

NALAS Newsletter

02 | APRIL - JULY 2026



Local leadership. Regional solutions.

Ten stories from a network turning shared challenges into local results.

Between April and July 2026, NALAS turned regional dialogue into practical tools and opportunities for local governments - from new political leadership and policy positions to municipal investment, inclusive services, climate action and reform monitoring. This issue brings together the people, partnerships and ideas moving local government closer to citizens across South-East Europe and Ukraine.

Leadership for local results

NALAS' 21st General Assembly connected political direction with practical priorities for municipalities.



A NEW PRESIDENCY

Emil Drăghici

President of ACoR and Mayor of Vulcana-Băi, Romania, was elected NALAS President. He is supported by Vice-Presidents Agim Aliu, Irfan Čengić and Tadej Beočanin.

He thanked outgoing President Dubravko Bilić and called for stronger local government as a foundation for stronger democracy.

A network responding to a changing Europe

Held in Sibiu, Romania, from 20 to 22 April and co-organised with ACoR, the Assembly brought together local leaders and partners around a clear message: local governments are where trust is built and where European reforms become visible in people's daily lives. Speakers connected democratic resilience with local economies, infrastructure, health, education and equal opportunities for women and girls.

Members approved the 2025 activity and financial reports and adopted the 2026 workplan and budget. Executive Director Kelmend Zajazi reported that more than 3,200 mayors, local officials and administration representatives took part in NALAS activities in 2025.

Two policy positions were adopted: one on stronger collaboration between local governments and public utilities in water and sanitation; and one defining the role of local government associations in sustainable urban mobility planning.

[Read the full story](#)

FROM REPRESENTATION TO DELIVERY

A dedicated roundtable with associations from South-East Europe and the Eastern Partnership examined how LGAs are evolving beyond advocacy to provide direct support and services to municipalities.



EU access: Build local expertise so municipalities can design and implement EU projects.

Better services: Scale professional training, peer learning and practical municipal support.

Local autonomy: Use strategic planning and flexible roadmaps to navigate reform and uncertainty.

[Read the full story](#)

Green solutions worth scaling

The 2026 Green Champions Awards recognised municipalities turning climate ambition into practical public value.



1

CLIMATE ACTION & ENERGY

Kragujevac, Serbia

RENEW-KG combines public-building renovation, solar panels on schools, cleaner heating, LED lighting, reforestation and SECAP development to cut emissions and improve air quality.

2

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Bursa, Türkiye

An abandoned pepper-drying facility now turns municipal and agricultural plastic waste into drip-irrigation pipes, distributed to farmers and returned into a closed recycling loop.

3

GREEN & INCLUSIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Lezhë, Albania

Rehabilitation of the Drin River basin created greener, safer and more accessible promenades, gardens, bridges, play and sports spaces for residents, families and vulnerable groups.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Marmara Municipalities Union received a special award recognising the breadth of green initiatives implemented by municipalities across Türkiye.

[Explore the winning initiatives](#)

From policy to local climate action

Two regional workstreams are giving municipalities practical routes to circular services and climate-resilient mobility.



15-16 APRIL | SKOPJE



MOBILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Circular economy: building a common local toolbox

NALAS convened the first meeting of its Working Group on Circular Economy, bringing together associations and municipalities from across South-East Europe. A practical "Circular Economy Marketplace" showed that promising local practices already exist, especially in waste management, but often remain fragmented and outside mainstream planning.

Participants called for simple indicators and benchmarking tools that reflect local realities. Their priorities will shape a targeted training programme covering circular solutions in local services, municipal roadmaps, and access to finance and project development.

WHY IT MATTERS

The Working Group gives local governments an ongoing platform to co-design practical, gender-responsive and measurable approaches instead of importing one-size-fits-all models.

[Read the full story](#)

A clearer regional route to sustainable urban mobility

NALAS' new policy position gives associations a roadmap for engaging national institutions, supporting National SUMP Support Programmes, building municipal capacity, enabling peer exchange and improving data, monitoring and reporting.

It was developed alongside a Western Balkans policy framework prepared with the Transport Community, GIZ and CIVINET Slovenia-Croatia-SEE. At the United for Climate Conference in Tirana, 5-7 May, the NALAS Expert Group examined financing and methodological tools for putting the recommendations into practice.

The work was reinforced by the Climate-Resilient Sustainable Urban Mobility Academy and a 22 April Clean Bus Platform study visit to Île-de-France Mobilités.



[Read the full story](#)

Turning resources and ideas into local results

New investment in Montenegro and hands-on project development for Ukraine are expanding municipalities' capacity to act.



A new route to stronger local development in Montenegro

Funded by the European Union and implemented by NALAS with the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, EU4ALL combines direct municipal grants with technical assistance, capacity development and peer learning. It responds to infrastructure gaps, constrained local finance and limited administrative and technical capacity.

€2.1m

TOTAL BUDGET -
OVER

€1.5m

MUNICIPAL GRANTS

40

MONTHS |
2026-2029

3 priorities

Services &
infrastructure
Local economy
EU funds

[See how EU4ALL will support municipalities](#)



Ukrainian municipalities move from needs to fundable projects

Representatives of 13 Ukrainian municipalities completed four intensive days of EU Fundraising and Project Development training through U-LEAD with Europe - Pathways of Partnership. Working with real local priorities, participants mapped stakeholders, built problem and objective trees and developed early logical framework matrices.

The programme also covered EU evaluation logic and funding opportunities, with particular attention to CERV. NALAS mentorship continues after the training so municipalities can refine their concepts into stronger applications and partnerships.

[Read the full story](#)

Inclusion by design

Municipalities need both evidence about who is being left behind and budgets that turn that knowledge into better services.



CAPACITATION PROGRAMME
to improve the socioeconomic participation of women from vulnerable groups and youth and children at risk

Call for Applications
for Municipalities in Western Balkans

From local evidence to inclusive services

In June, NALAS member associations launched calls for municipalities to join a 14-month capacitation programme supporting the socio-economic participation of women from vulnerable groups and youth and children at risk.

Municipalities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia will strengthen their ability to understand local needs and develop practical, locally owned measures. The programme is delivered through Bridges for Inclusion, part of GIZ's regional SPARK project, on behalf of BMZ.

PARTNER ASSOCIATIONS

Republic of Srpska • North Macedonia
Montenegro • Albania

The calls linked municipal participation to a wider regional learning journey focused on evidence, capacity and practical service responses.

[Read the full story](#)



16 STORIES

Budgets that respond to people's lives
A new NALAS booklet shows how gender-responsive budgeting translates commitments into everyday change.

The human side of gender-responsive budgeting

Prepared by the NALAS Group of Gender Focal Points, the publication gathers 16 human-interest stories from across South-East Europe. Each shows how inclusive budget choices can reshape services, opportunity and belonging.

The stories span women's employment and rural growth; care, health and social protection; culture, sport and education; prevention and response to gender-based violence; women and peacebuilding; and data, governance and GRB mainstreaming.

THE MESSAGE

"When budgets respond to people, they build communities where everyone belongs and thrives."

The booklet is designed to help local officials and policymakers adapt proven approaches and develop new solutions.

[Explore the booklet](#)

Evidence for a stronger local voice

The future LORAI Dashboard is being shaped around one question: what do Reform Agendas mean for local governments and citizens?



From baseline findings to dashboard logic

NALAS brought LORAI partners together to validate the regional baseline study, review monitoring indicators and shape the data collection, analysis and reporting process. The joint EU-Council of Europe programme brings together the Congress, NALAS, CEMR and seven NALAS member associations. Local government associations' findings were considered alongside central-government interviews by KDZ, allowing participants to compare perspectives across the region.

The discussion confirmed a shared challenge: local governments are affected by many Reform Agenda measures, yet are often treated mainly as implementers, without sufficient financial and technical capacity or a strategic place in decision-making.

Working partly in a world café format, participants prioritised indicators with the greatest local implications, mapped available data and its owners, and examined financial consequences. Their input produced the first outline of the NALAS-developed LORAI Dashboard.

[Read the full story](#)

WHAT THE DASHBOARD WILL ADD

- 1 **Local lens**
Track Reform Agenda measures through their implications for municipalities.
- 2 **Shared evidence**
Create a comparable regional base for dialogue and advocacy.
- 3 **Clear access**
Present findings in an understandable, open and policy-relevant format.
- 4 **Stronger role**
Support local governments as strategic partners, not only implementers.

Local government is where reform becomes real.

Across this issue - from climate action and public investment to inclusion and Ukraine partnership - the common thread is practical regional cooperation that helps municipalities deliver better outcomes for citizens.

www.nalas.eu | [LinkedIn](#) | [X](#)