



2026 **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT**

Simplification, Implementation
& Enforcement



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1. Introduction

As outlined in my [Mission Letter](#), my main task is to take Global Gateway from start-up to scale-up and ensure the programme's role in supporting global connectivity and investment until 2027 and beyond. In line with the Communication '[A Simpler and Faster Europe](#)', I am pleased to present this **Annual Progress Report on Simplification, Implementation and Enforcement** covering the period 1 August 2025 – 31 July 2026.

This report focuses on the policy areas under my responsibility, namely **building international partnerships with countries and regions in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean**. These long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships are key to the EU's external cooperation and our economic foreign policy. They contribute to progress on fostering the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of our partner countries with the primary aim of eradicating poverty, while enhancing our own prosperity, competitiveness, resilience and security. In this context, scaling up the implementation of the **Global Gateway strategy** also directly contributes to the promotion of the United Nations' **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development including its **Sustainable Development Goals**.

In building our partnerships, the Commission applies a **differentiated approach**, from the specific needs and interests of Middle-Income Countries to those of Least Developed Countries, by focusing more effectively on their specific vulnerabilities and to **conflict areas, fragile countries, and other complex settings**. In coordination with and Members of the Commission, in particular those in charge of the EU external action, I aim to build **comprehensive partnerships through an integrated approach**, so that economic, humanitarian, development, peace and security policies all contribute to strengthening these partnerships and to addressing the root causes and key drivers of **irregular migration** in partner countries and to combating smuggling networks. Finally, in an increasing complex and fragmented world, the EU firmly supports **multilateralism**. My services and I firmly support **global initiatives that** are at the heart of EU values and principles.

2. Executive Summary

The core of the activities carried out by the European Commission under my portfolio, in the area of international partnerships, concerns the implementation of the EU budget through projects and programmes. These are not of a regulatory nature. The only exception is the lead role of the services under my remit, in the adoption or amendment of the External Financing Instruments for each cycle of the Multiannual Financial Framework (currently 2021-2027). In this context, the adoption of the **Regulation (EU) 2026/995 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/947 as regards increased efficiency of the External Action Guarantee**¹ on 29 April 2026, represents a step towards the simplification of the implementation of the amended Regulation.

The implementation of projects and programmes requires interaction with a variety of stakeholders, in particular civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities (LAs), private sector actors and development financial institutions. These stakeholders often act as implementing partners and our rules and regulations, notably those laid down in the EU's Financial Regulation, have a direct impact on them.

As mentioned in the report of the previous year, the [first Implementation Dialogue on International Partnerships](#) was held on 24 June 2025, bringing together stakeholders representing CSOs and LAs. [A direct follow-up has been the update of the country-level Civil Society Roadmaps](#), as communicated to EU Delegations on 4th July 2025. A [second Implementation Dialogue on International Partnerships](#) was convened on 8 October, focussing on the role of the private sector in the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy. The **preparation and delivery of integrated packages** is a direct, ongoing follow-up in response to the needs expressed by our partners.

The Implementation Dialogues, together with the other consultation formats, including **four 'reality checks'** conducted during the reporting period, the **information sessions on the new Investment Hub**, the

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32026R0995>

business fora etc., contributed to a more structured interaction and information flows. Guidance tools have also been elaborated and shared with stakeholders.

While rather technical in nature, referring mainly to various **contractual provisions – such as simplified costs options, single lump sum grants and financing not linked to costs, reporting requirements** etc. – these exchanges nevertheless enhance transparency and predictability and facilitate the operations of our implementing partners and contribute to reducing the administrative burden. Thus, they can act faster and more efficiently which in turn contributes to increasing the effectiveness of the EU external action.

I also want to highlight the **launching, in October 2025, of the Global Gateway Investment Hub** which has a positive impact on the simplification of the submission of project proposals through EU Team Nationals as well as on the access to various support tools.

Adapting our working methods according to the needs expressed by our partners and identifying practical simplification measures and follow-up mechanisms remain ongoing processes. For example, the next release of the Practical Guide to Contract Procedures for EU External Actions (PRAG)² will duly consider the results of our exchanges with stakeholders. The overall objective continues to be strengthening our partner's capacity to contribute to the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy.

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification and costs savings

The Commission's services under my remit, the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), implements programmes and projects under the External Financing Instruments adopted by the EU for the 2021-2027 period, notably the **Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe** (NDICI-Global Europe)³, the **Decision on the Overseas Association including Greenland** (DOAG)⁴ and the **European Instrument for International Nuclear Safety Cooperation** (EINSC)⁵

NDICI-Global Europe Regulation was modified in 2026. Following a proposal by the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council adopted, on 29 April 2026, the **Regulation (EU) 2026/995 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/947 as regards increased efficiency of the External Action Guarantee**. This amendment aims at facilitating the delivery of Global Gateway impactful projects in partner countries, while also making it easier for European businesses to engage in international cooperation.

To implement the above-mentioned programmes, my services apply the rules and procedures of the EU's Financial Regulation. This requires adopting implementing acts in the form of financial decisions (i.e. Annual or Multi-annual Action Programmes, Individual Measures, Support Measures and Special Measures) adopted by the Commission to authorise the use of the EU funds required to implement actions. These **decisions are all legally required** to allow the Commission to use EU funds within a given timeframe **and essential for the achievement of our policy objectives**. They **do not have a regulatory impact on European stakeholders**.

The Commission pursued its targeted simplification agenda for external action procedures in line with the political objective of making implementation simpler and faster, while maintaining high standards of legality and sound financial management. The approach focused on adjusting delivery modalities under direct and indirect management, notably **streamlining grant and procurement processes** and rationalising control and reporting requirements, without weakening the internal control framework. This is important for key stakeholders such as civil society organisations, local authorities or the private sector, notably service providers.

² [Contract award procedures for European Union external action – A Practical Guide \(PRAG\) – International Partnerships](#)

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0947&qid=1754462307011>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021D1764&qid=1754462307011>

⁵ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2021.209.01.0079.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2021:209:TOC

The Commission has strongly promoted the use of simplified forms of funding when appropriate, including **single lump sum grants and financing not linked to costs**. These modalities are meant to simplify financial management and reporting by focusing on the achievement of agreed results and the performance of activities instead of detailed cost reporting, thereby reducing the administrative burden for implementing partners and speeding up processing.

Procedures for grants and procurement under the 2025 PRAG were reviewed through **four “reality checks”** with stakeholder organisations representing civil society and service providers.

Firstly, my services met twice with the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation (CONCORD) in October 2025 and in April 2026 to discuss concerns of CONCORD members about the novelties in the new contractual templates for grants and their interpretation, as well as implementation challenges on the ground. Also, future changes, in particular as regards the digitalisation of processes with the onboarding of my services to eGrants and the Model Grant Agreement environment, were also discussed. In this context, my services have committed to advocate for the use of a simplified version of the financial reporting template in external actions.

Secondly, my services also met twice with the European Federation of Management Consultancies Organisations (FEACO) in November 2025 and June 2026. The main objectives of these meetings were to discuss the main operational challenges encountered by FEACO members when participating in procurement procedures under the 2025 PRAG and to jointly examine how contractual provisions could be better aligned with the practical realities faced by companies. The results of these fruitful discussions will be translated into relevant changes in the next release of the PRAG.

B. Implementation and Enforcement⁶

The [first Implementation Dialogue on International Partnerships](#), with civil society organisations and associations of local authorities, was held on 24 June 2025. Its main recommendations included comprehensive mapping of and early engagement with civil society and local authorities involved in Global Gateway sectors and project design in partner countries; flexible and context-appropriate funding mechanisms; and capacity-building initiatives.

In line with these main takeaways, **the update of the country-level Civil Society Roadmaps** further progressed, with 42 EU Delegations out of 101 having updated or currently being in the process of reviewing their roadmap; out of the 42, a total of 41 received some sort of support in the process from the Civil Society Support Facility managed by my services. The fourth generation of Civil Society Roadmaps launched in July 2025, as multi-annual strategy up to 2027/2028 jointly designed with Team Europe, aims to better anchor the engagement with civil society around the EU priorities in each partner country. This includes the Global Gateway initiatives and is supported by a detailed mapping of civil society actors relevant to the main Global Gateway sectors in the country, ensuring that civil society involvement is targeted and systematic.

In addition, [three regional online webinars](#) were organised on 15-17 April 2026 to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations and local authorities on [“Understanding EU funding mechanisms and application procedures”](#). The sessions attracted more than 1600 participants from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean and enhanced the ability for local organisations to present strong proposals for EU funded projects. It is expected that this will lead to less administrative burden for EU Delegations and applicant organisations due to fewer clarifications, better quality proposals, and strengthened delivery of projects.

In the framework of the regular engagement with local authorities, a comprehensive mapping of local authorities' participation in Global Gateway projects was undertaken, identifying 46 Global Gateway initiatives in which local authorities are actively involved. The purpose of the study was to inform the preparation of the **9th edition of the [Cities and Regions Forum for International Partnerships](#)**, co-organised in Brussels in December with the European Committee of the Regions and dedicated to the theme “Localising the Global Gateway”. This Forum, which gathered almost 400 participants from Europe and partner countries, served as

⁶ Enforcement of EU rules is mainly relevant for Executive Vice-Presidents and Commissioners responsible for legislative acquis in their portfolios. As this is not the case for International Partnerships, this section focuses only on the implementation of relevant policies.

a major multi-stakeholder platform to discuss good practices, challenges and concrete ways to scale-up the engagement of local authorities in the Global Gateway in the future.

Other ongoing engagement mechanisms with CSOs and LAs at global and regional level continued through the [Policy Forum on Development](#) (PFD), supporting knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer exchanges. These included the facilitation of Civil Society Fora in the margins of the CELAC-EU Summit, as well as the AU-EU Summit in November 2025 and an Asia-Pacific regional PFD Forum focused on Scaling Green Transformation and Climate Resilience, on 2-3 June 2026.

Responding to the request for more flexible and context-appropriate funding mechanisms and in order to tailor simplification efforts to the local context in partner countries (in particular in cases of repressed or closed civic space), the use of **Simplified Costs Options** was recently implemented in the framework of [the EU System of Enabling Environment \(EU SEE\)](#) programme. It makes wide use of microgrants through the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) mechanism, implemented by partners, to complement EU Delegation contracts and provide flexible, tailored support to civil society organisations (CSOs).

A [second Implementation Dialogue on International Partnerships](#), chaired by President Ursula von der Leyen, was held on 8 October 2025, in Brussels, focusing on the **involvement of the EU private sector** in Global Gateway, the EU investment strategy in key areas such as renewable energy and critical raw materials, transport, digital transformation and health and education. Commissioner Sikela and Director-General Koen Doens also attended the meeting. Members and observers of the Global Gateway Business Advisory Group (BAG) expert group, representing a balanced mix of Member States and areas of expertise, participated in that meeting. BAG members included Brussels Airlines, Business Europe, Danone, Eductrade, ENEL Green Power, FAM AB, MultiplexDX, SolarPower Europe, Telecom Italia Sparkle, Volvo Group. Observers included Agence Française de Développement and Export Guarantee and Insurance Cooperation (EGAP). The Dialogue was dedicated to the discussion on the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy and on strengthening engagement with the private sector.

The main takeaways included strong support for the Global Gateway strategy and recognition of substantial progress so far. Participants welcomed the **new Global Gateway Investment Hub** as a promising entry point for private-sector engagement, but stressed the need for further simplification, especially in procurement, access to information, and engagement channels. Businesses called for earlier and more structured involvement with EU Delegations, as well as for integrated packages combining policy, finance, and expertise. There was broad agreement that Team Europe should act more cohesively, leveraging also Export Credit Agencies (ECAs), national development banks (NDBs) and private sector expertise, as well as a better coordinated Team National. President von der Leyen and I reaffirmed these priorities and noted that future EU budget planning should help address them. Coordination of Team Europe members has improved as part of the Investment Hub through bi-monthly meetings between the Investment Hub Secretariat and Team National members. Over 20 EU business fora took place during the reporting period, strengthening the dialogue between the EU and local private sector with the European Commission, including the EU Delegations and partner countries' governments. To simplify access to information, my services organised information sessions on the Investment Hub and Global Gateway activities for EU companies and EU business organisations (January, April and June 2026).

My services continue to strengthen coordination between Team Europe stakeholders and the private sector as part of the Investment Hub. The **preparation and delivery of integrated packages** are of particular importance in supporting sustainable and impactful projects for partner countries.

4. Way forward

My services and I will continue to have a meaningful engagement with our stakeholders, in particular civil society, local authorities and the private sector and European development financial institutions, both through Implementation Dialogues and other meetings. We will continue to focus on translating the main takeaways of such meetings into further simplification and adaptation of our working methods to better respond to the needs expressed by our implementing partners. The next release of the practical guide (PRAG) will reflect the results of our consultation and exchanges with various stakeholders. We will continue to conduct regular meetings between the Investment Hub Secretariat and Team National members as well as business fora. The design and delivery of integrated packages combining policy, finance and expertise will also remain a priority.

Two **Implementation Dialogues on International Partnerships** are planned for autumn 2026. One with the members of the Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Advisory Platform that would focus on skills development in international partnerships. The second one would be jointly hosted by Commissioner Kos and me and would focus on private sector and connectivity in Central Asia.

Annex: examples

The **reality checks conducted with CONCORD** — the European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation — in October 2025 and April 2026 led to further clarification on, *inter alia*, the notion of a shared project office, the conditions under which severance payments may be considered eligible costs, and the rules on currency conversion. These clarifications have been reflected in the public guidance and has greatly facilitated the interpretation and implementation of the related contractual provisions, especially by beneficiaries of EU-funded grants, such as NGOs.

As regards the **reality checks held with FEACO** — the European Federation of Management Consultancies Associations — in November 2025 and June 2026, several concerns raised by the federation were addressed and corresponding clarifications were provided. In particular, my services agreed, at FEACO's request, to increase transparency and predictability as regards the needs of the contracting authority by publishing, already at the initial stage of the contract notice for service contracts, the estimated amount of the provision for incidental expenditure. FEACO also warmly welcomed the PRAG revision of 15 January 2026 which introduced a major simplification for economic operators by removing the requirement for separate invoicing in cases of de facto consortia under service and supply contracts.

The **call for proposal «Global Gateway Early-Stage Investment Mechanism»**, launched by INTPA in December 2025, facilitates EU companies' access to grant support for strategic initiatives requiring very early-stage support. It allows projects to progress from initial planning and feasibility stages to implementation and financing in a context where EU companies are competitive but lack the resources for early-stage development of projects or entering a new market.

Many concrete examples of local authorities' participation in the Global Gateway were presented and discussed during the last [Cities and Regions Forum for International Partnerships](#) held in Brussels, from waste management in Ecuador and green hydrogen in Argentina to digitalization in Kenya and Mozambique or access to local finances in Indonesia and Nepal. It was concluded that this needs to be scaled up. As a direct follow-up to the Forum, a dedicated guidance tool was elaborated by DG INTPA and shared in June 2026 with the whole network of EU Delegations operating in partner countries in the geographical areas covered by DG INTPA in order to guide EU staff working on the ground on how to understand better the territorial dimensions of Global Gateway investments and to engage more efficiently and systematically with the relevant local authorities in the future.

The **EU System for an Enabling Environment (EU SEE) for civil society** supported CSOs in a Sub-Saharan African country to analyse, respond and adapt to a restrictive law on associations and foundations which proposed increased state oversight and more burdensome registration requirements. Micro-grant funding was mobilised and accessed by CSOs within two weeks following an Early Warning Alert issued by EU SEE. The alert triggered flexible funding support via EU SEEs to CSOs to analyse, advocate on and adapt to the law, training 30 CSOs and 15 journalists on the law and its implications, and resulted in clear compliance guidance to CSOs which prevented more than 20 participating organisations from closing down by enabling them to draft adaptation plans and re-register with the relevant government ministry.