



Local & Regional
Europe

ACTIVITY REPORT 2023



01 ACTIONS

Working with and towards the European Institutions

Knowledge sharing and capacity building

Pan-European campaigns and visibility

Internal organisation

02 IMPACT GOALS

1. Build inclusive, democratic and trustworthy societies free of inequalities and discrimination
 2. Accelerate the transformation of territories to achieve net-zero goals, protect biodiversity and adapt to the challenges of climate change
 3. Foster territorial cohesion and enhance systemic approaches that can break down urban-rural silos
 4. Bridge the digital divide and make local and regional governments a driver for employment and digital transformation
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The year 2023 was a particularly challenging one for local and regional governments (LRGs) all across Europe. The conflict in Ukraine, the escalation of crises and the numerous ongoing environmental, social and economic challenges all directly and broadly impacted territories.

As for CEMR, it continued to follow the 2030 Agenda's guidelines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in all of Europe's municipalities and regions and to actively support its members in effectively instituting all the measures necessary to ensure that a green, digital and just transition transpires in all territories, regardless of size.

To do so, we undertook consultations, dialogues and activities focusing on:

- Working with and towards the European institutions
- Knowledge sharing and capacity building
- Pan-European campaigns and visibility
- Internal organisation.



01

ACTIONS



Our activities were centred around:





WORKING WITH AND TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS

CEMR'S WORK IN 2023

PLATFORMA'S ROLE

**ENGAGEMENT IN
EUROPEAN PLATFORMS**





Several position papers and joint letters were produced, targeting the:

- Revision of the Waste Framework Directive
- Reform of the Electricity Market Directive
- Nature Restoration Law
- Future of Cohesion Policy post-2027
- Impact of the Reform of EU economic governance on municipalities and regions
- Waste/Circular Economy
- Revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive
- European Commission Enlargement Report 2023
- EU External Financing for Local Authorities: Global Gateway, Team Europe and the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe

In view of successfully pulling off the green, energy and digital transitions, the European Union institutions proposed a great deal of new legislation in 2023.

Consequently, one of the key pillars of CEMR's work in 2023 consisted of advocating on behalf of its members to shape this new EU legislation in order to ensure that LRGs' needs, challenges and priorities were being addressed. These efforts also had the benefit of boosting the associations' lobbying actions aimed at their own national governments as well as giving them a firsthand idea of the implications of implementation for their members' territories. All this required our examining the legislative proposals, keeping territories apprised of European initiatives and ensuring that said proposals met the needs of territories of all sizes, notably by passing on in situ information acquired from local stakeholders to European institutions.

The means used to achieve CEMR's objectives included the organisation of political debates with European Union institutions, panel discussions, expert group meetings and webinars along with participation in high-level meetings and events at European and international levels. Evidence-based briefings, amendments to European Parliament reports, position papers and declarations as well as legislative monitoring were the tools used to strengthen our standing and arguments. Furthermore, underpinning all of this was the active participation and collaboration of CEMR's member associations, which led to unique contributions made through CEMR's 23 expert groups, task forces and clusters and helped to build up members' experiences and knowledge, both in the EU and non-EU countries, while also enriching the process of developing our positions.

In this respect, a number of contributions were made in 2023 in connection with various consultations and meetings involving the Committee of the Regions (CORLEAP, gender-based violence, urban wastewater, nature restoration, etc.).



PLATFORMA's Role:

- Co-chaired Policy Forum for Development.
- Shaped LRG engagement in EU development policy.
- Advocated at EU-CELAC Summit.
- Joined Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Platform.

As regards the advocacy focusing on EU development policy and its instruments, CEMR attained a number of significant achievements in many key areas in 2023.

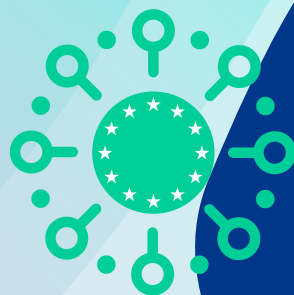
PLATFORMA reaffirmed its role as representative of LRGs in co-chairmanship with CSOs of the Policy Forum for Development's (PFD) Steering Group. Through its active involvement, PLATFORMA could help shape the agenda of this first annual global meeting in four years and drive the discussion forward on LRG engagement and the protection of civic space in EU development policy.

Similarly, on the global stage, an important milestone for LRGs was reached at the EU-Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-CELAC) Summit with the issuance of a final declaration and a video message, addressed to the heads of state attending the Summit, calling for a greater push towards decentralisation and the inclusion of LRGs in political dialogue at both the national and international levels.

Through its active participation in a variety of regional and thematic consultations relating to NDICI-Global Europe's mid-term review, PLATFORMA also advocated for the restitution of a budget line as well as deeper dialogue with EU delegations. The latter was facilitated through its new role co-chairing the recently established Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform (GG CSO/LA Platform), which was launched during the Global Gateway Summit in June 2023 by Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International cooperation. This will also strengthen its capacity to continue safeguarding the inclusion of LRGs in the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy.

PLATFORMA also stepped-up advocacy efforts in connection with the Team Europe Initiative, notably the newly created Team Europe Democracy Network (TEDN), where their messages have especially resonated given its thematic focus on civic participation and the promotion of local democracy.

Further afield, CEMR with UCLG Africa and COPPEM organised a parallel event at the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) on 6 March 2023 entitled "Cities forging the path to gender justice", which was attended by European local and regional elected representatives, including Ms Silvia Baraldi, Councillor of Legnago, CEMR Spokesperson on gender equality.



Engagement in European Platforms:

- Active in various structured dialogues.
- Contributed to shaping European initiatives and promoting multi-level governance.

In anticipation of the 2024 EU elections, CEMR started coordinating in 2023 the work with its members of developing key messages and defining policy priorities for the new term. The resulting '[Call to Action](#)' sets forth these key messages for the prospective members of the European Parliament, laying out the arguments for changes to EU policy processes from the territorial perspective. CEMR Call to Action underscores the challenges facing municipalities and regions and how EU policy-making should evolve to best deliver improved public services and more sustainable outcomes on the ground.

Alliances with other organisations proved very useful in 2023 in strengthening our messages, such as those established with Polis, Energy Cities, Housing Europe, Eurocities, the Committee of the Regions, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE), the Cohesion Alliance, the Local Alliance on climate and environment issues, Municipal Waste Europe, the Alliance for the Reconstruction of Ukraine and many others. Partnering with networks pursuing common interests or with think tanks such as the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), working in a like-minded way to bolster evidence-based policy-making, also helps in bridging gaps across Europe by promoting multi-level governance and mutual understanding.

CEMR also worked to keep its member associations actively engaged in the following European platforms and structured dialogues led by European institutions or member states:

- Policy Forum on Development (DG INTPA),
- Global Gateway CSO-LA Advisory Platform (DG INTPA),
- Team Europe Initiative: Team Europe Democracy Network (DG INTPA),
- Structured dialogue on cohesion policy (DG REGIO),
- Social dialogue (DG EMPL),
- Urban mobility platform (DG MOVE)
- Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform (DG ENVI)
- European Network for Rural Development (DG AGRI)
- Global Education Network Europe (member states and DG INTPA),
- Urban Development Group and Territorial Development Group (member states) - this was constructive in shaping the ideas of several European initiatives during the preliminary stages.



KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

**STRENGTHENED
CAPACITY-BUILDING
ACTIVITIES**

**STRUCTURED TRAINING
PACKAGE**

TRAINING SESSION

**INFORMATION SESSIONS
ON EU FUNDING
PROGRAMMES**





Capacity-building activities were also strengthened in 2023. CEMR organised workshops for its national associations to help their member LRGs access funds, understand EU programmes and revisions as well as develop appropriate territorial policies and skills.

In particular, CEMR developed a structured training package encompassing materials, presentations, exercises and tools specifically tailored to our membership and LRGs. By way of the Platform for External Funded Activities, CEMR members could contribute to the training package's design, which works using four modules:

- understanding the EU funding landscape, including its evolution, prospects and opportunities;
- developing a competitive proposal;
- executing a partner search and the administrative steps for proposal preparation and submission, highlighting practical tools and best practices;
- conducting interactive exercises and Q&A sessions.

CEMR then organised a two-day training session for seven selected CEMR staff members on how to best utilise the training package and disseminate this knowledge to the member associations. Our goal was to provide greater accessibility and improve the quality of project proposals by building up CEMR associations' and LRGs' capacities.

To this end, four information sessions on the EU funding programmes were held over the course of the year. The following sessions were attended by around 70 participants, comprised of members and external actors:

- Info session on the ESPON programme: ESPON is an EU-funded programme that supports public authorities responsible for designing territorial policies with quality expertise;
- Info session on the URBACT programme: URBACT is an EU-funded programme that helps cities to develop an integrated set of actions for sustainable change;
- Info session on Horizon Europe: Horizon Europe is an EU funded programme for research and innovation;
- Info session on the CERV programme: CERV is an EU-funded programme that aims to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.





Specifically addressing the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), CEMR also organised a training session open to member associations and their member LRGs that included a general overview of the different funds presented by several European Commission DGs (DG REGIO, DG EMPL, DG AGRI) as well as talks given by managing authorities from different countries explaining how they implement the Cohesion Policy funds. As part of the training material, CEMR also published an overview of the implementation of European Structural and Investment Funds for the 2021-2027 period, providing pertinent details regarding the Managing Authorities of the different funds in each member state, the investment priorities, and the potential benefits for local and regional governments to be derived from these funds.

A workshop was organised with the EPRS (European Parliamentary Research Service) to give CEMR secretariat staff members and EPRS researchers a chance to exchange views and discuss research priorities. Several research projects and studies were carried out with EPRS to compile data that corroborates and strengthens our advocacy messages, while also serving to increase the sharing of knowledge among member associations.

To complement our activities and bring in additional expertise and strategic partners, CEMR signed two memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in 2023 with the following organisations:

- Smart City Expo World Congress
- Development Aid



Our goal was to provide greater accessibility and improve the quality of project proposals by building up CEMR associations' and LRGs' capacities.



PAN-EUROPEAN CAMPAIGNS AND VISIBILITY

**COMMUNICATION
TRANSFORMATION**

**DIGITAL
OPTIMISATION**

HOLISTIC APPROACH

**NEW NARRATIVE
TOOL - RESONANCE**





In 2023, CEMR significantly transformed its communication strategy by establishing a dynamic team that focused on digital transformation, storytelling, and the introduction of Resonance

The year 2023 was one of positive change in terms of CEMR's communication, information dissemination and visibility.

In the second quarter of 2023, CEMR enacted a significant transformation with the establishment of a dynamic communication team. This team brought in a fresh set of skills and an essential shift towards innovation, particularly in terms of storytelling, narrative crafting, digital transformation and managing the ubiquitousness of media relations.

Digital Transformation: A cornerstone of this transformation was the optimisation of CEMR's digital presence across various social media channels and the incorporation of increased audio and visual communication tools. There were also preparations in view of the launch of CEMR's redesigned website.

Holistic Approach: The new communication team adopted a holistic approach taking into account policy, projects and campaigns. This shift will ensure closer alignment with CEMR's overarching goals while also fostering synergy between various communication elements.

A New Narrative: The communication team also implemented a new and comprehensive tool, Resonance, which consolidated multiple pre-existing newsletters onto one unified platform. Resonance serves as a central hub, keeping CEMR members updated about the organisation's activities, relevant news, key events and policy developments. This integrated approach ensures efficient and streamlined communication, providing members with a cohesive and insightful overview of CEMR's initiatives and commitments.

Externally, CEMR was actively involved in different European Days, campaigns, as well as EU events and debates, the primary objective of which was to widely share the EU institutions' messages through its various communication channels.



CEMR has an active presence on various platforms:



1 519 700
views



186 730
views



4 500
views



4 200
views



Local & Regional
Europe

Social media was capitalised on as an essential instrument for improving communication outreach and establishing a direct link to local and regional leaders, experts, associations of local and regional governments, EU decision makers and other target audiences. CEMR has an active presence on various platforms: Twitter views: 1 519 700, LinkedIn views: 186 730, Instagram views: 4 500, YouTube views: 4 200. In total: 1 715 130 views.

The new CEMR website is currently under development. It will reflect the organisation's commitment to creating a space suitable for promoting members' stories, projects and activities as well as members' joint statements and positions on EU affairs, in a way that prioritises modernity and accessibility. The new website will be launched in 2024.



INTERNAL ORGANISATION

**STRATEGIC
PROCUREMENT FOR
INCLUSION**

**ENHANCING HR
PRACTICES FOR
DIVERSITY**

**SUSTAINABLE
AND INCLUSIVE
TENDERING TOOLKIT**

**VERBAL SELF-
DEFENSE TRAINING
FOR STAFF**





CEMR achieved progress in promoting diversity and equality by developing tailored strategies.

Regarding its aim of promoting diversity and equality within the Secretariat, CEMR achieved progress after developing strategies and actions focused on three areas:

- The use of strategic procurement to make certain that the criteria and selection process for the purchasing of products and services are in line with CEMR's values. Furthermore, a CEMR staff training session was organised to delve into social and gender-responsive procurement. Afterwards, CEMR received a report along with a toolkit containing guidance on how to design more sustainable and inclusive tendering processes.
- To ensure respect for equality and diversity in CEMR's human resources management approach, a staff training session was organised to increase awareness regarding issues surrounding diversity, equality, inclusion and belonging in the workplace. Included in the final report issued was a set of recommendations to guide CEMR's follow-up action. These recommendations were taken forward by CEMR's human resources department and certain changes to CEMR's recruitment procedures have already been made.
- CEMR staff were given the opportunity to attend a training event on verbal self-defence. The session focused on teaching participants how to recognise different types of aggression and how to then choose appropriate counterstrategies.



02

IMPACT GOALS

A yellow rocket icon with a white target symbol on its nose, pointing upwards and to the right.

Launch of
the strategy
“CEMR 2030:
our journey to
resilience and
impact”

In terms of CEMR’s growth as an organisation, 2023 was a turning point.

With the launch of the strategy “CEMR 2030: our journey to resilience and impact”, CEMR set about revising its multi-annual strategy and revisiting its operational framework to more closely align with the political priorities identified by the organisation’s political leadership. This strategy, endorsed by CEMR’s political leadership in December 2023 in Prague, marked a new approach centred on establishing specific Impact Goals for each thematic area of work with the aim of aligning efforts towards a shared long-term impact.

For an organisation like CEMR, Impact Goals offer a focal point, emphasising long-term activities and the pivotal areas that need attention. The benefits of framing specific Impact Goals around identified thematic priorities are manifold. Impact Goals give a sense of direction to the organisation as a whole, including its member associations, and convey a strong message to external partners, rallying everyone around a shared purpose.

Each Impact Goal is associated with an impact community. The latter are formed by a group of experts from the CEMR Secretariat, tasked with assessing progress, learning, and leading the work, which is completed by way of multiple workstreams broken down into policy, projects, communication, and knowledge sharing and by cultivating synergies with external partners and organisations allied with our mission. Impact communities employ a systemic view in assessing progress and activities linked to a specific Impact Goal, keeping efforts in perspective, while maintaining an eye on the broader landscape as well as staying abreast of what other organisations are doing and current and emerging challenges.



1. Build inclusive, democratic and trustworthy societies free of inequalities and discrimination

SOCIETY

2. Accelerate the transformation of territories to achieve net-zero goals, protect biodiversity and adapt to the challenges of climate change

CLIMATE

3. Foster territorial cohesion and enhance systemic approaches that can break down urban-rural silos

PLACES

4. Bridge the digital divide and make local and regional governments a driver for employment and digital transformation

LABOUR





1.



**Build inclusive,
democratic and
trustworthy
societies free of
inequalities and
discrimination**



GENDER EQUALITY



EUROPEAN DAYS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY



PLATFORMAWARDS



YOUNG ELECTED OFFICIALS COMMITTEE



PLATFORMA



BRIDGES OF TRUST



INCLUCITIES



TOWN TWINNING





Gender equality

Building on CEMR's longstanding and successful work on gender equality, several knowledge and best practices exchanges were organised in 2023 to raise awareness and to facilitate learning from local experiences. In follow-up to the previous year's update to the CEMR European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, priority was given to promoting and disseminating the 2022 version. The secretariat devoted considerable effort to assisting member associations in getting the Charter finalised in different languages and formats. Two events were organised as well:

- UN Women Albania: A learning and exchange workshop for municipalities engaged in implementing the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.
- Women leaders on the frontline: An Exchange on Women's Local Leadership in Peace, Recovery and Reconstruction Processes.

A training session devoted to the Charter indicators was organised in conjunction with the "Eastern Neighbourhood Equality and Women's Solidarity Forum" held on 5 June 2023 in Tbilisi, Georgia. The training session was attended by 50 participants in person and an additional 50 online. Support materials on using the Indicator Toolkit to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the European Charter for Equality were produced in additional languages (Georgian, Romanian and Ukrainian) and distributed to the participants and national associations concerned.

Expanding on the 2019 CEMR study that highlighted the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes, new research was undertaken in 2023 to delve specifically into the issue of violence against elected women in politics. Another of the study's main objectives was to determine why certain gaps exist and to then come up with policy recommendations. Data was therefore collected by way of CEMR's associations and key partners as well

as through an anonymous online survey accessible to CEMR members. More than 2 400 local elected officials from 31 European countries responded to the survey, which focused on two dimensions: 1) the portfolios held by elected women at the local level; and 2) an examination of violence against women elected representatives. More specifically, the survey looked in-depth into fundamental aspects such as the percentage of women in politics who have experienced any form of violence, reporting rates, the ramifications for their private and political lives, perceptions regarding the evolution of violence against women in politics as well as the initial feedback on existing initiatives aimed at tackling this pressing issue. The survey was critical in

raising awareness on this matter and will underpin our future policy and advocacy work in this area.

The research is still ongoing in 2024 with more data being collected for analysis. The principal findings will be presented in a final study report at an event in September in Brussels. CEMR aims to use this study as an important instrument for increasing awareness of the different types of violence women experience (physical, verbal, psychological, etc.) in view of advocating for improved policies that can shift social norms to help in the fight to end violence against women in politics.



Achievements

- [Infographics](#) available in English and French presenting the key findings of the study on violence against women in politics at the subnational level.



European Days of Local Solidarity

As part of the European Days of Local Solidarity (EDLS), PLATFORMA coordinated more than 70 activities organised by municipalities from Belgium, France, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain that took place from 15 to 30 November 2023. More than 50 local elected officials have already signed the EDLS Charter.

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PLATFORMAwards

PLATFORMAwards is a prize rewarding excellence in decentralised development cooperation that is organised every two years by PLATFORMA and supported by an independent jury made up of European elected representatives, practitioners of development cooperation and partners of CEMR and PLATFORMA. The next PLATFORMAwards prize will take place in 2024.

On Monday, 16 October 2023, the “Espace 16 Arts” in Anderlecht (Belgium) hosted an advance showing of the documentary film *Niekhe Kilintii - Together*, showcasing the partnership that won the 2022 PLATFORMAwards prize: the cooperation between the municipalities of Anderlecht (Belgium) and Marsassoum (Senegal). On 28 October 2023, the film premiered on the local TV channel BX1 in Belgium. A special jury prize was also awarded to all municipal partnerships between municipalities in Ukraine and the EU in recognition of their efforts to support their peers in the midst of war.



Young Elected Officials Committee

PLATFORMA also provided support and coordination for the network of Young Elected Officials Committee (YEOC), which was mobilised to engage in policy dialogue on global development issues at different events and to ensure that younger voices are heard and able to bring their perspectives to bear in international forums such as:

- EU-Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-CELAC) pre-summit in January,
- High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July,
- European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) in October,
- Climate conference (UNFCCC CoP 27) in November.

The YEOC effectually established synergies and engaged in exchanges with members of the PLATFORMA Political Council at their meeting on 23–24 March 2023.

Since the launch of the Youth Action Plan (YAP) for EU external action, PLATFORMA has been actively involved in the preliminary stages of developing the Youth Dialogue Platform, namely by assisting and taking part in the drafting of the terms of reference for the Platform and its Liaison Team. CEMR-PLATFORMA's association with this Platform is primarily intended to establish strong ties and help contribute to its effectiveness. For the latter, this entails ensuring the presence and engagement of young elected representatives, especially at local and regional level, and the development of a monitoring system to keep abreast of the YAP for EU External Action's priorities and implementation.

As is the case every year, CEMR-PLATFORMA also exercised its duty as a member of the jury, in cooperation with the European Youth Forum, that nominates the European Youth Capital (EYC). In 2023, PLATFORMA and CEMR took part in the process of selecting the EYC 2027, which assigned particular importance to the institutional commitment of young people at the local level in the designing of the prize programmes presented to the jury.

PLATFORMA

PLATFORMA's 3rd Specific Grant Agreement (SGA3) with the European Commission (DG INTPA) ended on 31 August 2023 and was followed by the 4th Specific Grant Agreement (SGA4) which started on 01 September 2023. The SGA4 project will last for three years (01/09/2023–31/08/2026) with a total budget of € 5 million. It assembles 29 partners, three of which are direct beneficiaries (AUC Ukraine, NALAG Georgia, CALM Moldova).

In 2023, CEMR and ten of its member associations (AFCCRE, FEMP, LALRG, RGRE, VNG, VVSG, NALAG, ALAL, CALM, AUC) were active partners in the PLATFORMA coalition, tackling different project portfolios such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR), including Global Citizenship Education (GCE), coordination of dialogue with EU Delegations in partner countries, cooperation with the EU Neighbourhood-East, ensuring the representation and voice of EU LRGs in EU and global policy discussions, as well

as the dialogue between EU LRGs and/or their associations and their peers in partner countries.

PLATFORMA partners continued to demonstrate their active commitment to implementing decentralised cooperation activities in the EU Eastern neighbourhood countries, which include Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In November 2023, the first meeting of the cluster (working group) under the SGA4 project was held to discuss the main objectives for the 2023–2026 programming period, on account of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine having been granted the status of candidate countries for EU membership.



Bridges of Trust

This project, started in 2021, is centred on Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction through partnerships and collaboration with European cities. The project was implemented by CEMR in close coordination with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and receives support from the U-LEAD with Europe Programme. Through the exchange of experiences with experts and mayors from each partnership (30 from Ukraine and 30 from the EU), 48 project proposals were developed and have reached the application for funding stage.

Achievements

- Organisation of ten online training and info sessions for Ukrainian and European municipalities and their more than 500 municipal representatives, which focused on project design and EU funding programmes as well as the impact of regional policies stemming from the country's accession to the EU;
- Hosting of seven solidarity forums to raise awareness among European municipalities of the current challenges and needs facing local self-government and citizens in Ukraine and the potential of the former's involvement in mutually beneficial partnerships;
- Advocacy efforts aimed at the EU institutions. Ensuring the voices and experiences of municipalities are heard by the European institutions, CEMR advocated for additional support to build partnerships between European and Ukrainian municipalities through the Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine;
- Drafting of the Final Declaration/Recommendations at the workshop «Putting the Lugano Principles into Action» by eight national associations belonging to the Bridges of Trust initiative. This event was organised by the Committee of the Regions prior to the conference on Ukraine's Reconstruction (London, June 2023). The Final Declaration is available [here](#).

The Bridges of Trust's work will continue in 2024 and **focus on developing the partnerships** further while also looking for **opportunities to apply for EU funding**. The project's final conference will be held in 2024.



IncluCities

The IncluCities project, funded under the AMIF programme with a budget of € 2.2 million, was launched in 2020 and ended in June 2023. The aim of IncluCities was to build more inclusive cities, particularly with respect to migrants. The project's methodology comprised a mentoring system whereby cities and associations of local governments offered guidance and knowledge sharing to their peers and counterparts. IncluCities' strength stems from being able to provide concrete proven local solutions for cities while propagating inspiration germinating from real local experiences found all across the EU. By scaling up what works well, CEMR influenced EU integration policies so as to better respond to local needs.



Achievements

- In 2023, IncluCities organised its last training academy, issued a booklet of recommendations and held a final conference attended by more than 70 participants from CEMR member associations, mayors, EC representatives and other relevant stakeholders. For more information on the project's activities and outcomes, please visit its website: <https://www.inclucities.eu/>.

Town Twinning

To provide its members with innovative and citizen-centred solutions to the common challenges of our time, CEMR worked in 2023 on giving its town twinning programme a new impetus. Following up on the 2022 assessment of the twinning.org platform, CEMR launched a 2023 study to analyse the town twinning needs of national associations of LRGs, as well as cities, municipalities, and regions, by issuing them a survey which generated 315 responses. From these answers, we learned that town twinning remains a relevant practice with an effective and meaningful impact. Moreover, almost 80% of the respondents expressed their intention to continue developing town twinning activities, with a majority wishing to explore new partnership possibilities. Our analysis also revealed that these municipalities' town twinning experiences were not strictly confined to the classic traditional framework and, what's more, could also be used as a springboard for developing sustainable networks (sprouting up from workshops, conferences, training activities, as well as the development of joint projects). However, there were also challenges

to be overcome by LRGs and LRGAs in taking their town twinning partnership further, namely a shortage of financial and human resources, as well as a lack of knowledge on how to effectively manage twinning activities.



Achievements

- Study on Twinning, presented in December 2023, which shed new light on the specific role played by town twinning, and on the challenges faced by local and regional governments in trying to achieve their town twinning goals. The report concluded with guidelines and recommendations for strengthening involvement in town twinning activities.



2.



Accelerate the transformation of territories to achieve net-zero goals, protect biodiversity and adapt to the challenges of climate change



SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGISLATIVE RESPONSE



ELECTRICITY MARKET REFORM



ENERGY AND CLIMATE PLANS



ADVOCACY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



NATURE RESTORATION LAW



URBAN WASTEWATER TREATMENT DIRECTIVE



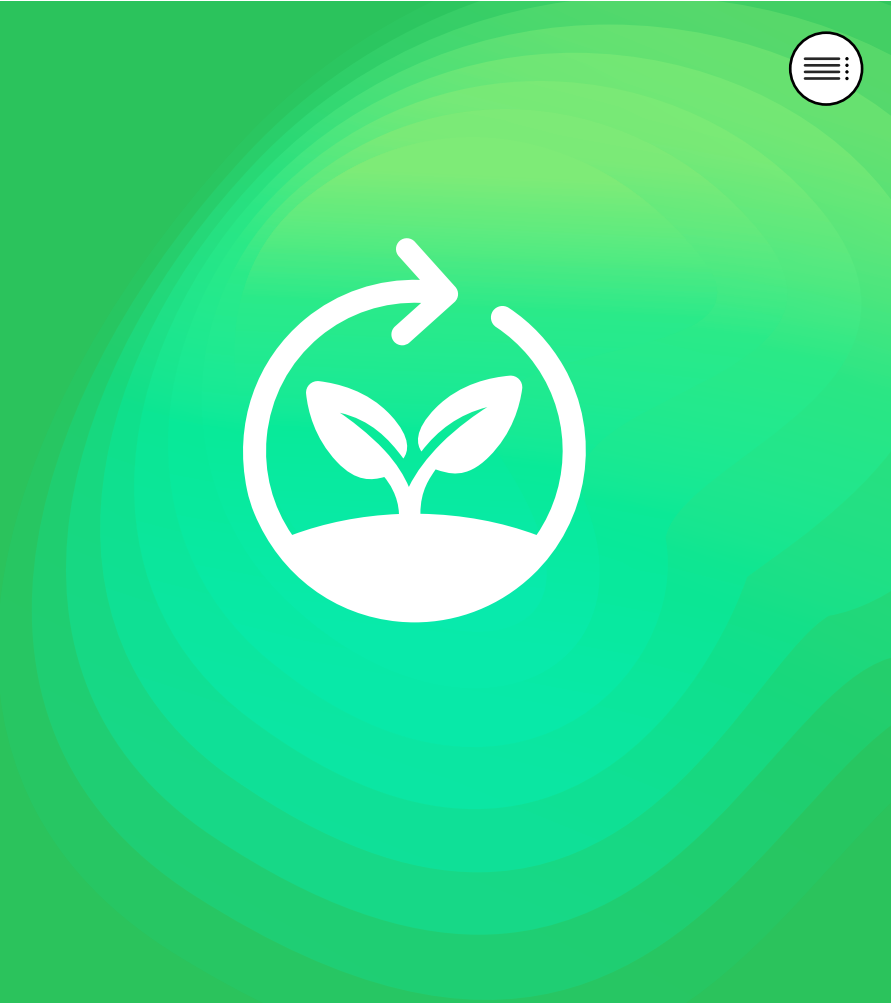
LEGISLATION ON TEXTILES, FOOD WASTE, AND SOIL



URBAN MOBILITY AND PUBLIC



EVENTS AND COLLABORATION





Sustainability and Legislative Response

To achieve ambitious sustainability targets and address the environmental, economic, and social impact of climate change, CEMR continued its work in 2023 of analysing and responding to the massive amount of new legislation proposed by the European institutions, notably in the areas of renewable energy, energy efficiency, solar and photovoltaic energy, but also touching on the circular economy and mobility.

Electricity Market Reform

In light of the reform of the Electricity Market being undertaken in 2023, CEMR took a stance on the correlating issues as well as possible future emergency situations in Europe. This resulted in the adoption of a CEMR [position paper](#) on the reform of the Electricity Market Directive, which underscored the need to facilitate public and private investments in renewable energy generation and to offer better hedging options for local and regional governments, the main public consumers of electricity.

Energy and Climate Plans

Furthermore, over the course of the year, CEMR regularly assessed the revision of national energy and climate plans (NECPs) and conducted a study to examine LRG competences with respect to energy and climate policies (multilevel governance). As part of this, a joint survey was conducted in collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions, which received responses from 22 participants, with 50% representing associations of local and regional governments. This research project led to the publication of [«Powering the Future: Driving Europe's Climate and Energy Policies through Regions and Municipalities»](#). This CEMR report sheds light on the pivotal role played by European LRGs in implementing sustainable energy and climate policies. It advocates for a nuanced approach, acknowledging the large degree of variation between countries when it comes to subnational governments' responsibilities in implementing climate and energy policies. The report's key findings were also presented to EU Commissioner Šefčovič at a meeting on urban matters.



The NECP Report sheds light on the pivotal role played by European LRGs in implementing sustainable energy and climate policies.



CEMR with other stakeholders introduced the polluter-pays principle for the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.

Advocacy and Policy Recommendations

Regarding CEMR's Climate and Energy Expert Group, its activities in 2023 included conducting targeted advocacy and formulating voting recommendations in connection with the Net Zero Industry Act, especially in the areas of permitting, spatial planning and public procurement.

More broadly, CEMR and PLATFORMA adopted a [COP28 position](#) reaffirming LRGs' commitment to the Paris Agreement. This position, intentionally aligned with that of the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) constituency, of which CEMR is a member, was presented in December.

Nature Restoration Law

In response to the Nature Restoration Law proposal, the designated CEMR expert group came out in support by putting together voting recommendations and a communication campaign, which led

to the dissemination of a [joint letter](#) to the European Parliament. It resulted in a positive modification of the proposal to take into account the diversity of urban ecosystems and to allow for sufficient flexibility in its implementation. Throughout this process, CEMR kept its members updated on the progress of negotiations in the Parliament, the Council and the trilogues.

Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive

On the EU's update to the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and ensuing negotiations, the CEMR expert group on water helped draft a joint statement affirming the views and recommendations of local and regional governments in response to the EU's proposal. CEMR worked with other stakeholders to support introducing the polluter-pays principle. It also actively took part in around ten public meetings to disseminate its key messages.



Legislation on Textiles, Food Waste, and Soil

With respect to the current revision of legislation on textiles and food waste, the relevant expert group determined CEMR's priorities and worked on drafting a [policy paper](#) to present them. It also organised meetings with MEPs and the Council Presidency to emphasise its key messages further and to ensure that the Extended Producer Responsibility was equitably implemented.

Regarding soil legislation, CEMR put together a statement containing its key messages in response to the EP's legislative proposal and organised meetings with MEPs to share these priorities and our recommendations relating to subsidiarity ahead of the directive's implementation.

Urban Mobility and Public

As a recognised stakeholder, CEMR is a member of the Commission's expert group on Urban Mobility and takes part in its meetings. There, CEMR's expert group actively promoted our priorities and concerns in this area and asked that considerations critical to LRGs be taken into account in legislative proposals

relating to the mobility framework, particularly with regard to the new requirements for urban nodes.

Events and Collaboration

Following the publication of the study on "Local Finances and the Green Transition (December 2022)", CEMR took part in several discussions with the EU institutions and other bodies on raising awareness and promoting the need to close the existing investment gap at local and regional level, as well as the need to increase local public finances to boost Europe's recovery and achieve the twin green and digital transition. It also participated in the event organised by the Committee of the Regions and the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments «Resilient Cities and Regions: Impact of Public Investments on Economic and Social Development at the local level», where an open exchange of insights and experiences regarding local public investment, green infrastructure development, and digitalisation scaling within the European Union was possible. On these matters, there have been ongoing discussions with the OECD as well in connection with the expert group on Multi-level Governance and Public Investment for Regional Development.



Need to increase local public finances to boost Europe's recovery and achieve the twin green and digital transition.



Achievements

- Advocacy documents such as position papers and joint letters were drafted and many meetings and activities were organised to strongly lobby on LRGs' behalf with respect to the various climate, energy and environmental EU legislation under proposal.
- The study «Powering the Future: Driving Europe's Climate and Energy Policies through Regions and Municipalities» was published, which highlights the key role played by local and regional governments in implementing climate and energy policies in the territories. Its findings will be used to bolster CEMR's advocacy activities in the new EU term.

Projects

● **Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Europe**

CEMR, in cooperation with its member associations, implemented several national actions planned under the current contract, including:

- The National Energy and Climate Plan: the way forward to join the Covenant of Mayors, 21.04.2023, Malta
- Cities on their way to Climate Neutrality, 11.05.2023, Poland
- Sustainable urban and municipal development, 12.05.2023, Poland
- Multilevel governance meeting, 30.05.2023, Poland
- The Slovenian National Energy and Climate Plan and the role of municipalities, 14.06.2023, Slovenia
- Funding and innovation on climate and energy, 19.09.2023, Latvia
- Energy communities for local government units, 24.10.2023, Poland
- NECP stocktaking meeting during CEMR Green Day, 22.06.2023, Brussels
- Workshop at the EU Week of Regions and Cities on "The Covenant of Mayors: together for ambitious climate and energy action», 11.10.2023, Brussels
- Helpdesk for Covenant of Mayors' supporters



Projects

• Several EU climate and environment project proposals were submitted in 2023:

- **Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Europe (2024-2027):** In October 2023, the European Commission DG ENER published a call for tenders for the “Operation of the EU Covenant of Mayors Office (CoMO)” for the upcoming period. For the Covenant’s next phase, the Commission is looking to promote cities’ active involvement and to support them, particularly small and mid-sized municipalities, in implementing climate and energy actions in line with 2030 and 2050 targets. In the medium term, the Covenant will encompass broader environmental policies and, in time, its framework should provide cities with a single entry point. A consortium led by Climate Alliance and Energy Cities and made up of an additional five other partners (including CEMR), which has been running the CoMO initiative from the start, responded to the tender. If successful, the project will start in March 2024 with a duration of 3.5 years.
- **Future-Oriented Solutions Towards Environmental Resilience (FOSTER) project with ALDA (European Association for Local Democracy):** In September 2023, CEMR joined a consortium led by ALDA for the submission of a project that will promote citizens’ and representative associations’ participation in and contribution to climate and environment actions. The project leverages the concept of foresight strategies and forward-looking governance to engage public authorities, citizens and civil society actors in partnership as useful means in confronting climate change-related challenges. If successful, this project is expected to start mid-2024.
- **EU Forum for boosting energy efficient behaviour:** In August 2023, the European Commission DG ENER published a call for tenders to create an “EU forum for boosting energy efficient behaviour”. This Forum will support municipalities and regions in mobilising and empowering their citizens to use energy efficiently. Means will include a capacity-building programme for local and regional actors, technical assistance, a knowledge-sharing platform for representatives from municipalities and regions, tools to monitor and report activities from municipalities and regions, and actions to raise awareness of the platform among municipalities and regions. A consortium led by VITO (Flemish Institute for Technological Research) made up of twelve partners (including CEMR) responded to the tender. Results are expected in January 2024. If successful, the project will run for two years.
- **SUN4Ukraine:** In April 2023, the European Commission published a call for “Associating Ukrainian cities to the Climate-neutral and smart cities Mission” under the HORIZON Europe programme. The call’s goal was to contribute to EU policy and global commitments by identifying a core group of Ukrainian cities for climate neutrality, accelerating their systemic transition to European Green Deal objectives, and showcasing them through twinning with Cities Mission participants, thus boosting collaboration between EU and Ukrainian cities in reconstruction and climate initiatives. A consortium led by Eurocities, with twelve EU and Ukrainian partners (including CEMR) and five affiliated partners, responded to the call. Results are expected in February 2024. If successful, the project will start in 2024 with a duration of four years.



3.



Foster territorial cohesion and enhance systemic approaches that can break down urban-rural silos



CEMR'S ROLE IN COHESION POLICY



PARTICIPATION IN EXPERT GROUPS



MONITORING RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE FACILITY



PUBLIC EVENT ON SKILLS IN RURAL AREAS





CEMR's Role in Cohesion Policy

Owing to its longstanding work on cohesion policy and the years of expertise accumulated by its members as well as its involvement in effective cooperation initiatives such as the Cohesion Alliance, CEMR has long been identified as a key stakeholder in the future of cohesion policy debate. This explains why the Secretariat was directly invited by MEP Andrey Novakov to contribute to his report on “cohesion policy 2014–2020 – implementation and outcomes in the Member States”, the purpose of which included making recommendations for the next programming period. The resulting [draft report](#) does in fact incorporate several messages along the lines of those shared by CEMR in its draft position paper.

Participation in Expert Groups

CEMR participated in several of the European Commission's expert groups to share members' feedback on challenges and opportunities tied to the Cohesion Policy's implementation:

- [Dialogue with Common Provision Regulation partners 2021–2027](#)
- [European Community of Practice on Partnership](#)
- [Just Transition Platform working group on Horizontal Stakeholder Strategy](#)
- [European Urban Initiative steering group](#)
- [Common Agricultural Policy Network Assembly \(and steering group\)](#)
- [Rural Pact Coordination Group](#)
- Practitioner's panel for [ex-post evaluation of Territorial Instruments 2014–2020 \(ITI, CLLD\)](#)

Monitoring Recovery and Resilience Facility

Also in preparation for the next programming period, CEMR continued to monitor the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the experiences of local and regional governments during this process. CEMR's members met in 2023 to discuss and exchange experiences on the impact of RRF funding and the implementation of the national recovery plans at the local and regional level.

Public Event on Skills in Rural Areas

In November 2023, as part of its work on the Rural Pact to ensure LRGs have a voice in shaping the 2040 vision of European rural areas, CEMR organised a public event on [“Harnessing Skills in Rural Areas”](#). This event coincided with the European Year of Skills and brought together a variety of speakers and stakeholders: EU institutions, the OECD, local elected officials (including two CEMR spokespersons), member states (including a representative of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU), NGOs and members of the Rural Pact Community. The very productive discussion that ensued was also a first step towards making the Impact Community on territorial cohesion a reality.

CEMR has long been identified as a key stakeholder in the future of cohesion policy debate.



Initiatives under the Revised Urban Agenda

Under the revised Urban Agenda for the EU, CEMR was instrumental in kicking off two thematic partnerships on Cities of Equality and Urban Food and was influential in the decision taken to establish two new thematic partnerships in the future, one focused on water and the other on local heating and cooling plans. We also ensured that all information, including news of calls and events surrounding the new European urban initiatives (EUI) started in 2022, was duly disseminated. As a member of the EUI steering committee, we also made sure that the voice of associations and medium-sized urban areas was amply heard in the group.

Focus on Rural Skills

As mentioned above, 2023 was the European Year of Skills and, in celebration of this as well as CEMR's commitment to the Rural Pact following the Commission's adoption of the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, CEMR organised an event focusing specifically on skills in rural areas, inviting local elected representatives, the OECD and NGO partners in the Rural pact to share their experiences and challenges they face in attracting and retaining skills in rural areas.

CEMR also makes sure that the voice of associations and medium-sized urban areas is amply heard.



Achievements

- In view of the discussions on the 2028–2034 programming period, CEMR drafted a position paper in 2023 on the [Future Cohesion Policy Post-2027](#) with the support of the expert group on Territorial Cohesion. This work was what allowed CEMR's Secretariat to make effective contributions to the various debates held on this issue throughout the year, particularly the Committee of the Regions' reports on "Do no harm to Cohesion Policy" and on the future of Cohesion Policy.
- A short [video](#) was produced featuring several of CEMR's members, highlighting their experiences with the RRF, and how it was being implemented through national reform plans at the local level.





Projects

● Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)

Through the RFSC, CEMR promotes the principles of sustainable and integrated urban development and supports municipalities of all sizes across Europe in the design and implementation of local development strategies. Through the project, we promote EU policies on sustainable urban development namely the Leipzig Charter and the New Leipzig Charter, as well as offer a free self-assessment tool and capacity building training to cities on localising the SDGs, complementing CEMR policy and advocacy work in these fields.



Achievements:

- As part of the project, we celebrated our collaboration with URBACT over the last 2 years, in the framework of the Global Goals 4 Cities network, in which we supported 19 cities using the RFSC to prepare an Integrated Action Plan to achieve the SDGs.
- We have organised an SDG Training Academy to train 10 cities in using the tool to prepare a SDG Voluntary Local Review.
- Moreover, we have organised an high-level event, together with the Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament, focusing on multilevel governance as an accelerator of the SDGs, with the participation of Cllr Gail Macgregor, CEMR spokesperson 2030 Agenda and Mayor Vitor Aleixo, Loulé, Portugal, member of CEMR Policy Committee
- We have organised an event during the European Week of Regions and Cities on Sustainable and inclusive development at the local level, highlighting the role of decentralised cooperation, with the participation of CEMR/ PLATFORMA young elected representatives.
- We have reinforced collaboration with other institutions namely European Commission Joint Research Centre and UN HABITAT SDG Cities Global Initiative, discussing alignment and synergies
- Furthermore, we have maintained a strong online presence through newsletters, website updates, and active engagement on social media platforms, enhancing visibility and outreach to stakeholders.



4.



Bridge the digital divide and make local and regional governments a driver for employment and digital transformation



TURNING POINT FOR DIGITALISATION IN 2023



PROJECTS





Turning Point for Digitalisation in 2023

The year 2023 was a turning point for digitalisation with key legislation enacted and adopted and new funding opportunities made available through the new Digital Europe Programme (DEP). CEMR was active in this area throughout, keeping members informed, lobbying the EU institutions and joining forces with other networks under a new DEP-funded project.

During an interactive session with the European Commission (DG DIGIT) on the Interoperable Europe Act, CEMR's Expert Group on digitalisation had the chance to give input, providing their insights following the presentation of the Act proposal at the Expert Group's first meeting of 2023. In addition, since the publication of the Gigabit Infrastructure Act proposal and a promising initial discussion with DG CNECT, CEMR and the Expert Group have been closely

monitoring the progress of the proposed initiatives. Our action also consisted of drafting and disseminating amendments to the Parliament's report, including voting recommendations encapsulating our key messages for the EP's Committee for Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE).

In 2023, CEMR also joined the newly established Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Social Services, strengthening our position as a social partner. Our positions on this committee have highlighted the importance of social dialogue for our members and stressed the importance of LRGs as providers and EU public social services employers.

Additionally, CEMR's Chair of the Expert Group on LRGs as employers participated in the hearing on firefighters' working conditions in the EP's Employment and Social Affairs Committee, advocating for the interests of local and regional governments.

The CEMR has been active in the fields of digitalisation and social dialogue.

An abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping, rounded shapes in shades of purple, blue, and teal. The text is centered within a dark blue shape in the middle of the graphic.



Projects

● Living-in.EU community

Through the ‘Living-in.EU community’ project, CEMR supports activities that boost a sustainable digital transformation in Europe’s cities and communities. An important conference on this issue took place in June 2023. The European Commission will be using the conference findings as a reference platform in advancing the digital transformation in cities and regions. Other 2023 CEMR activities for this project included sending out a survey and promoting its activities through CEMR’s communication channels and the pertinent expert group.

● Local, Social, Digital

This project reinforces the capacity of national social partner organisations to confront the challenges stemming from the digital transition and the new work patterns that arose following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, with further permutations in the aftermath of the pandemic. The project gives national employers and trade unions in the local and regional government sector the possibility to explore and learn how to best contend with the digital transition through exchanges with their counterparts all across Europe. Local, Social, Digital relies on independent research and the work contributed by the national social partner organisations on a variety of issues linked to the European Social Partners Autonomous Agreement on Digitalisation signed in 2020: digital skills and securing employment; modalities of connecting and disconnecting; artificial intelligence (AI) and the human in control principle; respect of human dignity and surveillance. This collaborative work should culminate in the drafting of a proposal for sectoral guidelines on digitalisation that is to be adopted by social partners of local and regional governments. In view of this, several meetings were organised in 2023, one involving the steering committee and another focusing on research on national provisions and social partners’ agreements, particularly those between European social partners which fall under the scope of the European Social Partners Autonomous Agreement on Digitalisation.



03

ANNEXES





Position papers



- Revision of the waste framework directive
- Reform of the Electricity Market Directive
- Nature Restoration Law
- Future of Cohesion Policy post-2027
- Impact of the Reform of EU economic governance on municipalities and regions
- Waste/Circular Economy
- Revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive
- European Commission Enlargement Report 2023
- EU External Financing for Local Authorities: Global Gateway, Team Europe and the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - Global Europe
- Call to action

Publications



- Women in Politics study: infographic
- Twinning in Europe study
- Powering the Future: Driving Europe's Climate and Energy Policies through Regions and Municipalities
- Multilevel Governance, Exemplary Policies, and Financial Dynamic
- Urban Wastewater and Nature Restoration



Media activity

CEMR leverages social media as an essential instrument to optimise its communication outreach, establishing a direct connection to local and regional leaders, experts, associations of local and regional governments, EU-decisionmakers, and other target groups. CEMR maintains an active presence on various platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube.

- Twitter views: 1 519 700
- LinkedIn views: 186 730
- Instagram views: 4 500
- YouTube views: 4 200
- Total views: 1 715 130

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