### A Story of Resilience

Despite structural constraints and operating in a fragile environment, A4DG initiated training sessions, citizen meetings, and youth-led public debates in selected localities. Participants reported increased confidence in speaking publicly and initiating community-led monitoring of public services.



### Reflections & Outlook

The Chad project shows how, even in restrictive contexts, civic space can be carved out and protected through local partnerships. A4DG's work is a reminder that investing in youth leadership is not only about future potential—it's about enabling democratic agency in the present.



# Reflections on the Africa Section

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These five stories reveal the many ways in which youth-led civil society is not only participating in democratic life, but actively shaping it. From constitutional education in Benin to leadership training in Chad, and from civic dialogue in Tanzania to grassroots mobilisation in Uganda and Cameroon, the WYDE Civic Engagement programme is helping to build a continent-wide fabric of democratic resilience. What unites these diverse efforts is a belief that meaningful participation must start with inclusion—and that democracy cannot thrive without its youth.





# Section II – Ukraine: Resilience in the Face of War

## Introduction to the section

The full-scale war in Ukraine has become one of the most acute and sustained tests of democratic resilience in Europe. While facing massive destruction, displacement, and systemic violence, Ukrainian communities have continued to uphold democratic processes, particularly at the local level. Local authorities, civil society organisations, and citizens have worked together to maintain governance, support displaced populations, and protect participatory rights under extreme conditions.

This section presents two complementary stories from ALDA's engagement in Ukraine: the establishment of LDA Vinnytsia, showcasing how local democracy has adapted to wartime realities through inclusive governance and international cooperation; and the ongoing work of LDA Mariupol, where civic engagement and psychosocial support continue to sustain displaced communities and strengthen local resilience despite conflict and trauma.



# Democracy Through Inclusion: The Vinnytsia Experience

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## Context

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has profoundly tested the capacity of local governments to preserve democratic practices while ensuring essential services under wartime conditions. Amidst violence, displacement, and economic hardship, Ukraine's territorial communities have emerged as crucial pillars of resilience—maintaining local governance, supporting vulnerable populations, and sustaining civic engagement.

In this critical context, the Vinnytsia City Territorial Community has demonstrated remarkable adaptability in upholding citizen participation, transparency, and inclusive governance, while responding to the immense pressures brought by the war.



## ALDA's Engagement in Ukraine

Since 2014, ALDA has supported Ukraine's decentralisation reforms, capacity building, and participatory governance. In 2023, with support from the European Union and in cooperation with Ukrainian and international partners, ALDA launched its Flagship Initiative in Ukraine, establishing nine new Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) across the country — including LDA Vinnytsia, which officially began its work in 2024.

This expansion builds on ALDA's long-standing presence in Ukraine and reflects one of its most ambitious efforts to date, promoting grassroots democracy through multi-stakeholder partnerships at a time when local engagement is more vital than ever.





Despite the ongoing war, Vinnytsia has developed an innovative governance model that keeps citizens actively involved in decision-making. The city introduced a hybrid format for public hearings, combining in-person meetings with online participation via Facebook and YouTube. This approach ensures that all residents — including displaced persons, elderly citizens, people with disabilities, and residents of remote areas — can follow discussions, submit proposals, and participate in real time.

To prepare citizens for engagement, the city regularly offers educational sessions promoted through social and local media. As a result, public participation increased by 35%, over 50% of citizen proposals were adopted, and 80% of residents reported feeling better informed — a strong indicator of growing civic trust and accountability.

Beyond these local innovations, LDA Vinnytsia has also actively engaged in international cooperation. As part of the TIPS4UA project, delegations from Vinnytsia and Khmilnyk participated in a multi-week learning exchange in Catalonia (Province of Barcelona) in partnership with ALDA, Diputació de Barcelona, and U-LEAD with Europe. Ukrainian delegates met with Catalan municipalities including Terrassa, Mollet, Manresa, Vic, Olesa, Sitges, Cubelles, and Caldes de Montbui, exchanging practices on:

- Social service provision and inclusion policies; Support for IDPs and veterans;
- Urban governance, innovation, and youth engagement;
- Building sustainable municipal partnerships for post-war recovery.

These exchanges have already led to the development of new project proposals and long-term partnerships, reinforcing the international support network surrounding Vinnytsia's democratic recovery efforts.

The partners engaged are the city and the regional council of Vinnitza, the association of municipalities of Vinnitza, the Metropol of Dijon, Bourgogne France Comté and Deputació de Barcelona.

The partners are Vinnytsia City and Regional Council, the Bourgogne-Franche-Comté Region, Dijon Métropole, the Diputació de Barcelona, and All-Ukrainian Civic Initiatives.



## Reflections & Outlook

The experience of Vinnytsia demonstrates that inclusive and adaptive governance is not only possible during wartime — it is essential. What began as a response rooted in emergency solidarity has progressively evolved into a sustainable framework for participatory governance, where international partnerships, civic inclusion, and democratic innovation reinforce one another.

By prioritising accessibility, fostering hybrid participation, and building strong international partnerships, the community has safeguarded trust and civic engagement even in the most challenging circumstances. LDA Vinnytsia stands as an example of how democratic resilience can move from initial solidarity into long-term sustainability, strengthening both local democracy and social cohesion.

As Ukraine continues to navigate the uncertainties of war and prepares for post-war recovery, these adaptive governance practices will remain crucial to preserve civic trust and democratic participation throughout the reconstruction process.





# Pictures from the Vinnytsia mission

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# A Second Story of Resilience: From Trauma to Action – Local Democracy in Practice

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## Context

As the war in Ukraine continues to displace millions of people, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have become one of the most vulnerable groups within the country. Beyond material needs, displaced citizens often face psychological trauma, social fragmentation, and disconnection from democratic life. Ensuring that these communities remain active participants in civic processes has become both a humanitarian and a democratic challenge.



## ALDA's Engagement in Ukraine



In addition to its work establishing new LDAs across Ukraine, ALDA continues to support existing partners such as LDA Mariupol (LDAM), which has become a critical actor in delivering civic engagement, capacity-building, and psychosocial support for displaced communities. Through financial and institutional support, ALDA has enabled LDAM to lead targeted initiatives for IDPs, combining participation, education, and wellbeing as mutually reinforcing aspects of democratic resilience.



## A Story of Resilience

In May 2025, LDAM launched the “Dream. Write. Act.” training programme in Slavuta (Khmelnytskyi Oblast), bringing together displaced persons, youth, women, and active citizens for two days of intensive civic education. With support from ALDA and NGO Love in Action, the training offered participants:

- Guidance on civic participation and local decision-making;
- Tools for building cooperation between communities and local authorities;
- Skills in drafting high-quality project proposals.

The event provided not only practical knowledge but also a much-needed platform for reflection, as participants shared personal stories of displacement and resilience since 2022, transforming lived experience into renewed civic engagement.

In parallel, between February and March 2025, LDAM implemented the project “Psychological support for IDPs from Mariupol and other communities”, in collaboration with the Charity Fund “I-Mariupol”, the Mariupol City Council, and ALDA. With additional support from the Italian partner Cooperativa sociale “STUDIO PROGETTO”, the project delivered:

- 930 individual counselling sessions (771 women, 159 men);
- 120 group sessions across 15+ Ukrainian cities on resilience, stress management, parenting, and reintegration;
- The introduction of metaphorical associative cards to support emotional processing and trauma recovery.

These services were delivered through the Ya-Mariupol IDP Support Centres network, offering much-needed psychosocial support to displaced citizens across Ukraine.

The partners are the City of Gdańsk (Poland), Etterbeek, ADL Zavidovici, Studio Progetto, and the City of Mariupol, now operating in exile.



## Reflections & Outlook

These two initiatives exemplify the depth of democratic resilience beyond institutional processes. Even in the face of ongoing war and forced displacement, LDA Mariupol has helped foster civic agency, psychological healing, and renewed community participation. These actions underscore how local democracy is not only about governance structures, but also about the restoration of citizenship, dignity, and solidarity in the most difficult circumstances.

# Section III – Eastern Partnership: Resilience Under Pressure



## Introduction to the section

Across the Eastern Partnership region, shrinking civic space, political repression, and democratic backsliding continue to challenge local and national governance. Despite these pressures, local actors have remained committed to safeguarding democratic values, defending civic participation, and preserving inclusive decision-making even under increasingly adverse conditions.

This section presents two complementary examples of democratic resilience: in Georgia, through the work of LDA Kutaisi in strengthening citizen participation, civil society capacity, and local democratic governance; and in Belarus, through the mobilisation of the democratic diaspora, which has transformed exile into a platform for civic engagement, advocacy, and solidarity.





# GEORGIA: Resilience through Local Democracy and Civic Participation

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## Context

In recent years, Georgia has faced growing concerns over democratic backsliding. The adoption of restrictive legislation targeting civil society and media has significantly reduced civic space and deepened political tensions. Despite these challenges, local actors have continued to play a key role in upholding democratic values through inclusive governance, community participation, and multi-level cooperation.



## ALDA's Engagement

ALDA has been present in Georgia since 2006 through the work of its Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi (LDA Georgia). Over the years, LDA Georgia has become a central platform for strengthening democratic governance, empowering civil society organisations, and fostering citizen participation at the local level.

As part of its commitment to building resilient democratic communities, ALDA and LDA Georgia have developed initiatives that not only promote inclusive local decision-making, but also strengthen the capacity of local actors to navigate democratic challenges in times of political uncertainty.





## A Story of Resilience

One of the key instruments supporting democratic resilience in Georgia has been the establishment of the Imereti Regional Hub for Civil Society Development, coordinated by LDA Georgia in partnership with ALDA. This regional platform offers sustained capacity building for local civil society organisations, promotes dialogue between citizens and local authorities, and strengthens civil society's role in local governance across multiple municipalities in the Imereti region.

In parallel, LDA Georgia has implemented the project "Increasing the Quality of Citizen Involvement in Local Self-Government", which directly supports municipalities and local communities in improving participatory practices. Through this initiative, ALDA and its partners have worked to:

- Train local authorities and community representatives in effective participatory planning;
- Facilitate public consultations and citizen assemblies;
- Promote tools such as participatory budgeting and local development strategies;
- Ensure greater transparency and accountability in municipal decision-making processes.

These actions have enabled citizens—especially youth, women, and marginalised groups—to engage more actively in local policy-making, contributing to democratic resilience from the ground up, even as national-level democratic space narrows.



## Reflections & Outlook

The experience of LDA Georgia demonstrates that local democratic resilience is not dependent on national political stability alone, but can be cultivated through sustained investment in local participation, civil society capacity building, and multi-stakeholder dialogue.

By anchoring its work in the daily realities of local communities, ALDA's engagement in Georgia offers a clear example of how grassroots democratic practices can persist and evolve even under pressure, helping to safeguard civic trust, social cohesion, and local accountability. These locally grounded approaches will remain essential as Georgia continues to navigate ongoing democratic challenges in the years ahead.



# Resisting Authoritarianism Beyond Borders: The Role of the Democratic Diaspora



## Context

Since the contested presidential elections of 2020, Belarus has undergone one of the most dramatic crackdowns on civic space in Europe. Peaceful protests were met with mass repression, thousands of activists were arrested, and hundreds of NGOs were dissolved. As independent media outlets and civil society organisations were forced into exile, the very possibility of democratic participation was pushed beyond the country's borders.

Yet even under these conditions, new and creative forms of democratic resilience have emerged—driven not by institutions, but by people in exile, determined to uphold democratic values from abroad.



## Network Engagement

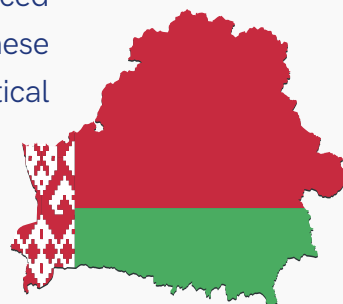
Among the most emblematic responses has been the establishment of the People's Embassies of Belarus—grassroots structures set up by the Belarusian democratic diaspora in more than 20 countries, including Poland, Italy, France, and Germany.

These People's Embassies serve multiple functions:

- They offer symbolic representation for the democratic Belarusian movement in exile;
- They provide support and orientation for Belarusians who have fled political persecution;
- They engage in advocacy, international dialogue, and community-building, often collaborating with local authorities, civil society organisations, and diaspora communities.

These decentralised structures are not state institutions. They are expressions of people-to-people democracy—bottom-up efforts to maintain civic identity, political visibility, and participation under conditions of forced displacement.

In Poland, for instance, the People's Embassy has engaged with municipal stakeholders in cities like Wrocław, promoted dialogue with local authorities, and supported displaced Belarusians in navigating social, legal and educational systems. Across the network, these initiatives also support vulnerable groups such as youth, women, and former political prisoners.



The work of the Belarusian democratic diaspora shows how resilience does not always happen within borders. In this case, it is the very act of exile that has generated new forms of democratic mobilisation.

Despite lacking formal power, these decentralised embassies have:

- Created international visibility for the Belarusian democratic cause;
- Facilitated transnational advocacy with institutions such as the European Parliament and the Council of Europe;
- Fostered new spaces for participation and community engagement outside repressive state frameworks.

In doing so, the diaspora has kept alive not only the narrative of democratic Belarus, but the practice of citizenship itself—through community centres, public dialogues, digital activism and cultural initiatives.



## Reflections & Outlook

The Belarusian case reminds us that democratic resilience is not always about preserving institutions—it can also be about reconstructing meaning, participation and solidarity after rupture. In the face of repression, the Belarusian diaspora has transformed exile into a platform for civic action, drawing strength from its decentralised, localised and international networks.

Though ALDA is not directly involved in these initiatives, their values align with the very mission of our association: defending democracy, fostering participation, and empowering local actors. As Belarusian civil society continues to operate in exile, transnational cooperation, local alliances, and inclusive networks will remain key to sustaining hope and preparing for democratic recovery.





# Section IV – Latin America: Resilience Through Decentralised Cooperation

## Introduction to the section

While ALDA's engagement in Latin America is only just beginning to take shape, other European actors have long been developing innovative forms of decentralised cooperation in the region. This section highlights the work of one of ALDA's key members, the Diputació de Barcelona, whose sustained partnerships in Latin America demonstrate how decentralised cooperation can serve as a vehicle for democratic resilience, human rights promotion, and peacebuilding across borders.



# Rethinking Decentralised Cooperation: The Experience of Diputació de Barcelona

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## Context

In recent years, decentralisation, human rights, and local democracy have come under growing pressure across Latin America. Fragile governance systems, shrinking civic space, and rising violence within communities are increasingly challenging the ability of local authorities and civil society actors to promote inclusive development. In this complex and shifting context, the need for renewed, rights-based approaches to cooperation is more urgent than ever.



## ALDA's Member Engagement

A long-standing member of ALDA, the Diputació de Barcelona has played a leading role in reimagining decentralised cooperation as a tool for strengthening democratic resilience in the region. Through its coordination of the Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean (OCDUEALC), the Diputació promotes dialogue, generates shared methodologies, and provides strategic instruments for actors working at the local level.

The Observatory functions as a platform for capacity-building and reflection, helping local stakeholders address today's challenges through cooperation models anchored in human rights, democracy, and peace.



## A Story of Resilience

The VIII OCDUEALC Conference, held in Barcelona in June 2022, marked a turning point. Under the title “Rethinking decentralised cooperation in a context of uncertainties and multiple transitions”, the conference set out a renewed vision for cooperation based on the values of equality, justice, coexistence, and sustainability.

Building on this momentum, the Diputació spearheaded the publication of the “Guide for Local Peace Agendas and Decentralised Cooperation” in 2024. The guide identifies practical tools and good practices for designing and implementing local peace policies through international partnerships. It also reflects on real-world experiences of local actors working on peacebuilding and policy development, offering concrete recommendations to improve the effectiveness and inclusiveness of territorial peace strategies.



## Reflections & Outlook

The experience of the Diputació de Barcelona in Latin America reaffirms that decentralised cooperation can be a powerful instrument of democratic resilience when rooted in shared values and adapted to territorial realities. By integrating peacebuilding, human rights, and inclusive governance into the core of its international partnerships, the Diputació has shown that cooperation is not simply about technical support—it is about building long-term trust, shared political agendas, and alliances for transformation.

The EU-LAC Observatory stands today as a key actor in this effort: a space for reflection, capacity building and narrative change. Its work demonstrates that local governments have both the legitimacy and the responsibility to contribute to international peacebuilding—helping shape a model of cooperation that is participatory, sustainable, and firmly anchored in democratic principles



# Conclusion: Resilient Democracies – Local Voices in a Global Challenge

The stories gathered in this handbook reflect a simple, yet powerful truth: democratic resilience is built from the ground up. In contexts as diverse as war-torn Ukraine, fragile transitions in Sub-Saharan Africa, the transnational struggle of the Belarusian diaspora, emerging solidarity in Latin America, and electoral pressure in Georgia, it is local actors—citizens, communities, municipalities, civil society organisations—who continue to defend democratic principles in the face of adversity.

Throughout these experiences, several common threads emerge:

- The essential role of local participation and inclusive governance;
- The need for international solidarity that empowers local actors rather than replaces them;
- The importance of adaptability, as resilience often takes new forms in response to evolving threats.

At the heart of ALDA's mission lies this conviction: that local democracy is not a secondary dimension of democratic governance, but one of its primary foundations. In fragile contexts, it is precisely this proximity between institutions and citizens that allows democratic life to continue, even under immense strain.

As we reflect on these stories, we are reminded that defending democracy today requires not only institutional reform, but also protecting the people, spaces, and networks where participation happens. Democratic resilience is not a static achievement, but an ongoing process sustained through cooperation, creativity, and shared responsibility.

This handbook stands as a small testimony to that ongoing work—and to the collective efforts of the many individuals and organisations that continue to turn democratic values into lived practice, even in the most challenging circumstances.

# Acknowledgements and Contributors

This Handbook on Democratic Resilience has been developed by ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy, with contributions provided by ALDA members, partners, and colleagues across the network. We warmly thank all those who contributed their time, expertise, and insights to the collection of stories presented in this publication.

## Contributions

- Diputació de Barcelona – contribution to the section Latin America: Resilience through Decentralised Cooperation and International Solidarity.
- Caucasus Open Space (Georgia) – contribution to the section Defending Electoral Integrity in Georgia.
- Belarusian Democratic Forces and People's Embassies Network – contribution to the section Democratic Resilience in Exile: The Belarusian Case.
- LDA Mariupol (Ukraine) – input for Local Democracy in Practice: From Trauma to Action.
- WYDE Civic Engagement Partners (Africa) – input for case studies on Tanzania, Uganda, Cameroon, Benin, Chad.

## Photo Credits

Selected photographs have been kindly provided by project partners, contributors, and ALDA's members:

- Diputació de Barcelona: photo provided by Municipalidad de Antigua.
- Belarus: photos provided by Belarusian People's Embassies Network.
- Georgia: photos provided by Caucasus Open Space.
- Ukraine: photos provided by ALDA, LDA Mariupol, and project partners.
- Africa: visuals provided through WYDE Civic Engagement partner organisations.
- Other visuals: ALDA internal archive or public domain materials.

## Disclaimer

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