



Network of Associations of Local
Authorities of South-East Europe

NALAS

Strategic Plan

2023-2027



Contents

1. OUR VISION	3
2. OUR MISSION	4
3. OUR BASIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES	5
4. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	6

About NALAS

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.

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 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. It is based in Skopje and responsible for the overall co-ordination and the implementation of the activities.

1. OUR VISION

Local governments (LGs) in SEE are a strong pillar of democracy, development and stability. They are empowered to improve the system of local self-government, have a broad range of adequate competencies accompanied with sufficient resources, have adopted the best models in the region to transform into sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient livelihoods, offer quality services to the citizens in line with EU standards and are connected to the world. They have a high level of financial autonomy and have improved access to national, European and international funds. They are able to cope with the global challenges.

Local government associations (LGAs) provide quality services and capacity development to their members, enjoy strong support from them and are financially sustainable. LGAs play an active role in putting into practice the principles of good governance and local democracy. They are recognised as the legitimate representatives of LGs at national level, are the key driver of the local public administration reform and development agenda and they actively participate in the development of laws and regulations in line with LGs' interests. LGAs work in partnership with central governments and other relevant institutions and organisations and provide important contribution in preparation for the EU membership and implementation of acquis communautaire.

NALAS is recognised as the strongest network, Centre of Excellence and the key collaboration platform supporting local autonomy in the region. We are the voice advocating towards central governments and international organisations in the region and in Europe for the common interests of local governments of South East Europe. We support the development of legislations and the application of the principles contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the UN 2030 Agenda and the related 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the Centre of Excellence, NALAS is the main knowledge and collaboration platform for local government affairs in SEE and the market leader for scaling up and disseminating pilot development programs and projects. By this, NALAS is consolidated in SEE and extends support to other local governments and their associations beyond the region.

European and international organisations, as well as national governments pay attention to the voices of local governments of SEE – either expressed directly or through LGAs or NALAS and take into account their economic, environmental, cultural, social and political interests.

The people of South East Europe (SEE) enjoy democracy, regional stability and prosperity in sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient cities and municipalities. Local autonomy is guaranteed, decentralisation is complete and functional, while local governments embrace a key role in the EU future of the region. With the support of strong local governments, their associations (LGAs) and NALAS, citizens and businesses benefit from high quality and efficient services and adequate representation of their interests.

2. OUR MISSION

We safeguard local autonomy, promote decentralisation and actively support the local public administration reform and development of strong local government in South East Europe, transformation into sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient cities and municipalities, through regional cooperation and Centre of Excellence, thereby contributing to democracy, stability and prosperity in the region.

We advocate for local autonomy, functional decentralisation and local government development and support the application of the principles contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the UN 2030 Agenda and the related 17 SDGs. We represent and protect our members' interests and provide high level services.

We operate as the Centre of Excellence and the key collaboration platform on local government issues in South East Europe. We provide first class across-the-borders knowledge that helps cities and municipalities address their key challenges in transforming into sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient livelihoods and providing high quality and efficient services to citizens and businesses by using innovative solutions, tools and best practices. We advocate for financial independence of local governments, develop their fiscal and absorption capacities and ease their access to financing for investment projects.

We respond to our members emerging needs, strengthen their capacities and provide them with the regional know-how and policy argumentation, supporting their efforts to become viable representatives of local authorities who are up to negotiate with their national government and international organisations for the benefit of the citizens of the region.

Through decentralised cooperation, our members use the Network to support each other, share experiences, produce knowledge, cooperate on cross border projects and contribute to an equitable development, modern and efficient local government, increased democracy, stability in the region and EU integration.

We share experiences, knowledge, ideas and people with local governments and local government associations beyond our region, and make available our best services to others that need them.

NALAS Secretariat promotes NALAS mission. It works in close cooperation with members and offers them the necessary up-to-date solutions and structures for advocacy, communication, knowledge production and sharing as well as project management. It also disseminates information and facilitates access to funds for the network and its members. The Secretariat works with partners from the development sector, civil society and academia for complementing resources and achieving bigger impact. The Secretariat permanently adapts its size in accordance with its tasks and member demands ensuring its financial sustainability.

3. OUR BASIC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Embracing Diversity: We are open, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and inclusive. We promote an equitable development of rural and urban local governments, youth and elderly, men and women.

Transparency: We operate in an accountable and transparent manner - both internally and towards external stakeholders.

Equal treatment: We guarantee equal conditions and opportunities for all our members.

Promotion of European values and principles: We promote relevant international principles such as those contained in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ECLSG), the European Urban Charter II - Manifesto for a New Urbanity and the UN guidelines on decentralisation.

Bottom up: Our *raison d'être* is to support local government through strengthening and supporting our member LGAs. We base our work on the common interests and identified priorities of local governments and we tend to be visible towards them.

Networking: We give preference to projects that strengthen the network.

Local Knowledge: Although we also facilitate the access of our members to knowledge situated beyond our region, we put our focus on disseminating knowledge from the region, developing knowledge from our own experience, learning from each other, and promoting the involvement of local experts.

Knowledge Sharing: We share our knowledge with local governments and local government associations.

Participation: NALAS members continuously and actively participate in the network. While representing NALAS, they represent and advocate for the interests of all members, not only their own.

Sustainability: We strive towards reaching institutional and financial sustainability. Concerning the big portfolio of services expected by members, we proactively promote NALAS' work and exchange with potential partners and supporters. The strong member LGAs, membership satisfaction, quality of services, loyal and committed staff, stable membership fees, recognition in the sector and the number of long-term projects from diverse sources provide a solid base for sustainability of the network.

4. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objective 1: **Strong Local Government Associations**

Strategic Objective 2: **Sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient cities and municipalities**

Strategic Objective 3: **Centre of Excellence**

Strategic Objective

1

Strong Local Government Associations

Developed and sustainable Local Government Associations, supported by NALAS, are the safeguards of local autonomy, promoters of decentralisation and drivers of local public administration reform and development.

MEASURES

Supporting the institutional development and consolidation of member LGAs. NALAS will focus on supporting the institutional development, capacitation, and consolidation of member LGAs in South-East Europe. On demand services such as *coaching, mentoring, shadowing, on-job learning as well as peer-to-peer reviews* will form the core of NALAS efforts in the area of institutional development for member LGAs. Additionally, building on the knowledge and expertise generated within the Network, NALAS will continue its efforts for the consolidation of its member LGAs capacities in the areas of *knowledge management* so that they are effectively transformed into and are recognised nationally and internationally as *centres of excellences* for the long-term capacitation of local governments which is a core function of member LGAs in SEE and a pre-condition for LGs to improve quality of and access to local public services for citizens.

Advancing the organisational capacities, portfolio of services and sustainability of member LGAs from the Western Balkans. Within the Regional Capacity Development Network for Water and Sanitation Services (RCDN), NALAS will develop an *Association Development Academy*, that will focus on the basis of a successful association, assessing the needs and working with members, developing and managing a service portfolio, training centre, advocacy and lobbying, finance management, HR management, donor relations, etc. A *Project Development Academy* will be focusing on introduction of relevant programmes and calls, phases of project design, project evaluation criteria, development of a proposal, mock evaluation of proposals, etc. NALAS will also support the establishment and advancement of LGAs' *Training Centres*.

Supporting the policy advocacy efforts of member LGAs. NALAS will continue to support the advocacy efforts of member LGAs in policy areas that are of crucial importance to local governments in South-East Europe, based on their functional responsibilities and prospects for the future, empowering member LGAs to have the position of a recognised strategic partners in consultation and/or negotiation with central government entities. Building on the cumulative knowledge of the Network and its international positioning, NALAS will continue to develop *policy positions*, regional *comparative studies*, *cross-border analysis*, collections of *best practice examples* and create regional *peer-learning and knowledge-sharing* opportunities to inform the advocacy efforts of local and central government policy makers, at national and regional levels in South-East Europe. Similarly, the *quick-response service* for member LGAs will form another important core for supporting the advocacy efforts of member LGAs. NALAS will continue to develop its flagship Reports on Fiscal Decentralisation and Solid Waste Management in SEE and will further enhance the NALAS Decentralisation Observatory into a *regional knowledge hub* on local government finance in South-East Europe.

Promoting the role and positioning of member LGAs at regional and international level. NALAS will continue to promote the role and advocate for the positioning of member LGAs as *unique actors* at regional level fostering *multi-level governance* and *local democracy* via their contributions in *intergovernmental relations*, *policy reform* and *sustainable and inclusive development*. NALAS will support the members' advocacy efforts at international levels for more support on effective decentralisation and local government reforms in SEE. Similarly, NALAS will support the advocacy efforts and positioning of LGAs in the Balkans and Moldova on EU accession processes.

Supporting LGAs in the Western Balkans and Moldova to contribute to the EU accession process. Building on the wealth of experience of the NALAS Network, NALAS will support LGAs in the Western Balkans and Moldova to effectively contribute to the EU accession processes, Green Agenda and Digital Agenda via *sharing knowledge and expertise* on the different stages of the preparations for EU

accession processes, in *building LG capacities* for a more *effective monitoring, evaluation and contribution* to the negotiating processes; in building local government capacities to absorb and manage EU and other donors financial assistance, as well as in contributing to the development of new policies and legislation harmonised with the EU acquis. NALAS will support member LGAs strengthen their cooperation with EU delegations at national via sharing successful cases of cooperation and partnerships, sharing successes and lessons learned from past experience with the LGAs from EU member States. NALAS will communicate the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation at the local level to national and EU policy-makers. NALAS will develop, maintain, extend information, communication and working relationship with relevant stakeholders and decision-makers in the Western Balkans, EU and European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Advancing digital transformation. NALAS will support member LGAs to play a key role in supporting the *implementation of the national digital strategy* in alignment with the EU's digital strategy. By advocating for local needs, building capacity, fostering collaboration, promoting citizen engagement, and monitoring progress and impact, LGAs can help to ensure that the benefits of digital transformation are realised at the regional and local level. NALAS will strengthen member LGAs in their key role in ensuring that the benefits of digital transformation and innovation are distributed fairly across the countries. They can help to identify and address the level of development, capacities, specific needs and challenges faced by their member local governments, and work with the national government to develop policies and initiatives that address these issues. NALAS will help to promote citizen engagement and participation in digital transformation processes, through the use of inclusive and participatory citizen-led innovation projects.

Strengthening the institutional capacities of NALAS and its member LGAs related to the development and implementation of needs-based initiatives on social and economic inclusion of vulnerable groups. NALAS will support sustainable anchoring of the topic of *social inclusion* in the LGAs' respective economy contexts with a focus to the *LENOB principle* and *gender* aspects. It will establish a *Regional Working Group on Social Inclusion* and develop policy positions on Social Inclusion appealing to relevant stakeholders and policy decision makers at national, municipal and regional level. NALAS will support member LGAs to develop roadmaps to implement recommendations on social inclusion.

Enriching the offer of crisis management and disaster risk reduction capacity development measures available and at disposal to LGAs, through the development of new and updating existing NALAS CD products i.e., e-learning courses, trainings, webinars, etc.

Strategic Objective

2

Sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient cities and municipalities

SEE cities and municipalities grow into sustainable, smart, inclusive and resilient livelihoods.

MEASURES

Support the modernisation of local public infrastructure and services. NALAS will continue to advocate at regional and international levels the *increase of EU and other donors' financial assistance* directly targeting the development potential of cities and municipalities and improving the socio-economic and environmental conditions of local communities in South-East Europe. *Reducing the infrastructure development gap* between and within SEE economies is of fundamental importance for balanced territorial development. NALAS will continue to support its member LGAs with the advocacy efforts and sharing knowledge and experience on the development of financing instruments targeting the development of local public infrastructure and enhancement of local public services in South-East Europe. On a demand basis, NALAS will partner with member LGAs to advocate for the *replication of the EU4Municipalities Grant Scheme*, providing direct grants to local governments to modernise local public infrastructure and improve access to and quality of local public services. Similarly, NALAS will support member LGAs from EU member states both in terms of advocacy for improved funding opportunities for cities and municipalities at EU level as well as in *promoting decentralised cooperation* for development and sharing of good practices.

Build local government capacities to deliver more and better local public services. NALAS core as well as project activities directly aim at *building LG capacities to deliver more and better local public services for citizens*. NALAS will continue to work with its member LGs to build local government capacities for *basic communal services* such as water and waste management, as well as *complex social sector services* such as social care and inclusion. Via specific projects, with the lead role of member LGAs, NALAS will *continue support and scale up* its successful projects, activities and capacity development programmes designed for LGs in SEE and their public utility companies in the areas of green agenda, circular economy, energy efficiency, climate change, digital transformation, disaster risk management and migration. NALAS will also continue to provide particular focus to cross-cutting and transversal issues such as gender, citizens' participation, LG openness and transparency, etc.

Establish Covenant of Mayors Help Desk. NALAS' decade long advocacy efforts will result with the establishment and promotion of a longstanding support system for the Covenant of Mayors members in the Western Balkans and Türkiye in delivering on their pledges under the energy and climate targets. NALAS will establish a regional structure which will offer a Help Desk service and facilitate the process of *developing municipal climate and energy action plans*.

Strengthen local governments' role in the EU accession process. NALAS will continue supporting LGs of South-East Europe to advance their capacities on the *EU accession process and EU fundraising*. Special attention will be paid to strengthening the municipal project teams in accessing EU and other donor funds, twinning, joint project development and implementation.

Strategic Objective

3

Centre of Excellence

NALAS Knowledge Centre is sustainable and recognised as the Centre of Excellence on local government issues and the key collaboration platform for local governments and their Associations in SEE and beyond.

MEASURES

Advancing NALAS Knowledge Centre. NALAS will continue developing the services of its Knowledge Centre on local government issues in South-East Europe, *responding to the emerging needs* of its member LGAs and the local governments and offering now only *knowledge*, but also *exchange* and *collaboration platforms*. NALAS will continue to develop its flagship Reports on Fiscal Decentralisation and Solid Waste Management in SEE and will further enhance the *NALAS Decentralisation Observatory*. *NALAS e-Academy* portfolio will be strengthened with new courses on local public services management and social inclusion, while the current e-Academy courses will be updated with contemporary good practices. NALAS Knowledge Centre will host regional exchanges and peer-to-peer learning on Green Agenda, digital transformation, migration and social cohesion and making cities resilient. *Capacity development programmes* will be developed for the professionals dealing with water and sanitation services, as well as for governmental and non-governmental key actors in

dealing with the people on the move with thematic focus on conflict sensitivity, intercultural competence, conflict transformation mechanisms and mediation. Dissemination of *best practices* will be one of the methods for knowledge sharing and scaling-up.

Disaster Risk Reduction Knowledge Exchange Platform. NALAS will establish a platform that will provide LGAs and their member local governments access to *best practices, knowledge, resources and capacity development measures in disaster risk management*, enabling them to develop more effective policy solutions and efficient services. The platform will emphasise the role and challenges of LG in preventing and responding to hazardous events and will bridge the gap between local governments, civil protection authorities, practitioners and scientific institutions fostering collaboration through integrated and coordinated approaches to mitigate vulnerabilities.

Establishing a Help Desk for Covenant of Mayors for Local Authorities of Western Balkans and Türkiye. NALAS will develop the capacities of its staff and community of experts to be able to provide support services on demand in regards to *climate action and green agenda*. It will establish and promote knowledge base for development, review, approval and implementation of Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans (SECAPs) as basic service of the COMO Help Desk.

Knowledge transfer in good governance, local democracy and local administration reform to territories beyond SEE. NALAS will enable *knowledge transfer to local governments in need beyond South-East Europe*, such as those in *Mongolia and Ukraine*. The Network will support the set-up of EU-Mongolia Cooperation Facility on Good Governance, promote and assist in creation and set-up of National Association of Mongolian Municipalities and transfer technical knowledge, expertise, experience, skills and content for supporting the development of Darkhan-Uul Province in Mongolia. Also, NALAS will support strengthening the capacities of Ukrainian local governments on the EU accession process and preparation and management of local development projects to support Ukraine's reconstruction.

Engage in fundraising and new partnerships. To be able to continue meeting the needs of the member LGAs and ensure sustainability, NALAS will continue its fundraising activities, cooperating with its traditional partners and engaging in new partnerships. The *Revolving Fund* will provide the base for EU project pre-financing, while member LGAs' and Secretariat staff's engagement in project development and implementation will be key for continuous success.



Network of Associations of Local
Authorities of South-East Europe

NALAS Secretariat



Varshavska 36 A, 1000 Skopje,
Republic of North Macedonia



+389 23090818

Fax: +389 23090818



info@nalas.eu

<http://nalas.eu/>

