

Urban Highlight 4

COUNTRY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: GHANA



Cities covered by the EU-Ghana Partnership for Sustainable Cities and other EU-backed initiatives (UDTF, CoM SSA)

Over the past several years, the European Commission has progressively strengthened its engagement in the urban sector in Ghana through a series of programmes aimed at supporting sustainable urban development, improving basic infrastructure, and strengthening the institutional capacity of local governments. Within this framework, the **EU-Ghana Partnership for Sustainable Cities** has become one of the main instruments supporting the development of secondary cities, particularly in Northern Ghana. The initiative is implemented under the broader cooperation framework of the **2021–2027 Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP)** and contributes to the objectives of the **Team Europe Initiative on Smart, Green and Digital Recovery**, which seeks to address structural challenges linked to rapid urbanisation, climate vulnerability, and limited access to urban services.

The Partnership has been developed through a phased approach implemented through successive Annual Action Plans and focuses on the cities of Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa, Yendi, Damongo and Nalerigu. These urban centres play an important role as regional service and economic hubs in Northern Ghana, but they face important challenges in terms of infrastructure provision, urban planning capacity, and environmental pressures.

The first phase of the programme, adopted under the **2022 Annual Action Plan**, focused primarily on strengthening urban governance and improving the availability and use of urban data. One of the main activities carried out under this phase was the establishment of an **Urban Observatory**, designed to improve the collection, management and sharing of urban information between Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and national institutions. In practice, the Observatory aims to address the fragmentation of data that has traditionally limited evidence-based planning at the local level. By improving access to reliable information, the initiative supports local authorities in identifying priority investments, improving planning processes and strengthening coordination between national and local levels of government. The programme also includes capacity-building activities to support local administrations in the use of digital tools and data systems for urban management.

The second phase of the programme, included in the **2024 Annual Action Plan**, focuses on investments in urban infrastructure with a strong emphasis on climate resilience. Northern Ghana is particularly exposed to climate-related risks, including seasonal flooding and drought conditions, which affect both infrastructure and service provision. In this context, the programme supports the development of urban infrastructure designed to improve resilience to environmental pressures. Planned interventions include improvements to drainage systems and flood management infrastructure, as well as the integration of green infrastructure within urban areas. These investments aim to support more sustainable urban growth while strengthening the capacity of cities to cope with climate variability.

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A third phase of the programme, included in the **2025 Annual Action Plan**, focuses on improving access to drinking water in several urban centres, namely Tamale, Damongo, Wa and Bolgatanga. Rapid population growth in these cities has increased demand for water supply services, placing additional pressure on existing systems. The programme therefore supports investments aimed at improving the reliability and coverage of drinking water supply networks. The intervention adopts a watershed-based approach, which considers water supply, wastewater management and environmental protection as part of a single territorial system.

In addition to the Sustainable Cities Partnership, the European Commission has implemented several complementary initiatives that contribute to the broader urban development agenda in Ghana. These include programmes aimed at strengthening energy infrastructure, supporting the green transition and agricultural value chains, improving public financial management systems and promoting private sector development. For example, specific actions have supported the modernisation of electricity distribution networks in the Tamale region in order to improve the reliability of the power supply. This is considered an important prerequisite for economic activity and for the development of digital services in urban areas. Other initiatives address economic opportunities in urban areas with high migration pressures and support measures aimed at improving the business environment and strengthening public financial management. Taken together, these programmes contribute to a more integrated approach to urban development that combines infrastructure investment with institutional strengthening and economic development.

The implementation of these programmes has been supported by the **Urban Development Technical Facility (UDTF)**, which provided specialised technical assistance to the EU Delegation in Ghana in areas such as urban governance, municipal finance, waste management and circular economy development. Through different assignments, the facility has supported analytical work, feasibility assessments and policy recommendations aimed at strengthening the design and implementation of EU-supported urban interventions and improving the institutional and financial capacity of local authorities.

An initial assignment focused on **analysing the decentralisation framework and municipal finance system in Ghana**, including the mechanisms used to channel funds to Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies. This work involved a review of the legal and institutional framework governing decentralisation, an analysis of the main stakeholders involved in municipal service delivery and an assessment of the main constraints affecting the capacity of cities to plan, finance and maintain urban infrastructure and services. The study also included a review of existing urban data collection systems and produced recommendations for the establishment of an **Urban Observatory** that could improve the availability and use of urban data for planning and investment prioritisation.

In parallel, the UDTF has supported the EU Delegation through **spatial sustainability analyses** carried out in several cities in Northern Ghana, including Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa and Yendi. These studies analysed patterns of urban expansion in relation to environmental conditions and land use dynamics. Particular attention was given to identifying areas exposed to flooding and to understanding the interaction between urban growth and natural hydrological systems.

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Further technical assistance has focused on **urban finance and service delivery systems**, including work related to wastewater management and municipal solid waste management. One component concerned the **economic and financial assessment of sludge treatment plants** planned in the cities of Wa, Yendi and Bolgatanga. The analysis reviewed the feasibility studies prepared for these facilities and assessed the financial sustainability of the proposed business models, including capital and operational expenditure, revenue streams, tariff structures and risk mitigation mechanisms. The objective was to ensure that the planned facilities are economically viable and that their operational models are adapted to local market conditions and service demand.

Another workstream focused on **strengthening solid waste collection and segregation systems** in the cities of Kumasi and Sekondi Takoradi. This work included an assessment of existing operational arrangements and the development of practical recommendations to improve the efficiency and sustainability of waste collection systems. The analysis considered the organisation of services, the use and maintenance of equipment, the design of waste collection schemes and the potential role of private operators in service delivery. The work also examined possible improvements to financing mechanisms, including waste fees and alternative funding arrangements that could support the long-term sustainability of waste management services.

The UDTF has also supported work related to **circular economy approaches and private sector development** in the waste management sector. As part of this work, an assessment of **waste-based circular economy business models in Northern Ghana** was carried out through field missions to Bolgatanga, Wa and Tamale. The study involved consultations with local authorities, waste management operators and recycling enterprises in order to identify existing private companies and start-ups operating along the waste value chain, including waste collection, recycling, material recovery and organic waste processing. The analysis highlighted the presence of both large operators and smaller recycling enterprises and provided an initial mapping of the emerging circular economy ecosystem in the region.

Another important area of support concerned **property tax implementation and local revenue mobilisation in six municipalities in Northern Ghana**. This work built on previous initiatives carried out by development partners and focused on analysing the current status of property tax systems, identifying institutional and operational bottlenecks and proposing practical measures to improve tax collection and integration with public financial management systems.

The facility also provided some recommendations to the EU Delegation on the potential for **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)** and other financing mechanisms to support investments in urban infrastructure and service delivery.

One of the last assignments supported by the facility, and still on-going, concerns the **redefinition of urban areas in Ghana**. The objective is to review the way urban areas are defined in Ghana considering the Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA) methodology, which is widely used internationally. This analysis will reassess the distribution of the urban population and establish a more accurate hierarchy of settlements based on different criteria, including population density and spatial continuity. The results will help national authorities in the review of national urban policy framework, a more reliable analytical basis for urban development policies and help guide the targeting of investments.