

Municipal international cooperation

Approaches
and practices

Dashboard



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Introduction

So you want to become internationally active as a local government and are looking for suitable forms of global cooperation? This dashboard can help you. It provides an overview of existing forms, approaches and practices. Each approach is briefly described with a definition and some characteristics, such as the added value for local government, participation, duration and budget. In addition, some good practices are given for each approach.

The main purpose of this dashboard is to inspire local governments and provide them with a tool to determine which approaches best fit their specific context, expectations and capacities.

The dashboard does not aspire to be exhaustive. It is a dynamic tool to which additional approaches can be added. Nor are the various approaches mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the rule rather than the exception to apply several approaches simultaneously. This means there may be overlap between the approaches and there may also be significant differences in the way they are put into practice.

This dashboard was created with the support of HIVA, the Research Institute for Labor and Society of the Catholic University of Leuven.

Legende



example



more information
(often in Dutch)

word

link

Officials from the Hoogstraten-Za-Kpota (Benin) city-to-city partnership discuss the SDGs.



A delegation from Bornem and intermunicipal organization IVAREM on a working visit to the South African municipality of Nquthu to exchange on the collection, processing and recycling of waste.



Nquthu

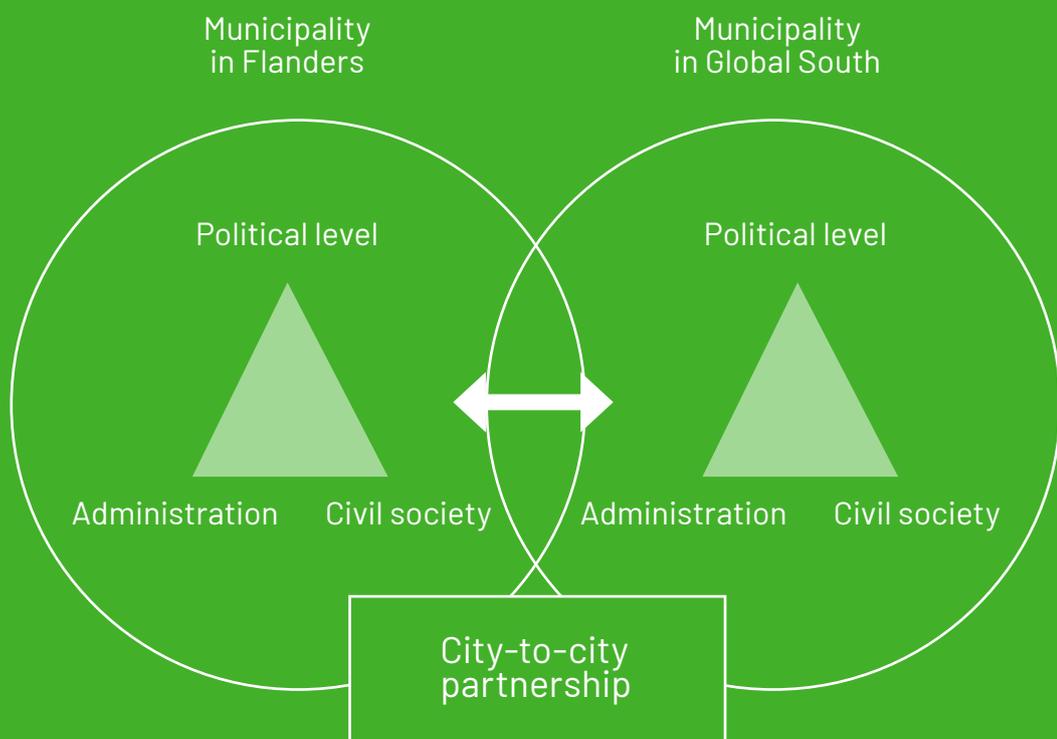
In a nutshell

The table below summarizes the approaches described later. For each approach, the extent to which different features are applicable has been indicated. This table provides guidance for municipalities that are looking for a (new) form of international cooperation and already have certain elements or features in mind for this.

| Features | Contribution to governance strengthening | Political and administrative involvement | Civil society involvement associations, NGOs, schools | Private sector involvement companies, social economy | Reciprocity | Opportunities for global citizenship | Duration | Budget |
|---|--|--|---|--|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------|--------|
| Approaches | | | | | | | | |
| City-to-city partnership | +++ | +++ | +++ | ++ | +++ | ++ | +++ | +++ |
| Twinning | - | ++ | +++ | + | ++ | ++ | +++ | + |
| International youth work | - | + | +++ | - | + | +++ | ++ | + |
| Indirect cooperation | + | + | +++ | + | ++ | ++ | +++ | ++ |
| International cooperation with private sector | + | ++ | ++ | +++ | ++ | + | ++ | + |
| International networks | + | ++ | + | + | ++ | - | ++ | + |
| Humanitarian and emergency aid | - | + | +++ | + | + | + | + | + |
| Short-term expertise exchange | ++ | ++ | ++ | + | ++ | + | ++ | + |

City-to-city partnership

A city-to-city partnership connects a municipality in Flanders with one in the Global South. The purpose of a city-to-city partnership is to strengthen good local governance¹ in both municipalities through the mutual exchange of knowledge, experience and support. Local governments around the world have similar competences and face similar challenges. These partnerships provide a good basis for cooperation and exchange. Involvement of politicians, officials and the population is essential.



1. Strengthening local governance is a long-term process to increase the capacity of local governments to carry out their mission in a quality manner.

Reciprocity

An important feature of a city-to-city partnership is the principle of reciprocity, a win-win situation for both local governments. This type of cooperation aims for substantive cooperation where a strategy is developed together around specific policy themes that both municipalities or cities are working on (e.g. waste management, local economic development, digitization of the population register, citizen participation, global citizenship...). From such a perspective, it does not work toward one predetermined solution through a mere transfer of resources or technical know-how. Instead, there is collaboration on locally embedded solutions that create a win-win for the various partners. The municipality of Mol (Belgium) describes the double win of their city-to-city partnership with Santo Tomás (Nicaragua) as follows: *'The partnership is not an end in itself, but a model, a way to make both the municipal administration and the population aware of global relations and the role they can play locally. The city-to-city partnership is, as it were, the peg on which municipal global policy can be hung. Because of the partnership, complicated global challenges can be translated very concretely into the day-to-day realities that people are confronted with. The partnership also reminds us of our responsibility to make the world a more liveable place for everyone.'* ([Website city-to-city partnership Mol - Santo Tomás](#))

Some points of interest regarding reciprocity:

- Many local governments in Flanders are still searching to give mutual strengthening of local governance a central place in their city-to-city partnership. It is important to develop a clear vision and objectives for this.
- Supporting projects in the partner municipality in the Global South through a classic model of assistance does not contribute to a mutual strengthening of governance. Such a classic donor-recipient model is not based on equality and does not promote the institutional embedding of the partnership within the Flemish municipality.
- Mutual governance strengthening requires an engagement of both partners to embed initiatives within the partnership in a process that contributes to capacity building through exchange of knowledge and expertise from different policy domains and with the involvement of the administration, the political level and other municipal actors.

Participation

A city-to-city partnership provides a powerful framework for local governments to mobilize and encourage various actors in their municipality to work together in an integrated way. The local government is well placed to facilitate this and take on a multi-actor approach. Such an approach implies active involvement from and cooperation between different municipal policy areas, both at the administrative and political levels. A multi-actor approach also presupposes a strong involvement of other actors such as civil society organizations, companies and knowledge institutions that work together on the basis of their expertise towards a common objective, for example the sustainable management of waste or natural resources. The extent to which such a multi-actor approach takes shape strongly determines the impact and public and political support for the city-to-city partnership.

Duration

A city-to-city partnership is a long-term cooperation between the two partner municipalities. Its long-term nature is conducive to the development of a relationship of trust between the partners.

Budget

- **Staffing:** an international policy officer (at least 0.5 FTE) to follow up on the city-to-city partnership.
- **Operating budget:** although this varies greatly, VVSG recommends Flemish local governments to invest at least €10,000 per year in the city-to-city partnership from their own resources. Several city-to-city partnerships additionally rely on federal grants (e.g. <https://www.vvsg.be/internationaal/algemeen>; European grants (e.g. [Ostend - Banjul](#) through the Partnerships for Sustainable Cities program); provincial grants (e.g. [partnership KeMoPoDi](#)).



Future Proof partnership Ostend - Banjul

The European program [Partnerships for Sustainable Cities](#) awarded a grant in 2018 to the 'Future Proof Banjul' project of Ostend in Belgium and Banjul in Gambia, both coastal cities. The project aims to contribute to the realization of a resilient and livable Banjul as a hub of trade, prosperity, sustainability and good governance.

The specific goals of the project focus on five pillars:

- 1) Good and effective governance;
- 2) Knowledge Center Sustainable Development Crab Island;
- 3) Sustainable waste management;
- 4) Greening Banjul and
- 5) Capacity building in Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital.

The partnership is strongly embedded within the two local governments and tries as much as possible to work toward its various objectives in an integrated manner and from a multi-actor approach.



The mayors of Banjul and Ostend shake hands.

P. Vanslambrouck



Pieter Clitteur



Oppeghade



The mayors of Dogbo and Roeselare receive the Platform Award, a recognition for their work on birth registration in Benin.



Officials from Roeselare and Dogbo complete the SDG circle exercise, a workshop developed by VVSG.



Roeselare - Dogbo wins award for work on birth registration

Since 2010, Roeselare has had a partnership with Dogbo, a city in the West African country of Benin. The administrations of both cities exchange knowledge and experience. They work together on jointly chosen themes such as birth registration, the market, culture, education, water and hygiene.

Specifically on birth registration, an intensive process of education, digitization and sensitization ensured that birth registration rose from 60% to 100% in Dogbo. To this end, hospital staff, officials and politicians were trained to ensure that every child is registered smoothly and correctly. In addition, parents receive information about the importance of birth registration through various channels. Moreover, births are not only recorded on paper, but all data are digitized. For their multidisciplinary approach to birth registration, Dogbo and Roeselare won the 2018

European PLATFORMAwards. This award is presented biennially to cities, towns or regions from Europe that have a strong commitment to municipal cooperation with a partner in the Global South.

Peer-to-peer exchange between the two municipalities strengthened technical know-how as well as support for the partnership in Roeselare. Moreover, the partnership offers opportunities for global citizenship education and indirect cooperation. For example, in collaboration with the Belgian NGO Join for Water, the link with Dogbo is made within an educational project that promotes sustainable water management in schools in Roeselare. Also linked to the partnership, D.O.G.B.O.-Dogbo, a non-profit organization in Roeselare, supports a number of social projects in and organizes immersive trips to the Beninese partner municipality.



A delegation from Roeselare on a working visit to Dogbo



An official from Deinze-Lievegem outlines their educational projects in Senegal.

Deinze-Lievegem



Inter-municipal partnership Deinze & Lievegem - KeMoPoDi

Since 2010, the Belgian municipalities Deinze and Lievegem have cooperated in a partnership with Keur Moussa, Pout and Diender (KeMoPoDi for short) in Senegal. The focus is on strengthening good local governance.

This partnership is unique because of the inter-municipal cooperation of no less than 5 municipalities and its innovative focus on education, with an educational, mobile 'Senegal house' for all elementary schools, 5 school links and many educational projects in KeMoPoDi. In the Flemish municipalities the focus is on global citizenship education, while in Senegal it is mainly about improving the quality of education. The partnership also aims to strengthen local governance with a specific focus on waste policy.

The partnership joined VVSG's federal Senegal program 2022-2026 in which it collaborates with 2 other Senegalese city-to-city-partnerships: Sint-Niklaas/Tambacounda and Zemst/Sokone. This program aims to strengthen local governments, improve service delivery and promote cooperation with the population for a sustainable inter-municipal waste policy.

There is also close cooperation with the intermunicipal city-to-city partnership committee of volunteers from Lievegem and Deinze. The partnership is thus a cocreation of politics, administration and the population. Also in KeMoPoDi, committees have been set up to increase citizen participation and experiments are being conducted with "territorial coaching," where trained coaches bring local people and politics closer together.

The federal grant is 30,000 to 40,000 euros per year, which is supplemented by funds from the partner municipalities.



Mobile Senegal house of KeMoPoDi

Deinze-Lievegem



- The motivation for engaging in a city-to-city partnership (VVSG)
- From North-South to Global. Toward a local global policy (VVSG)

Twinning

A twinning is an official bond of friendship between two or more local governments from different countries within the European Community. You often see them signposted as you enter a municipality.

Established in the period after World War II with a view to connecting "East" and "West," twinning has traditionally focused primarily on cultural exchange between citizens of both partner municipalities. Promoting mutual understanding and tolerance and strengthening European solidarity and identity remain important objectives of twinning to this day. Some municipalities choose to enter into a twinning with a municipality from outside the European Community. Like European twinings, such partnerships are mainly focused on cultural exchange (see example Ostend-Ostende).

Most twinings provide a framework for joint activities and exchanges of local associations and citizens. Usually exchanges take place in the areas of culture, tourism, youth and sports, but any theme can be addressed. In some cases, projects are set up around specific themes such as water management, economic development or the improvement of social services.

Reciprocity

Twinning offers several benefits to the partner municipalities. They allow to discover and experience the culture and traditions of other countries and communities. They can also boost tourism and provide opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs. In addition, they provide a framework in which young people from both municipalities can connect with each other through school or youth organizations. Moreover, there is often exchange between all kinds of local associations and committees and close friendships can be built.

Participation

Ideally, twinning requires a commitment from both local governments (political and administrative level) and citizens. To this end, a twinning committee is usually set up that includes both citizens and local government officials. The municipalities that officially join together sign a charter. This seals the cooperation, but there are no obligations attached.

Duration

A twinning involves long-term cooperation between the two partners.

Budget

Twinning activities are usually carried out by volunteers and financed by grants from the local government, supplemented by resources from fundraising activities carried out by the organizations involved (e.g. schools, associations, local businesses, etc.). There are (limited) opportunities for grants, including funding from the European Commission.

Sint-Niklaas informs about its twinings and city-to-city partnerships.





Twinning is winning: Lichtervelde – Region of Audruicq (CCRA)

Lichtervelde has been twinned since 2008 with the Community of Municipalities of the region of Audruicq (CCRA) in the Pas-de-Calais department of France, which includes 15 municipalities.



The Lichtervelde-CCRA Twinning Committee.

The starting point of the twinning was a festivity organized by the CCRA to which former seasonal workers from Lichtervelde were invited and to which the alderman in charge of European affairs played an important facilitating role. In the following years, contacts intensified through attendance at each other's folklore festivals. In 2008, a charter was signed stating that the twinning was aimed at establishing exchanges on cultural, sports, tourism, social and

economic levels and to dynamize community life for the benefit of all the inhabitants of both municipalities. A warm relationship was also built between the school-age youth of both regions. Since then, numerous activities have been organized including educational class trips, an annual twinning contact day for committee members at which new ideas for exchanges were developed, contacts between youth soccer clubs, hiking clubs, local history circles, choirs and brass bands and a biennial visit to the chicory festival.

The twinning committee in Lichtervelde comprises about 10 members including individuals from the political level, the administration and citizens. The latter participate as individuals and not as representatives of civil society organizations.

Associations engaging in an exchange can apply for a small grant from the municipality. The guidelines for such grant applications are

described in the twinning grant regulations. The municipality also receives European grants.

In addition to informal exchanges, plans were also made for joint projects, including the renovation of an old chicory Ast, a building in which the roots of the chicory plant used to be dried and roasted to make coffee substitutes. The intention is to use this Ast as an interactive archive and exhibition space where reference would also be made to municipal tourist attractions, including the accordion factory, walking tours with QR codes and bicycle routes. For example, a bicycle route was mapped out connecting Vieille-Église in France with Lichtervelde via small roads ideal for cycling tourism. In this way, in addition to cultural exchange, the twinning aims for an economic return for the municipality and the wider region around Lichtervelde and the Audruicq region.



Eurozoersel

The municipality of Zoersel has three official twinning partners: Lora Del Rio (Spain), Crucea (Romania) and Laubach (Germany). In addition, the town also has friendship ties with Gräfenhainichen (Germany), Moutier (Switzerland) and Elancourt (France). Through these twinning and friendship ties, Zoersel wants to encourage its residents to broaden their view on the world. At the same time, the municipality sees this form of international cooperation as an added value to realize its own local objectives. Together with volunteers from the twinning committees in Zoersel and the twinning municipalities, joint projects are set up and European grant opportunities are explored. For example, within

the Climate Alliance network, Zoersel and its partners collaborated on common environmental goals ([Zoersel magazine, 2018](#)).

An important recurring activity is the EuroZoersel twinning festival that has been organized in Zoersel every three to four years since 1993. People from the various partners come together for a number of days in a spirit of friendship and fraternity and with respect for everyone's uniqueness. Foreign guests usually stay in a host family during Eurozoersel. For the host family, this is a unique opportunity to get to know a fellow European citizen and build bonds of friendship.

Residents of Ostend dance tango to music by an orchestra from Ostende, Argentina.



It takes two to tango: Ostend-Ostende

Since 2021, the city of Ostend (Belgium) has had a formal partnership with the city of Ostende, which was founded in 1909 in Argentina by residents of Ostend. Through this partnership, both cities not only want to strengthen their historical ties, but also their international image, exchange knowledge and set up collaborations. Examples of joint activities include a [Belgium-Argentina exhibition](#), a tango and culinary-literary evening and the [Jazz en la Playa music festival](#) that takes place annually in Ostende. A performance by an [Argentine Tango Jazz quartet](#) is also planned in Ostend in 2023.



A tango orchestra from Ostende visits Ostend.



- [Twinning.org](https://www.twinning.org)
- [Europe \(vvsg.be\)](https://www.europe.vvsg.be)



Youth from Mol and Santo Tomas on city trip in Antwerp.

International youth work

Many local governments support programs or initiatives that promote international youth exchanges. These can take different forms such as international internships in cooperation with colleges and universities, school links, immersion trips, international camps or projects as well as volunteering with organizations committed to international justice. The goal is usually twofold, namely to promote global citizenship and global cooperation.

Local government support can take different forms: in addition to financial support, the government can provide infrastructure, guidance or put local youth organizations or schools in touch with similar organizations in partner municipalities in other countries. City-to-city partnerships and twinnings can provide an enabling framework for this. Usually the youth department plays a key role here, often in cooperation with other organizations (e.g. [JINT](#), [Bataljong](#)) with which, for example, grant applications are worked out for joint projects.

Reciprocity

For Flemish local governments, international youth initiatives offer excellent opportunities for promoting global citizenship in their community. They contribute to intercultural skills, a broader perspective on the world and a stronger commitment to global issues, such as sustainability, climate change and human rights. Moreover, it stimulates young people to engage in international solidarity as they grow older, for example in the associations where they are active (e.g. youth movements) or as volunteers within the international policy initiatives of the municipality.

Some international youth initiatives in which Flemish youngsters travel to countries in the Global South also facilitate a return visit to Flanders by youngsters from these countries. Examples are the [Nica Youth](#) of the municipality of Mol and the immersion trips of [Dwagulu Dekkente](#) in Sint-Niklaas. For many international youth collaborations, however, it remains a challenge to organize such counter-visits. Online communication platforms boomed during the corona crisis and offer new opportunities for international exchange without having to travel. Some organizations are also focusing on intercultural exchange in Flanders between young people with and without a migration background (see example Dwagulu Dekkente, Sint-Niklaas).

Participation

Supporting international youth initiatives offers opportunities to actively involve young people in local processes of international cooperation. Moreover, it offers opportunities to reach young people through schools or youth clubs who are often not reached through the mainstream operations of NGOs. In addition, it can contribute to keeping young people engaged in global cooperation in later life in their careers or as volunteers.

Duration

International youth initiatives as well as their support by local government usually require a long-term perspective.

Budget

Usually, local authorities include grant possibilities for international youth initiatives in their grant regulations for international cooperation (e.g. [grant regulations Merelbeke](#)). A number of conditions usually apply, such as embedding an international exchange or immersion trip in a broader program. Indeed, several studies² point to the risk that existing prejudices and perceptions of participants in immersion trips may be reinforced if no pre- and post-travel guidance is provided.

2. See, for example, the following studies:

- Van Ongevalle, J., Huyse, H., Van Petegem, P. (2013), *Learning about the effects of development education programs. Strengthening planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) through reflective practice*. The International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning. vol:5 issue:2 pages:47-70
- Love, J., (2013), *International voluntary service in a school partnership: "voluntaourism" or effective development education?* Unpublished Master Thesis. Institute of Education.
- Bourn, D., (2015), *The Theory and Practice of Development Education. A pedagogy for global social justice*. First edition. New York: Routledge.

Students from the Ostend Free Technical Institute on an exchange trip in Banjul, Gambia.



Yara Markey



Ostend - Banjul: city-to-city partnership as a framework for youth initiatives

The city of Ostend stimulates intercultural exchanges and learning between pupils and teachers and provides support for exchange trips to partner schools or for carrying out projects in Banjul (Gambia), with which Ostend has had a city-to-city partnership since 2003.

Since 2005, more than 1,000 pupils and teachers have visited Banjul. Currently the Onze-Lieve- Vrouwe-college, Sint-Jozefsinstituut, Vrij Technisch Instituut, Vesaliusinstituut, SBSO Ter Zee, Sint- Andreasinstituut and De Studio are involved in the realization of the immersion trips to Gambia. At the request of the city council of Ostend, an inspiration guide was developed that describes the vision of these schools on the

relationship with their partner schools in Banjul and that helps them to further develop their collaborations.

Within the framework of the city-to-city partnership, internships are also regularly organized in which students from different disciplines (e.g. nursing, social work, architectural engineering, etc.) gain practical experience for three to five months with an organization in Banjul. The internships come about in cooperation with the Banjul City Council, schools in Banjul, Red Cross Gambia Banjul, Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, city council of Ostend and several colleges and universities in Flanders.



Merelbeke - Toucountouna: from immersion trips to awareness raising

During an immersion trip in September 2019, youngsters from Merelbeke established a youth council (Conseil Communal de la Jeunesse de Toucountouna) in Toucountouna (Benin). In addition, the participants of two immersion trips in 2017 and 2019 founded "Friends of Toucountouna" to support this youth council financially and organisationally. Friends of Toucountouna organizes fundraising activities and evaluate projects. These projects are diverse: training for the manufacturing of soap,

awareness raising on dropping out of school, contraception, sexual health and teen pregnancy, a campaign on hygiene during the Covid-19 crisis, etc. Immersion trips are organized both for youngsters from Merelbeke to Toucountouna and vice versa. In 2020, Merelbeke spent 3,068 euros on this program from its own municipal resources. Merelbeke has had a city-to-city link with Toucountouna since 2014.



Sint-Niklaas and Dwagulu Dekkente: intercultural learning

For several years, the city of Sint-Niklaas has supported youth organization Dwagulu Dekkente for the promotion of intercultural learning. Dwagulu Dekkente organizes exchange programs for high school youngsters.

During these programs, youngsters explore themes such as interculturalism, global relations, agroecology, gender, etc. in depth. The trajectory includes a preparation program, an exchange trip to Senegal, a reflection weekend and a return visit by Senegalese youth to Belgium.

This is done in close collaboration with Solidagro, an NGO that works for the right to food and food sovereignty through the promotion of agroecological food systems. In addition, Dwagulu Dekkente collaborates with Senegalese partners

AJE and La Voie. Both are youth organizations working on issues such as the environment, agriculture, health, etc. The city of Sint-Niklaas is also a partner of Dwagulu Dekkente and has a city-to-city partnership with the Senegalese city of Tambacounda.

Dwagulu Dekkente organized the Crossing Borders program during the Covid-19 crisis. This was a one-week groundbreaking program during the summer vacation. In collaboration with Solidagro, the Sint-Niklaas refugee shelter and Red Cross Sint-Niklaas, a diverse group of young people came together to engage in a dialogue on global relations, interculturalism and agroecology. The youth brought their perspectives and ideas together to delve into shared challenges and shaping a sustainable and equal future.



- [About JINT | JINT](#)
- [International | Bataljong](#)
- [International exchange between schools - School links](#)

Indirect cooperation

Local governments can also support initiatives by local actors in their community that are committed to global cooperation (e.g. individuals, private voluntary organizations, NGOs, hospitals, schools, ...). Local governments can play both a facilitating and steering role.

As a facilitator, a municipality can provide a platform to encourage knowledge sharing, networking and cooperation among these local actors. The municipal advisory board for development cooperation provides such a platform in many municipalities. In line with new trends in global cooperation, such boards are increasingly named as municipal advisory board for international cooperation or the global advisory board. Thematic working groups and networking events can also be set up, such as an exchange evening for associations working on a specific topic.

A steering role may involve setting certain conditions for financial support, such as a requirement to contribute to a particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) or a requirement to organize educational activities in the Flemish municipality.

Reciprocity

Indirect cooperation can make an important contribution to activating and strengthening local actors within the municipality who want to engage in international cooperation. This often involves various types of actors such as NGOs, private voluntary organizations, diaspora organizations, hospitals, schools, associations, etc. Within their respective networks or through joint activities (e.g. an annual world festival), they can broaden support for international solidarity, cooperation and citizenship. Moreover, these actors often possess specialized knowledge and skills and can respond in a flexible and appropriate manner to specific questions of or needs in the Global South.

Participation

Although the global advisory board is not a legally mandatory advisory board in Flanders, local governments pursuing global policies usually support and encourage it, as it promotes the participation of local actors in their global policy initiatives. The members of the global advisory board include organizations and residents from the municipality that are active in international cooperation. The board promotes consultation and coordination among these actors, but also provides advice to the local government and sets up joint actions around, for example, global citizenship.

The global advisory boards of many local governments, like other advisory boards, face challenges such as aging members and insufficient influx of new volunteers, lack of diversity and old fashioned ways of working. Therefore, more and more local governments are pushing for dynamization and reform, for example by broadening its scope to sustainability or by working with a strategic steering committee combined with thematic working groups and opportunities for short-term commitment to implement specific activities.

Duration

Indirect cooperation requires a long-term commitment. Calls for proposals and applications are usually organized annually.

Budget

Grants for indirect cooperation projects vary widely depending on the number and quality of grant applications submitted. Generally speaking, the total budget a municipality allocates to grants for indirect cooperation ranges from several thousand to several tens of thousands of euros.



.....
: 4th Pillar Support Point | 11.11.11: The 4th Pillar Support Point supports anyone from
: Flanders and Brussels involved in a project of international solidarity.
:

City of Antwerp collaborates with numerous of partners on a water project in Ghana.



Inauguration of a water project implemented by non-profit organization Humasol with support from the city of Antwerp.



Antwerp connects migration with development cooperation

Through a broad network of local actors, the city of Antwerp supports development projects in Congo, Ghana, Senegal and Morocco. The network includes diaspora associations, colleges, the business community as well as local partners in the Global South. The city provides substantive, financial support and brings associations into contact with relevant partners. A textbook example is the project realized by the NGO FOS together with the Ghanaian umbrella organization Ghana Council. It's a collaboration between all pillars of development cooperation (an NGO, the Flemish government's Partnership Water for Development, Flemish companies, diaspora organizations, the students of Humasol, a local Ghanaian NGO and various Ghanaian levels of government: chiefs, district officers, etc.). Together, they are systematically building a better water supply that is sustainably anchored, both climatically (with solar panels) and socially through the installation of water committees.

The city of Antwerp considers its diaspora organizations as a crucial link between the Antwerp partners of the project and local actors. They can, like no other, capture

local needs and prioritize with local partners. They have the necessary intercultural capacities and connections with local networks. By working with various partners, they build bridges between Antwerp and their country of origin. In this way Antwerp wants to promote social cohesion and global justice both in the Global South and in Antwerp.

This form of indirect cooperation establishes a concrete link between migration and international cooperation and brings migrant communities closer to the Antwerp city administration, which also allows the needs of these communities to be better heard. This win-win represents an important added value for the city and a recognition for the migrants who engage in well-structured development projects in their countries of origin.

Antwerp also encourages universities and colleges to cooperate with diaspora associations in organizing internships and teacher exchanges. The local partner association then establishes contacts, provides places to stay and transportation.



European Network for Citizen Initiatives in Global Solidarity (CIGS): This European network aims to promote knowledge exchange among 4th pillar organizations working on global cooperation.



Lokeren supports Elasha asbl to improve education and water in DRC

Elasha is a non-profit organization founded by Emile Elasha, a resident of the city of Lokeren of Congolese descent. As an architecture student, he had to flee the regime of President Mobutu and ended up in Europe. He has since lived with his family in Lokeren for many years. In 2015, Emile co-founded the cooperative COOMIAP (Coopérative Minière et Agro-pastorale Pambi), which aims to stimulate local employment through artisanal diamond mining and agriculture. As chairman of the board of directors, he monitors the work on a daily basis from Belgium. He also visits the site regularly. In addition to his commitment within COOMIAP, Emile wanted to broaden his field of action

and also work on education, clean water, a medical post, modern technologies... To this end, he founded Elasha and sought contact with the advisory board for international cooperation of Lokeren in 2017. A committee was then formed around Emile to ensure networking and fundraising. Elasha is now a member of the board, like other private voluntary organizations in Lokeren. Elasha is currently building an elementary school with nearby infirmary in Lyamba in the Central Kasai region. Elasha is collaborating with the local authorities who have allocated a piece of land. The coordination of the construction works is done by COOMIAP, the local partner of Elasha.



Province of Antwerp partners with local governments on forest restoration and protection in Peru and DRC

The Province of Antwerp has made a commitment to be climate neutral as an organization. To this end, the province has entered into a partnership with the non-profit organization BOS+ to offset 4,000 tons of CO₂ annually by planting 72 hectares of trees in the Amazon forest. This is a final step, after limiting the CO₂ emissions of its own organization.

The Province of Antwerp is also contributing to the protection of 60 000 hectares of tropical forest in Peru in cooperation with BOS+. This is done through the project 'Conservation and restoration of Amazon

forest in the context of co-management of nature reserves by local communities'.

In addition, the Province of Antwerp is committed to preserving and promoting biodiversity and forest protection in the Lomako-Yokokala Nature Reserve in DR Congo with a specific focus on protecting the bonobo population. To this end, the Province is collaborating with the Royal Society for Zoology Antwerp (KMDA) in the project 'The conservation of bonobos and other animal species in the Lomako-Yokokala Nature Reserve, through forest protection and guidance of the local community'.

The Province of Antwerp encourages local governments to subscribe to these collaborations with KMDA and BOS+. Through a tailored investment in these projects, local governments can make a concrete contribution to several sustainable development goals including SDG 1: fight against poverty, 13: climate action and 15: life on land. Participating local governments can participate in networking and exchange events with BOS+ and KMDA regarding these projects.



Province of Antwerp encourages municipalities to protect biodiversity and the rainforest.



Province of Antwerp is working with the NGO BOS+ to protect the tropical forest in Peru.



Wevelgem partners with the private sector to provide students, teachers, entrepreneurs and health care workers with affordable bicycles in Uganda.

Global cooperation with the private sector

The private sector is increasingly recognized as an important actor within international cooperation, including within municipal international cooperation. The private sector, in collaboration with governments, NGOs and other stakeholders, can help implement and scale up innovative and sustainable solutions to global challenges. This requires a shift to sustainable business models, socially just production processes (e.g. regarding decent work) and efforts to reduce harmful environmental impacts.

Through municipal global cooperation, the institutional and operational capacity of local governments for carrying out local economic development policy can be strengthened. Possible policy aspects that can be addressed are the establishment and management of public-private partnerships, simplifying administrative procedures for businesses, attracting investments, promoting access to finance, stimulating the social and circular economy or formalizing the informal sector.

A partnership with a local government in the Global South is not always necessary. For example, local governments in Flanders can mitigate the risks of labor and human rights violations in international supply chains in their own procurement policies (see example TruStone).

Reciprocity

Within the framework of a city-to-city partnership, involving the private sector can contribute to mutually reinforcing policies on local economic development. Both partners can contribute to each other's sustainable economic growth and sustainable development. It can also provide business opportunities for enterprises from both partner municipalities.

Participation

A multi-actor approach involving local governments and private sector actors as well as civil society organizations, knowledge institutions, trade unions and other stakeholders is desirable. Such an approach promotes knowledge transfer, capacity development, resource mobilization and innovation. Multistakeholder initiatives for fair trade are an example of this (see example Bruges - Ebolowa).

Duration

Mostly projects with a long-term perspective.

Budget/Finance

The following international programs (not an exhaustive list) support municipal global cooperation that also encourages private sector involvement.

- The International Urban Cooperation (IUC) program: this program aims to enable cities to establish contacts and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term European Union strategy to promote sustainable urban development in partnership with both the public and private sector.
- The Global Sustainable Technology and Innovation Community (G-STIC): To support countries in the Global South in the fight against climate change, the Flemish government launched the G-STIC Climate Action Program in 2021. By providing financial support to climate change adaptation and mitigation projects, G-STIC wants to accelerate the implementation of climate policies, strategies, regulations and action plans in the Global South. Several projects in the first call for projects involved local governments.
- Through its permanent call "Enterprises for SDGs," the King Baudouin Foundation provides grants for projects by companies that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South.



- Global municipal cooperation and the private sector - Platforma 2021 (Chapter 4)
- Cities for Fair Trade: Alliances for a Sustainable Chocolate Chain | Capacity4dev (europa.eu)



Hotel school Ter Groene Poorte and the agricultural school in Ebolowa are jointly organizing master classes on sustainable cocoa.



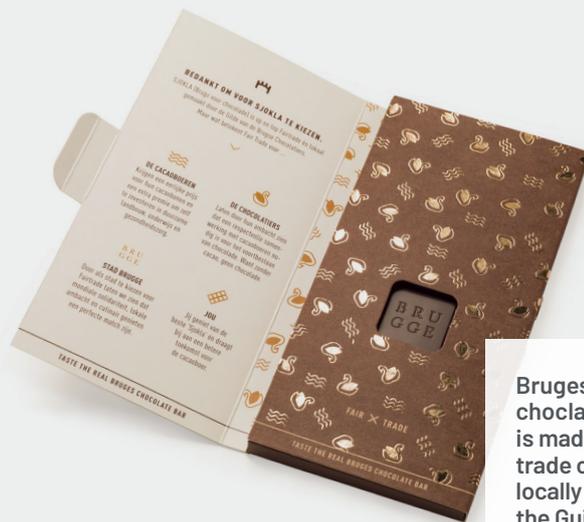
Bruges and Ebolowa promote sustainable chocolate

The city of Bruges has a partnership with Ebolowa, a provincial capital in a cocoa-rich region in southern Cameroon. Ebolowa and Bruges are both Fair Trade and chocolate cities. However, the chocolate sector faces major challenges such as deforestation, child labor, excessively low wages and poor working conditions. Through a partnership with the [Bruges Chocolate Guild](#) and cocoa cooperative Bityili in Ebolowa, the governments of both cities want to contribute to the transition to more sustainable chocolate. The partnership focuses on raising awareness, exchanges with other cooperatives, training and logistical support for cocoa producers to enable more sustainable production. This will also contribute to a higher income for cocoa farmers. In addition, efforts are being made to transform cocoa into by-products (oil, soap, chocolate) for the local and regional market.

Bruges has its own city chocolate, '[Sjokla](#)', made from fair trade cocoa produced by the Guild of Bruges Chocolatiers. Part of the revenue goes to projects in Ebolowa and the feasibility of producing the 'Sjokla' with cocoa from Ebolowa is currently being investigated.

With this city product, Bruges wants to underline the importance of sustainable chocolate and respect for the craftsmanship of the cocoa producer and the chocolatier. Marketing students of the Howest

University of Applied Sciences mapped out how the people of Bruges and the Bruges chocolate sector view sustainable chocolate. Based on this info, actions will be set up to promote sustainable cocoa and chocolate. The project takes on a multi-stakeholder approach in which local cooperation takes place with the Bruges chocolate guild for the production and sale of 'Sjokla' and with Oxfam and the chocolate museum Choco-Story for the awareness-raising actions concerning sustainable chocolate. Hotel school Ter Groene Poorte and the agricultural school in Ebolowa are also jointly organizing master classes on sustainable cocoa.



Bruges' city chocolate 'Sjokla' is made from fair trade cocoa and locally produced by the Guild of Bruges Chocolatiers.



- [FairTradeMunicipality](#)
- [Fair Trade Towns International](#)



TruStone: local governments commit to responsibly produced natural stone

In 2015, a high-profile documentary appeared, revealing human rights violations in the supply chain of natural stone purchased by Flemish cities and municipalities. The footage showed cases of child labor, modern slavery, extremely low wages and unsafe working conditions in the production of natural stone in India, Zimbabwe and Vietnam. The outrage that followed, motivated the Flemish government to search for appropriate tools to eradicate such practices, which resulted in the TruStone initiative in collaboration with the Dutch government, NGOs and trade unions. The initiative, localized in the Social and Economic Council (SER) in the Netherlands, is directed at local governments and natural stone suppliers. Contracting authorities and natural stone processing companies that join TruStone, commit to buying natural stone from

suppliers whose extraction and processing complies with international standards and guidelines. Companies participate on a voluntary basis, but once they participate they are expected to comply with the terms of the agreement, with the risk of exclusion if they do not comply. Suppliers must meet time-bound milestones on the transparency of their value chains (mapping quarries and processors), setting up and implementing an action plan, and reporting on that action plan. The TruStone secretariat supports both participating companies in setting up due diligence systems, and local governments in purchasing sustainable natural stone. At the beginning of 2023, TruStone had 29 local governments as members in Flanders and 10 in the Netherlands. There are 34 member companies in the Netherlands and 15 companies from Flanders.



Wevelgem, the bicycle and the South

Since 2019, the municipality of Wevelgem has partnered with non-profit organization Coop-Uganda in the project "Wevelgem, the bicycle and the South". Coop-Uganda is a local branch of the Dutch foundation Cycling out of Poverty (Coop-Africa) in the Ugandan city of Jinja. The project aims to promote cycling as a sustainable means of transport and encourage the inhabitants of Wevelgem and Jinja to fully opt for the bicycle. This way the project aims to make a positive contribution to climate, mobility and health. In collaboration with the centers for adult education Miras and Creo, used bicycles are collected which are then repaired and sold. The revenue goes to Coop-Uganda's bicycle projects.

In addition, the municipality of Wevelgem organizes knowledge exchange projects between

Belgium and Uganda for bicycle repairers. In the Jinja area, Coop-Uganda provides affordable bicycles for students, teachers, small entrepreneurs and health workers. Coop-Africa also organizes bicycle trips for tourists with its company Bikeventures. The income is then used for the projects of Coop-Africa.

The project came about partly thanks to funding from the Province of West-Vlaanderen, and will end in 2023. A follow-up project will focus on digital exchange between young people and on lobbying for the development of a cycling ecosystem. In the future, Wevelgem aims to consolidate its international cooperation, possibly by establishing a city-to-city partnership with the city of Jinja.



Students bike to school in Jinja, Uganda.



Mayor of Genk, Wim Dries, explains the contribution of local governments to the SDGs at the High Level Political Forum in New York.



Members of the Platforma network consult with the European representation at the United Nations.



Global networks

Municipal global cooperation need not be limited to activities within a 1-to-1 partnership. Local governments all over the world can also connect with each other through international networks to exchange knowledge and experience on specific policy areas. This can also be done through international consortia that may include other types of actors such as academics, civil society organizations and the private sector. Moreover, within these networks or consortia, joint projects can be set up and advocacy or lobbying can take place.

Reciprocity

Participation in an international (multi-actor) network offers many opportunities for exchanging knowledge and good practices. It can also provide opportunities to set up cooperation projects with other local governments and to attract grants for these projects, for example from Europe.

Duration

A long-term commitment is usual, but not necessary.

Budget

Mainly time investment for staff participation in the network meetings and travel expenses.

The European Union provides funding for several programs of international cooperation in which local governments work in consortium with other actors on specific themes. Some examples:

- The AfriFoodLinks program (see below) is financially supported by the European Union and coordinated by the Local Governments for Sustainability Africa (ICLEI-Africa) network.
- The EU 'Development Education and Awareness Raising' (DEAR) program supports projects where CSOs and local governments collaborate to promote global citizenship.
- The EU Inclucities network facilitates the exchange of expertise and best practices on the integration of newcomers between local governments.



Towards sustainable food systems with the AfriFOODlinks program

The EU funded AfriFOODlinks program started in December 2022. Coordinated by ICLEI Africa, the program brings together 26 partners from around the world to improve food security and urban sustainability in 65 cities in Africa and Europe. To this end, the program takes on the following strategies:

- 1) Apply an urban food system lens to promote shifts to healthy, sustainable food
- 2) Transform urban food environments through social engineering experiments
- 3) Promote inclusive multi-actor policies to empower officials, small businesses and communities to cocreate their food systems
- 4) Support agri-food enterprises run by women and youth with a view on creating locally added value and inclusive economic activity

AfriFOODlinks invests in food system transitions in 5 African Hub Cities and engages 10 African and 5 European 'Sharing Cities' to work together to learn from each other, share their innovations and set up replicable pilot projects.

The City of Bruges is one of these Sharing Cities and involved in the 'Food Smart Cities for Development Project', which is funded by the EU DEAR (development education and awareness raising) program. Its involvement in both programs allowed Bruges to participate in the working session of the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, a global network on sustainable food systems. London, Frankfurt, New York, Chicago, Melbourne, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Dakar, Osaka, Moscow and Tel Aviv are some of the big cities participating in this pact.



There are countless international networks for local governments around just as many topics. Some examples:

- Platforma is a European coalition of cities and regions - and their associations - active in the field of development cooperation. Platforma focuses specifically on promoting global cooperation between municipalities and cities through facilitating knowledge exchange, peer-learning, and experimenting with innovative ways of cooperation. Platforma is part of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the European umbrella association of local governments.
- ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in more than 125 countries, this network focuses on strengthening local policies on sustainable development, mainly through peer-to-peer exchange.
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan governments and their associations committed to representing and defending their interests and strengthening their voice. The Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) working group within UCLG focuses on knowledge exchange on international policy and cooperation.
- The RUAF Global Partnership on Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Food Systems is a consortium of specialized institutions and organizations, including cities, research institutions and NGOs, with a track record in urban and peri-urban agriculture and food system solutions. The partnership provides a platform for learning and knowledge exchange between science, policy and practice.
- Since its founding in 1990, The Climate Alliance has grown into a vigorous network of local authorities taking action against global climate change. Almost 2,000 cities, municipalities and regional governments as well as provinces, NGOs and other organizations across Europe are part of the network.
- Eurocities is a comprehensive network of more than 200 European cities. The network provides a platform to share knowledge and ideas, exchange experiences, analyze common problems and develop innovative solutions through a wide range of forums, working groups, projects, activities and events.
- Cities Alliance is a global partnership that supports cities in sustainable development. Based in Brussels, the organization is affiliated with the United Nations (UNOPS). Cities Alliance currently has programs in Tunisia and Uganda. National and local governments in these countries are supported in urban development, planning, management and service delivery. To this end, Cities Alliance collaborates with universities in the partner countries, among others.



Pakistan was hit hard by floods in 2022. Flemish local governments, including Duffel, showed their solidarity.

Humanitarian aid / Emergency aid

Many local governments provide humanitarian and emergency aid to assist other local governments facing acute emergencies or disasters.

- Humanitarian aid is usually provided over a longer period of time and is mainly aimed at alleviating post-disaster needs. These are often man-made disasters, such as armed conflict. Humanitarian aid can focus on rehabilitation and reconstruction as well as on strengthening the resilience of affected communities.
- Emergency aid is more likely to be short-term and is primarily focused on providing assistance during the acute phase of urgency, on “saving lives”. Emergency aid is often provided after natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes or floodings) or technological disasters (e.g. an explosion releasing hazardous chemicals). It mainly involves financial support, often through specialized NGOs such as the Red Cross or Doctors Without Borders.

The procedure for granting humanitarian or emergency aid is usually initiated following a request for aid from a humanitarian NGO or Consortium 12-12, after which the municipal advisory board for international cooperation gives its advice. But it also happens that the request for aid comes from the advisory board itself or from the board of mayor and aldermen. Many local authorities have grant regulations with guidelines for granting and distributing humanitarian or emergency aid.

Reciprocity

By providing humanitarian and emergency aid, Flemish local governments show their commitment and solidarity. It is a form of global cooperation that produces visible and tangible effects, which can strengthen support for global solidarity among the inhabitants of the municipality. Through their involvement in humanitarian aid or emergency relief, local governments can gain new insights and learn from the experiences of other municipalities. This can lead to innovative ways of disaster management, which can also be applicable to emergencies in one's own municipality.

Emergency assistance can help save lives, mitigate the effects of the disaster and strengthen the resilience of affected areas. Humanitarian aid can also contribute to strengthened capacity in reconstruction, disaster management and prevention. It can also give rise to new friendships or partnerships.

Participation

Since it usually concerns a deposit of funds through a specialized humanitarian organization, the participation of actors from the municipality is rather limited. In some cases, however, the municipality or city can play a facilitating role in an awareness-raising and fund-raising campaign among its population, thus encouraging international solidarity.

Duration

Emergency relief interventions are short-term. Humanitarian assistance usually involves a more long-term collaboration.

Budget

Rather limited budgets, depending on the emergency and the request for help. On average, it is a few thousand euros per grant awarded.



Cities 4 cities/United 4 Ukraine

Cities 4 Cities/United 4 Ukraine is a platform that provides support for establishing partnerships between Ukrainian municipalities and local governments from other countries seeking to provide humanitarian assistance. The platform provides a database with profiles of more than 100 Ukrainian municipalities open to cooperation. Each profile contains brief information about the municipality, its location, population, main economic sectors and how the municipality has fared since the beginning of the Russian invasion. Potential partner municipalities can send a request for cooperation to the platform, which then organizes an initial contact.



Duffel: financial aid for floods in Pakistan

In the summer of 2022, Pakistan was hit by the worst flood in 12 years, a direct result of climate change. 33 million Pakistanis were affected and thousands died as a result. The local branch of the Red Cross asked the board of mayor and aldermen of Duffel to contribute financially to the emergency assistance provided by the Red Cross branches in Pakistan. This assistance consisted of alleviating basic needs such as shelter and food supplies. Duffel has grant regulations for international solidarity that include emergency aid. Based on these regulations, advice was requested from the Duffel advisory board for international cooperation and consequently, 2,250 euros in financial aid was transferred to the Red Cross in Pakistan. In an interview, the alderman responsible for local global policy explains: 'As a



local government with FairTrade title and a signatory to VVSG's SDG commitment declaration on the Sustainable Development Goals, we believe it is important to take responsibility and offer financial support to Pakistan.' (Alderman Luc Van Houtven, Radioreflex, 8/12/2022).



Partnerships between local governments can help address humanitarian needs in Ukraine.

Short-term exchange of expertise

This approach concerns projects of a certain duration in which Flemish municipalities exchange with partner municipalities in the Global South around specific policy themes and challenges.

Reciprocity

Both partner municipalities exchange on an equal basis about each other's strengths and challenges regarding specific policy domains. The process can be a stepping stone to a more long-term cooperation.

Participation

Within an exchange process, involvement of the administrative and political level as well as of other actors (e.g. civil society, schools and businesses) from both municipalities is desirable.

Duration

Short-term trajectories of a certain duration.

Budget

The following grant programs provide funding for short-term exchange projects:

- VVSG funding for SDG partnerships (see case study)
- European funds including the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument). See also the EU Funds Guide for local and regional governments that was co-developed by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG).



VVSG's project call for SDG partnerships

VVSG, with the support of the federal government, wants to experiment with a new form of international cooperation starting in 2023. This call for projects offers Flemish local governments the possibility to exchange with a partner municipality from Benin or Rwanda on a specific theme for a period of 2 years on the basis of a colleague-to-colleague relationship. The goal is to stimulate mutual learning, a global outlook and internal reflection. This experiment was named 'SDG-partnership' because it wants to contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. For the trajectories with Rwandan partner municipalities, the choice was made to work together on topics of 'citizen participation' (SDG 16). For the trajectories with Beninese municipalities, the focus is on 'local prosperity' where themes such as innovation, decent work, inequality and renewable energy can be addressed. VVSG provides €35,000 in funding per SDG partnership. Further coaching and support from VVSG is possible if the partners show an interest in continuing to work together after the SDG partnership in the form of a city-to-city partnership.



VVSG visiting its Rwandan sister association RALGA to discuss the launch of the 'SDG partnerships' project on citizen participation.



VNG International's IDEAL program: inclusive local policies through international cooperation

The Inclusive Decision at Local Level (IDEAL) program of VNG International aims to facilitate exchange around specific policy themes between Dutch municipalities and local governments in the Global South. During the IDEAL program 2017-2022, the focus was on

strengthening citizen participation in local governance. A new program was launched in January 2022. It focuses on security, rule of law, migration, economic development and water management. The program is supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



ORIENT-8: orienting newcomers through Smart Mentoring

Orient8 was a two-year project (2021-2022) aimed at developing and testing an impactful mentoring program that contributes to the integration process of newcomers.

The project included a collaboration between the cities of Mechelen (Belgium), Nikaia-Rentis (Greece) and Sala (Sweden), research institute HIVA-KU Leuven and non-profit organization Beyond the Horizon. The project resulted in a digital application that informs newcomers in an accessible and user-friendly way, a digital matching tool for connecting newcomers with 'buddies' as well as a practical guide for setting up a buddy system. The project was funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).



Integrating Cities - UNITES

The acronym UNITES stands for "Urban Integration Strategies through co-design". The project runs from 2022 to 2024 and is led by Eurocities. It provides training, guidance and grants for 8 European cities to develop integration strategies for newcomers in cooperation with newcomers and other actors. An online course (MOOC) is being developed that is publicly accessible to practitioners working on the integration of newcomers. The participating cities are also exchanging experiences and knowledge in a learning network.

The UNITES project is a follow-up to the CONNECTION project that ran from 2020-2022. The aim of this project was the international exchange of knowledge on integration policy. Specific attention was paid to social networking, gender, accessing the labor market and the development of a one-stop shop where newcomers can go with their questions. Both projects were funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).



Municipalities use the SDGs as a framework for their international cooperation policy.

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More information?

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About VVSG

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities is the umbrella organization supporting local governments in Flanders and advocating for their interests. All 300 municipalities in Flanders are members, in addition to many police zones and intermunicipal partnerships. A house of trust that provides its members with advice, guidance and tailored information organizing trainings, conferences, network events and other support services. More than 10,000 politicians and civil servants attend a conference or training of VVSG every year.

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VVSG

