NALAS Newsletter

03 | JULY - OCTOBER 2026

Local leadership.
Regional solutions.

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

Between 15 July and 15 October 2026, NALAS connected regional evidence with practical local action - from reform monitoring and resilient water services to youth cooperation, social inclusion, climate implementation and support for Ukrainian municipalities. This issue follows the partnerships, tools and people helping local governments turn shared challenges into better outcomes for citizens.



LORAI Dashboard Regional Workshop, Skopje, 16-17 July 2026. Photo: NALAS

16-17 JULY

A local lens on the Western Balkans' Reform Agendas

The first outline of the LORAI Dashboard took shape in Skopje, turning municipal experience into a stronger evidence base for reform monitoring.

NALAS brought project partners together to test a simple but essential proposition: Reform Agendas will only produce durable results if local governments are involved in the decisions, financing and monitoring that shape implementation.

The workshop validated findings from a regional baseline study, compared the perspectives of local government associations with interviews conducted at central level, and examined the indicators most relevant to municipalities. Across the region, participants saw a recurring gap: municipalities are frequently treated as implementers, yet are not given sufficient technical capacity, financial resources or influence over policy design.

Working in a world cafe format, the group prioritised draft indicators, identified available data and data owners, and explored the financial implications of Reform Agenda measures. These exchanges shaped the dashboard's prospective audiences, structure and reporting logic.

The emerging LORAI Dashboard will offer an accessible way to track reforms from a local government perspective. Its wider value is strategic: evidence can help associations advocate for municipalities to be recognised not only as delivery bodies, but as partners throughout the reform cycle.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

LORAI - Local Observatory on Reform Agendas Implementation in the Western Balkans

A joint European Union and Council of Europe programme implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, in partnership with NALAS, CEMR and seven NALAS member associations. LORAI assesses the role of local governments and builds the foundations for their stronger involvement in implementation and monitoring.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS NOT THE LAST MILE OF REFORM. IT IS PART OF THE DESIGN.

READ THE FULL STORY



Left: field visit in Ilirska Bistrica. Right: WATERVILL partners in Valencia. Photos: NALAS / WATERVILL

20 JULY - 18 SEPTEMBER

From field evidence to practical water solutions

WATERVILL moved from on-site diagnosis in its pilot areas to the design of tools that can strengthen rural and mountain water systems across the Mediterranean.

From 20 to 23 July, consortium partners visited Ilirska Bistrica in Slovenia and Teslić in Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Technical teams observed water treatment and abstraction sites, complemented the project's infrastructure survey and spoke directly with local stakeholders about shortages, water quality, ageing systems and climate-related pressures.

The visits are part of an assessment covering four pilot municipalities: Žabljak, Ilirska Bistrica, Bitola and Teslić. Their findings will help partners tailor solutions to the realities of smaller, rural and mountain communities rather than import models designed for large urban systems.

That field evidence informed the WATERVILL Steering Committee in Valencia on 17 and 18 September. Partners advanced a digital database of solutions, climate-proofing approaches, a Decision Support System and a capacity-building offer for municipal representatives. Pilot municipalities also set out their investment needs and the practical obstacles they expect when modernising local water services.

A visit to the Realón Drinking Water Treatment Plant - an infrastructure serving around 1.6 million people in Valencia and its metropolitan area - offered a large-scale reference point as WATERVILL shifts from assessment towards testing and replication.

WATERVILL AT A GLANCE

Funded by Interreg Euro-MED, WATERVILL addresses water scarcity by combining smart technologies, nature-based approaches and local knowledge. NALAS leads knowledge-sharing, supports an e-learning resource and helps tested solutions travel through a regional community of practice. NALAS also receives financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

NEW: WATERVILL NEWSLETTER NO. 2

OPEN THE NEWSLETTER

FIELD VISITS **VALENCIA MEETING**





Study visit and regional working seminar, Ohrid, 1-4 September 2026. Photos: NALAS

1-4 SEPTEMBER

Town twinning becomes a platform for youth cooperation

Twenty practitioners from across the Western Balkans redesigned municipal partnerships around meaningful youth participation, peacebuilding and practical follow-up.

Town-twinning often begins with a formal agreement. In Ohrid, NALAS and UNDP asked what it takes for that agreement to become a working space where young people can shape regional cooperation.

Local decision-makers, youth officers, local government associations, youth councils and civil society organisations mapped existing partnerships and tested them against a practical Ladder of Youth-Inclusive Decentralised Cooperation. The ladder moves from ceremonial contact and consultation towards co-design and, ultimately, an institutionalised youth role backed by a mandate and budget.

The seminar combined honest peer learning with visits to the Municipality of Ohrid and Youth Centre Ohrid. Participants examined not only what structures exist, but how they work: who decides, how participation is financed, and whether young people's involvement can last beyond a single activity.

A Town-Twinning Design Clinic then connected emerging cooperation ideas with possible partners, deadlines and funding under CERV, Erasmus+, Interreg IPA, RYCO and other instruments. The results will feed into a NALAS toolkit on decentralised cooperation and town-twinning, as well as follow-up through the Regional Forum of Mayors.

THE YPS LENS

Five pillars of UN Security Council Resolution 2250

1. Participation
2. Protection
3. Prevention
4. Partnerships
5. Disengagement and reintegration

Implemented within the UN Joint Programme Youth 4 Inclusion, Equality & Trust.

READ THE FULL STORY



Course launch visuals for Albania and Montenegro, September 2026. Images: NALAS / LinkedIn

14-15 SEPTEMBER

One regional course, four local learning journeys

NALAS and its member associations launched language-adapted e-learning courses in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina) to help municipalities see who is being left behind - and act on the evidence.

The NALAS e-Academy course, LNOB Social Mapping and Evidence-Based Policymaking, gives municipal teams a structured path from identifying vulnerable groups to improving local policy and services. Introductory webinars opened four-week learning journeys combining practical assignments, methodological tools, templates, facilitated discussion and peer exchange.

The regional rollout was coordinated locally by NALAS member associations. It connected municipal administrations with service providers and specialists in social research and analysis, reinforcing the cross-sector cooperation needed for credible social mapping.

Participants work through four linked modules: the foundations of diversity, gender equality, social inclusion, Agenda 2030 and Leave No One Behind; the LNOB social mapping methodology; development of social mapping reports; and evidence-based decision-making. Special attention is paid to the socio-economic position of vulnerable people, including women and girls, and to the municipality's role in coordinating the process.

The course is not an end in itself. It prepares selected municipalities to conduct social mapping and translate findings into concrete recommendations, priorities and better-targeted public services.

REGIONAL ROLLOUT

- **AL** Albania
- **ME** Montenegro
- **MK** North Macedonia
- **RS** Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

BRIDGES OF INCLUSION

Delivered with member associations under SPARK, implemented by GIZ on behalf of BMZ.





Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, Žabljak, 18-19 September 2026. Photos: NALAS

18-19 SEPTEMBER

The Green Agenda becomes real when it becomes local

At the Berlin Process ministerial meeting in Žabljak, NALAS made the case for stronger local ownership, municipal capacity and access to finance.

Regional strategies and national commitments set direction, but citizens experience the green transition through municipal services: reliable water, cleaner air, sustainable mobility, waste management and communities able to withstand climate impacts.

That was the message NALAS Vice-President Tadej Beočanin brought to the Strategic Partners' Roundtable during the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The gathering brought together Western Balkan governments, the European Commission and regional and international partners to assess progress and guide the agenda's next phase.

NALAS called for municipalities to be involved not only in implementation, but also in setting targets, designing mechanisms and monitoring results. Structured dialogue between national and local governments must be matched by practical tools and financing that municipalities can use.

The intervention connected policy with initiatives already supporting local delivery: the Covenant of Mayors Office for South-East Europe, Green Champions, regional work on circular economy and sustainable mobility, WATERVILL, EU4ALL in Montenegro and EU4Municipalities in Albania. The meeting closed with the Žabljak Declaration and a renewed commitment to coordinated regional action.

THREE PRIORITIES

1. Local ownership
   Municipalities help shape targets and monitoring.
2. Capacity and tools
   Local teams can convert commitments into services.
3. Accessible finance
   Investment reaches communities where change happens.

"THE GREEN AGENDA BECOMES REAL ONLY WHEN IT BECOMES LOCAL."

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Regional conference on local government reform, Tirana, 23 September 2026. Photos: NALAS

23 SEPTEMBER

Reform, finance and EU integration meet at local level

A regional conference in Tirana placed municipalities at the centre of public administration reform - and focused on what makes decentralisation work in practice.

Organised by SIGMA, NALAS and the National Association of Municipalities of Albania, with support from the Swiss Development Cooperation, the conference brought central and local governments, EU Delegations, development partners and experts around one table.

The discussion connected four reform dimensions: multi-level governance and decentralisation, inter-municipal cooperation, administrative supervision and local public finance. A consistent message emerged: transferring a function on paper does not make it work. Responsibilities need realistic cost assessments, capable administrations, predictable finance and clear accountability.

Inter-municipal cooperation was highlighted as a way to pool expertise, plan investment and improve services while preserving local autonomy. Participants also called for supervision systems that provide guidance and support performance, rather than relying mainly on legalistic control.

Demographic change adds urgency. Population decline and ageing can reduce municipal revenues without reducing the fixed costs of roads, schools and essential infrastructure at the same pace. Financing systems therefore need to reflect density, territory, socio-economic conditions and service costs, not simply resident population.

As EU accession reshapes regulations, investment and service standards, municipalities need a meaningful place throughout the reform cycle - from design and planning to financing, implementation and monitoring.

FOUR REFORM LEVERS

- **Functions matched by finance**
- **Cooperation that creates scale**
- **Supervision that supports results**
- **A local voice in EU accession**

THE BENCHMARK IS BETTER, MORE ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC SERVICES.

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Bridges of Inclusion EU project development workshop, Bar, 6-9 October 2026. Photos: NALAS

6-9 OCTOBER

Turning inclusion priorities into fundable EU projects

Municipal and association representatives combined practical project-development tools with a live Euro-MED proposal for greener, more inclusive neighbourhoods.

A strong proposal starts before the application form: with a credible understanding of local needs, a clear problem analysis and results that can be delivered and measured. A four-day NALAS workshop in Bar helped participants put those fundamentals into practice.

Representatives of local government associations and municipalities from South-East Europe worked through the logic of EU project development while jointly advancing a concrete proposal for the Euro-MED call. The emerging concept focuses on transforming underused urban spaces into productive, inclusive and climate-resilient green areas through community participation.

The proposal gives particular attention to vulnerable people and their role in neighbourhood life. That makes inclusion a design principle rather than an add-on: who participates, who benefits, and which barriers need to be removed are built into the project's intended results.

The workshop's longer-term value extends beyond one call. Participants strengthened their ability to connect community needs with funder priorities, build coherent intervention logics, define achievable results and identify suitable partnerships - skills that associations can continue sharing with their member municipalities.

PROPOSAL IN FOCUS

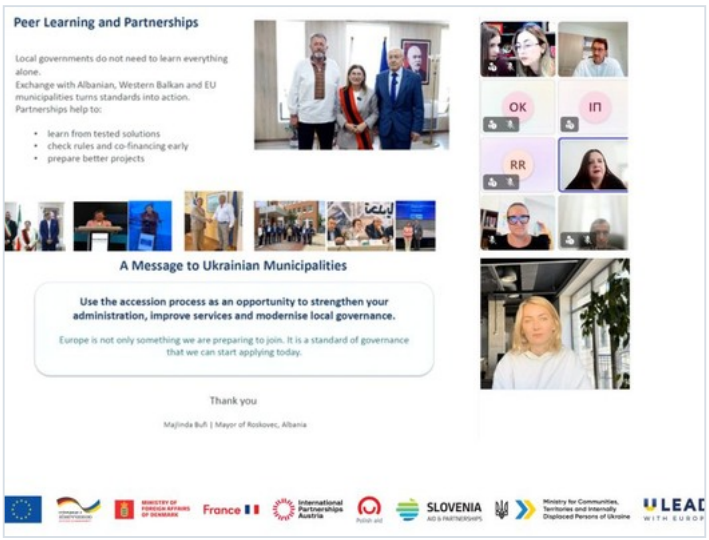
Underused space becomes shared value

- Productive green areas
- Climate resilience
- Community co-design
- Participation of vulnerable people

BRIDGES OF INCLUSION

Implemented by NALAS with member associations under SPARK, a GIZ programme commissioned by BMZ.

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Left: Pathways of Partnership online seminar. Right: Bridges of Trust Partnerships Award ceremony. Images: NALAS / LinkedIn

7-15 OCTOBER

Learning, recognition and stronger municipal partnerships for Ukraine

Two October milestones connected practical EU-readiness with the international partnerships helping Ukrainian municipalities strengthen resilience, recovery and trust.

On 7 October, NALAS convened an online Pathways of Partnership seminar for Ukrainian municipalities and peers from the Western Balkans and EU Member States. The exchange focused on what EU accession means locally: stronger administrative capacity, services aligned with EU standards, new responsibilities and better preparation for funding opportunities.

Contributions from NALAS and the Municipality of Roskovec in Albania translated the accession process into practical municipal lessons. The message was clear: learning from candidate and member states can help Ukrainian communities anticipate institutional change and build the systems needed to deliver it.

The quarter closed in Brussels with the first Bridges of Trust Partnerships Award ceremony. Six cross-border municipal partnerships were named Ambassadors for 2026, while Utrecht and Mariupol received special recognition for supporting recovery planning for a city that remains under occupation. The partnerships were selected from 55 applications through a process involving pre-selection partners, a final jury and Ukraine's four national local government associations.

Each Ambassador now enters a one-year acceleration programme combining peer learning, strategic support and European visibility. Together, the two activities show the wider value of municipal cooperation: knowledge prepares local administrations for integration, while long-term partnerships turn solidarity into practical capacity and sustained relationships.

PATHWAYS OF PARTNERSHIP

Supported by U-LEAD with Europe, a multi-donor action of the European Union and Germany, Denmark, France, Austria, Poland and Slovenia. The project strengthens cooperation between Ukrainian municipalities and peers across the EU and Western Balkans.

07 OCT
EU accession seminar

MID-OCT
Partnership awards

SEMINAR UPDATE **AWARDS UPDATE** **PROJECT POST**