

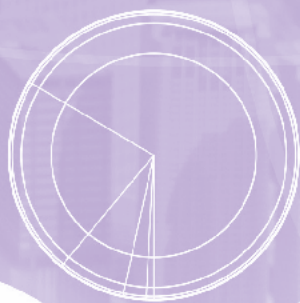


**European Committee
of the Regions**

**Commission for
Citizenship, Governance,
Institutional and External Affairs**

CIVEX

New avenues for functional cooperation at local and regional level in EaP countries



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This report was written by Agnieszka Kulesa and Piotr Kazmierkiewicz (CASE- Center for Economic and Social Research), Riya Roy and Elitsa Garnizova (LSE Consulting)

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Abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
ARM	Armenia
AZE	Azerbaijan
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CHF	Swiss franc
CLRA	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
CoR	Committee of Regions
CORLEAP	Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
CSF	Civil Society Forum
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
GEO	Georgia
GIZ	Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
LAs	Local authorities
LPAs	Local public authorities
LRAs	Local and regional authorities
M4EG	Mayors for Economic Growth
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOL	Moldova
NALAG	National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OA	Official assistance
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SIDCA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UKR	Ukraine
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

1.Introduction

This final note was prepared as part of a project on *New avenues for functional cooperation at local and regional level in EaP countries* commissioned by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) under the specific contract No CDR/2022/B3/1/1-CIVEX-RELEX implementing the multiple framework contract for studies in the fields of external relations No CDR/2022/B3/1/CIVEX-RELEX. The aim of the commissioned study is to provide data and information for discussion and analysis conducted by CORLEAP Bureau rapporteur Aleksandra Dulkiewicz in the course of compiling the report *What can we do with our partners?* The study will serve as an input for the rapporteur's work on the report while also providing recommendations for future CoR and CORLEAP projects. This final note presents research findings based on a combination of desk research, collected information requests and interviews, delivering an overview of the scale and structure of assistance to local and regional authorities in five countries of the Eastern Partnership (as per the agreement with the CoR, Belarus was not included in the study). The note combines a tabular and textual modes of delivery of information in the format proposed by the CoR.

The CORLEAP Action Plan for 2021–2024 has recognised mounting pressures on the local autonomy in the Eastern Partnership area during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to combat the pandemic and lead post-pandemic recovery were highly centralized. This has further eroded local and regional authorities' position in a variety of ways: placing stress on their already dire financial situation, making their resilience-building efforts relatively less visible than those of the central government and slowing down or halting decentralisation reforms.

As a result, for the period until 2024 CORLEAP members resolved to build capacity of LRAs in the Eastern Partnership region for vital engagement in post-COVID-19 recovery and resilience. Three main directions of capacity-building support were envisioned: (1) safeguarding of the legal and institutional position of LRAs and maintenance of autonomy vis-à-vis central authorities; (2) putting LRAs on a sound financial footing through the promotion of further fiscal decentralisation and by ensuring the necessary resources for pursuing measures for resilience and recovery; and (3) building the local expertise through the exchange of experience as well as training and instruction, including under the umbrella of the EaP Academy for Public Administration.

The CORLEAP Annual meeting, held in Liberec in November 2022, noted that the identified challenges were being tackled by a variety of actors in the course of projects carried out in EaP countries. It is therefore vital to consider the areas of focus of those actors' activities, the lessons of their implementation, and possible synergies and complementarities. Here we shall contemplate the opportunities that emerge in the respective thematic areas, noting in particular how the activities undertaken by major actors have tackled the challenges faced by local authorities in the EaP region and what lessons we could draw in regard to planning CORLEAP's contribution.

2.Review of the areas of activity

Framework for LRAs’ activities and cooperation

The desk research (analysis of recent reports of the local governance frameworks), included in the inception note was complemented with insights from interviews with practitioners with hands-on knowledge of the realities and gaps of the capacity of local governments in the EaP region. Every interview tackled such issues as the experience of LRAs’ absorption of assistance by LRAs, the current state of decentralisation reforms and the outstanding needs that should be addressed with continued assistance.

Table 1. Review of the system of local and regional government

Country	LRA framework	Challenges and opportunities for cooperation
Armenia ¹	Following mergers, 1,005 settlements were organised into 502 municipalities (2018), which are the only LAs. The capital city accounts for 1/3 of the population. Although the 2016 law requires that municipalities be consulted by the parliament, as of 2019 no procedures had been set up for this. While powers were delegated to municipalities, they can only be exercised under strict central state control. This assessment was affirmed by a respondent who, while admitting that more funds have been recently flowing to local authorities, dependence on the central government continues as the financial base consists of mainly transfers rather than increased tax revenues. The limited role of local governments and civil society is evident for	The CLRA assessment noted that “the administrative capacities in the vast majority of municipalities are not sufficient to deliver public services fully and with due quality, and scarce budget resources are only sufficient for remunerating municipal staff”. An interview with a major donor revealed capacity gaps in terms of limited finances and corresponding difficulties in securing adequate staffing levels. Other respondents pointed to a limited number of LRAs involved in cooperation as the donors preferred partners with past cooperation experience.

	<p>instance in their very minor involvement in infrastructural projects, run and finance by the central authorities.</p> <p>An additional issue, which has emerged since the military conflict in 2020, is the pressure on local governments to deal with displacement and to reskill and facilitate entrepreneurship among the rural population.</p>	<p>Municipalities may form associations, but since 2015 no new ones have been established. The Communities Association of Armenia², a legal entity since 2009, serves to protect the interests, strengthen the capacity and facilitate cooperation between all LAs. It maintains contacts with several regions and associations in the EU, Georgia and Russia.³</p>
<p>Azerbaijan⁴</p>	<p>LRA heads appointed by the central state and the division of powers is ill-defined between municipalities and executive state bodies locally. There is significant fragmentation of municipalities (1606 units in 2020, although down from 2757 in the 1990s); no independent regional structures have been set up. Only 0.15% of the state budget is allocated to LRAs, which cannot determine their own tax rates. CLRA assessment: insufficient funding for municipalities to fulfil their own limited tasks and functions.</p>	<p>Although since 2019, municipalities and their associations may share experience with partners abroad, this requires prior central state authorisation. Their functional and financial autonomy decreased further during COVID-19. However, in the 2019-2023 State Programme for the Development of Azerbaijani Justice, the MoJ was tasked with facilitating contacts between Azerbaijani and foreign local state bodies.⁵ Close cooperation reported with the Association of Municipalities of the Turkic World.⁶</p> <p>Many respondents noted that of the 5 countries under study, the opportunities for cooperation were the most limited here, which partly reflected the LRAs' limited autonomy and partly a</p>

		narrower agenda for cooperation with the EU.
Georgia ⁷	<p>On the local level, there are 5 self-governing cities and 59 municipalities while on the mid-level Georgia is divided into 9 administrative regions and three autonomous territories (the regions are part of the central government structure). Local governments levy taxes (their budgets are adopted by elected councils) and are headed by popularly elected mayors. Their tasks include socio-economic development, spatial planning, public spaces, roads and transportation, education, etc. By 2025, ministries' sectorial competences are to be delegated to local authorities. Their revenues accounted for 5.8% of GDP in 2018 and in 2019, the local budgets increased by 15% thanks to the introduction of sharing 19% VAT revenue with municipalities. However, 68% of their revenues are still from intergovernmental transfers.</p>	<p>A member of CORLEAP, the NALAG association, unites all local authorities. It cooperates with the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure on the basis of a memorandum, and has been included in a state commission on decentralisation reform underway since 2018. It co-authored the Decentralisation Strategy 2020-2025. Municipalities themselves also maintain a dialogue with line ministries on various aspects of delegated tasks. The Code of Local Self-Governance authorises municipalities to conclude international partnerships or cooperation schemes. Cross-border cooperation requires approval from the MFA. Most municipalities are staffed with at least one official in charge of communication with donors and international organisations. The interviewed donor representatives noted the significance of the decentralisation reforms, but stressed that at least in the area of development, priorities tend to be worked out at the central level, while the challenge remains for</p>

		LRAs to be engaged in issue identification and priority selection.
Moldova ⁸	<p>Two-level local governance: 898 first-tier (villages, communities, towns and municipalities) and 36 units of the second-tier (2 municipalities, combining first- and second-tier, 32 <i>raions</i>, autonomous Gagauzia and special-status Transnistria. Broad own competencies of municipalities (incl. urban planning, water and sanitation, roads and transport, preschool and extracurricular education, social housing) and delegated sectorial competencies. 2nd-tier units are responsible for a range of own tasks and delegated tasks. However, funding for own competencies is “very scarce while financing for delegated competencies is almost completely missing”.⁹</p> <p>Respondents displayed varied views of the amalgamation process: one speaker stressed that the first stage was voluntary, followed by funding incentives; another, however, could not see significant improvements in local authorities’ capacity.</p>	<p>According to a recent report “the vast majority of Moldovan municipalities up until now managed to establish twinning and partnership relations with their colleagues from the West and East (...) most of twinning are established with Moldovan neighbours – Romania and Ukraine [and] (...) significant cooperation with municipalities from (...) Bulgaria, Italy, Russia and Germany.”¹⁰</p> <p>Respondents generally seeing improved relations between central and local governments. However, they also agree that with expanding EU financing, there is a need to engage local authorities in infrastructural projects.</p>
Ukraine ¹¹	<p>The country has a three-tier local governance with the top-tier of 27 regional units (24 oblasts, 2 cities, 1 autonomous republic). Thanks to amalgamation, the number of intermediate units (districts) dropped from 490 to 136 while the number of municipalities was reduced from over 10,000 in 2015 to 1,469 (p. 251). Since 2015, the</p>	<p>Military conflict is expected to undercut advances in poverty reduction, and put strain on housing and healthcare and delivery of services (p. 90). The loss of territories has forced some offices (e.g. ALDA’s in Mariupol) to relocate. However, the mounting</p>

	<p>country's three-level local governance units (municipal, district, regional) have been developing territorial development strategies; however, according to the OECD, "a top-down approach predominates" (p. 139). Accountability was increased through granting local community officials (<i>starostas</i>) a range of tasks, including proposing budgetary changes and delivering administrative services as well as monitoring local development projects (p. 252).</p>	<p>assistance needs spurred the opening of territorial offices.¹²</p> <p>Cross-border cooperation has flourished between LRAs of Ukraine and those of its EU neighbours. These are institutionalised into Euroregions, but can also take on the form of sectoral agreements and Interreg programmes (European grouping of territorial cooperation). The latter initiatives between Ukraine and Poland, Slovakia and Hungary (members of the Visegrad 4) covered "conservation of natural and cultural heritage, (...) emergency situations, cross-border mobility, healthcare, (...) tourism and transport infrastructure". However, compared to parallel projects between Visegrad countries, those with Ukraine suffered from an "insufficient level of quality of project management and low ability to attract external financial resources".¹³ In one of the interviews, a reference was made to the <i>U-Lead</i> project's limited scale given the Ukrainian regions' enormous funding needs.</p>
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Table 1 Key takeaways

- The competencies and financial standing of local authorities vary widely in the EaP region, which calls for an individual approach (stress on capacity-building among those with limited competences);
- The majority of LRAs rely on transfers from state budget rather than on generating their own revenue.
- Amalgamation processes have brought down the numbers of municipalities but have not always been accompanied by a genuine transfer of competences. Only in the countries engaged in the EU accession process do we see a growing role of regions, and infrastructural projects have increasingly targeted the mid-tier of governance.
- Cooperation with foreign partners is severely constrained in some countries, requiring formal approval by central government, and is likely to continue to be hampered in others as municipalities have limited financial, staff and skill bases. These factors have prioritised cooperation with either large municipalities or those in the EU's direct neighbourhood.

Objectives and value of assistance to EaP countries

The following table identifies the broad objectives of country-specific assistance (for those donors that follow a country-by-country approach, such as the EU, USAID or UNDP) while also summarising the total assistance based on the donors’ public information. Net development and official assistance figures were drawn from the World Bank database¹⁴ for comparability purposes (as of 18 April 2023, the data are available up to 2021).

Table 2. General description and financial value of foreign assistance by year (3 yrs), country, and broad category

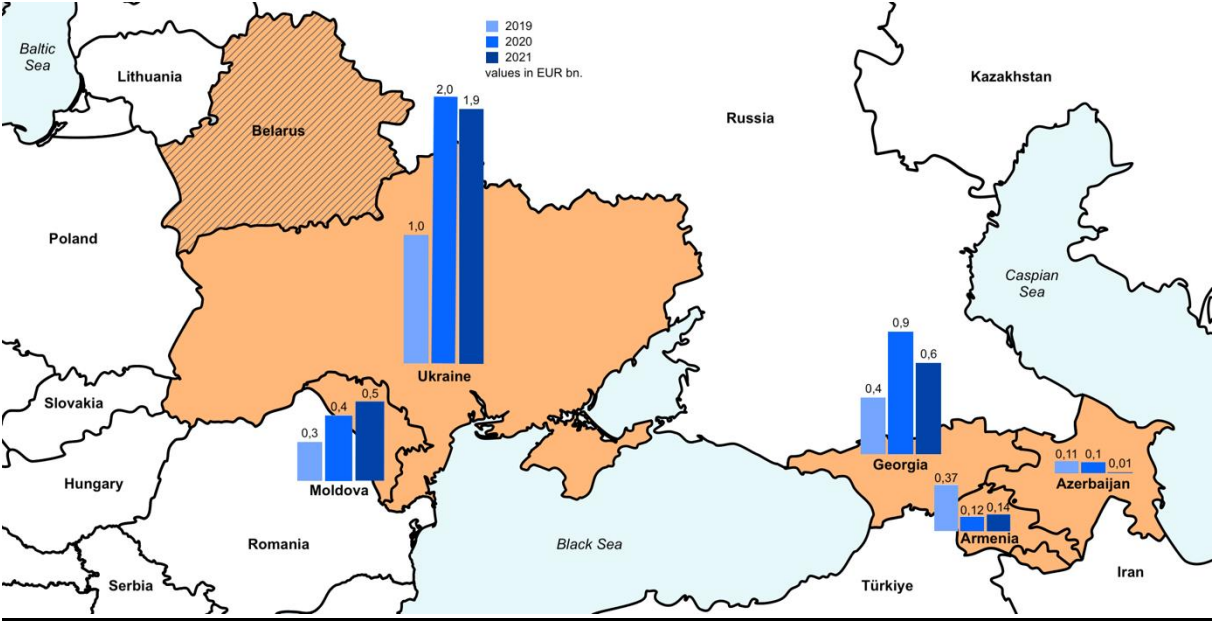
Country	Broad category	Value of assistance (EUR) ¹⁵
Armenia	<p>EU: capacity-building of NGOs¹⁶, increasing social inclusion through equitable access to public services¹⁷</p> <p>USAID: supporting public administration reforms, increasing citizen engagement in public financial management; promoting financial sustainability of CSOs;¹⁸</p> <p>SDC: resilience and economic recovery of border communities.</p> <p>SIDCA: 60% allocated to Government and Civil Society sector</p> <p>UNDP: smart public services, gender equality in decision-making¹⁹</p>	<p>Net ODA and OA 2019: 371.4m (\$417.3m); 2020: 118.2m (\$134.3m); 2021: 137.6m (\$161.9m)</p> <p>World Bank: 2.35bn (\$2.53bn)²⁰ (total commitment)</p> <p>EU: 211m (2017-20)²¹; allocated 180m (2021-27)²²</p> <p>US: 34.2m (\$36m) (2022), of which 13.3m (\$14m) on Governance-related projects²³</p> <p>Germany: 107m for municipal infrastructure²⁴</p> <p>Sweden: 6.66m (\$7.16m)²⁵</p> <p>Switzerland: 955,872 (CHF 960,000) (2022)²⁶</p>
Azerbaijan	<p>EU/UNDP: increasing NGOs’ capacities to engage in policy-making and local development²⁷ supporting municipalities in designing local development plans (M4EG)²⁸;</p> <p>USAID: “increased engagement between citizens and government to address critical needs” (incl. those of vulnerable citizens)²⁹</p>	<p>Net ODA and OA 2019: 106m (\$119.1m); 2020: 108m (\$122.7m); 2021: 7.8m (\$9.2m)</p> <p>World Bank: 4.29bn (\$4.61bn)³¹ (total commitment)</p> <p>EU: 90m under Azerbaijan Economic and Investment Plan³²</p> <p>US: 13.3m (\$14m) (2022)³³</p>

	UNDP: access to quality services for excluded groups ³⁰	USAID: allocated 6.5m (\$7m) for 2020-25. ³⁴ Sweden: 1.89m (\$2.15m) (2020); 693,728 (\$816,150) (2021); 77,155 (\$81,130) (2022) ³⁵
Georgia	EU: capacity-building for CSOs to engage in policy dialogues and act as watchdogs; involving them in a balanced, sustainable territorial development; ³⁶ USAID: guidance for local governments on providing essential services and for selected municipalities on providing access to quality services; developing internal control systems; cooperating with the central government on decentralisation. ³⁷ SIDCA: 27% allocated to Government and Civil Society sector	Net ODA and OA 2019: 438.1m (\$492.2m); 2020: 915.2m (\$1.04bn); 2021: 652.5m (\$767.6m) World Bank: 3.67bn (\$3.95bn) ³⁸ (total commitment) EU: macrofinancial assistance 819.2m (2014-20), 75m (2021) ³⁹ US: approx. 19.5m (\$21m) (incl. 6,091,500 (\$6,550,000) for Local Governance Programme) Germany: 23.7m (bilateral financial cooperation, 2020) ⁴⁰ ; BMZ: 85.1m (2021-22) ⁴¹ Sweden: 15.2m (\$16m) (total aid, 2022) ⁴²
Moldova	EU: support for public administration reform, improving efficiency and effectiveness of local administration, fostering fiscal decentralisation, strengthening gender budgeting; municipal and community infrastructure for climate resilience; engaging CSOs as partners in local development. ⁴³ USAID: building citizen engagement (support to CSOs, independent media), pressure on government accountability to ensure local governments'	Net ODA and OA 2019: 303.9m (\$341.5m); 2020: 461.1m (\$524m); 2021: 506.3m (\$595.6m) World Bank: 1.82bn (\$1.96bn) ⁴⁵ (total commitment) EU: macrofinancial assistance 3bn (2020) ⁴⁶ US: 57.5m (\$60.46m) (2022), of which 22.8m (\$24m) spent on Governance. <i>My Community</i> five-year programme (IREX), targeting local

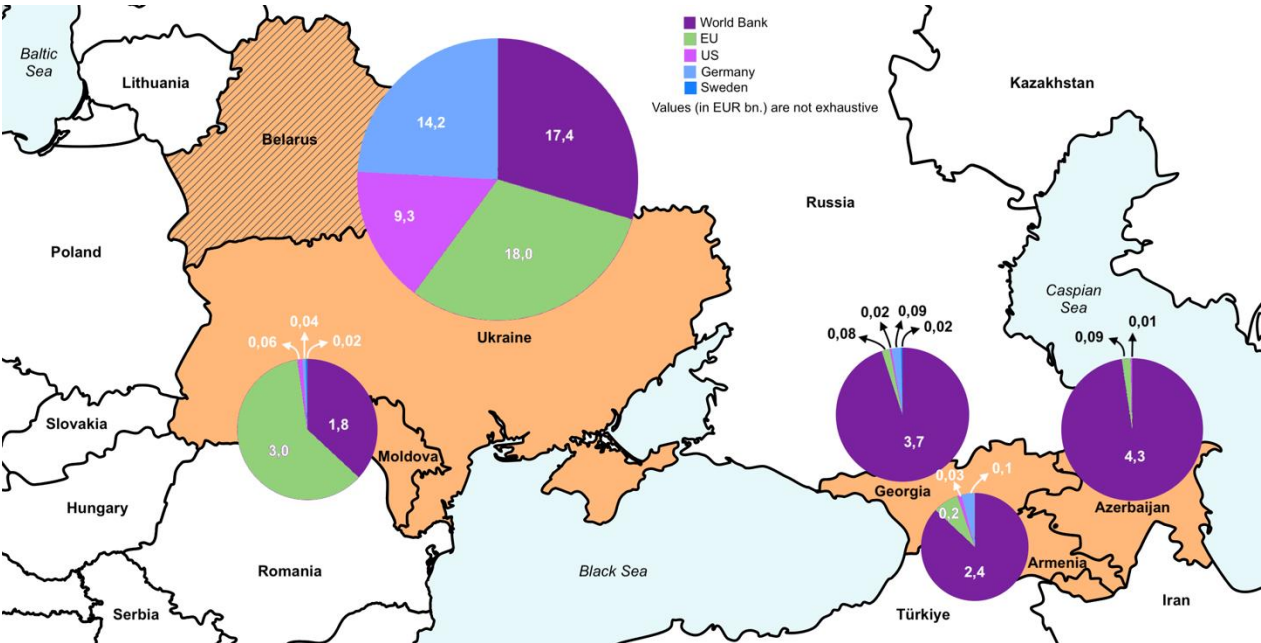
	<p>transparent and effective service provision.⁴⁴ SIDCA: 35% allocated to Government and Civil Society sector</p>	<p>communities: 6,147,606 (\$6,610,329).⁴⁷ Germany: 35m (BMZ commitment, negotiated November 2021), additional 149m of resilience funding, launched January 2023.⁴⁸ Sweden: 19.86m (\$20.88m) (total aid, 2022).⁴⁹ Switzerland: ODA 12.31m (CHF 13.18m) (2020); 11.49m (CHF 12.42m) (2021); 11.86m (CHF 11.91m) (2022)⁵⁰</p>
Ukraine	<p>EU: Objective of “multilevel governance (...) that is more transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of the population” as per “increased share of own-source revenues of local authorities” and “improved delivery of local administrative services”.⁵¹ USAID: Anti-corruption at all levels of government, decentralisation, empowering citizens (incl. vulnerable groups) to hold public office-holders accountable and influence local decisions.⁵² SIDCA: 24% allocated to Government and Civil Society sector</p>	<p>Net ODA and OA 2019: 997m (\$1.12bn); 2020: 2.06bn (\$2.34bn); 2021: 1.88bn (\$2.21bn) World Bank: 17.4bn (\$18.71bn)⁵³ (total commitment) EU: macrofinancial assistance 18bn (2023, of which 3bn disbursed)⁵⁴ US: 9.25bn (\$9.95bn) (2023, of which 8.1bn (\$8.7bn) on governance)⁵⁵ Germany: 14.2bn (since 24.02.2022)⁵⁶ Sweden: \$112.27m (total aid, 2022)⁵⁷ Switzerland: CHF 13,887,647 (2019-23, e-governance);⁵⁸ CHF3m (resilience, 2022-24);⁵⁹ CHF 8,994,550 (cohesion and regional development, 2021-26);⁶⁰ CHF 100m (emergency winter support)⁶¹</p>

The following two maps present the total value of assistance (World Bank data) and the breakdown by main donors.

Map 1. Value of official development assistance and official assistance (billions of EUR), 2019-2021



Map 2. Main donors in the EaP region, value of assistance in billions of EUR



More detailed information was provided in the Excel file, which is an attachment to the final note.

Table 2 Key takeaways

- Different trends can be observed in the volume of assistance – compared to 2019, the scale of overall support dropped in 2020/2021 to Armenia and Azerbaijan but increased in the other countries.
- Generally, there is continuity in donors’ aid priorities to specific countries, although EU, US and some European donors (e.g. Germany) have stepped up assistance since February 2022 to Ukraine and then to Moldova with separate lines for resilience-building. The categories of support to Moldova and Ukraine are broader and cover more far-reaching priorities.
- The bulk of the assistance is either macrofinancial, aiming at improving overall governance or responding to development needs. The majority of the programmes also include support to CSOs through different tools, including financial accountability, supporting public services, acting as a watchdog, and engaging with policymakers and media. It is not possible to single out shares of assistance, which involve capacity-building of LRAs.
- Large infrastructural and service delivery projects are predicated on engaging local and regional authorities, but in view of the structural factors and continuing legal and institutional changes, it is difficult to assess the share and effectiveness of their involvement.

Main providers of foreign assistance in EaP region

Based on the desk research, collected feedback from the respondents and indications from the CoR, the following table has been compiled, focusing on the main providers of assistance to the five EaP countries with attention being paid to objectives, related to the capacity-building of LRAs and CSOs. The table is not exhaustive, and serves as the basis for identifying examples of specific relevant projects in Table 5.

Table 3. Review of the main providers of foreign assistance to LRAs and EaP countries (sources: websites, forms received from donors)

Provider	Objectives	Approach
EU	Country-specific: <i>See Tables 2 and 5 for details.</i>	Capacity-building for CSOs in all 5 countries, but LRAs engaged explicitly as part of support for public administration, decentralisation and governance reforms in UKR and MOL and increasingly in GEO.
UNDP	Country-specific: <i>See Tables 2 and 5 for details.</i>	Women Resource Centres (trainings, vocational education) in 15 regions of AZE; gender equality in ARM; improved service delivery through capacity-building for municipalities in several EaP countries.
USAID	Country-specific: <i>See Table 2 for details.</i>	Stressing the role of CSOs as watchdogs improving the transparency of local governance; support for public administration reforms in ARM, GEO.
Switzerland Development Cooperation	South Caucasus: territorial decentralisation, encouraging local participatory democracy, making public finance management more transparent and effective. ⁶²	Multi-country projects based on whole-of-society approach. Attention to gender aspects. Linkage between rule-of-law, accountability, inclusion and effectiveness of local institutions. ⁶³ Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs and SDC jointly define and implement the Swiss Cooperation for South Caucasus. From 2017 to 2021, a total of approx. CHF 43m was earmarked for the region. ⁶⁴
GIZ	South Caucasus: improved delivery of	Following inter-governmental agreement on country-specific assistance objectives,

	local services through institutional restructuring and capacity-building, cross-country learning ⁶⁵	raising capacity of LRAs for undertaking new functions under decentralisation and establishing partnerships with CSOs and the private sector. ⁶⁶
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	European integration (GEO), rule of law, good governance (ARM), promotion of civil society (ARM, UKR), ⁶⁷ fostering democracy (UKR), ⁶⁸ promoting decentralisation and subsidiarity (MOL) ⁶⁹	Trainings for local decision makers (MOL) Building CSO coalitions and partnerships (MOL, UKR)
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung	Regional project “Dialogue Eastern Europe” (Kyiv): civil society dialogue, regional dialogue of progressive young leaders. ⁷⁰	The website (in either English or Russian) has not been updated in light of the 2022 conflict in Ukraine, listing still “establishing space for dialogue in the region of EaP and Russia” ⁷¹ and “facilitating peaceful dialogue, putting in place consensus in conflict situations” ⁷² through dialogue with young Russian and EaP leaders. According to a respondent, cooperation is not systematic. ⁷³
Heinrich Boll Stiftung	Encouraging decision-making on local and national levels (UKR); ⁷⁴ promoting democracy and the development of civil society (UKR, South Caucasus) ⁷⁵	Calls for proposals for NGOs; dialogue on gender, ecology, memory politics (South Caucasus); analyses on democratic political culture; urban planning; gender-sensitive democracy (UKR).

Table 3 Key takeaways

- One can see two complementary approaches appear. Some donors (especially, USAID and those working in the area of human rights, democratisation, and public reforms) stress the role of CSOs in bringing greater transparency of governance and prioritise further decentralisation and citizen-oriented service delivery. Others (in particular, the UNDP and

national development aid agencies) seek to engage LRAs in partnerships with central-level bodies and aim to strengthen their capacities to show results to the public.

- The donors or assistance providers with larger and more diverse portfolios tend to tailor their aid activities to match country-specific needs. The EU, UNDP and some European national donors work out national priorities with central authorities, which are central to determining the role of local bodies.
- Strategic documents, setting assistance priorities, were often adopted in 2019-2021, and determine steady directions of aid for multi-year activities. At the same time, additional lines were opened and in some specific instances (in particular, in Ukraine) activities were retargeted to respond to new challenges (most notably, post-COVID 19 reconstruction, and reconstruction and resilience during and in the wake of military conflicts).

3. Analysis of geographic and thematic areas of engagement in EaP countries

Territorial coverage of international cooperation of LRAs

The following table identifies levels of local governance at which international cooperation and assistance takes place. For Azerbaijan and Georgia, detailed lists of involved municipalities have been submitted by national association representatives; for Ukraine, desk research provided the information on geographic distribution and thematic focus of cooperation.

Table 4. Textual and cartographic description of level at which individual units receive foreign aid and are engaged in international cooperation

Country	Level of LRA	Engagement in cooperation (examples)
Armenia	Municipalities	Yerevan municipality – partnership with Tirana, Warsaw; other projects covering several locations.
Azerbaijan	Municipalities; local executive bodies	6 municipalities (two in Baku, one each in Gusar, Absheron, Mingachevir and Naftalan regions each: all in the fields of “infrastructure and basis local services” and in “reform, training and overall improvement of public administration”. ⁷⁶
Georgia	All regions: some involved in pilot projects; at least one project is implemented in every municipality.	33 municipalities involved in infrastructural/basic service projects; 27 in reform and capacity-building projects; 23 in civil society and media and 34 in health, social services, culture, education and support for youth, women and vulnerable groups. ⁷⁷
Moldova	Some projects focused on specific regions (<i>see Table 5 for examples</i>), however many issue	All 32 districts; Transnistria and Gagauzia included.

	country-wide calls for proposals.	
Ukraine ⁷⁸	<p>Three tiers of local governance engaged: regions, districts and municipalities.</p> <p>184 of 1,469 Ukrainian municipalities have had some form of cooperation with EU counterparts. Of those, 70 are found in five regions in the west in close proximity to Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Two-thirds of the active municipalities have partnerships with Poland (126), followed by Germany (52).</p>	<p>Over half of the partnerships focus on culture, youth, sport and tourism (96). Other major areas are: local governance and exchange of best practices (37), healthcare (21), education (19), environment (19) and citizen security (16). Only a few are devoted to economic development (9), infrastructure and public transport (6) or citizen participation.⁷⁹</p>

Table 4 Key takeaways

- Municipalities in the five EaP countries (the lowest level of governance) are generally beneficiaries or partners in assistance projects. Regional units have become targets of assistance in the largest country (Ukraine);
- Interviews confirm that the formal requirements of open calls for proposals may be hurdles for local authorities, lacking experience or competent staff. The relative concentration of cooperation initiatives to certain localities indicates the need for continued strengthening of the capacity of the less-experienced local actors;
- Although sufficiently disaggregated data are not available for all the countries under study, major differences in the thematic focus of assistance were revealed between some EaP states. Infrastructural and public administration reform projects make up the majority of initiatives targeting Azerbaijan or Georgia but account for only a small share of those in Ukraine. This may indicate that the various countries are at different stages of the policy reform and decentralisation process.

Thematic distribution of assistance: analysis of selected projects

The following tables summarise the results of an analysis of websites of major donors and assistance providers (EU, GIZ, KAS, SDC, ALDA), in the course of which a non-exhaustive sample of projects was identified to present a diversity of topics and approaches, pursued in the different countries of the EaP region. The sources of information are noted in the References section below. To ensure greater representativeness, requests for information have been made to interview respondents and additional projects were included into the final note.

Table 5. Information on 5 EaP countries: textual information with financial indicators of thematic areas (details in description of the request) of aid and cooperation (sources: websites, forms received from donors and associations)

Thematic area 1: Infrastructure and basic services

Country	Identified activities	Value, EUR (period)	Remarks
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia	GIZ (with SDC in Armenia, EU in Georgia): <i>Good governance promotes local development in the South Caucasus</i> ⁸⁰ : improving access to state services in rural and remote regions through developing local capacities, improving procedures and fostering inter-regional learning.	31,900,000 (2020-26)	In Armenia and Georgia, ministries responsible for local administration in charge.
Armenia	EU: <i>Capital Cities on Common Challenges in Hazardous Waste Management – Yerevan, Warsaw, Tirana</i> ⁸¹ : needs assessment, mainstreaming best practices.	5,326,377 (2019-23)	Yerevan Municipality; building city partnerships
Georgia	SDC: <i>Regional and Municipal Infrastructure in Georgia</i> ⁸² : trainings and consultancy for establishing skills for all municipalities outside capitals in project cycle management,	5,630,000 (CHF 5,575,000) ⁸³ (2014-23)	Implementation of previous infrastructural projects revealed need for developing

	financial and asset management.		capacity of municipalities. Requirement for women to make up 50% of targeted beneficiaries among residents and 30% among local officials
Moldova	EU/UNDP/UN Children's Fund: <i>EU4Moldova: Focal Regions (Cahul and Ungheni)</i> ⁸⁴ : improving LPAs' capacity for developing environmentally-compliant strategies and improving service delivery.	23,300,000 (2019-24)	Envisions broader CSO engagement, greater availability of public services for women.
Moldova	EU/GIZ/ADA/Solidarity Fund PL: <i>EU4Moldova: Local Communities</i> ⁸⁵ : building post-COVID 19 resilience of selected local communities through improved public service delivery.	27,400,000 (2021-25)	

Thematic area 2: Reform, training and overall improvement of public administration

Country	Identified activities	Value (period)	Remarks
All EaP	GIZ: <i>Promoting public administration reform in the Eastern Partnership</i> ⁸⁶ : exchange of public administration reform experience within EaP region (through e-governance and digitalisation)	N/A (2020-24)	
All EaP	EU/UNDP: <i>Mayors for Economic Growth – Facility II</i> ⁸⁷ : network of 350 LRAs,	10,294,364 (2021-24)	

	portfolio creation workshops for 12 LRAs, calls for proposals for selected LRAs, innovation CfPs for all participating LRAs.		
Armenia	<p>Council of Europe Congress: <i>Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and transparent, participatory local governance in Armenia:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improved dialogue between local and national authorities - supported local authorities in the areas of political integrity, ethics, open government and participatory decision making through a series of trainings, experts support and coaching under the Community of practice on Political Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance - developed corruption risk self-assessment tool for local authorities, adopted by the Corruption Prevention Commission 	900,000 (2018-22)	
Armenia	<p>SDC: <i>Improvement of the local self-governance system Armenia</i>⁸⁸: one-stop shops, e-governance, results-based budgeting</p>	7,237,775 (CHF 8,050,000) ⁸⁹ (2014-19)	
Georgia	<p>Council of Europe Congress: <i>Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia:</i> support to local authorities in developing ownership on key human rights concepts, through awareness raising and capacity building activities;</p>	900,000 (2021-23)	

	local initiatives; e-course on gender mainstreaming; baseline assessment to identify local capacities and needs for implementing human rights-based policies		
Georgia	UNDP/SDC/ADA: <i>Fostering Regional and Local Development in Georgia – Phase 2⁹⁰</i> : support municipalities in local economic development activities from the Good Governance Strategy; expert guidelines for strengthening capacity of municipal leadership and local civil servants.	4,563,641 (2017-21)	Targeting Racha-Lechkumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Guria and Kvemo Kartli.
Georgia	EU/UNDP: <i>EU for Integrated Territorial Development⁹¹</i> : replicating pilot initiatives and inter-municipal services; consultancy on municipal project management; knowledge-sharing among municipalities; one-stop-shop municipal service centres.	2,137,449 (\$2,309,009) ⁹² (2021-25)	Supports implementation of pilot integrated regional development programmes for Guria, Imereti, Kakheti and Racha-Lechkumi and Kvemo Svaneti.
Georgia	Denmark/UNDP: <i>Fostering Decentralisation and Good Governance at the Local Level⁹³</i> : enhancing institutional and human capacities of local authorities; improving municipal service delivery.	N/A	Targeting Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Imereti regions, civil society and local businesses.
Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine	EU/CEMR/PLATFORMA: <i>Local and Regional Action for Development Cooperation – Phase IV⁹⁴</i>	300,000 (2023-26)	

	Within the EaP Cluster of PLATFORMA, CEMR supports efforts for local public administration reform, the capacitation of the local governments and their associations for improved service delivery and facilitates opportunities for decentralised cooperation.		
Moldova	ALDA/EU/NED: <i>AGREED (Activating Governance Reform for Enhancing Development)</i> ⁹⁵ : trainings for participatory governance for LRAs/CSOs	N/A	Each of 32 districts covered by trainings; facilitating decentralisation reform.,
Moldova	Council of Europe Congress: <i>Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova</i> ⁹⁶ Support to the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) in advocacy and policy dialogue; strengthening the institutional position of the Association vis-à-vis central authorities	175,000 (2020-2021)	
Moldova	Council of Europe Congress: <i>Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova</i> ⁹⁷ strengthening political dialogue between local and central authorities; improving the quality of local governance through integrity, corruption prevention, open governance, public ethics, and gender equality at the local level;	475,000 (2022-24)	

	supporting authorities in managing migration.		
Ukraine	ALDA/UNDP: <i>Platform for Good Governance and Environmental Protection</i> ⁹⁸ : trainings to LRA officials/CSOs in EU standards, roundtables on sustainable local development.	N/A (2021)	Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts
Ukraine	Council of Europe Congress: <i>Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine</i> : established a Platform for National-Local Dialogue on Open Government in Ukraine involving the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Association of Ukrainian Cities	1,600,000 (2018-21)	
Ukraine	OECD: <i>Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA)</i> ⁹⁹ : advising on the draft law on public service in LRAs	N/A	
Ukraine	EU/GIZ: <i>U-LEAD with Europe – Phase II</i> ¹⁰⁰ : developing legislation considering needs of municipalities; trainings and consultations; study trips; promoting international partnerships.	40,993,307 (2020-23)	Targeting municipalities in all 24 regions of Ukraine

Thematic area 3: Support for independent local and regional media and civil society

Country	Identified activities	Value (period)	Remarks
All EaP	GIZ: <i>Promoting civic engagement beyond capital cities</i> ¹⁰¹ : trainings for experts and managers in CSOs; sharing lessons/challenges through regional networks.	N/A (2022-24)	Objective of increasing local civil society's influence on local development
Armenia	ALDA/EU: <i>Citizens Voice & Actions</i> ¹⁰² : developing citizen budgets, formulating community-driven pilot projects (esp. in tourism).	1,120,000 (2018-21)	Seeks to strengthen partnerships within the country and with foreign partners.
Azerbaijan	EU/Azerbaijan Red Crescent: <i>Bridging the gap between community needs and local capacities and capabilities of the civil society actors in Azerbaijan</i> ¹⁰³ : mitigating vulnerabilities through service delivery.	3,548,110 (2022-25)	Tackles capacity of volunteer groups, self-organising communities to deal with local vulnerabilities (post-COVID 19 and conflict).
Azerbaijan	UNDP/EU: <i>Developing Innovation-driven and Sustainable Civil Society</i> ¹⁰⁴ : trainings, coaching, networking; follow-up implementation of a small grant programme for policy dialogue.	3,584,229 (2020-23)	Aims to enable CSOs to implement projects in evidence-based local policy development. Municipalities foreseen as implementation partners, organising local events.
Moldova, Ukraine	KAS: <i>Empowering local authorities and civil society to deliver solutions with Participative Democracy</i> ¹⁰⁵ :	N/A (2019-20)	Explicitly aims at social integration of disadvantaged groups.

	participative processes of identifying by civil society and LRAs identifying solutions to environmental problems.		
Moldova	EU/ALDA/European Partnership for Democracy/People In Need: <i>EU4Accountability – Empowered Civil Society for Increased Social Accountability in Moldova</i> ¹⁰⁶	1,685,393 (2022-24)	
Moldova	KAS: <i>Grassroots Civil Society Development Facility in the RoM</i> ¹⁰⁷ : strengthening CSO partnerships, enabling them to monitor EU association process	3,750,000 (2018-21)	Explicitly aims to facilitate CSOs' policy dialogue with local authorities
Moldova	KAS/EU: <i>Inform, Empower, Act. Civil Society for good budgetary governance in Moldova</i> ¹⁰⁸ : building coalitions of LPAs/activists/CSOs for greater transparency of local budgets.	1,150,000 (2019-21)	750 final beneficiaries from all regions, including Transnistria and Gagauzia
Ukraine	EU: <i>Reinforcing the CSOs' role in the democratisation of Ukraine</i> ¹⁰⁹ : enabling CSOs to advocate democratisation on local and regional levels	886,833 (2020-23)	Re-purposed since 24.02.2022 for regional CSOs to react to war challenges and adapt communications.

Thematic area 4: Health, social services, culture, education and support for youth, women and vulnerable groups

Country	Identified activities	Value	Remarks
Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine	EU (Erasmus+): <i>JOURNEY (Joint Organization to Unite Rural Networks of Entrepreneurial Youth</i> ¹¹⁰ : training of youth mentors in entrepreneurship.	N/A (2019-21)	Led by Vinnytsia LRA association, participants: Ganja (AZ), Kutaisi (GE).
Georgia	EU/Women Engage for a Common Future: <i>Women's Power – Economic and Political Participation for Inclusive Societies in Georgia</i> ¹¹¹ : training local activists for participatory sustainability planning and budgeting.	959,201 (2021-25)	Four regions (Kakheti, Guria, Racha and Imereti); 10 women's CSOs as subcontractors

Thematic area 5: Other areas

Country	Identified activities	Value	Remarks
Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine	EU/UNDP: <i>EU4Dialogue: Support to Conflict Transformation in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova</i> ¹¹² : sub-granting to small-scale cross-border confidence-building initiatives; contacts across divides; capacity-building for grassroots actors.	9,100,000 (2020-24)	
Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine	EU/KAS: <i>EU4Dialogue: Supporting Understanding Between Conflict Parties</i> ¹¹³ : cross-regional meetings and workshops; exchange and networking with EU peers.	2,845,400 (2020-24)	Linkage to gender equality and human rights.
Ukraine	EU: <i>Strengthening the capacity of regional and local administrations for implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate change legislation and</i>	4,908,100 (2020-23)	Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Zaporizhe, Kherson, Zakarpatska regions.

	<i>development of infrastructure projects¹¹⁴: developing regional waste management plans, climate adaptation strategies.</i>		

Table 5 Key takeaways

- Supporting decentralisation reforms and strengthening civil society have been the most common objectives of the projects identified.
- Projects are increasingly combining capacity-building, partnership and networking with improved service delivery or more transparent infrastructure investments. This approach has been found to work especially in regional (South Caucasus or broader EaP) projects, and given the growing needs in reconstruction and resilience-building, is likely to gain prominence;
- Most projects (especially, larger-scale ones) involve partnerships between a donor (EU) and an implementing institution/organisation with the knowledge of local realities and trust from local stakeholders. Infrastructural projects often engage partnerships between major international institutions/organisations (e.g. the EU or UNDP), while those targeting civil society or media bring together the EU and foundations (e.g. KAS)

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The combination of desk and field research have enabled the team to draw a number of conclusions regarding the main directions of assistance and forms of engagement of LRAs, leading to certain conclusions for CORLEAP's involvement in support for municipalities and local authorities in the region, establishing certain complementarities.

The recent reports, background documentation of assistance projects and interviews, as well as the information forms from the assistance providers and LRA associations all point to certain persisting challenges, which need continued attention and matching capacity-building:

- Interviewed representatives of donors, regional associations and organisations underlined the growing role of local authorities as three countries of the EaP region seek to implement ambitious reforms on the path towards EU membership. All the countries have been strongly affected by a combination of shock factors (military conflict, population displacement, and economic disruption) and long-term challenges (climate change, uneven development, socioeconomic transformation). **Proper responses call for community resilience, in which local governments act in two fundamental functions: effectively delivering services to the local population and providing input for the policy-making process.** At the same time, analysis of the strategic objectives of the major assistance providers suggests that large donors (such as the EU, UNDP or USAID) continue to apply a long-term planning horizon, where the strategic documents continue to be based on the agendas, adopted prior to the most recent conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine).
- While **infrastructural and service delivery projects** account for substantial share of the overall envelopes of aid disbursement to EaP countries, **the portion allocated to self-governing local bodies is still minor, and executive bodies of the central government (on the national and regional levels) remain the primary addressees.** The respondents stressed that especially in some countries, where decentralisation reforms have progressed substantially (e.g. Moldova and Ukraine but also Georgia), the level of engagement of LRAs in actual service delivery under larger-scale projects could be higher. The work of development-oriented actors, such as the UNDP or GIZ and also under EU-funded projects, is still primarily targeted to the central government.

- Several respondents have raised the idea that it could be beneficial to open up large infrastructural projects, such as IPA funds, to local authorities. They believed that **engaging civil society in priority identification and the monitoring of implementation would be helpful**. According to the discussions conducted, these actions could improve the financial standing of the projects and build technical skills. Furthermore, the respondents suggest that this approach may address the imbalance of competences between local and central authorities. By involving local authorities and civil society, the respondents believe that the projects would benefit from a wider range of expertise and perspectives.

- **The projects in the broad area of “reform, training, and overall improvement of public administration” represent a large share of assistance**, undertaken by a variety of actors, including international organisations (the EU and its agencies; the UNDP) on their own as well as in partnerships with national ministries, agencies or foundations (for instance: BMZ, GIZ, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation /KAS/, Eurasia Partnership Foundation). It is noteworthy that **many of these projects pursue two objectives in parallel** : 1) enabling municipalities to take upon new responsibilities and thus becoming stronger partners to central authorities and 2) improving their capacities for service delivery.¹¹⁵ The interviews revealed **significant progress in engaging local authorities in both service delivery and agenda-setting for local development**. At the same time, many respondents agreed that the **LRAs’ effective participation in local governance continues to be hampered by an interplay of factors**. They pointed in particular to local authorities’ precarious financial position (both quantitatively and as a function of dependence on transfers from central government), the persistence of top-down governance, and the politicisation of policy making (with the central role of political parties).

- **Another area of convergence between CORLEAP priorities and the activities of various actors is strengthening the financial and technical position of LRAs and improving citizens’ access to local decision-making through the involvement of civil society**. Notable here is work within several EU-funded projects, implemented by KAS or the UNDP, throughout the region in CSO-LRA partnerships to seek solutions to local problems (environment) or formulate local sustainable development plans. Other directions of work towards improved governance and transparency include participatory budgeting, the use of e-tools as well as trainings and small grant programmes for CSOs to take on a greater role in decision-

making and monitoring.¹¹⁶ It is notable that while LRAs and NGOs in the EaP region have been considered essential partners in all donors' support for decentralisation reforms, two complementary approaches could be identified. Some donors stress the role of local actors in exerting pressure and ensuring the transparency of central authorities' actions while others engage local authorities and organisations in implementing service-delivery or even infrastructural projects in partnerships with central bodies. It appears that the choice of approach needs to take into account LRAs' and NGOs' current capacity, assets and skills: the stronger and more experienced local bodies and organisations may be directly involved in larger projects as partners to central authorities, while those with lower capacity or experience may need to be included in partnerships with stronger counterparts (in other regions or abroad) and be targeted with skills development.

- **Another field of possible cooperation is the core CORLEAP priority of facilitating the exchange of experience and enhancement of skills to address some of the limitations of the staff of municipalities and regional authorities.** Apart from the limited autonomy and often insufficient fiscal resources, and the resultant poor visibility of local bodies, their capacity is limited through high fragmentation and the tradition of centralisation. These have constrained the cooperation of local governments in the Eastern Partnership region with other domestic and international partners. CORLEAP has thus underscored the vital role of independent associations and networks of municipalities, which are able to aggregate the positions of otherwise dispersed localities and may serve as platforms for exchanging experience and the transfer of skills and knowledge. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), supported by PLATFORMA, in its 2022 declaration in favour of the EU membership application of the three EaP countries, reiterated the importance of a parallel approach, combining institutional decentralisation reforms with such forms of practical cooperation on the local level as “peer exchanges, municipal partnerships, mentorship, study visits, twinning, seminars, and trainings”.¹¹⁷
- **Several actors have been active in enhancing learning and skills exchange opportunities for LRAs in the EaP region.**¹¹⁸ Noteworthy is the EU–OECD’s joint initiative Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA), whose team of 20 experts has successfully provided assistance in key areas of public administration reform, policy development and coordination, human resource management, accountability, service delivery, public financial management, public

procurement and external audit. Under the EU–UNDP’s M4EG, an Urban Learning Center acts as an ecosystem of learning opportunities for municipality staff and their partners, including by offering learning pathways for the new generation of local economic development plans, the green and digital transition, and adaptive leadership, strategy and foresight. The EU’s project “STI International Cooperation Network for EaP Countries Plus (EaP PLUS)” aims to stimulate cooperation between researchers from the EaP countries and EU MS and enhance the active participation of the Eastern Partnership countries in the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme. The project aims to establish strategic priorities setting through supporting EU–EaP policy dialogue and through maximising the impact of the association to Horizon 2020.

Lessons for future assistance

The reviewed projects have helped establish foundations for strong partnerships. In order to continue successful synergies in the future, it would be wise to reassess and mitigate certain implementation challenges faced by completed or ongoing projects. The following ideas represent some suggestions.

1. *Responding to varying and emerging assistance needs within a regional context*
 - CORLEAP’s recent resolutions and reports have noted the need for **diversifying the geographic coverage, ambitions and priority areas**, tailoring assistance according to the degree of progress in decentralisation reforms, the uneven financial position of LRAs in different states, and the limited opportunities for cooperation with some countries’ LRAs. An additional crucial dividing line needs to be made between the countries which were recognised in 2022 as official (Ukraine and Moldova) or potential EU candidates (Georgia), and other EaP states.
 - Moreover, attention needs to be paid to **emerging additional needs for assistance as well as to new challenges facing LRAs in some countries** (specifically Ukraine, as a result of the war). Although donors appear to recognise a growing need for adopting country-specific approaches, they also stress a commonality of governance challenges and benefits from sharing experiences between EaP countries.

- While EU accession is undeniably a powerful trigger towards modernisation and governance reforms, several respondents stressed the value of **maintaining regional approaches, and transcending the boundaries of regional integration processes** (clearly visible in the South Caucasus where the three countries are in different wider integration configurations).
2. *Strengthening weaker municipalities' capacities for fund absorption and service delivery*
- Projects could be adapted to the ongoing territorial divisions to better reflect local specificities. It is also necessary to ensure that these small administrative units are **empowered through holistic support measures to provide public services effectively and with greater autonomy. Fiscal decentralisation is a key part of such support.**
 - The interviews suggest that uneven coverage of countries with assistance remains an issue, and that administrative measures such as amalgamation are insufficient on their own for raising the capacity of the weaker, rural municipalities. **Only by addressing such qualitative aspects** as lack of experience, understaffing and the tradition of implementing directives from above **can the smaller and poorer communities be expected to take more initiative and be able to absorb the funds.**
 - In fact, the **long-term planning horizon of large donors, combined with the use of open, competitive calls for proposals, represents an opportunity for building the capacity** of weaker LRAs and CSOs for articulation of local development needs, formulation of realistic project objectives and the drawing up of coherent proposals.
3. *Promoting retention and skills development of LRA staff*
- Municipalities play a crucial role in enhancing countries' absorption capacities and ensuring that the projects realise their intended outcomes. A key aspect of the capacity building would include the **training of personnel to ensure efficient, effective, and sustainable delivery of services to the locals.**
 - Municipalities in EaP countries often suffer from high staff turnover, which leads to a lack of accountability, diminished sense of ownership of local reforms and loss of institutional knowledge. Efforts can be directed towards

designing projects that include municipal staffs in a less ad hoc manner.

- The interviews with both donors, international institutions and regional and national associations all suggest that there is **no fundamental conflict between the strategies of engaging LRAs and civil society in service-delivery and infrastructural projects**, where they may ensure cost-effectiveness, transparency and more equal access for all residents, **and those of building their capacity for representing the positions of local residents and detecting the negative impact of planned investments or reforms**, thus serving as “early warning” mechanisms.

4. *Facilitating participatory local governance and including other stakeholders.*

- In the case of public administration reforms, there have to be greater incentives for EaP states and regions to implement related projects. This is particularly important for overcoming the tradition of top-down governance, in which local authorities are expected to implement centrally-planned and designed measures rather than formulate local development priorities in a participatory manner. This can be facilitated by **communication on the desired impact of such reforms and developing mechanisms for participatory identification of local priorities.**
- Reforms would need creative approaches that **allow for more ownership in the beneficiary countries**, increase the rate of implementation and increase the inclusion of citizens. It would in particular be essential to ensure that **projects are inclusive of youth, women, and minorities** at all stages of implementation and monitoring.
- Project synergies can be developed in finding complementarity between the projects on legal, financial, and administrative reforms. **Identifying potential synergies in advance can avoid the duplication of funded projects. E-governance, transboundary water cooperation and infrastructure could be potential opportunities to tap into.**
- Several respondents noted that **local authorities** that have been targeted with capacity-building efforts (trainings, study visits, skills development workshops), **are both eager and capable of undertaking practical projects**, which would significantly improve their image among the local residents as effective deliverers of solutions, addressing urgent development needs.

5. Completed activities

Following the submission of the inception note on 10 March and the interim note on 3 April, the team received feedback at reporting and planning meetings with CoR and has proceeded to complete three main components of the assessment, which enabled it to prepare the final note. Firstly, *desk research* was completed, allowing for identification of issues for each of the five analysed EaP countries on the basis of previous reports as well as review of donor, provider and LRA association websites in order to single out active or recently completed assistance projects, engaging LRAs in the region. Secondly, the feedback from the *information request forms*, which had been disseminated in late March was included into the analysis. In total, 7 requests were forwarded to donors and assistance providers while 5 were addressed to national LRA associations (see the Annex for details). Two-thirds of the forms (a total of 8) of the forms were responded to. Of those, three forms were comprehensively filled out (two country fact sheets submitted by national associations and one assistance provider form). Following the receipt of a support letter from the CoR, another round of requests was circulated, which brought the total number of interviews to six. Three of those were held with representatives of associations (one national and two international), one with staff of an international organisation (Council of Europe), one with staff of a national assistance provider and one with a representative of an NGO platform.

Additional information on the projects underway in the EaP region was collected through the use of information forms, circulated among some interview respondents.

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7. Annexes

List of identified projects (donor: countries of implementation)

1. *AGREED (Activating Governance Reform for Enhancing Development)* (ALDA/EU/NED: MOL)
2. *Bridging the gap between community needs and local capacities and capabilities of the civil society actors in Azerbaijan* (EU/Azerbaijan Red Crescent: AZE)
3. *Capital Cities on Common Challenges in Hazardous Waste Management – Yerevan, Warsaw, Tirana* (EU: ARM)
4. *Citizens Voice & Actions* (ALDA/EU: ARM)
5. *Developing Innovation-driven and Sustainable Civil Society* (UNDP/EU: AZE)
6. *Empowering local authorities and civil society to deliver solutions with Participative Democracy* (KAS: MOL, UKR)
7. *EU4Accountability – Empowered Civil Society for Increased Social Accountability in Moldova* (EU: MOL)
8. *EU4Dialogue: Supporting Understanding Between Conflict Parties* (EU/KAS: GEO, MOL, UKR)
9. *EU4Dialogue: Support to Conflict Transportation in the South Caucasus and the Republic of Moldova* (EU/UNDP: ARM, GEO, MOL, UKR)
10. *EU4Moldova: Focal Regions (Cahul and Ungheni)* (EU/UNDP/UN: MOL)
11. *EU4Moldova: Local Communities* (EU/GIZ/ADA/Solidarity Fund PL: MOL)
12. *EU for Integrated Territorial Development* (EU/UNDP: GEO)
13. *Fostering Decentralisation and Good Governance at the Local Level* (Denmark/UNDP: GEO)
14. *Fostering Regional and Local Development in Georgia – Phase 2* (UNDP/SDC/ADA: GEO)
15. *Good governance promotes local development in the South Caucasus* (GIZ/SDC/EU: ARM, AZE, GEO)
16. *Grassroots Civil Society Development Facility in the RoM* (KAS: MOL)
17. *Improvement of the local self-governance system Armenia* (SDC: ARM)
18. *Inform, Empower, Act. Civil Society for good budgetary governance in Moldova* (KAS/EU: MOL)
19. *JOURNEY (Joint Organization to Unite Rural Networks of Entrepreneurial Youth)* (EU: AZE, GEO, UKR)
20. *Local and Regional Action for Development Cooperation – Phase IV* (EU/CEMR/PLATFORMA: GEO, MOL, UKR)

21. *Mayors for Economic Growth – Facility II* (EU/UNDP: EaP)
22. *Platform for Good Governance and Environmental Protection* (ALDA/UNDP: UKR)
23. *Promoting civic engagement beyond capital cities* (GIZ: EaP)
24. *Promoting public administration reform in the Eastern Partnership* (GIZ: EaP)
25. *Regional and Municipal Infrastructure in Georgia* (SDC: GEO)
26. *Reinforcing the CSOs’ role in the democratisation of Ukraine* (EU: UKR)
27. *Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova* (Council of Europe Congress: MOL)
28. *Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova* (Council of Europe Congress: MOL)
29. *Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine* (Council of Europe Congress: UKR)
30. *Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia* (Council of Europe Congress: GEO)
31. *Strengthening the capacity of regional and local administrations for implementation and enforcement of EU environmental and climate change legislation and development of infrastructure projects* (EU: UKR)
32. *Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and transparent, participatory local governance in Armenia* (Council of Europe Congress: ARM)
33. *Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA)* (OECD: UKR)
34. *U-LEAD with Europe – Phase II* (EU/GIZ: UKR)
35. *Women’s Power – Economic and Political Participation for Inclusive Societies in Georgia* (EU/Women Engage for a Common Future: GEO)

List of institutions/organisations that provided information

The institutions/organisations, with which interviews were held are indicated in **boldface**.

Donor/provider organisations

NAME OF ORGANISATION	METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION	DATE
Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia	E-mail reply with online references	22 March 2023
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, South	E-mail replies	29 March – 2 April 2023

Caucasus/Ukraine/ Moldova		
Heinrich Boll Stiftung, East and Southeast Europe Unit	E-mail reply	28 March 2023
GIZ South Caucasus	Online interview	29 March 2023

LRA associations in EaP region

NAME OF COUNTRY	NAME OF ORGANISATION	METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION	DATE
Moldova	Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM)	Online interview	21 March 2023
Georgia	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Delegation	Information provided in the tables provided by CASE.	29 March 2023
Azerbaijan	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Delegation	Information provided in the tables provided by CASE.	29 March 2023

Other institutions and organisations

NAME OF ORGANISATION	METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION	DATE
ALDA - The European Association for Local Democracy	Online interview	18 April 2023
CSF - EaP Civil Society Forum	Online interview	20 April 2023
CLRA - Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe	Online interview	21 April 2023
NALAS - Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe	Online interview	21 April 2023

¹ Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' 2020 monitoring report on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (https://search.coe.int/congress/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680a288a5)

² <https://www.caa.am/en/>

³ <https://www.caa.am/en/company.html>

⁴ CoR's profile of Azerbaijan's system of governance (<https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Azerbaijan.aspx>); 2021 Council of Europe's CLRA monitoring report .

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⁷ David Melua (2021), *Decentralisation and Local Public Administration Reform in Georgia: Status Report*, NALAS/PLATFORMA/NALAG, <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Status-Report-Decentralisation-and-Local-Public-Administration-Reform-in-Georgia.pdf>

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⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹ OECD (2022), *Rebuilding Ukraine by Reinforcing Regional and Municipal Governance*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/rebuilding-ukraine-by-reinforcing-regional-and-municipal-governance_63a6b479-en

¹² ALDA to open 5 more offices of local democracy agencies, beginning with Vinnitsa and Odesa in 2023, followed by Lviv, Kharkiv and Bucha.

¹³ Yuliia Fetko, "Cross-border Cooperation Between Local and Regional Authorities of Ukraine and the Visegrad Group States", *Globsec/Think Visegrad*, 13 February 2023, https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/Think%20Visegrad%20Analysis_CROSS-BORDER%20COOPERATION%20BETWEEN%20LOCAL%20AND%20REGIONAL%20AUTHORITIES%20OF%20UKRAINE%20AND%20THE%20VISEGRAD%20GROUP%20STATES_Yuliia%20Fetko.pdf

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¹⁵ World Bank data, „Net official development assistance and official aid received (current US\$) (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD>) (accessed 24.03.2023)

¹⁶ European Commission, *EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia 2021-2027* (<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU%20ROADMAP%20FOR%20ENGAGEMENT%20WITH%20CIVIL%20SOCIETY%20IN%20ARMENIA%202021-2027.pdf>)

¹⁷ European Commission, *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument Multi-annual Indicative Programme (2021-2027) for Armenia* (https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/C_2021_9435_F1_ANNEX_EN_V2_P1_1621110.PDF)

¹⁸ USAID Armenia, *Country Development Cooperation Strategy, September 24, 2020 – September 24, 2025*, p. 20, <https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/CDCS-Armenia-external-September-2025-b.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.undp.org/armenia/democratic-governance>

²⁰ <https://financesapp.worldbank.org/countries/Armenia/>

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- ⁴¹ <https://www.bmz.de/en/countries/georgia>
- ⁴² <https://openaid.se/en/activities?filter=2022,GE,SE-6,...,false,all>
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⁶³ Objective 2 of SDC in South Caucasus reads: “In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, public institutions at the national and local levels are increasingly effective, inclusive, and accountable to all citizens and rights holders, and these institutions abide by the rule of law”. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

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⁶⁵ Information provided by Ms. Janine Gunzelmann (GIZ) in a reply of 29 March 2023 on the objectives of the project “Good Governance for Local Development, South Caucasus”

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⁷³ Reply to the team’s query by Felix Hett on 2 April 2023.

⁷⁴ <https://ua.boell.org/en>

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⁷⁷ Information provided by Ms. Tatiana Bokuchava, secretary of the Georgian delegation to the CLRA of the Council of Europe on 30 March 2023.

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⁸¹ <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1502;>

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⁸³ Average CHF to EUR rate for 2023: CHF 1=EUR 1.01

⁸⁴ <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=855>

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⁸⁹ Average CHF to EUR rate for 2019: CHF 1=EUR 0.90

⁹⁰

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ge/a795de999dee14a02f13bc3878dd56509f96d7c0e3398ec439c8a342b95db6dc.pdf>

⁹¹ [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/GEO/Prodoc%20signed%20EU4ITD\(2\).pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/GEO/Prodoc%20signed%20EU4ITD(2).pdf)

⁹² Average USD to EUR rate for 2023: USD 1=EUR 0.93

⁹³ <https://www.undp.org/georgia/projects/decentralisation-good-governance>

⁹⁴ <https://platforma-dev.eu/>

⁹⁵ <https://www.alda-europe.eu/progetto/agreed/>

⁹⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/republic-of-moldova-past-project>

⁹⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/republic-of-moldova>

⁹⁸ <https://www.alda-europe.eu/progetto/platform-for-good-governance-and-environmental-protection/>

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¹⁰⁰ <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1235>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/109425.html>

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<https://www.alda-europe.eu/progetto/citizens-voice-actions/>
<https://cfoa.am/activity/program/5d1295c7ca0ab22b75166a54>

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104 <https://www.undp.org/azerbaijan/projects/developing-innovation-driven-and-sustainable-civil-society-azerbaijan>

105 <https://www.alda-europe.eu/progetto/kas/>

106 <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1737>

107 <https://www.kas.de/en/web/europaeische-und-internationale-zusammenarbeit/eu-projects>

108 <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=673>;

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112 <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1576>

113 <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1570>

114 <https://euneighbourseast.eu/projects/eu-project-page/?id=1302>

115 In Ukraine, there are several projects dedicated to the decentralisation issue that offer technical support for Ukrainian LRAs. The largest one is the U-LEAD Programme funded by the European Union and aimed at strengthening the capacity of key actors at national, regional, and local levels, including vertical and horizontal coordination and capacity building. The second largest project is the DOBRE programme implemented by the Global Communities and funded by the USAID. The main focus of this programme is on technical and financial assistance at the local level, stimulation of the local economy, and increasing citizens' engagement. The EU has initiated the Eastern Partnership Panel on Public Administration Reform, which has played a successful role in discussing key challenges faced by the public administration in EaP countries. Their recent work has concentrated on COVID-19's impact. Along with this, the EU has also funded, in collaboration with the UNDP, the Mayors for Economic Growth Initiative to facilitate economic growth and job creation at the local level. The EU-funded Mayors for Economic Growth (M4EG) initiative supports local authorities in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) to become active shapers of their inclusive economic growth. The project has successfully committed 350 local authorities to the M4EG, with 130 new members joined in 2022, and 28 cities/towns engaging in designs and implementation of demonstration projects in EaP countries. In Moldova, EU4Accountability empowers Moldovan civil society organisations to better perform their role as actors of governance to improve the social accountability of the local and central government.

116 GIZ's "Good governance" promotes local development in the South Caucasus, provides support through optimising legal and institutional framework conditions, developing the capacities of key actors, implementing mechanisms for citizen participation and fostering learning processes and sharing experiences across national borders. GIZ has adopted a twin approach: its project "Promoting public administration reform in the Eastern Partnership" works in close cooperation with each country's state chancellery, civil service agencies, ministries and agencies for e-governance, parliamentary administrations, ministries and agencies for vocational training and regional development, and municipalities.

117 A very similar approach has also been pursued by the GIZ in cooperation with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the EU in the South Caucasus region. Another GIZ initiative, "Promoting public administration reform in the Eastern Partnership", involves municipalities in an exchange of reform experience through a variety of formats, including e-governance and digitalisation.

118 In Armenia, local self-government officials have access to trainings through the national Public Administration Academy (PAARA). The students may benefit from exchange programmes, including Erasmus+. Other states have also put in place several training programmes. In Georgia, the Municipal Development Fund, Rondeli Foundation and NALAG have been implementing training programmes for LRAs with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDCA), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the WB and the EU.



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of the Regions**

Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

Rue Belliard/Belliardstraat 101 | 1040 Bruxelles/Brussel | BELGIQUE/BELGIË | Tel. +32 22822211
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