

The Bureau of the Congress

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Co-operation activities of the Congress in member States and neighbouring regions

Introduction

This document provides a **brief update on the main results** attained by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (the Congress) through its co-operation activities in member States and neighbouring regions of the Council of Europe between **21 March 2023 and 22 October 2023**. The latest full report of the co-operation activities was submitted for information to the Congress Bureau on March 2023.² Co-operation projects take place in the framework of the Council of Europe's Action Plans for certain member States, Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy, or specific partnerships.³ A debate on the Congress co-operation activities was held during the 43rd Congress Session, on 27 October 2022.⁴

Through co-operation activities, the Congress further supports member States and States in neighbouring regions in their aspiration to enhance local and regional democracy and institutional frameworks in line with Council of Europe standards. It encourages the implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122), providing a link between the recommendations and resolutions adopted at the plenary sessions and the situation on the ground. Congress co-operation activities also support political dialogue on putting into practice recommendations from the monitoring of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

Through four lines of action, the co-operation activities contribute to [1] empowering local and regional authorities by fostering dialogue between central government and local and regional authorities and strengthening their associations; [2] building the capacities of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change; [3] making young people aware of the principles of local democracy and engaging them at local level; and [4] learning by doing through involvement in local initiatives to improve the quality of local democracy through the implementation of innovative, participatory, open, transparent, accountable and inclusive approaches at the local level.

The co-operation activities of the Congress include a human rights approach with a focus on gender equality and the integration and protection of internally displaced persons and minorities. The aim is to strengthen the capacities of local and regional authorities in mainstreaming and protecting human rights at local level in line with the Priorities of the Congress.⁵ The co-operation projects of the Congress contribute to the fulfilment of the [United Nations 2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, in particular to the Sustainable Development Goals 5 ([Gender equality](#)), 10 ([Reduced inequalities](#)), 11 ([Sustainable cities and communities](#)), 16 ([Peace, justice and strong institutions](#)) and 17 ([Partnership for the goals](#)).

Action required: for information

¹ This document is classified as confidential until it has been examined by the Bureau of the Congress.

² The latest full report on "Co-operation activities of the Congress in member States and neighbouring regions", CG-BUR(2023)51-22, Bureau of the Congress, 9 March 2023, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/co-operation-activities-of-the-congress-in-member-states-and-neighbour/1680aa7d4a>

³ Activities organised under the neighbourhood policy have been implemented following the creation by the Congress of the status of Partner for Local Democracy in 2014. For the policy see "Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions", CM(2017)27-final, Committee of Ministers, 19 May 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680712371>
For the status see Resolution 376 (2014) Partner for Local Democracy status. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680719fb5>

⁴ During the 43rd Congress session, a debate on the co-operation activities of the Congress was held. News available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/co-operation-concrete-programmes-to-promote-local-democracy-across-europe>

⁵ The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe, "The Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026". Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/priorities-of-the-congress>

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Recent developments

During the reporting period, the Congress had bilateral projects under implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine; a multilateral project aimed at strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges in Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania; and a project for local democratic forces from Belarus that has been recently launched. In addition, project proposals have been submitted for funding under relevant Action Plans and co-operation documents for Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine as well as Belarus, Kosovo*, Morocco, Tunisia, and a follow-up project on migration management at the local level.⁶

I. Bilateral projects

A. Bosnia and Herzegovina

Project title	Innovating democratic participation at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dates	January 2022 – June 2024
Budget	€ 780 000
Funding	Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025 ⁷
Project summary	The project aims to enhance the quality of local democracy and create opportunities for citizens to engage in innovative participatory processes in Mostar and elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It promotes new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy making in the country.

The **first-ever joint meeting of the Presidencies of the associations of local authorities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska** took place in May 2023, setting a major milestone for further joint co-operation and advocacy efforts of the associations for the enhanced quality of local governance. In this endeavour, **an Expert opinion on guaranteeing local autonomy in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina** was produced with the support of the Congress and discussed with mayors in May 2023.

The Platform of Exchange on open local government met for the third time in May 2023, bringing together 22 local authorities across the country, who reaffirmed their commitment to participatory decision-making that reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of their local communities.

The cities of Banja Luka and Mostar have been supported with capacity development activities to complement their efforts in **organising citizens' assemblies** which will be held in early 2024. In addition, the City of Sarajevo and the Municipality of Modrica are also benefiting from capacity development activities to set up tailored deliberative processes.

Representatives of local authorities across Bosnia and Herzegovina and their associations participated in the 8th **Open Government Partnership Global Summit**, held in September 2023 in Tallinn, Estonia. They shared their experience and expressed their willingness to work further on promoting open government principles at local level and contributing to the implementation of the State-level Open Government Partnership Strategy.

*All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

⁶ Projects within the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources, including Joint Programmes with the European Union, voluntary contributions from donor countries and international organisations, as well as the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe.

⁷ Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022-2025, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-bosnia-and-herzegovina-2022-2025-eng/1680a54231>

B. Georgia

Project title	Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia
Dates	December 2020 – December 2023
Budget	€ 1 800 000 (of which € 900 000 for the Congress component) ⁸
Funding	Government of Austria and the Action Plan for Georgia 2020 – 2023 ⁹
Project summary	The project aims to strengthen human rights protection and democratic public participation at local level in Georgia by ensuring that civil society organisations and citizens have a real impact on decision-making processes. The project also helps consolidating institutional frameworks and strengthening the capacities of local authorities and the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) to protect and embed human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, to incorporate a gender perspective and to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

The project is being implemented in co-ordination with the Directorate General of Democracy and in close co-operation with the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) and the Public Defender of Georgia.

The implementation throughout the year 2023 of an innovative **learning path on anti-discrimination for local authorities** is one of the project's main achievements. It was composed of a series of workshops, roundtables, and online tools aimed at developing local authorities' capacities to design and implement sustainable anti-discrimination measures.

In April, in the context of the "Council of Europe Visibility Days", the second workshop of the learning path promoted communication practices for effective participation of vulnerable groups in local public life.

In July, the third workshop focused on the development of inclusive codes of ethics for anti-discrimination within public institutions at the local level. The learning path concluded in October with a roundtable for peer exchange and **dialogue with the central level** on inclusion and non-discrimination. Such principles will be mainstreamed in the national human rights strategy and action plan through the effective participation of local authorities in its design and implementation.

The project also addressed the **protection of children's rights** with an online workshop in March, emphasising the role of human rights in local governance and effective child-sensitive policies. Furthermore, the project focused on the **inclusion of people with disabilities**, empowering local authorities to mainstream disability issues into their policies, with a workshop in May.

In addition, continuous, productive **dialogue between the Public Defender** and local authorities, represented by NALAG, was supported. The Georgian Forum of Exchange on Human Rights, the platform for dialogue composed by 13 local authorities, met in July with the newly elected Public Defender of Georgia to discuss co-operation on human rights localisation, awareness-raising, and the exchange of good practices. This strengthened dialogue aligns with **NALAG's draft strategy for human rights localisation**, developed by the new **Committee on Localisation of Human Rights** thanks to the financial support of the project.

Lastly, an **e-course** on "Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level in Georgia" was piloted in August and launched in the NALAG newly established human rights' resource platform to equip local authorities and municipal staff with strategies to combat discrimination and promote gender equality.

⁸ The project is jointly being implemented by the Congress and the Directorate General of Democracy, Division Elections and Civil Society.

⁹ The Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023 is funded by 9 member States: Czech Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168098f179>

C. Republic of Moldova

Project title	Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova
Dates	March 2022 – March 2024
Budget	€ 475 000
Funding	Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 ¹⁰
Project summary	The project aims to strengthen the political dialogue between local and central authorities, provide support for improving the quality of local governance through integrity, corruption prevention, open government, public ethics, and gender equality at local level, as well as support authorities with migration management. Together, these efforts contribute to enhancing the quality of local democracy and ensuring that citizens of the Republic of Moldova benefit from local policies and practices that are ethical, fair, inclusive, and open.

Since May 2023, the project facilitated important breakthroughs in promoting open local government. Local authorities and the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) were accompanied in increasing their knowledge on open government principles and their importance, and subsequently in co-creating the **5th National Action Plan under the Open Government Partnership (OGP)** together with central authorities and civil society organisations. For the first time since Moldova joined the OGP in 2011, the **Action Plan includes local commitments proposed by local authorities**. Another novelty is that the Government-led **Open Government Co-Ordination Council includes a seat for local authorities**, represented by CALM. These achievements are essential for advancing open government related policies, as well as for reinforcing a culture of dialogue across government levels. The grassroot level of governance and the national association of local authorities are increasingly recognised as important stakeholders in defining national strategies and commitments to international partners.

To further support the multi-level dialogue, the Congress also worked closely with the national authorities and CALM on the development of the **National Public Administration Reform Strategy**. Comments and inputs from the national association were appreciated by central authorities and the majority were incorporated in the final Strategy adopted in July.

Moreover, representatives of local and national authorities participated in a **study visit to Serbia** in July, where they exchanged with representatives of the Serbian national association of local authorities on advocacy and services to members. They also learnt about the consultation mechanism in Serbia, and the harmonisation of national and local policies and regulations and standards in the process of accession to the European Union through discussions with the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government.

In view of supporting gender balanced participation in local decision-making, a **Guide on preventing and combatting sexism in the Republic of Moldova** was developed, completing the Congress series on this subject.

The project is also supporting the development of a Human Rights Perception Index, together with other Council of Europe projects, ensuring that the findings will also reflect the situation at the local governance level.

¹⁰ The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024 is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-043221-eng-1501-action-plan-moldova-couv-texte-a4-bat-web/1680a22649>

D. Ukraine

Project title	Strengthening multi-level governance, democracy and human rights at local level in Ukraine
Dates	January 2023 – December 2024
Budget	€ 1 200 000
Funding	Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” 2023-2026 ¹¹
Project summary	The project aims to strengthen the dialogue, partnership, and consultation between different levels of government; enhance collaborative governance and citizen participation in line with the principles of local democracy and open government; and promote and guarantee the right to equality and non-discrimination at local level, for the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine. Thereby, it contributes to building ethical, inclusive, sustainable, resilient, and transparent local communities.

The Congress has been implementing co-operation activities in Ukraine since 2014, with the most recent project launched in January 2023. The project complements the political dialogue and support to Ukraine.

The President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Leendert Verbeek and Congress Secretary General, Mathieu Mori, **visited Ukraine** from 18 to 20 April 2023. They took active part in several high-level events such as the International Summit of Cities and Regions, the First Ukrainian Summit of Open Civic Hubs, and the Roundtable to discuss the Roadmap for good democratic governance. On this occasion, a **Memorandum of Understanding** was signed between the Congress and the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) to strengthen efforts for joint advocacy, democratic stability, and resilience of local authorities.

The aforementioned Summit of Open Civic Hubs was organised jointly by the Congress and the City of Kyiv with participation of around 400 local elected representatives, public officials and local activists who gathered to share and disseminate across all regions of Ukraine new approaches to enhance citizens’ engagement and non-discriminatory practices at local level through civic hubs.

The experience and successes of more than 100 Ukrainian municipalities in responding to most pressing problems faced by their citizens’ and addressing their needs was promoted during the “open government marathon” as part of the global initiative **Open Gov Week**. Participants shared best practices in applying innovative and resilient open government approaches in times of war. Ten municipalities received special recognition for implementing the best youth engagement, digital governance, social cohesion and inclusion initiatives.

Representatives of these 10 municipalities and other local elected representatives from 11 regions of Ukraine participated in the 8th **Open Government Partnership Global Summit**, held in September 2023 in Tallinn, Estonia. They shared their experience in implementing innovative approaches to enhance open and transparent government at local level, youth engagement, co-creation mechanisms and e-governance. The Congress side-event “Fostering open government as a key ingredient for resilient local authorities” gathered participants from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and OGP Secretariat where they have identified main take-aways from the Summit and next steps for localising open government principles in their communities.

A call for local initiatives was launched in early October to support up to 10 local authorities in introducing democratic innovations through open government approaches and in protecting human rights at local level in local communities. The selected municipalities will benefit from expert support focused on governance processes, tools and mechanisms to be introduced in order to achieve local initiatives’ objectives.

¹¹ The Action Plan for Ukraine 2023-2026 is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-ukraine-2023-2026-eng/1680aa8280>

II. Multilateral project

Project title	Strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges
Dates	January 2023 – December 2024
Budget	€ 500,000
Funding	Germany – Implemented under the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025) ¹²
Project summary	The project contributes to building strong local democracy in Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania for inclusive, resilient and sustainable societies. This multilateral, multi-stakeholder project aims to support local and regional authorities facing migration challenges so that they are able to provide sustainable and democratic solutions to citizens and migrants in the targeted countries.

The project was praised as timely and necessary at the first project **Steering Committee** meeting held in Strasbourg in June 2023. Representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and representatives of the Association of Polish Cities, the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova, and the Association of Communes of Romania had an exchange of views with the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, Leyla Kayacik, who highlighted the key role of local authorities in refugees' reception and integration. The meeting concluded with the signature of a **quadripartite Memorandum of Understanding** between the Congress and the Association of Polish Cities (APC), the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM), and the Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR).

Furthermore, the project established a **Community of Practice on Migration and Human Rights at local level**, which will act as a platform for peer exchanges between local authorities in Poland, the Republic of Moldova and Romania, as well as with their European counterparts. During their first meeting in Strasbourg on 29 June, the members of the Community of Practice discussed the initial findings of the **project baseline assessment**, and then took part in a guided discussion on managing migration at local level, in order to better understand practical realities at local level and identify key challenges and needs to be addressed within the project. The project baseline assessment report will be published at the end of October.

¹² The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-on-protecting-vulnerable-persons-in-the-context-of-migrati/1680a409fc>