

“U-LEAD with Europe – New Wave of Cooperation project”

U-LEAD with Europe programme – NALAS proposal “New Wave of Cooperation” submitted.

U-LEAD with Europe office in Kyiv invited NALAS to present an intermediary project proposal as result of the successful implementation of the pilot action ‘*Bridges of Cooperation.*’ The U-LEAD office expressed interest to have NALAS on board for Pillar III – technical assistance and other supporting measures once the Ukraine Facility (EUR 50 billion) has been approved by the EU Council.

The intermediary project proposal will cover the period 2024 and follows up on the previous pilot action building on the successful implementation of NALAS’ Shadowing Programme. One of the outcomes is to increase the number of 08 so-called tandems (EU host and UA beneficiary LGs) by incorporating two additional EU host LGs from Montenegro and North Macedonia.

The proposed action, like the pilot before, is designed to use best practices to support UA municipalities in generating changes which assist in solving real life issues encountered where they are most pressing and present for citizen in an environment characterised by destruction and annihilation: at local level. In this context, the project intervention intends to demonstrate the capacity of the local level via peer-to-peer partnerships to contribute to a national effort of building resilience, promoting reforms and generate recovery for both territory and its citizen.

The extension of tandems among EU host and UA beneficiary LGs set-up during the previous action, both in number and geographical terms, is sought to expand knowledge exchange beyond the EU MS to reach out and include LG expertise from candidate countries. The aim is unaltered by strengthening the strategic collaboration beyond the immediate needs of UA beneficiary LGs, offering unique knowledge exchange via shadowing. The intention is to pave way for long-lasting partnership and collaboration beyond the timely horizon of this short-term project intervention with the perspective of follow-up support to consolidate inter-municipal partnerships.

Project background:

NALAS started in May 2023 implementation of this pilot in coordination with U-LEAD GIZ office in Kyiv. The main goal of the project is to strengthen the capacities of Ukrainian local governments on the EU accession process and preparation and management of local development projects to support Ukraine’s reconstruction. This implies: (i) to support local capacities to address acute challenges in specific sectors faced by LGs and local communities in terms of service delivery and (ii) to increase knowledge and understanding on the EU integration process and the role of LGs. An important function will be the use of NALAS’ Shadowing Program, a mechanism belonging to the NALAS Knowledge System, for exchange and transfer of expertise between members, through coaching, mentoring, and on-job learning using the knowledge within the NALAS network.

VSR Romania 2023 - Presentation of climate action at UN event

During the VNR-VSR-VLR Studio titled: *Unveiling Best Practices for Multilevel Governance in Localizing SDGs* organised by UNECE, UN HABITAT, UNDESA and UCLG on 13 March, NALAS member ACOR from Romania presented the climate topic under SDG 13 as reflected in the VSR Romania 2023. The Panel discussion on Multilevel Governance in Action: Leveraging Data for Evidence-Based Policy Making in SDG Voluntary Local Reviews, was designed as a side event to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Geneva, 13-14 March 2024) and dived into topics such as (i) The latest developments on

localizing the SDGs in the UNECE region (ii) Experiences in the use of data for evidence-based policymaking by cities (iii) Concrete examples on cities and national administrations and UN agencies and (iv) How collaborative structures between city and national governments can be optimized. Adelina Bilan, one of the lead consultants for the elaboration of the VSR 2023, represented ACOR and UCLG in the panel because UCLG World Secretariat and NALAS supported ACOR and the Romanian Association of Cities (AMR) in elaborating VSR 2023 on the progress of implementing SDGs in Romania.

Background info:

UCLG together with NALAS supported via concerted technical cooperation NALAS member LGA from Romania (ACOR) in preparing for the 1st time the Voluntary Subnational Report on progress in implementing the SDGs for Romania. The aim to contribute to the Voluntary National Review was met successfully establishing a constructive working relationship with the line ministry in charge of the VNR Romania 2023 which led to include local best practice examples in the final VNR presented at the HLPF at the UN in May 2023. This result was possible because both Romanian Associations, ACOR and the Romanian Association of Cities (AMR) worked in tandem and committed to continue to assume monitoring in the future.

TED Working Group 2 on Political and Civic Participation – NALAS recommendations

On 5 March 2024 NALAS brought to the fore its recommendations on inclusive participation within the meeting dedicated to strategies and options to improve support to inclusive participation for vulnerable people and communities in partner countries. The objective of the meeting was to present the key findings of the report¹, discuss the crosscutting challenges identified, determine the operational options to address them, and create a conducive environment for leaving no one behind and building sustainable as well as inclusive institutions. Darko Mrvaljevic highlighted key NALAS' recommendations, forwarded beforehand as written feedback to the TED Secretariat, during the panel on crosscutting challenges.

NALAS recommendations were directed to both the programming & coordination level with the aim to include LGs as strategic stakeholders and stress the crucial importance of multi-stakeholder dialogue. Strangely, the draft report did not mention at all Local governments and Local Government Associations despite their crucial role and function in sustainable and inclusive development. Not to mention finally, the involvement of the local government level in localizing SDGs and adapting to EU rules and standards in the EU enlargement process.

In this context, NALAS stated the following:

- ✚ For the programming level: the inclusion of local government in their function as policy-maker and service provider is crucial. We should not forget that it is the local government level who designs social policy at local level with the input provided from civil society.² In fact, sustainable and inclusive development depends on the functioning of the strategic alliance between local government and civil society as tandem. Here, social mapping in coordination and collaboration of

¹ DRAFT REPORT ON “TOOLS, METHODOLOGIES, AND APPROACHES TO SUPPORT MEANINGFUL AND INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION OF GROUPS VULNERABLE TO MARGINALIZATION INCLUDING WOMEN, YOUTH, AND PERSONS WITH ISABILITIES IN PARTNER COUNTRIES”, FEB.2024

² LGs are not only called to deliver the infrastructure, or basic services to their citizens, and to create a conducive context for (local) economic development, but also to promote local spaces for dialogue and service delivery, increase democratic participation, active citizenship, participation of women and youth in the public sphere and multilevel accountability.

civil society provides data about vulnerable groups and their needs which are fed into the decision finding process and allow for evidence-based decisions to be made regarding social policy, action plans that consider needs, provide effective and efficient service delivery, and assure that no one and no territory is left behind!

- ✚ For the coordination level: the multi-stakeholder dialogue requires local governments and Local Government Associations to be included among strategic dialogue partners and stakeholders. In line with the principle of inclusive partnership, local governments and their associations must play a meaningful role during design, implementation, and associated monitoring processes. The inclusive partnership principle between all levels of governance is a **MUST** to deal with complex global issues and repercussions at national, regional and local level and to provide effective and swift response in multi-stakeholder coordination and programming.

Enlargement Days 2024 – NALAS participation

The Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) of the Committee of the Regions, extended an invitation to NALAS to participate actively in the upcoming Enlargement Days (29-30 April) in Brussels. The new NALAS President, to be elected during NALAS General Assembly in Bar, Montenegro (18-19 April), will address the plenary in the 1st session dedicated to "Local and regional authorities in the enlargement process". Besides, NALAS will be involved in the 2nd session on "Public administration reform and fiscal decentralisation" presenting "Best practice in fiscal decentralisation" with emphasis on the results of the latest (10th edition) Fiscal Decentralisation Report for South-East Europe.

Earlier this year, NALAS contributed in his function of consultative entity to the CIVEX Commission its recommendations for the drafting of the CoR opinion on the EU Commission's Enlargement Package 2023 with focus on the role of Local and Regional Authorities in: (i) Programming and monitoring the EU financial assistance to WB6 (ii) Managing migration challenges (iii) Responding to key challenges of green and digital transition (iv) Setting up JCCs in remaining countries of WB (v) Growth Plan & Finance Facility.

FRIENDSHIP project – milestones in 2023

Within the "*FRIENDSHIP - Strengthening EU-Mongolia Friendship through Equitable, Resilient and Innovative Growth in Darkhan City*" project, the year 2023 saw impressive progress by meeting important milestones in the implementation process. Some of the highlights of this decentralised cooperation measure from 2023, underlining the extraordinary work and achievements of the FRIENDSHIP project, were:

- ✚ 1.3 million EURO invested in Darkhan-Uul province through the Friendship Project.
- ✚ Five international forums were organized. Among the major results: (i) 1.2 million EURO have been set aside in the state budget to develop Darkhan-Uul Province into **Mongolia's 1st Smart City model** (ii) A trilateral cooperation agreement led to the setup of a consortium to promote Darkhan-Uul Province on the **international carbon market** with emphasis on plastic waste recycling & reduction of methane emissions.
- ✚ The **1st National Association of Local Authorities of Mongolia** was established by the initiative of the Darkhan City Governor (including all 21 provinces) to accelerate the decentralization process and localization of SDGs.

- ✚ Within the framework of empowering human resources of the business sector (i) 16 sets of training were organized in 4 areas with 310 participants (ii) **Seven start-ups were supported** providing technical & financial assistance of 20.000 EURO each (iii) **10 start-ups are being incubated** (iv) 140.000 euros have been invested in 4 pilot projects aimed at civil society and the environment in cooperation with business enterprises (v) 64 permanent and 16 temporary jobs were created, totalling 80 jobs.
- ✚ The **Darkhan City Forum**, aiming to strengthen participatory governance, was established, organising 5 conferences in cooperation with the Peoples Representatives and other civil society organizations.
- ✚ The **development of the E-HEALTH system** in the provincial general hospital and 5 family hospitals was improved, introducing the integration of the E-Clinic system, investing 30.000 EURO.
- ✚ MoUs were signed with the cities of Bar, Montenegro, and Ajdovščina, Slovenia within the framework of 4 study visits.
- ✚ Darkhan City has become an **official member** of the **Global Covenant of Mayors**, enabling it to join global climate change mitigation and renewable energy initiatives and cooperate in many ways.

Background information:

The overall objective of the project under the EU Partnership for Sustainable Cities facility is to promote inclusive and sustainable growth of Darkhan city, the 2nd largest city in Mongolia and its province using collaborative multi-stakeholder participatory and knowledge sharing approaches for improving resilience, accelerating digital transition, fostering innovation and promoting employment opportunities.

The project has a volume of EUR 3 million and is supported under the EU funding facility “Local Authorities: Partnerships for sustainable cities 2021 - EuropeAid/171273/DH/ACT/Multi – LOT 2: Partnerships for sustainable cities in Asia and the Pacific”.

Implementing partners are: Darkhan-Uul Province Municipality (City) as Lead Partner - NALAS - School of Agroecology and Business of the Mongolian University of Life Sciences.

“2023 Green Champions of the Western Balkans Recognition Award”

Jointly with RCC, NALAS has published a call “2023 Green Champions of the Western Balkans Recognition Award” inviting member LGs to apply for this prestigious award with their achievements in the following areas:

- Decarbonisation
- Sustainable Transport
- Fostering community engagement and awareness on circular economy/environment
- Innovation and creativity in addressing environmental challenges – depollution
- Sustainable Agriculture Practices
- Commitment to environmental conservation and protection and Biodiversity

The call is accessible at the following link for more details:

<http://nalas.eu/2023-green-champions-of-the-western-balkans-recognition-award/>

Invitations are extended to LGAs to identify, motivate and support best performing member LGs to apply. The winner in the end will be 6 LGs, one from each of the 6 economies of the WB6. Mayors will be invited to attend the events in Bar, Montenegro on 19 April and present their winning projects.

NALAS
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The deadline for submission of applications is 31 March 2024.