Localizing the Global Gateway

United Nations Consolidated Input

September 2025

The United Nations has come together, as one through the Local2030 Coalition [1], to provide a consolidated input on localizing the Global Gateway. Fourteen UN entities jointly developed this input, which captures our collective orientations and recommendations to ensure the Global Gateway meaningfully integrates local contexts, needs, and priorities.

A. Introduction

Europe's territorial development is one of its key strengths, underpinning its ability to support sustainable development locally and globally. Local and regional authorities (LRAs) are central to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), accelerating their inclusive implementation by bringing local knowledge, capacities, and multi-actor engagement to bear on the 2030 Agenda. Effective localization also requires that financing reaches the local level, ensuring that LRAs and other local stakeholders have the capacities and resources needed to meaningfully and safely participate and implement transformative projects that advance human rights, gender equality, and respond to context-specific challenges.

EU regions and cities made up to 58% of total government public investment between 2004-2022. [2] Investment in local, regional, and territorial development, supported by EU instruments like the Cohesion Policy, underpins the economic, social, and territorial cohesion of the union by reducing disparities in the level of development between regions. In this context, localization means more than the transfer of resources: context-sensitive investments reinforce the social, economic, and environmental development of territories through innovation, creativity and smart specialization. By investing in the systems that communities rely on, regions strengthen their human capital and long-term competitiveness.

The Global Gateway Initiative (GGI), as the EU's key vehicle for international partnerships, should draw on this positive European experience. A localized human rights and gender sensitive compliant approach to the GGI will not only ensure a positive local uptake of its investments, which is key to de-risking, sustainability, and ensuring 360-degree transformation, but will also contribute to the stability and resilience of partner countries, thus anchoring long-term partnership.

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[1] The Local 2030 Coalition is the United Nations System platform to accelerate the localization of the 2030 Agenda, enhancing coherence, efficiency, and the impact of UN action. 14 UN entities (FAO, ILO, IOM, UN DESA, UN Women, UN-Habitat, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, DCO, and the Regional Commissions) drive the Coalition, co-chaired by UN-Habitat and FAO, ensuring that the UN system is equipped to articulate global goals and national policies with local contexts, needs, and priorities, while securing a single and powerful UN approach to localization. Through its 5 Constituencies —National and Local and Regional Governments, Civil Society and Academia, the Private Sector, and Youth—the Local2030 Coalition is also a bridge between the UN and local development stakeholders, co-creating solutions for systemic transformation with a focus on those furthest behind.

[2] EU Committee of the Regions (2024) "The state of regions and cities".

Similarly, the UN has recognized SDG Localization as a key driver of progress and as an accelerator of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the ground. For instance, within the Pact for the Future adopted at the UN Summit of the Future, SDG Localization is referenced as a key lever to leave no one and no place behind and encourages engagement with LRAs on the 2030 Agenda. Likewise, the Compromiso de Sevilla adopted during FFD4 underscores the importance of empowering local and regional governments through strengthened subnational finance and capacity-building, positioning them as key actors in implementing sustainable development. Moreover, the UN SDG Summit in 2023 recognized SDG Localization as one of the high impact initiatives to accelerate progress on the key SDG transitions (food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution) through the Local2030 Coalition, a UN-wide platform for localizing sustainable development. Through this platform and related initiatives, UN organizations and the coalition constituencies (Member States, LRAs, private sector, civil society/academia, and youth) have joined forces to share knowledge and expertise to localize all SDGs.

The UN, with its on-the-ground presence, together with its local partners, understands the complexities of localizing investments and is ready to leverage its country presence to make this possible. The reforms of the UN development system since 2019, which the EU has supported since their onset, have transformed its ability to support countries with the implementation of the SDGs. Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinators (RCs)[3], UN country teams (UNCTs) are better positioned to act as catalysts to accelerate the SDGs, building on the existing optimal entry points that stem from their respective country-contexts. Through its deep contextual knowledge and coordination mechanisms, the UN is uniquely positioned to support the EU in implementing Global Gateway investments that deliver high-impact, territorially anchored results. Moreover, the collaboration of the Local2030 Coalition with the UN Joint SDG Fund, a key global catalytic instrument that helps leverage additional financing for the SDGs, equips UN Resident Coordinators and Country teams with tools such as the SDG Localization Marker 2.0 and the Bilbao Blueprint. Together, they assist in co-creating, financing, and implementing local catalytic actions – translating development finance into territorial development and to tangible impact at the community level.

Acknowledging the need to generate demand for localized investments, this input seeks to make the case for localizing the EU's Global Gateway investments, emphasizing that impact is maximized when accountable investments reach the local level.

B. Global Gateway Pillars

The EU's Global Gateway strategy offers a transformative opportunity to align international investments with local development realities and priorities. Ensuring that Global Gateway initiatives integrate a localized approach, across all its pillars—Digital, Climate and Energy, Transport, Health, and Education—can maximize its impact by grounding investments in territorial realities and designing action from the ground up. Drawing on lessons from UN action on SDG Localization, this section outlines how embedding local ownership, leveraging multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, enhancing local capacity and aligning with community-driven priorities may unlock inclusive growth, resilience and sustainability. As demonstrated in cities and regions around the world, these transformations are also only possible when fueled and nurtured by coordinated investments from multiple sources, operating within an adequate enabling environment based on a coherent policy framework.

[3] When it comes to the UN's development work at country level, there are 130 UN Resident Coordinators, the UN Secretary-General most senior development official in-country, leading 132 UN country teams, covering 162 countries and territories.

Digital

Challenges

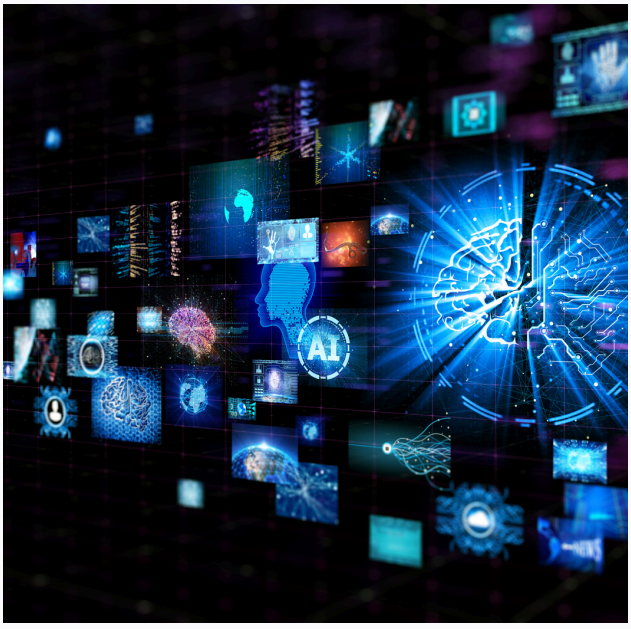
Persistent digital divides (urban/rural, gender); affordability; insufficient local technical capacity; inadequate digital skills; rights to data; regulation of AI; lack of strategic and targeted financing for local ICT infrastructure.

Opportunities / Why Localize

Localizing digital investments, through a human rights and gender sensitive lens, builds inclusive local digital ecosystems, expands public internet access, boosts local SMEs' performance in digital services, and embeds digital skills into local education systems. Supporting local digital transformation can also increase people's access to basic social services, including social protection, health and education. This ensures European innovation and standards directly benefit communities, while creating jobs and improving SMEs' productivity, including women-led SMEs, and expanding avenues for international private-sector collaboration.

A localized approach to digital transformation can also enable accountable, inclusive governance at all levels, while ensuring adequate data protection frameworks are in place. Digital skilling at community level, linked to vocational and lifelong learning systems, ensures that workers and SMEs can adapt to technological change and access new employment opportunities. Locally driven dialogue and partnerships building will also ensure that investment in digital infrastructure and services contribute to the resilience of territories, the promotion of sustainable enterprises and an inclusive approach to development.





Climate and Energy

Challenges

Financing barriers for small-scale projects; limited access to climate risk insurance; unclear mandates for local climate action.

Opportunities / Why Localize

Localizing climate and clean energy investments enables decentralized local needs-based governance and efficient management of clean energy generation, decarbonization programs and community-led climate adaptation projects. It improves energy security, reduces emissions, improves air quality and health, fosters community resilience, and generates long-term societal, environmental and economic sustainability.

Localization also enables a just transition: creating green and decent jobs in construction, waste management, and other local services while equipping workers with the skills needed for new occupations. Local social protection schemes and active labor market measures can support workers and communities in adapting to climate change transitions. A localized approach can support social partners to anticipate and manage labor market transitions while ensuring that participation and contribution of all economic sectors (public and private) in the development of just transition plans.





Transport

Challenges

Risk of infrastructure bypassing local economies; environmental and social impacts, occupational safety and health risks, lack of integrated urban–rural planning.

Opportunities / Why Localize

Transnational corridors facilitate the movement of raw materials and goods from sites of extraction and production to national and international markets, serving as critical enablers of global trade partnerships. However, their potential goes beyond trade. When integrated with strategic investments in cities and towns—positioned as specialized nodes in value chains such as production, logistics, and trade—and complemented by local and subnational transportation planning, these corridors can drive regional and local economic development and expand opportunities for decent jobs and women's empowerment. They also enhance access to essential goods and services for rural hinterlands.

Such integrated investments also strengthen resilience by enabling productive towns to serve as safe havens for surrounding communities during climate-related crises, with proximity allowing for timely return and recovery. Moreover, as corridors stimulate the growth of more economically active towns and cities, they expand opportunities for migrants and displaced populations to achieve self-reliance and access durable solutions.

Investment in inclusive local public transport systems and active mobility infrastructure is equally important. This is not only critical to the economic competitiveness of cities and regions, but key to enabling access to jobs and public services, and to reducing pollution and climate emissions.





Health

Challenges

Limited access to health services, essential medicines and vaccines, poor coordination between local and national authorities, insufficient local capacity for emergency preparedness.

Opportunities / Why Localize

Localizing health investments strengthens primary care, integrates health into territorial systemic transformation planning, and supports local production of essential medical supplies. It builds community resilience, prevents disease outbreaks, and ensures European-funded health innovations reach those who need them most at the local level, maximizing the principle of leaving no one behind. Investments in health systems also generate decent jobs in care and related services, one of the fastest-growing sectors worldwide. Localizing health investments allows communities to expand health and care services, create quality jobs for women and youth, and strengthen preparedness through trained local personnel.

Within a territorial perspective, urban food systems are central to climate resilience and public health. With cities responsible for the majority of global food consumption, localizing food waste prevention and management is critical. Integrated approaches that reduce food waste across the urban food system can mitigate methane emissions, enhance food security, and build circular and resilient food systems—delivering co-benefits for climate, biodiversity, and human well-being.





Education and Research

Challenges

Skills mismatch and skill shortages; uneven access to quality education; chronic underfunding; limited financing for local research institutions.

Opportunities / Why Localize

Localization aligns vocational and higher education with territorial labor market and skills councils' needs, strengthens and aligns local research capacity on sustainability, and promotes local-to-local learning. Linking education and research to local labor market needs further ensures smoother school-to-work transitions, reduces skills mismatches, and builds pathways to decent employment. Fostering inclusive access to STEM and digital literacy at local level can help address territorial and gender divides. Local vocational training centers and universities are hubs for innovation and lifelong learning, particularly when they are connected to employers and workers through social dialogue. Moreover, supporting regional research agendas and local research institutions (on topics aligned with regional and local priorities) can generate practical solutions and innovation with direct relevance and impact on communities. Fostering locally driven innovative financing solutions can also help unlock and diversify long-term funding for education and skills at local and regional levels.





C. General Recommendations Moving Forward

Localizing investments requires robust financial mechanisms, local ownership, multi-level coordination, multi-stakeholder co-creation, adequate regulatory environments and capacity at the local level. The following recommendations outline key actions for Global Gateway investments to support the strengthening of decentralized fiscal systems, alignment of national and local priorities, and ensure that financing mechanisms and international funding are accessible, predictable, and responsive to territorial needs.

1. Align GGI investments with local priorities

- Ensure GGI investments are aligned with national SDG strategies and embedded in local planning processes to promote ownership and long-term sustainability.
- Use territorial data, local finance diagnostics, and climate risk assessments to tailor investments to local contexts—avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches.

2. Ensure local ownership and inclusive engagement

- Involve local authorities, communities, academia and civil society throughout the investment cycle—from planning to monitoring—to build ownership and avoid fragmentation.
- Apply human rights–based and gender-responsive approaches to promote transparency, accountability, and inclusion.
- Support local monitoring and voluntary local reviews to track outcomes and improve climate resilience.

3. Strengthen local capacity for project development

- Provide technical assistance and capacity-building to help local actors design, finance, and manage investments.
- Strengthen municipal project preparation facilities and public-private collaboration to develop bankable, GGI-aligned projects.

4. Expand and improve local public finance

- Institutionalize fiscal decentralization and align national-to-local financing to reflect territorial priorities.
- Provide local and regional authorities with direct, predictable, and flexible funding, using innovative tools like green bonds, results-based transfers, and subnational guarantees.
- Adopt the Bilbao Blueprint principles to guide finance toward high-impact local investments.
- Create dedicated funding streams for catalytic sectors such as the cultural and creative industries that drive economic localization and SDG achievement.
- Increase international support to strengthen local public finance systems, financial literacy, and financial inclusion.

5. Unlock investment and engage the private sector

- Improve access to finance for local actors through blended finance, guarantees, and subnational credit facilities.
- Strengthen the financial autonomy of local governments to reduce investment risk and attract private sector engagement.
- Structure GGI investments to strengthen local supply chains, support SMEs and cooperatives, and generate decent jobs—reinforcing local economic resilience.

D. Conclusion

Localization is the pathway to impact. In a climate of geopolitical competitiveness, a localized offering strengthens the attractiveness of the offer and builds the foundations for stable, enduring partnerships. The UN stands ready to support partner countries, building the capacity, pipeline, and demand necessary for localized investments, and stands ready to participate in the localization of the Global Gateway through existing UN programs and mechanisms.

By ensuring an effective pathway to bring GG investments to the local level, and engaging local and regional authorities and stakeholders, alongside national governments, and leveraging EU-UN collaboration, a localized approach will:

- Enhance the effectiveness, visibility, and sustainability of Team Europe partnerships, ensuring that Global Gateway investments deliver shared value and long-term impact for both partner countries and the EU;
- Open new opportunities for European businesses, cities, and regions to collaborate with dynamic local economies, fostering innovation, mutual learning, and stable markets for sustainable growth.
- Broaden avenues for private sector collaboration in partner countries by enabling linkages with a wide spectrum of cities, regions, and private sector entities operating in them;
- Ensure tangible, transformative impact directly touching the lives of those living in partner countries and addressing specific discrimination and obstacles faced by women and girls, and promoting human rights for all;
- Catalyze local economic development, driving clean energy transitions, strengthening community resilience to climate-related shocks, generating decent jobs, and improving living standards without discrimination.

At the global level, the EU and UN can harness the Local2030 Coalition as a platform to turn the commitment to multilevel and multi-stakeholder collaboration into lasting practice—ensuring that local priorities shape and drive global agendas. Through this partnership, fiscal decentralization can be advanced, access to funding expanded, and innovative financing models scaled to empower territories to deliver on the SDGs. At the country level, the UN's development system—through Resident Coordinator-led UN Country Teams and global instruments such as the UN Joint SDG Fund—translates these ambitions into action.

By working closely with national and local authorities, the EU and UN can jointly support the creation of policies, data systems, and investment frameworks that enable territories to plan, finance, and implement sustainable development strategies. In doing so, it helps strengthen the connective tissue between levels of governance—turning global commitments into tangible, locally owned results.

Localizing Global Gateway investments can not only accelerate SDG impact and promote gender equality and human rights but also deliver decent work, social justice, and resilience, while providing measurable value for European citizens, businesses, and communities.