

April 2018

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NALAS Newsletter

Key 2017
achievements

Diversity in
the core of
NALAS' values

Do you think
we are all equal?
Not yet.

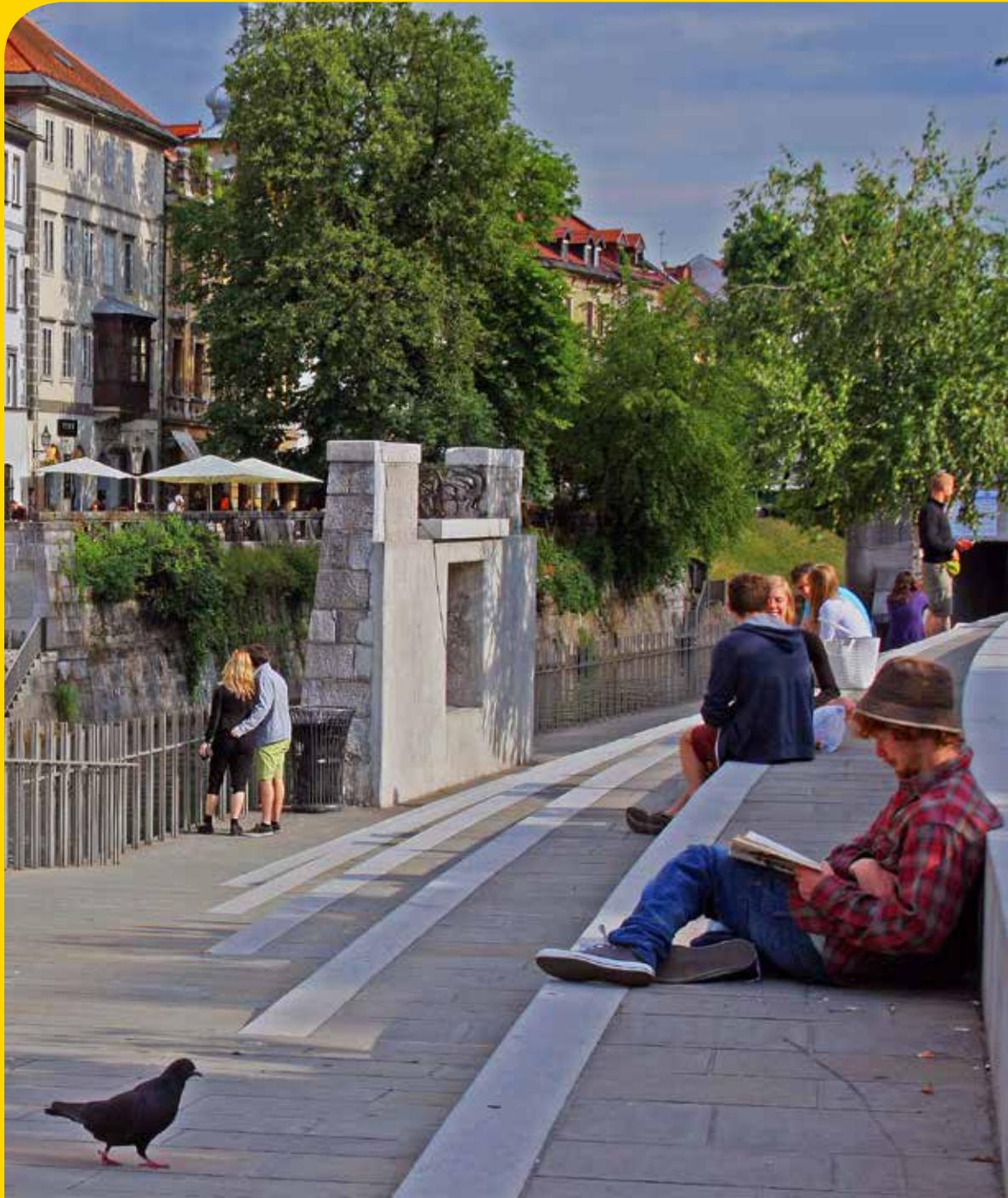
Gender equality in
public services:
the case of solid
waste management

Interview with
NALAS Vice
President
Tatiana Badan

Best Practices

Ongoing initiatives

News from
NALAS Members



Network of Associations of Local
Authorities of South-East Europe
Réseau des Associations
de Pouvoirs Locaux de
l'Europe du Sud-Est

Gender Equality in the focus

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This newsletter is developed within the project "Strengthening the knowledge base and capacities of NALAS to promote gender responsive policy making and to engender local service delivery in SEE", implemented by the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS).

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Editorial



Dear reader,

In light of the upcoming, 13th NALAS General Assembly, to be held on 18 March 2018 in Brdo, Slovenia, I have the pleasure to write to you as I round up four years as part of NALAS Presidency, out of which three years as a Vice President and the last year as President of NALAS.

This has been an exciting journey, that strongly confirmed that we, the local governments and our Associations, run the most important regional network in this part of Europe. Our Network raises the voice of local governments on all important topics for our everyday work, provides capacity development interventions that match our needs and facilitates knowledge and information exchange that has helped us successfully address many emerging issues.

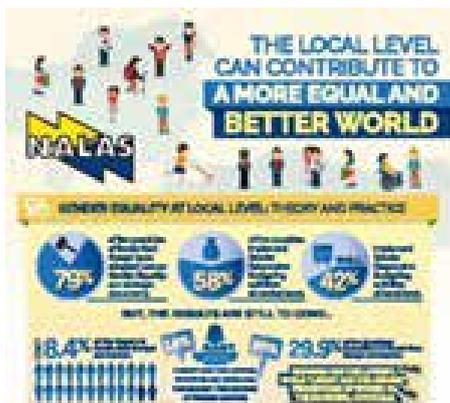
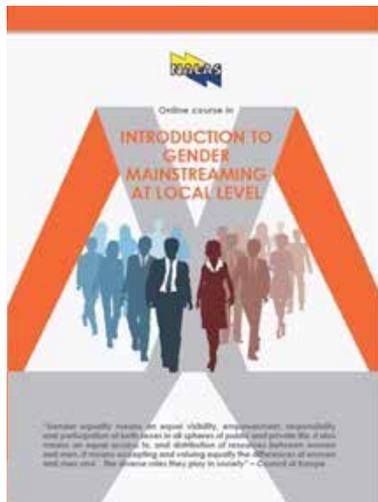
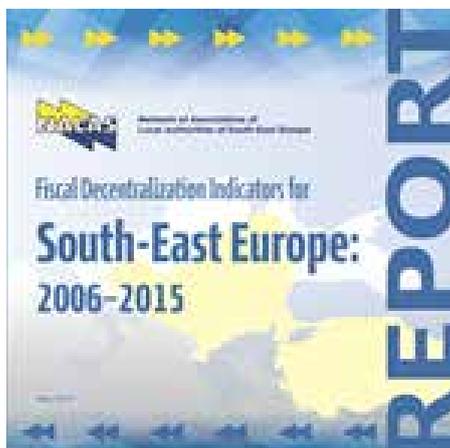
The achievements of our Network are numerous, and you will read about some of them in the next pages. You will also get the chance to learn more about our vision for the next five years. With our new Strategic Plan (2018-2022), we will put the focus on development of strong local self-government in South East Europe, creation of smart, sustainable, inclusive and resilient communities, based on innovative solutions, through a unique regional partnership, wide knowledge base and strong policy-making influence, thereby contributing to democracy, stability and prosperity in the region.

None of this is possible without active participation of all citizens. The municipality must provide equal opportunities to all and involve all citizens in making it a place of wellbeing. This is the reason why we decided to focus on Gender Equality in this issue of the NALAS Newsletter. We don't speak about gender equality once a year, we mainstream it in our key planning documents, we implement consistent actions and we encourage South-East Europe municipalities to do so. In this edition of the Newsletter, you will read about inspiring women and men and the changes they make in their communities. You will also learn about different tools and best practices that might be used in your own context. We encourage you to try them and inform us about your successes that will be featured in our next issues.

Finally, thank you for your commitment and support to our Network. It has been a pleasure working with all of you. I am looking forward to many more successful years of NALAS, to the benefit of our communities and citizens.

Enjoy reading!

Mico Micic
President of NALAS
Mayor of the City of Bijeljina,
Bosnia and Herzegovina



- **NALAS Knowledge Centre** continued to prove its role of the knowledge hub of local government issues in South-East Europe. Six new **knowledge products** have been made available to LGAs and LGs in 2017. The existing knowledge products proved attractive for NALAS audiences and have more than **60.000 downloads**.
- **NALAS e-Academy** has been enriched with **two new e-learning courses** in Disaster Risk Management and Municipal Finances in Bosnian language. The course “**Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level**” was delivered for the first time and evaluations showed **100% participants’ satisfaction rate**.
- **NALAS Services for Members** had significant impact on the work of NALAS member LGAs. The **Quick Response (QR) Service** was used 8 times, providing policy arguments for NALAS member Associations in their efforts to improve legislation and environment affecting local governments. The evaluation of the QR service for 2017 showed that the QR Reports responded adequately to the needs/demands of the LGAs and documented numerous **results** achieved with the contribution of the QR. For example, AKM opposed the creation of a landfill in Kosovo, ALVRS lobbied at the Ministry of Health to not proceed with the initiative of placing primary care institutions at local treasure, AKM strengthened its position as a national training provider, AAM took



an active role in advocating for better solid waste management in Albania, while MMU got ideas for improving their training system.

- In 2017, **concept and methodology for SEE Decentralisation Observatory has been developed**, with the support of the RCC, OSCE and KDZ, with active involvement of the NALAS Task Forces and Advisory Consilium, but also the European Commission, international organisations, NGOs and Academia.
- The Task Force on Fiscal Decentralisation published the *sixth edition of the Report “Fiscal Decentralisation Indicators for SEE”*, steering up dialogue on local government financing in SEE. Additionally, NALAS continued capacitating four member LGAs in utilising the Municipal Finance Self-Assessment (MFSA) diagnostic tool and as a result 12 pilot local governments have progressed towards improved municipal finance management.
- **The second edition of the Report: Benchmarking on Solid Waste Management in South-East Europe 2015** has been prepared, presenting the progress in solid waste management, compared to the 2014 baseline.
- 2017 set the basis for the **“Regional Capacity Development Network (RCDN) for Water and Sanitation Services”**, supported by SECO and BMZ. This Network aims at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the water utilities in the Western Balkans, contributing to better service provision and meeting the EU environmental *acquis communautaire*.
- Within the activities of the EmBuild project where NALAS coordinates the Work Package 5, two publications were elaborated and published: **How to Improve Investment Climate at Local Level** and the **Guide to Raising Awareness at Municipal Level**.

- Together with its **Gender and Youth Focal Points**, in 2017 NALAS continued to enhance regional exchange of experiences and knowledge on gender responsive budgeting and to increase regional cooperation in the area of gender equality among the associations of local government through the UN Women funded project: **“Strengthening the knowledge base and capacities of NALAS to promote gender responsive policy making and to engender local service delivery in SEE”**.
- Under the second strategic objective of NALAS Strategic Plan: **Creation of stable and resilient communities**, the project Migralona started in September with the goal of disseminating good practices and the Italian SPRAR model for integration to the countries of the Western Balkan.
- **NALAS was very active in promoting the role of LGs in front of the European Institutions**. NALAS took active role in lobbying to bring back the Western Balkans in the priority agenda of the EU. A key element in the lobbying and liaison efforts has been the elaboration of the NALAS position paper **“Western Balkans in the loop, Local Governments and their Associations as key stakeholders in the EU Integration process”**.
- The **12th General Assembly of NALAS** took place in Vienna, with over 50 participants, including SEE Mayors as delegates, LGAs’ leadership, partners and supporters. The General Assembly discussed and approved the **new Strategic Plan of the Network for the period 2018-2022**. The new strategy will focus on supporting LGAs and LGs in sustainable local economic development, smart and innovative growth, job creation and community resilience and regional cohesion.

Diversity is in the core of NALAS' values

- the Network takes action to make it a reality



Diversity is a value of highest priority in NALAS: as we declare in the statement of our basic values and principles “We are open, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and inclusive. We promote an equitable development of rural and urban municipalities, young and old, men and women”.

This principle is embedded in the new NALAS Strategic Plan (2018 – 2022) within the Strategic Objective 2: “Stable and Resilient Communities”, focused on decentralised cooperation that contributes to stable, safe, inclusive and resilient SEE communities and regional cohesion.

To address this commitment, as a regional structure NALAS decided to more actively engage in implementing activities in the area of promoting gender equality at local level. Initially, NALAS adopted the Strategy for Gender and Youth (2013-2017), Operational Plan for Gender and Youth and established an informal Network of Focal Points for Gender and Youth. NALAS also commenced with data collection, compilation of relevant literature and developed an overview of the members' gender-related activities.

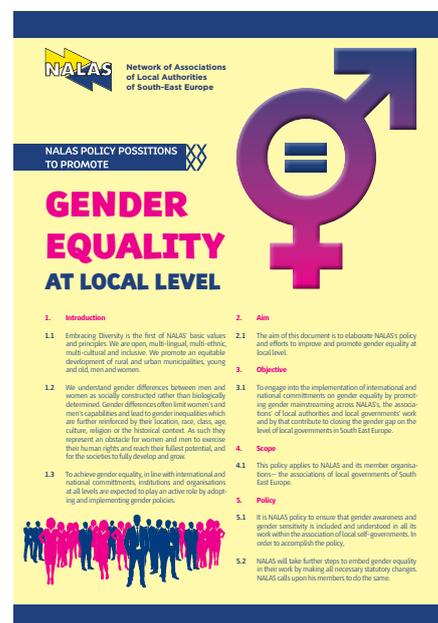
NALAS became an Ambassador of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Man in Local Life and started cooperating with Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in its promotion, with an aim to raise awareness and inspire development of municipal action plans for its implementation.

With the “NALAS Policy Positions to Promote Gender Equality at Local Level” adopted by the General Assembly in April 2016, NALAS committed to “take further steps to embed gender equality in our work by making all necessary statutory changes”. Based on that, NALAS developed an Action Plan that includes specific commitments, priorities and key actions for promoting and development of gender equality for the period of the new NALAS Strategic Plan, 2018-2020. The Network also decided to propose to the next General Assembly a set of statutory changes, that will engender NALAS Statute in the direction of achieving gender equality in the Network.

Data collection on representation of women and men among the elected officials (Mayors and members of the City Council) in South-East Europe, as well as member Associations is NALAS' regular activity.

Gender and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) concepts are mainstreamed into the fifth edition of the report “Fiscal Decentralisation Indicators for SEE” produced by the NALAS Task Force on Fiscal Decentralisation. The chapter “Gender Mainstreaming in Fiscal Decentralisation” became an integral part of the report and introduced a set of indicators to understand the extent of integration of gender into decentralisation and governance.

The inclusion of a gender perspective in urban development and its



management would seek to ensure that both women and men obtain equal access to and control over the resources and opportunities offered by the municipality. It would also seek to ensure that the planning, provision and management of public services benefits both women and men. In this direction, the service of solid waste management was selected to serve as pilot local competence for assessment of the level of application of the principle of gender equality in everyday life. A methodology for identifying gender perspective in this particular local service delivery was discussed with representatives of the NALAS Task Force for Solid Waste and Water Management and the Gender Focal Points.

NALAS is strongly dedicated to support its members and their constituency to increase their awareness, knowledge and skills in relation to gender issues through the provision of appropriate capacity building and resources on relevant topics. In that regard, besides the other capacity building measures, an e-learning course in “Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local level” has been developed and delivered via NALAS e-Academy.

Do you think we are all equal? NOT YET.

The gender disaggregated data collected in a research conducted by NALAS in September 2017 shows that there is a long way to go to achieve gender equality at local level in South-East Europe. **We must and can do more! Empowering women empowers the whole society.**

The report's findings show that only 8,4% of the Mayors in SEE are women in comparison to the EU28 average of 14,9%. The situation is slightly better when it comes to the municipal councillors where 29,9% are women, compared to 32,1 % women councillors in EU28.

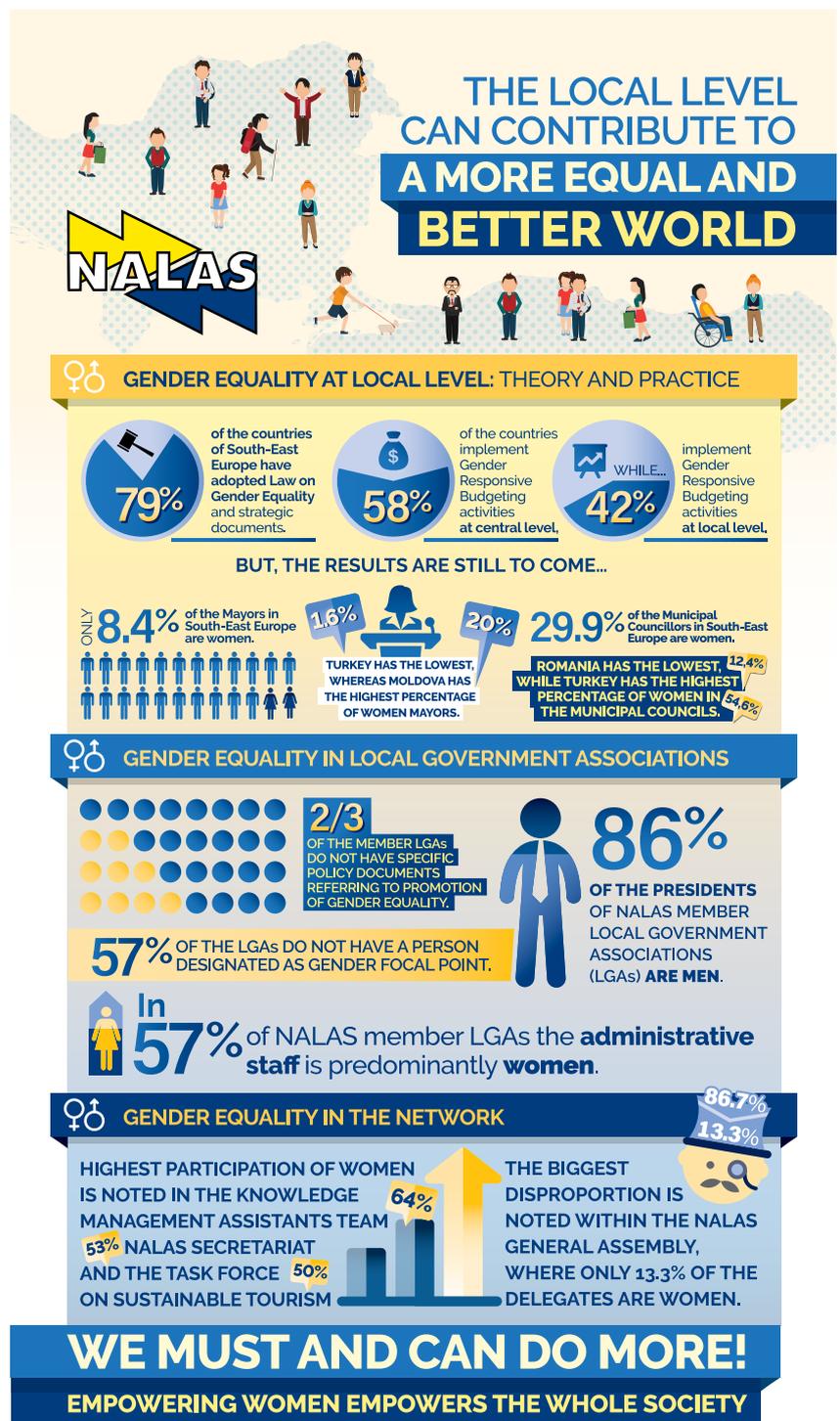
In 10 out of 12 SEE countries, a Law on Gender Equality and strategic documents have been adopted. 7 countries implement gender responsive budgeting (GRB) activities at central level, while only 5 countries have GRB practices at local level.

Local Government Associations (LGAs) have not yet fully embraced the gender equality concept, so gender is rather seen as a cross-cutting issue included in the existing plans and actions. Out of 14 LGAs in the Network, 8 neither have a person designated as a gender focal point, nor specific policy documents referring to promotion of gender equality.

86% of the member LGAs are led by a man as a President of the Association. The administrative staff is predominantly women, while the leadership (consisting of elected officials) of the Associations is predominantly composed of men.

Several NALAS structures lack gender balance. The biggest disproportion is noted within the NALAS General Assembly where only 13,3% of delegates (elected officials) are women. Highest participation of women is noted in the Knowledge Management Assistants' team (64%), NALAS Secretariat (53%) and the Task Force on Sustainable Tourism (50%).

The key findings of the research were presented in the form of a Gender Info-Graphic 2017, designed, published and disseminated within the Network and beyond.



This publication was supported by the UN Women regional project "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South-East Europe and the Republic of Moldova", financially supported by the Austrian Development Agency and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

A course within NALAS' e-Academy helps municipalities improve gender equality

The e-learning course "Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level" aims to enable participants to act both as individuals, and as representatives of organisations working for gender equality. The course helps participants to understand that gender is not only personal, but an institutional and structural issue, and therefore should be considered in local policies.

The course is organised in four modules, each lasting a week:

1. Gender Equality at Local Level
2. Gender Responsive Budgeting at Local Level
3. Local Government Associations as Promoters of Gender Equality at Local Level
4. Best Practices in Promoting Gender Equality at Local Level

Each module includes interesting readings, case studies, videos, quizzes and discussion forums.

Two cycles of the course were delivered in late 2017 and early 2018, with some 40 participants. After completing the course, successful participants received certificates.

All participants stated that they liked the course and would recommend it to a colleague. Look what some of them said:

"Besides all the documents, conventions, strategies, laws, gender is still an issue, different in each country, based on the social limitations, economic possibilities, tradition... One of the solutions might be integrating gender equality in all policies, making it an integral part of planning and development and be consistent in the planned measures"

"Each module provided many useful information about gender mainstreaming at local level-methods and tools, as well as gender responsive budgeting. We learnt from the many real examples already applied in other municipalities and countries"

"I achieved a respectable knowledge on participatory budgeting and ways to achieve it"

If you and your colleagues wish to become part of the next delivery of the course, contact us at: info@nalas.eu.



Considering gender equality in public services: the case of solid waste management

Local government (LG) is an important tier of government which is considered the closest to the citizens. Municipalities provide a vast array of services for citizens which have significant impact on their lives. Local government also provides an extensive range of community services relating to property, economic, social, recreational and cultural spheres. The services play a vital role in defining the quality of life for women and men in a community. Taking this into account, women and men may experience different barriers and constraints with regard to accessing services.

Overview of the gender perspective and participation in the policy-making process in the Public Utility Companies that handle solid waste

Public Utility Companies (PUCs) are established by the local authorities to perform certain task which are of public interest. PUCs for waste management are very common in South-East Europe and greatly outnumber the private operators. PUCs are one of the major actors in implementation of waste management plans and strategies and are in charge for the great part of waste management process/cycle on a certain territory. They operate under the public law and have boards which represent the local authority, but also employees. When considering waste management change from a gender equality perspective, various aspects should be taken into account. One consideration relates to the very low participation of women in decision-making in the sector.

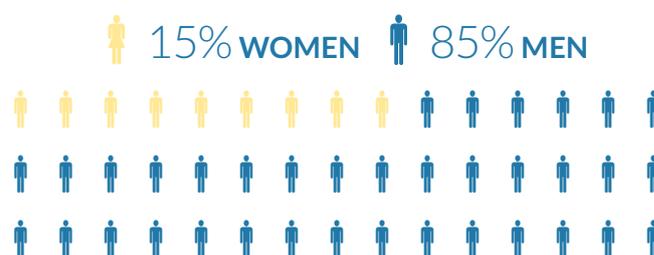
The boards of the PUCs as well as the company executives are appointed by the local government and thus do not have obligation for gender representation as the elected officials in local assemblies do. Yet, PUCs are part of the public sector and have to exercise equal gender representation under the Law on Gender Equality. This is important since waste management is a service dominated by men who have different understanding and views on certain issues compared to women.

For example, a short survey prepared by representatives of the Marmara Municipalities Union, Turkey, shows that more men are employed in the solid waste management system.

Staff engaged in solid waste management	Number of staff (per 10.000 citizens)
Average number of STAFF engaged	15,8
Average MALE staff engaged	15,3
Average FEMALE staff engaged	0,5

In general, female staff is almost not present in solid waste management in Turkey. In some municipalities it rises up to 20%, in Maltepe, followed by Eyüpsultan with 10%, Gaziosmanpaşa with 9%, Kadıköy with 6%, Büyükçekmece with 5,22%, while the smallest ratio of female to total staff is around 0,48% in Bağlılar Municipality.

In Macedonia, the gender structure of the employees in the communal issues sector also shows predominance of men.



Gender structure of the employees in the communal sector-Macedonia

LGs need to be sensitised and lobbied to increase the number of women in the boards of the PUCs. Also, internal mobility towards higher management positions needs to be enabled by PUC's management. LGs can undertake activities to encourage women to apply for jobs in these companies, not only in the administrative sector, but in more technical positions by providing incentives for them (priority in employment, quotas, etc.).

Greater number of female executives in waste management PUCs would might help in introducing the gender perspective into this service in an easier way.

NALAS Task Forces' activities related to particular local competencies and service delivery in several attempts tried to integrate the gender perspective within the work and products. Unfortunately, despite the recognition that women do not have equal access to basic services at local level as men, the challenges in identification of the gender perspective were more than evident. Therefore, the NALAS Task Force on Solid Waste and Water Management in close cooperation with the NALAS Gender Focal Points developed a Guide for Gender Mainstreaming in the Municipal Waste Management.

This guide attempts to provide an answer to the question how to mainstream gender in the waste management process in all its key phases. It is mainly intended at guiding the municipal administration (mayor, municipal administration, public utility companies' management and administration, etc.) step by

▶ step through the process of waste management and providing advice and ideas how to include the gender aspect in its implementation, based on the EU legislative and policy framework for waste management. In this context, the document provides an analytical overview of waste management processes and practice with focus on gender aspects in South-East Europe countries.

The guide focuses on the following main waste management aspects:

- [Planning and decision making in waste management](#);
- [Management of waste following the hierarchy of prevention and waste management given in Waste Framework Directive](#);
- [Data collection and waste statistics and](#);
- [Service delivery by waste operators](#).



The guide has been developed within the NALAS project: “Strengthening the knowledge base and capacities of NALAS to promote gender responsive policy making and to engender local service delivery in SEE”, in the framework of the regional UN Women project “Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in South East Europe and Republic of Moldova”, financially supported by the Austrian Development Agency and the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development.

[Why is gender important for waste management?](#)

One of the key services that local government provides to its citizens is waste management. Waste management or waste disposal is defined as all the activities and actions required to manage waste from its inception to its final disposal. This includes amongst other things collection, transport, treatment and disposal of waste together with monitoring and regulation. It also encompasses the legal and regulatory framework that relates to waste management encompassing guidance on recycling.

In this context, waste management is often perceived as a technical or technological matter and therefore completely deprived of gender perspective. Still, such understanding is not fully accurate since in many ways waste management systems are defined and dependent on human behaviour and requirements which can and often differ between men and women. There are authors who have shown in their research that there are differences in the way women and men look at waste as well as that recycling and reusing of wastes have critical gender dimensions. Furthermore, there are number of waste management aspects to be considered that affect different social groups including men and women differently in regard to their needs and capabilities.

As mentioned earlier, waste management is traditionally considered a gender-neutral area, particularly in the planning phase being based on households as the key element of service reception. However, when it comes to decision making at the level of local authorities or the service provider it is usually heavily influenced by the masculine perspective, since most of the decision makers are men, hence providing a gender-blind perspective. Therefore, it is important to apply gender perspective and mainstreaming in all phases of waste collection starting with the phase of planning, even more so because when it comes to the waste management “the lifestyles of women and men differ in their use of local services and public or open spaces or confront different environmental problems”.

[Gender waste statistic and indicators](#)

Sex- disaggregated data collection and statistics is very important for improved understanding the different habits and preferences of women and men and for responsible planning of the waste management service to serve their different needs. The sex-disaggregated data for the purpose of waste management planning should also include all relevant socio-economic areas of human activities such as employment, income, household habits, ownership, etc. Gender sensitive indicators and data collection should also be applied in monitoring and evaluation of the services to provide valid information for the updating of plans and policies and provide input for the next cycle of planning. Usually statistical offices are obliged by national laws to collect and process sex-disaggregated data at national level, but there is not an obligation for data collection and reporting at local level. Improved gender statistics is certain way to waste management planning which is in line with needs of all socio-economic groups including women and men.



” We have laws that stipulate gender equality, but there are gaps in the implementation part. Political parties should have more women candidates. “

Tatiana Badan is the third Vice-President of NALAS, President of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) and Mayor of Selemet Municipality from Cimislia District of the Republic of Moldova.

Mrs. Badan is an inspiring woman. She has over 25 years of experience in local public administration, serves as a Mayor for more than 15 years, in 4 mandates, and each time she was elected with more than 80% of the votes, which confirms the trust that her voters have in her program and her personality. Mrs. Badan emphasizes that she is not politically affiliated, that makes it very difficult to attract funding from the state budget. This “weakness” made her work harder to attract foreign investments. In 2014 Mrs. Badan was awarded the title “Mayor of the Year”.

Q: Mayor Badan, it is a pleasure talking to you today. If you go back, when was the first time you thought about becoming a Mayor and what was your driving force to go for the local elections?

Immediately after graduating from the University, I joined the Selemet Village Hall and started working as an accountant. At this position, I saw the financial possibilities and I was convinced that even with an austere budget you can do something for your community. On this topic I often had contradictory

discussions with the Mayors who run the municipality at that time, I was trying to convince them that under such conditions, not really favourable, certain things can be done for the community. In 2003, I was encouraged to run for a Mayor. My ideas and initiatives were supported by most of the citizens, so I was elected for a Mayor of Selemet. This repeated during all following elections, in one of them I was even the only candidate. This citizens' trust is an enormous responsibility and I have always tried not to disappoint them, to live up to their expectations. In 2010, my Mayor colleagues elected me for a President of the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM). In 2015, after the local elections, I was also reconfirmed in this position.

Q: A recent survey conducted by NALAS showed the very unpleasant reality - only 8.4% of the Mayors of South-East Europe are women. What do you think are the reasons for this and what can be done to improve the situation?

Policies, culture, traditions of many countries from South-East Europe have not allowed women's involvement in public functions. Let us remember the recent past of the Republic of Moldova, when it was part of the Soviet Union, women did not have the right to go forward and very few succeeded in becoming leaders. Today, in the Republic of Moldova, ►►

▶ out of 898 Mayors, 186 are women (around 21%), which is one of the best results of women participation in local level decision-making in South-East Europe. However, there is a lot of room for improvement, as our society still has stereotypes about women in leadership positions. The situation is already changing and we could get more results if gender equality is promoted truly at state policy level. We have laws that stipulate gender equality, but we have gaps at the implementation part. Political parties should have more women candidates for the positions of deputies in the Parliament, Ministers, etc. – here the change should be made. Women also need family support to get involved in public activities. Usually the woman manages to come up with several arguments to implement one idea or another, while men are being more pragmatic and discuss less. I am convinced that if only women are to rule all the states of the world, wars would stop, because no mother wants her children to fight in military conflicts.

Q: You are very active, not only at national level, as Mayor and President of CALM, but also internationally, as a Vice-President of NALAS, and a member of the Moldovan Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. How do you manage it all? Do you have any advice for other women that might want to get engaged in improving their communities?

I always try to plan my time according to priorities. I have great luck with my family that supports me in everything I do, because it would be very difficult for me to do everything without the support of those at home. I think women are stronger than they can imagine. If they want to get involved, they must not give up after the first failure, women should trust their own forces and find allies. I am convinced that women will succeed, they have the qualities, although sometimes the society makes them feel doubtful about them.

Q: How do you see your role as a Mayor in achieving gender equality in your municipality? Does Selemet Municipality have any best practices in this area?

In Selemet, all public institutions are run by women. This does not mean that men are less trained, but many of them choose to go abroad for higher wages. I would like to achieve a balance in this regard in Selemet. As a village leader I try to promote capable people in leadership positions, both women and men. Achieving and maintaining gender balance in the leadership positions is important for the harmonious development of the community.

Q: The Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM), under your leadership, has established Women's Network. How does it function and what achievements does it have to date?

The Women Mayors' Network was created within CALM, an association representing the interests of over 800 local governments across the country. The launching event took place in December 2011, and since then our common goal has been to make the voice of women in public administration a strong and distinct one. As a consistent promoter of gender equality and of the idea that women must participate in the governance structures at all levels, we have advocated and will continue to do so from national and international platforms for the most active and fair involvement of women in the decision-making processes. Our efforts have spurred a change of perception and attitude towards women in leadership roles. According to Central Electoral Commission data, if after the local elections in 2011, about 18% of the Mayor's positions were occupied by women, then after the local elections in 2015 their number was almost 3% higher.

CALM Women's Network is a training and communication platform for women in local administrations - mayors, district presidents, local councillors, secre-



taries of local councils, local government employees. In addition to empowering women's leadership in local government, we encourage them to actively participate in local and national decision-making forums. The Network also provides an excellent opportunity for exchange of ideas, knowledge and transfer of good practices, addressing the most important aspects and challenges of public administration. Women's participation in the country's governance structures is their right and a fundamental requirement for a genuine democracy. That is why CALM Women's Network focuses its activities on encouraging, training and promoting women in decision-making.

Selemet is the biggest village from the Cimişlia District in Romania, with a population of over 4.000 inhabitants. During her long-lasting Mayor's career Mrs. Badan implemented various projects related to social centre for disabled and vulnerable children, kindergarten, general and music school, etc. In 2014 Selemet launched a new, unique in the country festival, called "iProsop". Concerned with the cultural emancipation of the village, Tatiana Badan didn't neglect the infrastructure projects. She illuminated the central Selemet street, built a portion of the aqueduct to supply water to the village's three sectors that have never had centralised water supply, repaired a considerable segment of the village road and created a waste disposal service.

Q: To conclude, what is your vision for Selemet Municipality, CALM and NALAS in the next five years? Where do you see yourself in that vision?

Selemet is my home town and I'm confident to continue to provide my contribution to increasing the welfare of my community. I will continue with economic projects such as the agribusiness market, wa-

ter and sewerage infrastructure projects, road construction, solid waste management, as well as many social projects. Selemet has the only music school in the Southern region of Moldova that grows many talented young people that are the basis of the culture of the Republic of Moldova. Many young people who graduated from this school continue to work in well-known orchestras abroad, so the renovation and maintenance of this school is a strategic priority for Selemet. Selemet has talented athletes who take the country's flour around the world, and the support of these athletes is the duty of the community. There is also a social centre for children with disabilities and children from socially vulnerable families in Selemet. This is where 47 teenagers are involved in various activities, are helped and guided to prepare their homework, to develop continuously, both physically and intellectually. The young people have a computer room, a rehabilitation hall, a library and all the sanitary facilities. We have also a Selemet Village Museum with over 8.000 exhibits.

The Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova is a necessary association for Mayors and for the consolidation of local democracy in the Republic of Moldova. I want CALM to become more and more powerful, to have an institutionalised dialogue with the Central Public Authorities and thus to be able to elaborate and implement Laws and Strategies that will contribute to increasing the level of local autonomy, decentralization and to improve the lives of Moldovan citizens.

As far as NALAS is concerned - I am sure that members of this Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe will continue to fortify their efforts in lobbying and promoting decentralisation, but also to exchange good practices in order to strengthen local autonomy in this part of Europe, emphasising the increased involvement of women in decision-making process.



UN Women best practices from the Region

Across the Western Balkans, rural women are influencing local budgets and shaping progress

Across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Moldova, UN Women works with governments to implement gender equality commitments and enhance women's participation in decision-making. Funded by the Austrian Development Agency and Swiss Development Cooperation, the programme enables women to influence local budgets to address their diverse needs.



Gentiana Sinjari, Administrator of “Tree of Life” (Pema e jetes) farm in Shkallnur, Durres, Albania.
Photo: UN Women/Yilka Parllaku

Gentiana Sinjari points to the “Tree of Life”, her six-hectare farm overlooking the Adriatic Sea. The land is lush with olive trees, fruits, vegetables and vineyards. For three years now, Sinjari has been working hard to transform the land into an agritourism business to benefit the people of Shkallnu, a rural area near the city of Durres, **Albania’s** largest port.

“This land was love at first sight. We wanted to build a house with a sea view, but then I insisted on building a farm. Visiting this land every day, meeting with the villagers, getting to know the flora and fauna...made me realize that it was more than a holiday dream”, says Sinjari.

She had to start with building a road to access the farm, with the help of friends and villagers. As she began cultivating the land, she realized that irrigation would be a problem. The land had not been cultivated for years and the irrigation system was destroyed. *“The climate is becoming an issue year after year”,* explains Sinjari. *“This land is very fertile, but the rains that*

flood during the winter and lack of rain during summer, make it very difficult for the plants to grow. A drip irrigation system was the first necessity, and it was impossible for me to build it by myself”.

Through the Ministry of Agriculture, Sinjari applied for a subsidy scheme and received about USD 10,000 to install a drip irrigation system that distributes water into the soil, and 3,000 grape plants. Sinjari is among 471 women farmers in Albania who have benefited from the agricultural subsidy scheme that was put in place as a result of gender-responsive budgeting—a tool that is used to ensure that budget allocations and spending meet the needs of men and women equally. Sinjari’s project will benefit many more in the village of Shkallnur, as she plans to hire more than 50 people for running the farm, most of them women.

Across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Moldova, UN Women is working with governments at the local and national levels under the regional programme, titled “Promoting Gender-Responsive Policies in South East Europe and the Republic of Moldova”. The programme, running from 2011 – 2019, is funded by the Austrian Development Agency and Swiss Development Cooperation.

In Albania, for instance, UN Women improved the knowledge and capacity of public servants, in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, on how to use gender-responsive budgeting tools. As a result, Albania approved a new law on Local Government Finance that enables women and men to equally participate in and influence decisions regarding local budgets.

In the **Macedonia,** UN Women supported organisations, such as Strategic Development Consulting and Akcija Zdruzenska, that increased local women’s knowledge on municipal budgets and promoted their participation in public forums, where they could voice their priorities and influence decision-making.

“Rural women in Western Balkans do not benefit equally as men from government funds, especially when it comes to different subsidies and grants. Gender pay gap in the region is around 20 percent, and women’s participation in different government processes is low as well”, explains Ermira Lubani, UN Women Regional Project Manager.

“Through the gender-responsive budgeting project in the region, on one hand, UN Women is supporting the government in identifying the needs and allocating the needed resources to close gender gaps, and on the other hand, supporting women from the community to demand their rights and voice their priorities at the local level”.



Zilha Kurešević, in her strawberry farm in Samac, Bosnia and Herzegovina. UN Women worked with local municipality of Samac to improve gender responsive budgeting. As a result, Kurešević received a grant from the government to purchase drip irrigation system and strawberry seeds.
Photo: UN Women/Rena Effendi

After devastating floods in 2014, 58-year-old Zilha Kurešević, from the town of Šamac in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, lost her job as an accountant and needed to find new ways of providing for her family. With the help of an agricultural scheme, Kurešević started cultivating strawberries in the 500 square metres of land she owned.

“Cultivating strawberries brings more profit than cultivating other fruit or vegetables”, says Kurešević. Strawberry is a crop that grows quickly and produces yield in a short period of time.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, several local governments have created specific schemes to address gender inequalities, primarily in the agricultural sector, where women’s participation is often low, since women are expected to be home-makers and rarely own land, while men are expected to be the breadwinners. Kurešević was among 15 women in her community who received seeds, equipment, fertilizers and the knowledge required to cultivate the land.

In the **Macedonia**, gender-responsive budgeting initiatives in local communities have addressed the lack of public transportation from rural communities to bigger towns, which hindered women’s mobility and their ability to access work or send their children to school.

In the municipality of Sveti Nikole, located in the east-central part of the country, a local organisation named Civic Initiative of Women of Sveti Nikole organised a petition voicing the need for better mobility of women in rural areas.

“We plan to submit the petition to the Mayor and the Council of the Municipality and request a decision for introducing public transportation”, says Milena Maneva, member of Civic Initiative of Women of Sveti Nikole, which is supported by UN Women project partners, Strategic Development Consulting and Akcija Zdruzenska.

Women are also mobilizing in the village of Shipkovic, in the western part of the country, to demand better public transportation. The floods of 2015 had severely damaged the roads in the area, and the only way to reach the nearest town, Tetovo, is through private vans and taxis—a costly means of transportation for most women.



Dzane Kreshova, President of Zenski Forum from Tetovo, addressing the women in the village of Shipkovic.
Photo: UN Women/Mirjana Nedeva

“Women have the right to participate in the local budget decision-making processes and have the right to ask for accountability from their municipality”, says Dzane Kreshova, President of the local non-profit organisation, Zenski Forum.

Across the Western Balkans, women’s needs vary, and actions and commitments to address their needs must be accompanied by resources. *“Women, especially in such rural areas need help to make their life easier and better”,* reminds Gentiana Sinjari from the “Tree of Life” farm in Shkallnur, Albania. Gender-responsive budgeting gives women like Sinjari a tool to voice their needs, influence the local budget-making process and hold their governments accountable for actions that can improve their lives.

OTHER NALAS issues

The idea for NALAS' Regional Decentralisation Observatory: Measuring the progress of decentralisation and its impact on the life of citizens

Good governance continues to be one of the most important expected outcomes of decentralisation and one of the most powerful ideas in development policy. On the other hand, the progress of SEE countries and their local governments towards good governance is very uneven. Measuring the progress in the good governance indicators at local level and providing regional comparisons will certainly help in supporting Local Government Associations' advocacy efforts and in advancing public administration and decentralisation reforms.

This is why NALAS is working on the development of the Regional Decentralisation Observatory (RDO) for South-East Europe. The RDO will be a niche product, placing NALAS and its members in a strategic position for the years to come, with a great opportunity to strengthen the roles of Local Government Associations (LGAs) in national and regional policymaking.

The purpose of the RDO is to regularly monitor the current situation in South East Europe, over a number of important development dimensions and indicators.



The products and services of the RDO are expected to have a great impact in helping LGAs' efforts for improved decentralisation through a data driven and evidence-based process; helping policymakers at na-





tional and local level to understand differences and gaps when compared to the region and therefore help in setting development priorities and public administration reforms, but also contributing to improved donor aid and coordination.

In December 2016, NALAS developed a Concept and Methodology for South East Europe Decentralisation Observatory with support of the Regional Cooperation Council in the frames of the NALAS role as dimension coordinator of the SEE Strategy 2020. The concept was furtherly developed during two consequential workshops in 2017 supported by OSCE Mission Offices in the Western Balkan Countries. The input and discussions of over 40 participants from the SEE countries resulted in a concrete proposal of 180 indicators to monitor/measure decentralisation in SEE within 4 RDO dimensions:

1. **Autonomy of local government**
2. **Quality of local services**
3. **Citizens participation and local government responsiveness**
4. **LGAs involvement in policy dialogue**

The RDO should include a Composite Index, aggregating a number of quantitative and qualitative indicators, used as proxies of different aspects of good governance, which could be tracked over time. The RDO will generate impact on collecting verified comparable data usable for identifying gaps as well as identifying the champions among the 8,000 municipalities represented in the Network through the 14 member LGAs from 12 SEE countries.

"I am glad to see the best experts from all NALAS Task Forces have come together to create jointly a new measurement system to observe the progress of decentralization in the region. This will be done for the first time and it is so much needed", said Mr. Mico Micic, President of NALAS and Mayor of the City of Bijeljina, adding: "I can speak as NALAS President and as a Mayor at the same time. We need to have a clear view on the real situation with decentralization through hard evidence, numbers and indicators. We need to compare where we are and where are we going in the region and beyond in Europe".

Regional Capacity Development Network for Water and Sanitation Services: How will it contribute to the water sector?



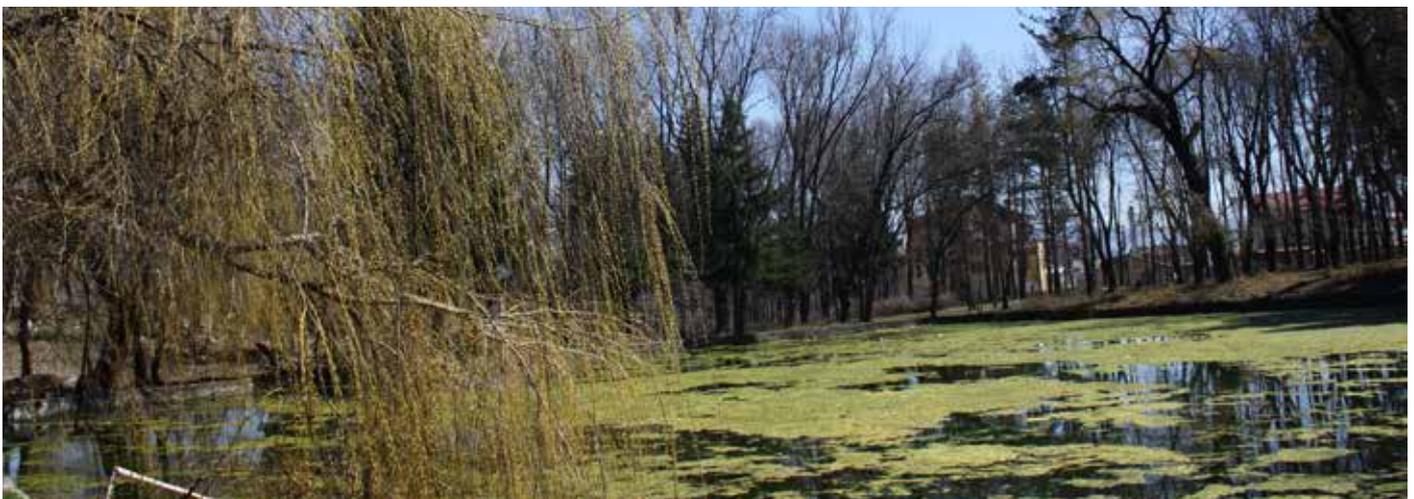
The project “Regional Capacity Development Network (RCDN) for Water and Sanitation Services” is a joint initiative of associations of local governments and water utilities from six Western Balkan countries and their regional networks NALAS and IAWD for establishment of a self-sustained Regional Capacity Development Network. It aims at increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the water utilities in the Western Balkans, contributing to better service provision with larger numbers of population groups getting access to drinking water and sanitation services and meeting the EU environmental Acquis Communautaire.

The project is jointly financed by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and development (BMZ), and it is administratively embedded

in the GIZ Project “Open Regional Fund for Southeast Europe - Modernisation of Municipal Services (ORF MMS)”, commissioned by BMZ. The Project Implementation Team (PIT) consisting of qualified representatives of NALAS, IAWD and AQUASAN is set-up to implement the project as defined in consultation with the partner associations partners.

Three key sets of activities will contribute to achieve the RCDN project outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** The Associations of water utilities and municipalities in the Western Balkans, in cooperation with NALAS and IAWD, are enabled to deliver quality capacity development measures to water utilities and municipalities in the frame of the RCDN in a financially sustainable manner.





- **Outcome 2:** Management and technical staff of water utilities and public officials of local governments have access to and make use of RCDN's high-quality, demand-oriented and formal capacity development products.
- **Outcome 3:** National Authorities, International Financial Institutions and Donors promote the use as well as contribute to the improvement of the RCDN capacity development offer.

The advantage of the RCDN is that it builds upon and integrates the existing Capacity Development (CD) activities, both at regional and at national levels, and facilitates scaling-up and further replication throughout the region, where the strengthening capacities of associations for collaborative CD delivery is core of the methodological approach. The project will provide the necessary assistance for introducing and enhancing functional capabilities, procedures and instruments that shall allow the RCDN partner associations to deliver fee-based CD products to water utilities and local governments in an effective manner.

To this end, the project will enable 16 Associations of municipalities and water utilities from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as their regional networks NALAS and IAWD, to facilitate and coordinate CD initiatives in the region and to support the delivery of CD measures to water utilities and local governments in the respective countries. It will also involve further key stakeholders, such as lending institutions (International Financial Institutions, etc.) active in the infra-

structure sector which are interested in strengthening capacities to develop and secure their operations in the water and sanitation sector or Donors which may benefit from a regional platform to identify CD needs, stimulate dialogue with the stakeholders and design policies.

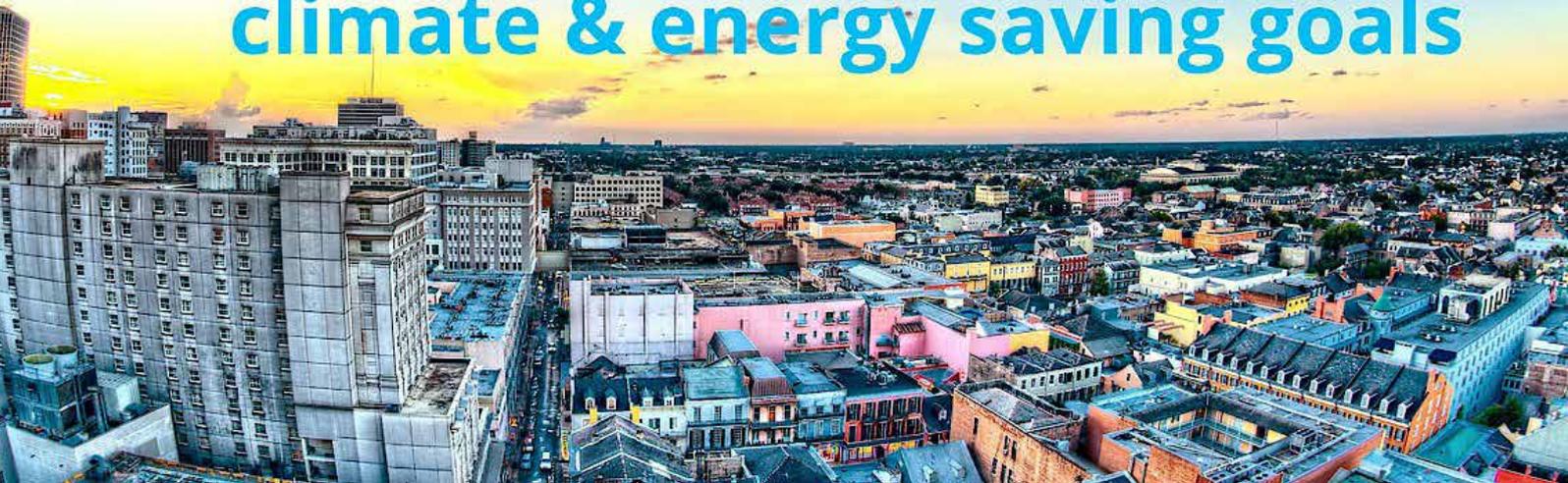
From the very start, priority is set on mobilising potentials as well as existing initiatives or good practices in the countries of implementation which could be used as an opportunity for the swift improvement of the CD offer through up-scaling, complementing, partnering-up, etc. As a result, eight first CD measures (so called Quick Wins) have been identified and developed by the partner associations for implementation in 2018.



For more information about RCDN and your potential involvement, please contact Jelena Janevska (janevska@nalas.eu) or Miodrag Kolic (kolic@nalas.eu).

EmBuild PROJECT BRINGS RESULTS

RENOVATING BUILDINGS is the key to achieving the EU's climate & energy saving goals



EmBuild Project which is bound to empower public authorities at local, regional and national level, in formulating renovation strategies for the building sector that foster deep renovation and facilitate the acceleration of the renovation, is in its final phase. Many of the project results are already delivered and find their users in the six partnering countries, as well as in whole Europe. The project has already produced tools and guidance for inventory of the building stock and stakeholder involvement in public buildings, cost-effective approaches to renovations, recommendations on policies and measures to stimulate cost-effective deep renovations of buildings, provided advice on estimation of expected energy savings and wider benefits and with the coordination of NALAS has published guidance on supporting public authorities as main actors in improving investment climate. A series of national roundtables in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Serbia and Slovenia asserted the need for intergovernmental dialogue and cross-sector exchange.



Final Conference: Energy efficient buildings. Plan. Invest. Renovate!

The culmination of the project will be the Final Conference in Belgrade that will bring over 100 participants on 7 June 2018. The participants represent policy makers, including from EU level, national level authorities, regional actors, investors, local actors (branch associations, consumer organisations), associations and agencies, as well as representatives from industry and media.

Best practices of local plans, aspects that may stimulate similar actions by others and tools that can facilitate the formulation of local plans will be presented. The expected outcome of the conference is: "How can municipalities be the engine for achieving the deep renovation target of Europe's building stock."

The final conference is the main event to present the project activities and results of EmBuild to a broader audience and trigger action beyond the focus of the 100 municipalities of EmBuild in an exciting event with lots of innovative meetings, demonstrations and visualisations.

For more information about EmBuild, please check: <http://embuild.eu/>

NALAS voices South-East Europe local government in front of EU institutions

The EU positioning activities implemented by NALAS since the beginning of 2018 focused on maintaining and following up on the established contacts within the Committee of the Regions and EU Commission services responsible for the Western Balkans region.

CoR opinion on “Enlargement: Inclusion of Western Balkans Local and Regional Authorities in the EU’s Macro-Regional, Cross-Border and Other Transnational Cooperation Initiatives”

NALAS was contacted at an early stage by the Special Rapporteur Dr. Franz Schausberger, the Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs of the CoR (CIVEX Commission) and the drafting team requesting relevant key messages, best practices, position papers, and reports to support the work of the drafting team.

In response to the invitation to participate on 6 February 2018 in an exploratory debate of the CIVEX

Commission on EU Enlargement of the Western Balkans, NALAS elaborated a series of key messages/recommendations regarding the crucial role of LGs and LGAs in the frame of a sustainable EU accession process comprising all levels of government.

The key messages focused on the following topics:

- European Integration
- Decentralisation and Democracy
- Dialogue facilities EU - local level
- Reform challenge of public administrations
- EU support instruments
- LGAs as strategic partner
- Opportunities for LGs in EU Macro-Regional, Cross Border Cooperation and Other Transnational Cooperation Initiatives

Interesting to note is that the rapporteur used a NALAS message to summarise his position by stressing: *“Decentralisation is a pillar of the democratic reform process in the Western Balkans and regional and local governments in the Western Balkans should be an integral part of the regular negotiations in the frame of the EU accession process”*.

Besides, the CoR draft Opinion to be shared in its ratified version with the EU Commission, the Council and the European Parliament, contains in its amended position 18 a direct link to NALAS: *“The activities and initiatives undertaken by local government associations and their regional network, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS), should be highlighted in particular here, and they should be integrated and promoted to a greater extent at European level”*.



Meeting of CoR and NALAS Presidents

There is a strong commitment of the Committee of the Regions to work closely with NALAS to improve the role of local governments and their Associations in the EU integration processes and to ensure effective decentralisation.

For many years now, these processes systematically exclude local governments, forgetting that the solutions to the many problems of the accession countries can be solved by the local and regional level. If Europe strives to be close to its future citizens, then it has to go local. The promotion of local democracy is key to contribute to reconciliation and stabilisation in the region and the preparation of EU integration of the Western Balkans.

These are some of the key messages shared by the **First Vice-President of NALAS, Mayor Darko Fras**, and the **President of the Committee of the Regions, Mr. Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, at a meeting held on 15 February 2018 in Brussels.

“The EU has committed to serve as a leader of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the world, which is expressed explicitly in the “New Consensus for Development” of the EU. It does not make any sense that this does not apply to the enlargement policies and pre-accession assistance. We look at the Committee of the Regions as our prime ally to advocate with the Commission to change this approach and rely on NALAS and the



Local Government Associations as its strategic partners in implementing the enlargement agenda”, said Mr. Fras.

NALAS and CoR share similar missions and both Presidents see a potential for deepening and broadening the cooperation in the future for the benefit of the local governments of the Region. Some of the proposed actions include: obtaining an Observer Status for NALAS that will allow the Network to be present at CoR CIVEX meetings and provide input, developing a Memorandum of Understanding and an Action Plan, bringing the knowledge on decentralisation together, evidence-based policy making, active participation of NALAS in the upcoming Enlargement Days, etc.

Enlargement Days 2018

As a response to NALAS' active participation in the Enlargement Days 2017 with former NALAS President Naim Ismajli and its Executive Director Kelmend Zajazi opening windows of opportunities to bring to the fore concrete NALAS proposals on the Western Balkans, the CoR invited NALAS to play an active role in preparation and contribution to the event, both the Working Group on Western Balkans and the plenary.

According to the request to identify speakers for the Western Balkans Working Group and the plenary, NALAS submitted speaker proposals for the Working Group agenda on “EU-Kosovo relations” and for “Digital transformation of the Western Balkans”. Besides, the next NALAS President Darko Fras will form part of the panel of opening session of the Enlargement Day Plenary on 4 May 2018, together with the President of the CoR, the Presidency of the EU Council, DG NEAR and RCC.



The first e-platform on Gender Equality and Gender Responsive Budgeting at local level established by ZELS

The Association of Local Self-Government Units in Macedonia (ZELS) designed and launched the first online platform on Gender Equality (GE) and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) at local level, <http://www.rob.zels.org.mk:3000/>, to channel and share important international, regional, national and local documents and practices among municipalities. The platform has been particularly valuable in encouraging other municipalities to undertake similar activities and to promote GRB among the local self-government units. The e-platform was established within the project “Enhancing the capacities of local administration and municipal bodies on Gender responsive policies and budgets”, implemented from 2014-2016, with the support of UN Women.

The project resulted with improved quality and empowerment of municipal capacities on gender responsive budgeting, increased number of municipalities with prepared GE actions plans, GE programmes and GE strategies. On the other side, ZELS staff strengthened its capacities in this field, and as a result, the Association established the Gender Equality Working Group (GEWG), as a part of its networking structure and adopted more strategic approach towards gender equality,

as demonstrated by the ZELS’ first Gender Equality Action Plan which is in line with ZELS’ Strategy for the period of 2016-2020.

The follow-up project “Strengthening the capacities for gender responsive policy making and budgeting at local level”, for the period 2017-2018, is designed to enhance the sustainability of the previous project results and will strive towards promotion of gender responsive fiscal laws, policies and national action plans to enable specific budgetary allocations for gender equality in local self-government units. Specifically, the project will further support the exchange of knowledge and capacity development efforts of ZELS, its Gender Equality Working Group, as well as local administration and

councillors in the implementation of GRB in local budget planning. It will be magnified throughout: coordination of local and national authorities in the application of GRB and learning from good practices and experiences both at the country and at regional level.

The ZELS e-platform will continue to serve as a repository of knowledge on GRB on which beneficiaries can rely for relevant and up to date information on GE and GRB both in the country and the region. In addition, beneficiaries are expected to contribute to the e-platform with relevant information and updates on GE and GRB-related developments in their respective municipalities, thus contributing to the enrichment of the content placed on the e-platform.



Municipalities, NAMRB and the Bulgarian (Balkan) Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Municipalities, NAMRB and the Bulgarian (Balkan) Presidency of the Council of the European Union

From 1 January until the end of June 2018, Bulgaria is holding the rotation Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Four are the leading priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency:

1. The Future of Europe and the Young People - economic growth and social cohesion;
2. European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans;
3. Security and stability in a strong and united Europe; and
4. Digital economy and skills of the future.

The main events calendar of the Bulgarian Presidency includes over 25 high-level events, more than 200 political events, 6 parliamentary events and 12 informal Councils. Part of this program is organised and hosted by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB), the national delegation to the EU Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Bulgarian local authorities.

Based on the request of the Bulgarian Presidency, on 22 March 2018, CoR adopted the opinion "Enlargement: Inclusion of Western Balkans Local and Regional Authorities in the EU's Macro-regional, Cross-border and other Transnational Cooperation Initiatives". It focuses on preparing local and public administrations as "absolutely essential" for the success of integration. Around 70% of EU legislation requires action by regions and cities. The opinion warns of "a shift towards more autocratic forms of government and centralisation" and says that EU "must be stronger and more stable" as a result of enlargement to the Western Balkans. CoR notes that, especially at local level in the Western Balkan countries, cross-border cooperation has been stepped up through the exchange of experience, transfer of know-how, transfer of best practices and

the introduction of new methods and approaches. The activities and initiatives undertaken by local associations and local organisations such as the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS) should be highlighted in particular here, and they should be integrated and promoted to a greater extent at European level. CoR also suggests involving the representatives of local and regional authorities or local associations in the process of IPA negotiations, programming, monitoring and evaluation.

The events and initiatives of the regional and local dimension of the Presidency that are organised, implemented and hosted by NAMRB and Bulgarian municipalities are:

- 1 January - 30 June, Grant Scheme - Support of municipal initiatives related to the regional dimension of the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency 2018

As a result of the efforts and lobbying of NAMRB, a national funding of 150,000 Euros was provided for the implementation of municipal projects for promotion of the Presidency. After an expert evaluation, NAMRB provided funding for 93 municipal projects. Through them, more than 3 million people, from children in kindergartens to adults, participate in cultural and sporting events, flash mobs and festivals, quizzes and competitions promoting the European Union and the Bulgarian Presidency.

- **1 February, Brussels:** Presentation of the national priorities of the Bulgarian presidency at the CoR Plenary Session;
- **8 March, Sofia:** Visit of the Vice-President of the CoR Markku Markkula to NAMRB;
- **9 March, Sofia:** Conference of CoR EPP Group - Investments of Regions and Cities in Education for the Strengthening of European Values;
- **22 March, Brussels:** Reception of the Bulgarian CoR delegation;

- **12-13 April, Veliko Tarnovo:** Meeting of the Secretaries-General and Executive Directors of the 60 Associations, members of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) from 41 countries;
- **16 April:** Public promotion of CoR and NAMRB Brochure for the Bulgarian Presidency;
- **16-19 May, Sofia:** Study visit of delegation of 50 Mayors from the Austrian Association of Municipalities;
- **6 June, Sofia:** CoR Coter Commission meeting;
- **6 June, Sofia:** Official NAMRB reception for CoR participants;
- **7 June, Sofia:** CoR Bureau Meeting;
- **7 June, Sofia:** CoR and NAMRB Conference MFF after 2020;
- **8 June, Sofia:** High Level Forum on Cohesion Policy

Below are some of the highlights from the municipal projects implemented under the Grant Scheme - Support of municipal initiatives related to the regional dimension of the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency 2018:

Sapareva Banya Municipality promotes folklore richness, lifestyle and culture. The 4th edition of the International Folklore Festival 'Maid Sings, Forest Swingings' will be organised with the funds provided by NAMRB.



Photo: Folklore Festival 'Maid Sings, Forest Swingings'

The municipality of Belitsa is the ambassador of the small mountain municipalities in the EU. It will create a model for future general treatment of mountain regions and the opportunities for their socio-economic development with a common legislative framework and specific funding. Part of the messages are to limit the depopulation of mountain areas with the development of the economy and the provision of jobs and work to preserve the environment. On behalf of the mountain municipalities Belitsa insists to seek possibility of targeted funding for these regions.



Photo: Official launch of Belitsa project

Nessebar Municipality puts young people in the centre of their project - students from the second level of education in the city. An awareness campaign is planned to establish a positive attitude towards the EU by informing about the commitments and benefits to the countries as members of the Union.

In February, Svishtov Municipality held the first international information day to raise awareness among students, young people, citizens, representatives of the non-governmental sector and guests from friendly EU municipalities. The event was attended by over 30 young people from Svishtov and their peers from the Czech Republic and Slovenia.



Initiative of the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro for establishment of a Fund for Local Self-Governments for pre-financing of EU funded projects (Revolving Fund)

Within the financial perspective 2014-2020 of the European Union, local governments have at their disposal **significant funds for the implementation of capital and strategically important projects** in the interest of citizens and local communities.

In recent years, the Montenegrin local governments have passed through the program of **capacity building in the use of EU funds**. Acquired experiences and established partnerships with international partners, are a good prerequisite for the active participation of the municipalities in the new cross border and transnational EU programs as well as other EU programs.

However, when it comes to the capacities of local governments in Montenegro to absorb these funds, **the main challenge which they face is the pre-financing of EU projects**.

Namely, for the implementation of projects in a large part of these programs, local governments have to pre-finance 90% of the funds, that is, they have to finance from their own resources project activities until they are refunded by the EU, which can last up to a year in a regular procedure. This is a significant burden for municipal budgets, especially having in mind that the majority of municipalities are in a difficult financial situation.

It is therefore important to establish a mechanism that would provide financial support to municipalities in the preparation and implementation of projects funded by the EU.

This mechanism/financial instrument, which could be a kind of a Revolving Fund, could be established within the framework of the Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro as a special credit line with preferential interest rate. Local governments would be obliged to repay the loan upon approval of the report and payment done by the Managing Authority.

As the loans are repaid into the Fund, it is re-released for new lending, and thus money permanently circulates in the system, so, with the exception of the initial investment, there is no need to make new investments in this Fund. **The initial investment that would be sufficient for the pre-accession period is estimated at 2 million EUR.** The loan term could be up to 12 months.

The need for bigger investments will occur after Montenegro joins the EU and accesses the structural and cohesion funds of the EU.

Recent developments

- The Union of Municipalities of Montenegro in 2017 participated **in the session of the Committee on European integrations of the National Parliament**, discussing current level of EU funds absorption on local level and administrative capacities. UoM presented the results of its Network of Municipal Project Managers and the needs assessment related to the Revolving Fund for pre-financing of EU projects.
- After several negotiation and explanatory meetings with the Minister for European Affairs/NIPAC it was agreed that a **Revolving fund for pre-financing of LGs EU projects should be established within the State Budget and be in a form of no-credit loans to municipalities** and not within the framework of the Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro as a special credit line with preferential interest rate. This will lower the costs of municipalities and overcome existing borrowing limitations.
- In the Parliament of Montenegro, answering the question by a MP, **Prime Minister Dusko Markovic** stated that pre-financing obstacles of municipali-

A Network of Practitioners for Local Development established in Bosnia and Herzegovina



ties could be a major issue in absorption of the existing and future EU funds and that it should be addressed by the Government. In that regard, he announced that a solution will be proposed based on the existing initiative of the UoM.

- *The Revolving Fund was introduced in the Proposal of the Law on Budget of Montenegro for 2018*, adopted by the Government of Montenegro and sent to the Parliament for further discussion. The Revolving Fund is addressed in the explanation part of the Law and foreseen in the amount of 0,5 million euro.
- The Law on Budget of Montenegro for 2018 was adopted by the Parliament of Montenegro, with the same amount for the Revolving Fund as envisaged in the Proposal of the Law. Although *UoM sent an initiative for increasing the amount for the Revolving Fund*, in the adopted Law the amount remained the same, 0,5 million euro. *UoM is preparing a new initiative in this regard.*
- For legal, smooth and effective usage of the Revolving Fund, further *changes of the current Law on Financing of Local Self-Government are needed* and UoM already sent its suggestions for articles describing the Revolving Fund. Moreover, even after changing of the Law on Financing of Local Self-Government, several by-laws (Rulebooks, Guidelines, forms, etc.) will need to be drafted and adopted.
- Currently, by the municipalities and their public bodies there are trilateral and transnational EU projects in phase of implementation *worth more than 3,6 mil euro (budget part of Montenegrin local authorities)* and therefore fully functional Revolving Fund is crucial instrument for smooth financial implementation of the projects.

The Network of Practitioners for Local Development was established in Sarajevo on 15 March 2018 for the purpose of exchanging good practices and networking between the members of the Associations of Municipalities and Towns of Republic of Srpska and the Federation of BiH.

The Association of Municipalities and Towns of the Republic of Srpska and the Association from the Federation of BiH organised a founding meeting based on expressed needs from the everyday practice of officials working on local development affairs. During the founding meeting, representatives from 70 municipalities and towns signed a Declaration on the Establishment of a Network of Practitioners for Local Development, expressing the common orientation of practitioners from the local level to building a functional Network that will contribute to the improvement of professional capacities and more effective management of local development activities in BiH.

With the exchange of good practices and networking, the Network will enable the Associations' members to jointly address priority issues to higher levels of government and also the international organisations active at local level.

The practitioners' Network for Local Development will act as an informal advisory body of the members of the Associations, which aims to improve the application of the regulatory and methodological framework, expertise and good practices in the domain of development planning and implementation of priorities and reporting on the achieved development results of local self-government units.

Support to the work of the Network of Practitioners for Local Governance in BiH is provided by the Integrated Local Development Project (ILDPP), a joint project of the Government of Switzerland and UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Who we are?

NALAS is a network of associations of local authorities of South East Europe. The Network brings together 14 Associations which represent roughly 9000 local authorities, directly elected by more than 80 million citizens of this region. The NALAS Secretariat, based in Skopje, is responsible for the overall coordination and the implementation of the activities.

NALAS was created in 2001 following the first Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe (Skopje, November 2000), organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Network was established under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (Working Table 1) and the Council of Europe. During the first years, NALAS functioned as an informal organisation with regular meetings, seminars and training programmes. In July 2005 NALAS became an officially registered association with its seat in Strasbourg. The NALAS Secretariat was established in March 2007.

NALAS promotes the process of decentralisation in cooperation with central governments and international organisations, considering local self-government as a key issue in the current process of transition affecting the various countries in South-East Europe. NALAS builds partnerships in order to contribute to the reconciliation and stabilisation process in the region and henceforth contributes to the process of the European integration of the whole region.

NALAS initiates and carries out regional initiatives for its members and helps the associations to become viable representatives of local authorities vis-à-vis central government. NALAS aims to provide services to local governments for the benefit of the citizens in the region and wishes to develop itself as the knowledge centre for local government development in South-East Europe, recognised among all relevant stakeholders.

Our members

- Association of Albanian Municipalities
- Association of Cities in the Republic of Croatia
- Association of Communes of Romania
- Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Croatia
- Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia
- Association of Kosovo Municipalities
- Association of Towns and Municipalities in the Republic of Srpska
- Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of Macedonia
- Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova
- National Association of Municipalities from the Republic of Bulgaria
- Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
- Marmara Municipalities Union
- Union of Municipalities of Montenegro

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If you want to contribute to the next issue of NALAS Newsletter, please contact NALAS Knowledge and Communications Manager Jelena Janevska at janevska@nalas.eu