

2025 Forum Cities and Regions for International Partnerships

LOCALISING GLOBAL GATEWAY

The contribution of Local and Regional
Authorities to the EU's Global
Gateway strategy

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ABSTRACT

European external action is changing fundamentally, moving away from traditional donor-recipient relations towards more strategic engagement with equal partners around converging interests and win-win partnerships in a context of global uncertainty and geopolitical competition. The **Global Gateway strategy**, launched in 2021, epitomises this new paradigm. It **seeks to boost investments in sustainable infrastructure** (across sectors, including by leveraging private funding) to **create prosperity, decent jobs and services for local communities while reinforcing ties with partner countries and defending European interests and values**. Global Gateway goes beyond investing in ‘hard’ infrastructure. To distinguish itself from investment schemes supported by other global actors, the EU promotes a ‘value-based offer’, by focusing on core principles to ensure that the required ‘soft’ elements are in place for sustainable projects benefiting local communities. To this end, the EU introduced the ‘360-degree approach’ aimed at fostering an enabling environment for investments (see section I of this report).

Five years later, the EU is seeking to scale-up the potential of Global Gateway and the operationalisation of the 360-degree approach. One way to do so is by further **localising the Global Gateway by ensuring stronger territorial anchorage and working more systematically with Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs)**. Against this backdrop, the Commission’s Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) organised a three-day Forum on this topic in December 2025, attracting significant participation. The event aimed to demonstrate the added value LRAs can bring to implementing the Global Gateway and the 360-degree approach, while exploring options to scale-up this engagement. Forum debates highlighted that the scaling-up and **impact of Global Gateway will largely depend on the degree of territorial anchorage, local ownership and effective multi-level governance** (see section II of this report).



A key feature of the 2025 Forum was its focus on practices and lessons from the implementation of Global Gateway projects involving LRAs. Sessions examined how recurrent constraints to involving LRAs such as limited access to finance, governance and capacity gaps or fragile contexts were addressed and what benefits resulted from engaging local actors and territories. The debates illustrated that many opportunities exist to meaningfully involve LRAs through different modalities, creating mutual benefits and strong convergence among participants on how to mobilise this potential further (see section III of this report). Another cross-cutting theme, which yielded a large consensus, was the relevance of decentralised cooperation (or city-to-city / region-to-region exchanges) in strengthening the capacities local actors to meaningfully engage in the Global Gateway (see section IV of the report).

Overall, a clear set of shared conclusions emerged emphasising that: (i) **Global Gateway becomes tangible at territorial level**, requiring effective localisation; (ii) a **‘360-degree’ multilevel and multi-actor approach is essential** to translate EU priorities and investments into locally owned, SDG aligned outcomes; (iii) **LRAs can play a critical role in creating an enabling environment** for legitimate, impactful and sustainable investments (including in fragile settings) and; (iv) **decentralised cooperation can multiply impact**. These conclusions were translated into **actor-specific recommendations** for EU institutions, EU Delegations, EU Member States and national partner country authorities, LRAs, international financial institutions and development banks as well as for the European Committee of the Regions and networks of LRAs. They received strong political and institutional support at the closing session of the Forum in the Hemicycle of the European Parliament (see section V of this report).

I. WELCOME AND BACKGROUND TO THE FORUM

The [Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum 2025](#), which was held from 8 to 10 December 2025, welcomed 380 participants from 71 countries across four continents, including 130 local and regional authority representatives from Europe and partner countries, including Members of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), EU institutions, international (financial) institutions and development practitioners. Organised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and the CoR, the 2025 edition was entitled "*Localising Global Gateway – The contribution of Local and Regional Authorities to the EU's Global Gateway strategy, including in fragile contexts*".

The Forum took place in an overall context marked by instability, multiple crises, intensified geopolitical competition, erosion of the traditional development cooperation as well as slow progress on global agendas. With a view to respond to these complex challenges, the EU adopted a more geopolitical approach by launching in 2021 its [Global Gateway strategy](#).

The Global Gateway approach represents a major paradigm shift in EU external action and development cooperation. It reflects a move away from traditional donor-recipient relations towards a strategic engagement with equal partners based on mutually beneficial and agreed interests in a context of geopolitical competition. This strategy seeks to boost investments in quality and sustainable infrastructure in partner countries to create prosperity, decent jobs, and services for local communities, while strengthening connections between the EU and its partners. It is driven by equal partnerships and anchored in democratic principles and good governance, including social, environmental and governance (ESG) standards. The Global Gateway strategy embodies a Team Europe approach that brings together the European Union, EU Member States, their development agencies, EIB, EBRD and European development finance institutions. Five years later, more than 306 billion EUR of investments has already been mobilised through Team Europe across key sectors such as connectivity, energy, digitalisation and resilience. The EU ambition now is to scale-up up the potential of Global Gateway. This may entail examining how investments could be better anchored in the territories (by localising Global Gateway) and deepening the engagement with LRAs in view of enhancing overall impact and sustainability. As a biannual platform of dialogue and exchange, the Forum is well placed to stimulate this debate.

Building on the outcomes of the 2023 Forum — which aimed to familiarise LRAs with the Global Gateway strategy — the aim of this edition was to dive deeper into the many 'how-to-do questions' involved in the localisation of Global Gateway. The overall objective of the 2025 edition of the Forum was to demonstrate the concrete added value that LRAs can bring to the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy and its '360-degree approach'¹ — focused on ensuring an enabling environment for investments. Beyond showcasing best practices and lessons learnt, the Forum served as a platform to promote the integration of decentralised cooperation as a recognised modality in the EU toolbox to roll-out the Global Gateway.



1. The 360-degree approach entails the systematic application, tailored to the context, of 6 key principles (1) democratic values and high standards; (2) good governance and transparency; (3) equal partnerships, (4) green and clean, (5) security-focused, and (6) catalysing private sector investment which guide the selection, implementation and monitoring of Global Gateway investments. Several of these principles are linked to legal obligations, notably mainstreaming human rights, democracy, rule of law, gender equality, environmental protection and the fight against climate change.

To this end, the Forum brought together key local and regional (elected) representatives and officials already working in selected Global Gateway flagships (based on a [study of 46 Global Gateway investments involving LRAs²](#) in different ways across regions, prepared in advanced of the Forum) or interested in doing so in the future. The Forum was tied to the CoR Plenary session, which unanimously adopted the CoR Opinion on *“The Localisation of the Global Gateway strategy”*, providing further political endorsement for the role of LRAs in Global Gateway.

The Forum also marked the public launch of two new EU-funded initiatives. The EU announced EUR 250,000 in support for the State of Sonora (Mexico) for the decarbonisation and green-logistics transformation of the Port of Guaymas. This project will be implemented directly with local authorities through the Financing Not Linked to Cost (FNLC) modality — the first FNLC grant with local authorities in EU co-operation. The EU also confirmed its support for Ecuador’s first green bond, to be issued in 2026 by the public Development Bank of Ecuador (BDE), with a planned volume of USD 50–100 million. Developed with EU and UNDP technical support under the Global Gateway Flagship “Global Green Bond Initiative” (GGBI), the bond will unlock new opportunities for sustainable investments in Ecuadorian cities and municipalities, demonstrating how EU support can help expand access to green finance at local level.

In a spirit of co-creation, Forum participants came up with concrete recommendations for the various actors involved — particularly EU Delegations as well as LRAs from partner countries and from Europe. The Forum also provided opportunities for peer-to-peer exchanges (respectively among LRAs from Europe, from partner countries and EU Delegations). All discussions were brought together in a high-level closing in the CoR plenary session, in the European Parliament hemicycle, in which positive feedback was provided on the core recommendations presented by CoR members and key institutional speakers, including the Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Development.



2. In addition to the mapping report, a booklet was prepared for the Forum that provides an overview of each of the Global Gateway projects analysed. The booklet can be accessed [here](#) and via the Forum 2025 website hosted by the CoR [here](#).

II. WHY LOCALISING GLOBAL GATEWAY AND INVOLVING LRAS MATTERS

Global Gateway is more than just investing in ‘hard’ infrastructure. To demarcate itself from investments provided by other global actors, the EU proposes a value-based offer, as reflected in the EU’s ‘360 degrees approach’, focused on the ‘soft’ elements required to ensure sustainable investments and benefits for local communities. In this logic, six key principles are expected to guide the selection, implementation, and monitoring of all Global Gateway investments (i.e. democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean, security focused and catalysing the private sector).

During the initial phase of implementing the Global Gateway strategy, the place and role of LRAs was not clearly defined. Over time, growing interest and positive dynamics emerged in terms of recognising both the need and the added value of a stronger territorial anchorage of Global Gateway investment schemes and a more meaningful involvement of LRAs as public entities mandated to foster local development. In 2024, a [Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform](#) was established as the main entry point for integrating the perspective of LRAs. The mapping study prepared by INTPA for the Forum revealed a growing interest of EU Delegations to reach out to LRAs on Global Gateway projects and engage with them through different modalities (i.e. from consultation to have them in the driving seat for design or implementation to direct access to funding). However, these valuable efforts to link Global Gateway investments to LRAs remain largely ad hoc and fragmented. More systematic steering from INTPA headquarters could further support and encourage EU Delegations to engage more consistently with LRAs. At the same time there also exist structural barriers for LRAs to participate in Global Gateway projects, particularly in terms of limited administrative and fiscal autonomy and restricted access to international financial markets — complicating investment planning driven by local priorities. Financial risks, particularly currency exposure, as well as capacity gaps in project preparation and management at the local level are strong deterrents, especially for smaller municipalities.

From the start of the Forum, the need to structurally anchor the territorial dimension and scale up LRA involvement in Global Gateway projects was emphasised, as reflected in the welcome speech of the European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jozef Síkela:

“It is in cities and regions where many of today’s challenges become the most visible. It is also where solutions begin to take shape, where policy directly impacts citizens”.

High-level panellists agreed that the impact of Global Gateway depends on translating strategic objectives into concrete, locally owned outcomes. Since investments materialise and services are delivered at territorial level, localisation is a strategic necessity. Due to their democratic legitimacy and legally defined mandates, LRAs operate within an institutional framework that differs fundamentally from that of civil society organisations and private sector actors. As political entities, they represent local communities, and they are uniquely positioned to design local public policies and to deliver cross-sectoral services aligned with Global Gateway priorities.



The Forum stressed that dealing with LRAs as secondary partners in Global Gateway would undermine both project effectiveness and the EU's value-based approach because:

- As political entities and the first port of call of citizens, LRAs can bring democratic legitimacy, proximity to communities, convening power, local development planning and service delivery mandates as well as the ability to embed EU values such as democracy, participation and subsidiarity.
- LRAs can mobilise investors, SMEs, CSOs and academia to implement investments in critical sectors such as water, sanitation, waste management, transport or renewable energy. These partnerships, including public-private partnerships (PPPs), offer critical means to bridge infrastructure and financing gaps, while ensuring quality, affordability, and resilience.
- LRAs contribute invaluable local knowledge and responsiveness, including in fragile contexts, enabling better risks management as well as faster and more context-specific interventions.

III. MAIN OPPORTUNITIES SHAPING LRA ENGAGEMENT IN GLOBAL GATEWAY

Experience gained with attempts to open-up Global Gateway to LRAs shows the prominence of recurrent challenges, including:

- Access to financing;
- Effective application of the 360-degree approach;
- Partnerships with the private sector and;
- Working in fragile settings.

The Forum provided the platform to present **best practices** and lessons learnt in each of these four areas reflecting how obstacles faced were overcome and on what enabled success.



1. LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES ACCESS TO FUNDING UNDER THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

How to get access to (direct) funding under the Global Gateway? The session focused on whether the EU's existing financial architecture is sufficiently adapted to recognise cities and regions as political and financial actors, and what structural conditions (particularly decentralisation frameworks, fiscal autonomy and risk-sharing mechanisms) must be in place for LRAs to move from downstream implementers or beneficiaries to actual project holders with financial responsibilities for Global Gateway investments.

Conditions for LRAs access to Global Gateway financial instruments

It was emphasised that currently, in practice, LRAs can access Global Gateway financial instruments only in a limited number of partner countries, mainly those with well-established decentralisation frameworks and fiscal autonomy. In such contexts, LRAs can exploit instruments such as blending and guarantee schemes and assume different roles within Global Gateway investments. Of the 46 projects analysed in the mapping conducted by DG INTPA ahead of the Forum, only 17 provided some form of direct funding to LRAs. Some of the 17 projects combine more than one financial modality so the funding was delivered in 15 projects through grants (including one Financing Not Linked to Cost), through a few loans (5 projects, e.g., Morocco via the Municipal Equipment Fund) and guarantees (2 projects, in Ecuador and Morocco).

Concrete examples from Ecuador, India and Morocco highlighted that LRAs may have different roles when it comes to financing, depending notably on national political, fiscal and regulatory conditions. These cases demonstrate that access to Global Gateway finance is not determined by project quality alone, but also by the extent to which sub-national authorities are recognised as legitimate political and financial actors within national systems.

Across cases, a consistent pattern emerged:

- Where decentralisation is institutionalised and fiscal autonomy is sufficiently developed, LRAs can participate more directly in Global Gateway financing;
- Where decision-making and borrowing capacity are centralised, access to international finance remains structurally constrained.

Structural bottlenecks affecting access to finance

Persistent bottlenecks were identified, that continue to limit LRA access to Global Gateway funding.

- Limited administrative and fiscal autonomy constrains the ability of LRAs to act as project holders or to engage directly with international financial institutions. Even where technical capacity exists, national approval requirements can delay or block access to external finance.
- Restricted access to international financial markets complicates long-term investment planning at local level. Many LRAs lack credit histories, borrowing authority or the scale required to meet standard financial requirements.
- Communication gaps between local authorities, national governments, EU institutions and financial actors hinder the translation of territorial priorities into investable pipelines. Fragmented procedures and unclear mandates further weaken LRA positioning within the Global Gateway.
- Financial risks, particularly currency exposure, were repeatedly cited as a deterrent, especially for smaller municipalities. These risks reduce appetite for borrowing and increase dependence on national intermediaries, reinforcing centralisation.
- Limited technical and management capacities at the local level to prepare and submit “bankable” investment projects proposals.
- High transaction costs and elevated perceived risks constrain the ability of small-scale municipal projects to attract traditional financial institutions. Even where projects are technically sound, these factors often block or delay access to external finance.



EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE: UNLOCKING ACCESS TO FINANCE FOR CUENCA (ECUADOR)³

An illustration of how these bottlenecks can be addressed when appropriate financial tools are combined with political recognition of LRAs came from Cuenca in Ecuador. A project to manage solid waste was supported through an EFSD+ guarantee, which covers up to 70% of a loan provided by Agence Française de Développement (AFD), demonstrating how Global Gateway instruments can address structural barriers to municipal finance. As a medium-sized city, Cuenca faced barriers typical for LRAs, including limited borrowing capacity and national requirements for state-backed guarantees, effectively restricting access to external finance. By combining strong municipal leadership with EU-backed de-risking mechanisms and the involvement of development finance institutions, the city was able to act as a direct project holder, strengthening ownership and accountability.

"In Ecuador we need a guarantee for our loan from the state. It's a national bottleneck problem. In Cuenca we were the first city in Ecuador to address the issue successfully!" noted Christian Zamora, Mayor of Cuenca.

This case demonstrates a broader lesson highlighted repeatedly in discussions: supporting LRAs early in project preparation and granting them access to appropriate financial instruments can unlock investment-ready pipelines rather than remain a peripheral add-on to national strategies.

Financial architecture and territorial investment

The importance of aligning Global Gateway's financial architecture with territorial realities was emphasised. National Development Banks were identified as key actors for co-financing territorial investment and for bridging the gap between international finance and local implementation.

Participants stressed that Global Gateway should contribute to:

- Strengthening the capacities of National Development Banks,
- Aligning national financial priorities with territorial needs,
- Supporting the establishment of such institutions where absent.



Mobilising territorial resources was repeatedly framed as a multiplier for Global Gateway finance. Local expertise, networks and funding enhance project ownership and help deliver the 'final kilometre' of investments on the ground. Co-financing by LRAs was highlighted as a strong signal of commitment, reinforcing continuity across electoral cycles and strengthening accountability.

International initiatives such as the [Sevilla Platform for Action on localising finance](#) (launched during the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development in June 2025) aim to support cities and regions in their efforts to attract sustainable development investments. The Sevilla Platform intends to create a multi-stakeholder community of practice and strengthen decentralised cooperation while also providing knowledge and practical tools to foster enabling environments and scale up transformative local financing solutions.

Key conclusions from participants

- LRAs access to finance is a strategic test of the EU's commitment to localisation.
- Financial instruments must be adapted to sub-national contexts.
- Territorial finance should be embedded structurally.
- Scaling Global Gateway requires stronger financial roles for LRAs across governance levels.

3. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

2. THE 360-DEGREE APPROACH IN PRACTICE: PREPARING THE GROUND FOR TERRITORIAL DELIVERY

How can Global Gateway be effectively localised through a 360-degree approach? The approach was consolidated as an organising principle for translating EU priorities into locally owned, sustainable territorial initiatives moving beyond fragmented or sector-specific interventions.

From strategy to territorial readiness

Discussions recognised that the localisation of Global Gateway depends not only on investment volumes, but on the quality of upstream engagement.

Cities and regions were identified as spaces where policy objectives meet service delivery, administrative capacity, and citizen expectations, making it crucial to reinforce local governance frameworks, project preparation processes, and structured dialogue to anchor Global Gateway. Early and continuous engagement of LRAs can prepare the ground for future investments and maximise their sustainable impact, even before large-scale financing is deployed.

“Because sustainable development happens not in ministries or board rooms but in cities, regions, towns and rural areas, where services are delivered, where jobs are created and communities are transformed.”

(Hildegard Bentele, Member of the European Parliament – DE/EPP)



Governance, capacity and institutional anchoring

An emerging central message was that the 360-degree approach hinges in institutional anchoring. Strengthening governance at local and regional level was presented as a prerequisite for sustainable impact, not a secondary objective.

Discussions highlighted that local and regional authorities provide legitimacy, proximity to citizens and bear responsibility for essential public services. Their early engagement supports clarification of territorial priorities, improves coordination across levels of government and reinforces accountability. This is particularly relevant in contexts where national frameworks are complex or highly centralised, and where sub-national actors require support to navigate policy and administrative interfaces.

It was emphasised that governance support under the 360-degree approach is not limited to formal institutional reforms. It also includes peer learning, administrative strengthening and the mobilisation of local ecosystems involving utilities, academic and civil society actors, all of whom contribute to building long-term capacity and ownership.

Project preparation as a pathway to impact

Participants consistently identified project preparation as a critical function of the 360-degree approach. Rather than focusing narrowly on individual projects, the approach should support the development of project pipelines that are aligned with territorial strategies and capable of evolving over time. Early-stage support enables LRAs to translate identified needs into coherent project proposals and ensure alignment with national and EU priorities. This upstream engagement reduces the risk of ad hoc interventions and supports continuity across political and administrative cycles.

Case studies presented demonstrated that project preparation is most effective when embedded in long-term partnerships and supported by dialogue among local, national and European actors. This allows learning, adaptation and scaling to take place incrementally.

Complementary projects help create coherent development strategies

As part of the 360-degree approach, the importance of complementary projects was highlighted as they can help to plan and sequence reinforcing rather than stand-alone initiatives. They combine different tools and scales, such as technical assistance, capacity building, community-level works, and larger investments, so that upstream support on planning, design and governance directly feeds into downstream, bankable investments. By aligning these actions across different levels of government and sectors, complementary projects create a more coherent development pathway.

This logic was illustrated in presentation of projects in Nepal and Indonesia. In Nepal's Cities for Women initiative, small, co-designed public open spaces and safer markets are linked to broader riverfront regeneration and integrated urban infrastructure plans so that community-scale pilots can be scaled into larger investments with development banks and private partners. In Indonesia, preparatory support and capacity building for municipalities, such as feasibility and environmental studies, are tied directly to infrastructure financing via the national development finance institution, enabling complex projects like waste-to-energy to move from concept to implementation by aligning local systems, national regulation, and private capital.

EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE: DRIVING DIGITAL AND URBAN TRANSFORMATION IN KENYA⁴

In Kenya, the 360-degree approach was applied as a preparatory and enabling mechanism by anchoring EU support for digital and urban transformation in county systems and plans, within an EUR 435 million package across 32 projects.

County governments are engaged from the conceptualisation stage, for example in the Digital Land Governance Programme, urban development, and slum upgrading, which has reduced coordination failures and strengthened ownership and sustainability.

The approach is complementary by design, combining support for county planning and governance, the development of bankable project pipelines and a public-private partnership handbook, and supporting public-private partnerships in urban services such as waste management. Institutions like the Council of Governors further reinforce this by aggregating the voice of the 47 counties and co-creating programmes with partners, helping ensure that subnational priorities shape project design and financing.

Dialogue, partnerships and territorial ecosystems

The 360-degree approach relies on structured and continuous dialogue among local and regional authorities, national institutions and EU actors. Such dialogue was seen as essential for aligning expectations, managing complexity and avoiding duplication.

Participants emphasised that decentralised cooperation provides a practical framework for this engagement, enabling peer-to-peer exchanges and long-term relationships that support learning and trust. Through these partnerships, local and regional authorities can position themselves not only as implementers, but as co-creators of Global Gateway initiatives.

The mobilisation of territorial ecosystems was highlighted as a further strength of the approach. By engaging a broad range of local actors, the 360-degree approach reinforces local governance and enhances the social acceptance and sustainability of interventions.

4. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

Embedding the territorial dimension in Global Gateway delivery

A recurring theme was the risk of treating the 360-degree approach as an add-on rather than a core logic for delivery. Participants cautioned that without systematic integration into planning, programming and monitoring, the approach risks remaining theoretical. Embedding the territorial dimension requires flexibility to reflect diverse political, financial and regulatory contexts, as well as respect for subsidiarity. It also requires recognition that one-size-fits-all models are ineffective, and that adaptive, place-based engagement is essential to respond to the complex realities on the ground. It was stressed that early and continuous involvement of LRAs strengthens coherence, improves implementation capacity and enhances the visibility of EU action.

Key conclusions from participants

- Localising Global Gateway requires a long-term, process-oriented approach that strengthens governance, capacity and structured dialogue at territorial level.
- LRAs are strategic partners whose engagement enhances legitimacy, alignment, and sustainability of EU external action.
- Consistent application of the 360-degree approach enables scaling from pilot projects to coherent territorial planning.



3. PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN LOCALISING THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

How can partnerships between local and regional authorities and the private sector mobilise additional resources, improve infrastructure and service delivery, and drive local economic development hence contribute to the localisation of Global Gateway? Discussions focused on the conditions under which such partnerships become effective and efficient, and on the specific role of LRAs in shaping predictable, territorially anchored frameworks that enable private sector engagement.

Stability, predictability and continuity as preconditions to unlock private engagement

A central message of the session was that private sector engagement under Global Gateway can only be unlocked where stability, predictability and continuity are ensured. LRAs play a critical role in achieving these conditions at territorial level. Growth is only possible where economic activity takes place, and private investment can bridge gaps that public funding alone cannot fill. However, this requires clear regulatory frameworks, credible institutions and long-term planning.

Participants stressed that SMEs depend on predictable investment pipelines and transparent planning frameworks. LRAs play a catalyst role in this regard by embedding Global Gateway projects within territorial development strategies and long-term service delivery plans. By doing so, they reduce uncertainty and signal commitment beyond electoral cycles. This continuity across political mandates was repeatedly identified as decisive for building trust with private partners. Stable governance structures and consistent enforcement of rules increase investor confidence and enable projects to scale. Robust risk mapping and multi-stakeholder governance approaches were highlighted as effective tools to de-risk investments and strengthen credibility.

Public-private partnerships as drivers of local economic development

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) linked to Global Gateway were presented as key instruments to translate strategic investments into tangible local impact. When properly structured and territorially anchored, PPPs can create stable demand for local goods and services, strengthen value chains and support skills development linked to infrastructure and service provision.

Discussions emphasised that LRAs are not passive intermediaries but strategic partners capable of mobilising private actors at multiple levels — from infrastructure supply and operations to digital innovation and maintenance services. By aligning partnerships with local economic ecosystems, LRAs help ensure that investments generate employment, improve service delivery and produce measurable economic benefits for communities.

Decentralised cooperation as a risk-reduction mechanism

Examples discussed highlighted decentralised cooperation as a practical instrument to overcome recurring bottlenecks in public–private engagement. Peer-to-peer exchanges between European and partner-country LRAs enable problem-solving on procurement, service models and contractual arrangements and regulatory standards.

Such exchanges reduce transaction costs and uncertainty for private investors by improving institutional capacity and investment readiness at local level. Decentralised cooperation was also seen as a mechanism to ensure continuity beyond electoral cycles, strengthening credibility vis-à-vis private partners.

Presented project examples showed that decentralised cooperation between port cities, regional authorities and sectoral agencies can accelerate risk reduction through feasibility studies, regulatory improvements, digitalisation of procedures and capacity-building of operators. By enhancing local governance and technical preparedness, decentralised cooperation directly boosts investor confidence and unlocks private engagement.

EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE: BUILDING CONDITIONS TO ATTRACT PRIVATE INVESTMENT FOR LAGOS (NIGERIA) INLAND WATER TRANSPORT⁵

The Nigeria ferry transport project, located along a strategic Global Gateway corridor, was presented as a high-potential example to mobilise private sector engagement and anchor it territorially. Lagos State acts as implementer in this EUR 360 million initiative and assumes financial responsibility, providing political stability and institutional credibility. An EUR 130 million loan from AFD is combined with a EUR 170 million EIB loan and a EUR 60 million EU grant.

The project is expected to transport up to five million passengers and creates an enabling framework for private participation at multiple levels, including fleet supply, terminal development, digital ticketing systems, operation and maintenance services. A robust risk-mapping process and strong coordination between waterways authorities, regional and federal actors have strengthened confidence that private investment will be attracted. Additionally, the project framework was explicitly designed to incentivise private sector engagement in the future.

Ultimately, the project aims to improve the mobility and livelihood of Lagosians who currently spend an average of 5 hours every day in traffic and allocate approximately 30 to 40% of their household incomes to transportation costs.

Key conclusions from participants

- LRA–private sector partnerships should be central to delivering lasting local impact under Global Gateway.
- Strong territorial anchoring and active LRA involvement are key to effective partnerships.
- Decentralised cooperation strengthens public–private partnerships through peer learning and risk reduction.
- Predictable frameworks and stable local governance help mobilise private investment and support local development.

5. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

4. WORKING IN FRAGILE SETTINGS

How can Global Gateway be implemented strategically, effectively and sustainably in fragile and complex settings, and what role can LRAs play in maintaining continuity, legitimacy and impact? Discussions focused on how integrated approaches, flexible procedures and long-term engagement with territories can enable Global Gateway to deliver results despite political instability and where national frameworks are weak, contested or volatile.

Fragility as a defining context for Global Gateway delivery

The discussions underlined that fragile settings are not marginal to the Global Gateway, but central to its implementation challenge. In many partner countries, political volatility, contested authority, weak state capacity and security constraints complicate the translation of strategic priorities into tangible outcomes. Participants emphasised that, in such contexts, conventional top-down delivery models often struggle to get and maintain traction. Fragmented governance structures, rapid changes in leadership and limited institutional capacity increase the risk of interruption and undermine trust. As a result, engaging effectively in these settings has required a growing body of policies, integrated approaches and more flexible instruments and procedures. Within this context, the localisation of the Global Gateway was framed not as a risk, but as a pragmatic response to fragility.

The role of local and regional authorities in fragile contexts

A consistent message was that LRAs often remain the most trusted and operational level of governance in fragile settings. Their proximity to citizens and embeddedness in local social and political dynamics allow them to maintain a degree of continuity even when national institutions are weakened or contested. In such contexts LRAs are political and operational anchors that are often best placed to:

- Identify urgent and legitimate local priorities,
- Sustain service delivery despite instability,
- Act as interlocutors between communities, national authorities and international partners.



Treating LRAs as secondary actors was repeatedly described as a missed opportunity that risks undermining both effectiveness and legitimacy. In fragile settings, integrated local approaches linking governance, service delivery, citizen engagement and institutional capacity were seen as essential, while isolated interventions were considered less suited to addressing systemic challenges such as low levels of trust and weak resilience.

Evidence from practice: Cities Alliance and country cases

The [Cities Alliance](#), which has long worked in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, highlighted how territorial engagement, incremental capacity-building and strong local ownership can sustain development despite instability. A bottom-up approach is important, starting with local actors and projects to address people's real needs, helping to build trust and social cohesion. In this way, localisation means real local ownership.

The Cities Alliance described its technical assistance to help cities mitigate risks, such as lack of data to inform planning, or addressing unpredictability, like changing demographics and political uncertainty, enabling continued services delivery. They highlighted the need to shift from fragmented funding to predictable finance, reinforced by Global Gateway's support for stability and long-term planning and investment.

LOCALISING GLOBAL GATEWAY IN FRAGILE SETTINGS: KIVU-KINSHASA GREEN CORRIDOR (DRC)⁶

The Kivu–Kinshasa Green Corridor initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates how Global Gateway investments can be localised in fragile and conflict-affected settings by anchoring large-scale interventions in local governance structures. Spanning biodiversity protection, sustainable livelihoods, energy access and infrastructure, the initiative operates in a context marked by insecurity, weak state capacity and overlapping authorities. By engaging territorial actors alongside national institutions, development banks and international partners, the Green Corridor approach seeks to reduce risk, build legitimacy and ensure that investments respond to local socio-economic realities.

“The partnership with the EU has been critical to build an alternative model to address the outstanding root problem: what is it about this region that produces a breakdown of governance over national resources,” explained Emmanuel de Merode, Director of Virunga National Park.

The project underscores a central lesson for Global Gateway implementation in fragile contexts: without early and sustained involvement of local authorities, even strategically significant flagship initiatives risk losing traction on the ground, while decentralised cooperation can provide the connective tissue that links security, development and governance objectives into a coherent, resilient intervention.

Flexibility, learning and adaptive engagement

A further emerging theme was the need for flexible instruments and procedures when operating in fragile settings. Participants noted that rigid programming cycles and standardised approaches are often inadequate for rapidly changing environments.

Working effectively in fragile contexts requires iterative learning, the ability to adjust methods and sustained engagement over time. LRAs were identified as key partners in this adaptive process, given their ongoing presence and contextual knowledge.

Discussions emphasised that such flexibility should not be confused with lower ambition. On the contrary, it was presented as a means of safeguarding impact, accountability and relevance under difficult conditions.

Legitimacy, trust and citizen engagement

Speakers repeatedly returned to the issue of legitimacy. In fragile settings, citizen trust in national institutions is often limited, making LRAs critical conduits for engagement. By anchoring Global Gateway initiatives in territorial governance, the EU can help to improve transparency, accountability and social acceptance.

Participants stressed that visible, citizen-facing outcomes delivered through local institutions help sustain trust and demonstrate the EU’s commitment to long-term engagement rather than short-term intervention. This dimension was seen as central to the EU’s values-based external action and to its differentiation in a competitive geopolitical environment.

Key conclusions from participants

- Fragile settings test Global Gateway’s ability to deliver durable, locally owned results.
- Fragility makes engagement with LRAs essential, especially where national frameworks are weak.
- LRAs provide continuity, local intelligence and legitimacy in volatile contexts.
- Flexible, integrated approaches are necessary to ensure resilience, trust and long-term stability.

6. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

IV. UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF DECENTRALISED COOPERATION IN LOCALISING GLOBAL GATEWAY

The second day of the Forum focused on the specific instrument of decentralised cooperation (DC) and the contributions it could make in delivering Global Gateway objectives and the EU's 360-degree approach.

Decentralised cooperation or peer-to-peer exchanges between cities, regions or both across the world has a long history, particularly in Europe. Over time, city-to-city cooperation moved beyond a donor-recipient relationship and evolved into horizontal and reciprocal partnerships, extending their ambit while increasingly raising the voice of LRAs in international circles and global fora. Available evidence shows that decentralised cooperation processes can demonstrate valuable results benefitting LRAs and citizens with tangible development outcomes. A recent proof is the EU-funded programme *'Partnerships for Sustainable Cities'* which supported 57 city-to-city collaborations between LRAs in Europe and in partner countries across the globe. The data collected on this programme show strong development and institutional outcomes whether by catalysing public policy reforms and mobilising additional resources, improving participatory governance or strengthening LRAs to assume their mandate to deliver services to the communities in their territory.



Yet the decentralised cooperation tool is poorly known in wider circles, and its use remains limited in EU external action. Many LRAs involved in the programme felt it was time to revalue this cooperation approach by coming up with a **new narrative** that would demonstrate the added value of the instrument in today's volatile and competitive world. The essential message is that decentralised cooperation can be a strategic asset for Europe in tackling global challenges, localising Global Gateway and defending its own interests and values.

The new narrative was presented to the Forum participants with the aim to show the potential leveraging effect of decentralised cooperation under the Global Gateway paradigm:

- The starting point is the assertion that the achievement of Europe's geopolitical and global ambitions ultimately depends on delivery and concrete results improving people's lives. Key success factors are the provision of investments plus an enabling environment (360-degrees), solid international partnerships at multiple levels and positive impact on citizens.
- The second pillar of the new narrative builds on the localisation debate by acknowledging that cities are the location where Europe's strategies come to life and where LRAs can help to turn ambitions into legitimate, locally owned and sustainable dynamics and results.
- Decentralised cooperation can be a valuable instrument to enable LRAs to fulfil their core roles in Global Gateway projects by scaling up local innovations, leveraging actors and private sector funding and influencing global norms through local diplomacy.
- To unlock the potential of decentralised cooperation, the EU and Member States need to continue developing a political partnership with LRAs, facilitating direct access to finance and integrating decentralised cooperation in the external action toolbox. For cities and LRA networks, this means delivering results on the ground and helping to achieve the EU's ambition as geopolitical and global player.

This new narrative on decentralised cooperation was embraced by a panel with the OECD, a LRA representative, a member of the CoR and from a EU Member State as being consistent with the growing realisation that the effective delivery of Global Gateway will require multilevel and multi-actor approaches. New alliances and methods of working together with LRAs can mobilise other relevant stakeholders such as private sector, civil society organisations, universities and research institutions to co-design Global Gateway projects embedded in the territory and local dynamics. Both the [Team Europe](#) and Team National mechanisms can provide useful frameworks to mobilise the various actors at different levels. Decentralised cooperation can play a key role in process facilitation of such multi-actor alliances, particularly at local level, which can trigger positive effects on the quality of local governance (e.g. increased trust, transparency, collective action, mobilisation local resources).

Decentralised cooperation can also help LRAs from partner countries to better perform its core roles of local planning, budgeting and regulation with a view to create a conducive environment for investments to land. International solidarity can continue to provide support for smaller decentralised cooperation projects, yet the optimal use of the full potential of the decentralised cooperation instrument requires a clear link with major investments - as offered by Global Gateway.

The prospective debate on 'what next' for decentralised cooperation was continued in seven thematically oriented breakout sessions, again based on concrete Global Gateway flagship projects from across the globe with the aim to identify good practices and opportunities to use the decentralised cooperation approach (along the lines of the new narrative). The outcomes of these various working groups were summarised and presented in plenary to an inter-institutional panel with a view to have a forward-looking discussion on the added value of decentralised cooperation as a strategic lever in EU external action and in the localisation of Global Gateway.

Some of the key points arising from these discussions include:

- Decentralised cooperation can help preparing the ground for relevant Global Gateway projects, based on local data and diagnostic capacity related to priority needs or by building an enabling local environment that increases investor confidence. Long-term, trust-based partnerships make decentralised cooperation a strong entry point for Global Gateway.
- Decentralised cooperation - often reinforced by city diplomacy and networks - offers the EU a distinctive advantage: a transparent, accountable and empowering model that contrasts with other approaches and enhances EU credibility.
- Decentralised cooperation is a problem solver: city-to-city and region-to-region partnerships can help overcome implementation challenges as they bring in peer expertise, shared learning and tailored solutions that reflect local realities
- Territorial financial know-how and innovative funding models shared through decentralised cooperation can be effective in mobilising capital and unlocking investment. Substantive transfer of decision-making authority, resources, and responsibility in partner countries is essential for Global Gateway success, yet current global trends point rather towards centralisation of power than decentralisation in many partner countries. Decentralised cooperation provides a mechanism to strengthen local governance and incentivise national-local cooperation platforms in partner countries.
- When embedded from the outset, decentralised cooperation can enhance alignment with local needs, improve implementation capacity and support the scalability of SDG-aligned solutions.



DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AS A DELIVERY CHANNEL: MUEVE, COSTA RICA⁷

The mUEve programme in Costa Rica, involving 15 municipalities, illustrates how decentralised cooperation can function as a systemic delivery channel for the Global Gateway by translating strategic objectives into territorially anchored investments. Focused on sustainable urban mobility and transit-oriented development, the initiative brought together local governments, national authorities and European partners in a coordinated framework that combined policy dialogue, technical assistance and investment preparation.

Rather than relying on a single project intervention, mUEve supported inter-municipal cooperation, enabling cities to jointly plan, prioritise and implement mobility solutions aligned with national climate and urban development goals. The programme demonstrated the value of the 360-degree approach, in which local authorities are engaged across the full project cycle – from problem identification and co-design to implementation and capacity building – while benefiting from peer-to-peer exchanges with European local and regional authorities.

As discussed during the Forum, mUEve highlights a key lesson for Global Gateway implementation: when decentralised cooperation is embedded structurally and supported by long-term partnerships, it can move beyond isolated pilots and serve as a scalable mechanism for delivering coherent, citizen-focused results across multiple territories.

DECENTRALISED COOPERATION IN FRAGILE SETTINGS: THE REBUILD PROJECT IN LIBYA⁸

The REBUILD project exemplifies an innovative approach to resilience building in fragile environments such as Libya. Initiated in the framework of the Nicosia initiative by the CoR, REBUILD focuses on fostering long-term development through peer-to-peer partnerships. It is a process-driven cooperation designed to change mindsets and systems across ten Libyan municipalities. It focuses on strengthening local governance and the relationships between Libyan and European partners.

A notable example of this collaborative approach is the pilot project on fishery sector development in the coastal town of Zliten. The project shows how LRAs can act as decisive political and operational anchors for Global Gateway-related investments in fragmented contexts. It places the Municipality of Zliten in a leading role, combining co-financing, project steering and coordination in a wide partnership with national entities, universities, international partners and private sector. The mayor brought together fishery entrepreneurs from various municipalities to establish a coordination mechanism aimed at optimising efforts for the achievement of the Eurocode for Libyan fish exports to the EU. The existing decentralised cooperation scheme was highly instrumental in facilitating his connection.

In a country marked by contested authority, weak state capacity and security volatility, the project faced acute dilemmas: how to move forward in the absence of stable national frameworks, how to balance speed of delivery with political sensitivity, and how to ensure local ownership without exacerbating existing power tensions. LRAs proved capable of acting decisively when national channels were blocked, translating community needs into concrete action while maintaining political traction and trust at local level.

“We can be fast and furious,” stressed Benedetta Oddo from the Nicosia Initiative, demonstrating that partnership rooted in local contexts and supported through decentralised cooperation partnerships, is often the most viable pathway for delivering impact.

Taken together, these insights confirm that decentralised cooperation is not project-specific, but a cross-cutting enabler of effective Global Gateway delivery. There is significant potential to better link decentralised cooperation with Global Gateway initiatives as part of a comprehensive 360-degree approach, especially as Global Gateway enters its scaling up phase. Decentralised cooperation experiences in the EU-funded programme ‘Partnerships for Sustainable Cities’ show this potential (e.g. by enhancing the capacity of cities to prepare solid investment proposals, improving the local policy environment and

7. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

8. A description of this project and of all other examples mentioned in this report can be found in the [booklet of best practices](#) prepared before the Forum.

strengthening the skills available at local level). Better integration of decentralised cooperation schemes involving European LRAs within the Global Gateway could also act as a catalyser to crowd-in more European companies and public utilities into Global Gateway investments.

However, so far, concrete examples of such linkages remain limited, including the role of EU Delegations and Team Europe or Team National mechanisms in these processes.

At the closing session of the Forum, the Commission announced its intention to launch in 2026 a new pilot initiative-designed and implemented together with key actors from the LRA community. The initiative will be dedicated to demonstrating how the link between decentralised cooperation and Global Gateway could be strengthened.

“We believe that Europe’s strength does not lie solely in its economic power or its institutional architecture, but in its unique ability to mobilise territories, communities and citizens in service of a shared global vision based on democracy. [...in this logic] decentralised cooperation is not an optional extra -it is a strategic tool” (Jaume Duch Guillot, CoR Rapporteur on the [Localisation of the EU’s Global Gateway](#), Minister for the European Union and Foreign Action, Government of Catalonia, ES/PES).



V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The closing session of the Forum took place in the European Parliament Hemicycle and confirmed the global convergence of key local and regional representatives on their contribution to Global Gateway. The presentation of the conclusions of the Forum by mayors from four continents to the CoR Plenary session was remarkably aligned with the key messages of the CoR [opinion on the localisation of the EU's Global Gateway](#), which was unanimously adopted by CoR members.

Overarching messages

- The Global Gateway strategy is moving from “start-up” to “scale up” and the same logic should be applied to its “localisation”: Moving from isolated good practices to become a structural feature of the strategy. This requires embedding the territorial dimension in Global Gateway projects, involving LRAs early and in a systematic way and adjusting financial tools.
- LRAs are indispensable actors for the delivery of the Global Gateway: They have competences aligned with Global Gateway priorities, anchor EU values, provide legitimacy, enable implementation and ensure long-term ownership.
- A 360-degree multilevel and multi-actor approach is essential: It facilitates the necessary coordination across EU institutions, national governments, LRAs, IFIs, civil society organisations and the private sector to scale up the Global Gateway. The Team Europe and Team National mechanisms provide a channel to meaningfully associate LRAs and their networks, coordinate resources and technical capacity, reinforce policy dialogue and co-create territorial pipelines of new projects.
- Decentralised cooperation can be a valuable delivery channel for Global Gateway: It creates incentives to localise investments, strengthens local governance and offers a distinctive value based (democratic) alternative to competing models while providing opportunities to crowd in more European private sector and public utilities.
- The Forum should be maintained as a strategic platform to foster joint reflection on the localisation of Global Gateway. It provides a structured space for dialogue and knowledge exchange, connecting local and regional authorities from the EU and partner countries with EU leadership.



Core recommendations for various actors

The Forum discussions and case-based insights demonstrate that localising the Global Gateway is less a matter of creating new instruments than of **recalibrating roles, coordination mechanisms and delivery practices across governance levels**. It requires a truly multi-stakeholder approach, hence the recommendations below are structured by type of actors. They also focus on strengthening decentralised cooperation as a valuable delivery channel, improving multilevel coordination and ensuring that Global Gateway investments deliver sustainable, development results for local communities.

For EU Institutions

Governance & recognition:

- **Formalise LRA status** - Grant LRAs a distinct (political) status in Global Gateway governance structures, separate from civil society, to reflect their mandate as public service providers.
- **Integrate a territorial dimension** into the earliest stages of the Global Gateway project cycle, specifically during the “facilitation” phase of investment proposals.

- **Coherence across services** - Foster pragmatic approaches to improve internal coordination on territorial development and urban-related topics within the structures of DG INTPA as well as with other relevant Directorates-General and services such as the European External Action Service.
- **Decentralised cooperation** should be explicitly embedded in the EU toolbox related to Global Gateway programming and the 360-degree approach, building on existing examples and new pilots, while maintaining strategic partnerships with LRA networks to support knowledge-sharing and peer learning.

Financial Frameworks:

- **Direct access mechanisms:** Adapt the EU toolbox of financial instruments to increase direct financial access for LRAs, moving them from “downstream implementers” to “project holders”, learning and capitalising on existing examples.
- **Post-2027 MFF:** Ensure the next Multiannual Financial Framework recognises the need to invest resources for territorial development and decentralised cooperation.

For EU Delegations

Operational Leadership:

- **Dialogue hubs:** Position EU Delegations as the primary entry point for structured engagement with LRAs and their networks to channel territorial priorities into the Global Gateway pipeline. Engagement should include sharing information on Global Gateway progress, strengthening the capacities of LRAs, and facilitating dialogue between local, regional and national authorities, financial and other relevant actors.
- **Functional support:** Strengthen Delegations’ capacity and expertise to engage strategically with cities and regions on territorial/urban development, decentralised cooperation and sub-sovereign investment, through clear institutional steering from Headquarters, complemented by targeted guidance and operational tools.
- **Leveraging facilities:** Make more strategic and coordinated use of specialised technical facilities, such as the Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD) and the Urban Development Technical Facility (UDTF) managed by Headquarters.

Conflict & Fragility Framework:

- **Continuity anchors:** In fragile contexts, rely on and strategically engage with LRAs as sources of intelligence, entry points to local actors, catalysts for resources and source for service delivery continuity and social cohesion.
- **Adaptive programming:** Implement flexible procedures that allow for rapid adjustment to local political shifts.



For EU Member States and National Authorities in partner countries

Strategic integration:

- **Team National structures:** Integrate European LRAs into “Team National” structures to leverage their expertise, resources and contacts including to European SMEs and public utilities for Global Gateway projects.
- **Strategic decentralised cooperation alignment:** Use national tools and resources to promote and support decentralised cooperation partnerships that are strategically connected to Global Gateway flagships. Explore how Team Europe structures on the ground could be instrumental in that respect.

Regulatory reforms in partner countries:

- **Bottleneck mitigation:** Partner-country governments should review national regulations that restrict municipal borrowing or limit LRA participation in international finance.
- **Fiscal autonomy:** Adopt and effectively implement decentralisation frameworks that grant LRAs the administrative and fiscal autonomy necessary to manage long-term investments.

For Local and Regional Authorities (EU and partner countries)

Upstream engagement:

- **Pipeline generation:** Proactively reach out and articulate territorial priorities to EU Delegations in a manner that supports “bankability” and alignment with Global Gateway objectives.
- **Capacity building:** LRAs in partner countries should explore opportunities to strengthen their administrative and technical skills in investment project preparation, financial management, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Inter-municipal cooperation:** Explore models for pooling financial needs across municipalities to achieve economies of scale and better access to capital markets.



Partnerships & capacity:

- **Private sector catalysation:** Initiate joint projects with the local private sector from Europe and in the partner countries to align business interests with community development goals. LRAs should mobilise their business networks towards the Global Gateway.
- **Peer-to-Peer support:** European LRAs should deploy their technical expertise to help counterparts in partner countries strengthen financial management and project preparation capacities. They should also approach their national governments and lobby for their integration in Team National structures.

For International Financial Institutions and Development Banks

- **Expanded guarantee schemes:** Further expand the use of EFSD+ guarantees and blending to cover municipal loans and address currency exposure.
- **Proportionate procedures:** Adapt financial requirements and reporting standards to be proportionate to the administrative capacities of smaller local municipalities.
- **Bridge financing:** Utilise National Development Banks as intermediaries to bridge the gap between international capital and local implementation

For the European Committee of the Regions and LRAs regional/global Networks

- **Standing exchange:** Continue using the Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform as well as the Cities and Regions Forum as a recurring policy platform to follow up on the “localisation of the Global Gateway” and the local dimension of the EU’s international partnerships. The Forum should be closely linked to Global Gateway programming cycles and investment pipelines.
- **Sharing and strengthening knowledge:** Experiences from LRAs engagement and decentralised cooperation, including in fragile contexts, should be captured and disseminated in a systematic way. LRA networks are also crucial to providing information and training to support their members in meaningful engagement in the Global Gateway.
- **Advocacy for territorial dimension and decentralised cooperation:** Networks should ensure that local and regional perspectives are reflected in EU external action, including in view of the next MFF and the upcoming integrated EU approach to fragile settings.



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