

**Deliverable 2: Guidance note on modalities and means to enhance institutional mechanisms to strengthen engagement of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes**

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**Summary: Institutional mechanisms for engagement of local and regional governments**

The Guidance Note is the second of four deliverables of the Secretary General’s Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments, with objective to enhance institutional mechanisms to strengthen engagement of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes, through selected modalities and means that contribute to the achievement of more inclusive, effective, and networked multilateral systems.

The Note complements the recommendations of the Advisory Group’s first deliverable<sup>1</sup>, to reinforce the role of local and regional governments into the preparatory processes of the Summit of the Future, including to inform its principal outcome document, the Pact for the Future. It recognizes the call for action by local and regional governments to the Summit of the Future for a special, formal, and permanent status for the organized constituency of local and regional governments. In addition, it provides guidance on options that can be pursued on discretion of the Secretary-General.

The Guidance Note comprises two sections. The first section contains a brief synthesis of the [catalogue of options](#), presented as proposals of the Advisory Group for relevant mechanisms to strengthen the participation of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes. The second section briefly summarizes how the proposed options can enhance coordination and cooperation between global, national, regional and local spheres of government.

## **Introduction**

There is growing recognition of the indispensable roles and functions of local and regional governments in responding to many global and systemic challenges, in support of the implementation of intergovernmental agendas. Despite this, the organized constituency of local and regional governments is currently classified in the UN System as a Non-Governmental Organization. The constituency lacks clear, institutionalized links with the UN’s principal policymaking bodies while the UN rules and procedures have gradually accommodated elevated roles and responsibilities for other actors, such as parliamentarians, representatives of the Chambers of Commerce and the private sector.

Ambitious scenarios to facilitate the meaningful engagement of local and regional governments in the future of an inclusive and networked multilateral system is a timely imperative for the United Nations.

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<sup>1</sup> Advisory Group of the United Nations Secretary-General on Local and Regional Governments: [Input to the Summit of the Future](#). Submitted in November 2023.

Various UN entities have actively sought consultation and collaboration with local and regional governments and their networks, employing individually tailored mechanisms for specific purposes or engaging in collective initiatives with LRGs, such as within the Local2030 Coalition, which was chosen as one of the twelve UN high-impact initiatives in September 2023 and brings together more than 20 UN entities and LRGs to advance localization of the SDGs to demonstrate that transformative progress is possible despite challenging circumstances. However, the level of formal representation of the organized constituency varies across different UN entities and inter-governmental processes. This underscores both the relevance of local and regional governments as strategic development partners for the UN system and the necessity to enhance their structural engagement for stronger political engagement and performance through collective action.

In preparing this Guidance Note, the Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments summarizes the aim to establish a distinct, formal, and permanent status for the organized constituency of local and regional governments before the primary political bodies of the United Nations.

While these options differ in their scope and ambition, they share common criteria and are intended to be complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Ultimately, each option contributes to the broader objective of enhancing the representation of LRGs in the UN system.

Additionally, it's important to note that the various options presented involve either building upon existing structures, such as UNACLA or the modalities of High-Level Political Forums (HLPFs) or creating entirely new bodies. Depending on the option selected, there may be varying degrees of reliance on decisions by Member States and others that are at the discretion of the Secretary-General. This underscores the complexity of the decision-making process and requires careful consideration of the implications of each option, on the effectiveness and inclusivity of the engagement of local and regional governments within the UN system.

The recommendations remain focused on achieving a distinct status and building upon the necessity of recognizing local and regional governments as spheres of government, setting them apart from civil society and other stakeholders; the crucial role of these governments as full-fledged political actors with both policy-making capacity and responsibilities for service provision, directly influencing the quality of life within communities; and the imperative to implement global policies at the local level to ensure their widespread and meaningful impact. These principles underpin the goal of enhancing the representation and engagement of local and regional governments within the UN system, emphasizing their unique contributions to global governance and sustainable development.

### **1. Proposed options to enhance the engagement and formal representation of local and regional governments with intergovernmental and multilateral processes**

In line with its main objectives, the Advisory Group proposes options based on the following criteria: the mandate that the Advisory Group has and can build on, as described in the Terms of

Reference; the political space for LRGs constituency's participation that national governments may agree to; the legal feasibility of each option within the UN System and its processes; and the timeline that building a long-term permanent engagement for LRGs constituency requires vis-à-vis what can be achieved in the short-term as part of the Summit of the Future outcome – A Pact for the Future.

## 1.1 Recommendations to the Secretary-General

The Advisory Group's **overall objective** is to define a **special, formal and permanent status for the organized constituency of local and regional governments** before the main political bodies of the United Nations. Such status should:

- I) strengthen the permanent engagement of LRGs in intergovernmental processes by formalizing the relationship with the UN General Assembly;
- II) enhance and further formalize the special status of LRG under the UN Economic and Social Council, through its participation at the HLPF with acknowledgement as a specific and differentiated constituency beyond the current Major Group and Other Stakeholders; and
- III) recognize the special role of LRGs in the attainment of the Agenda 2030 and other global agendas by strengthening and formalizing their engagement with the UN System.

This could be pursued through four different options (Figure 1) that are not mutually exclusive, they are rather complementary and could occur at different stages of the process. Hence, a combination of options could be recommended for pursuit.

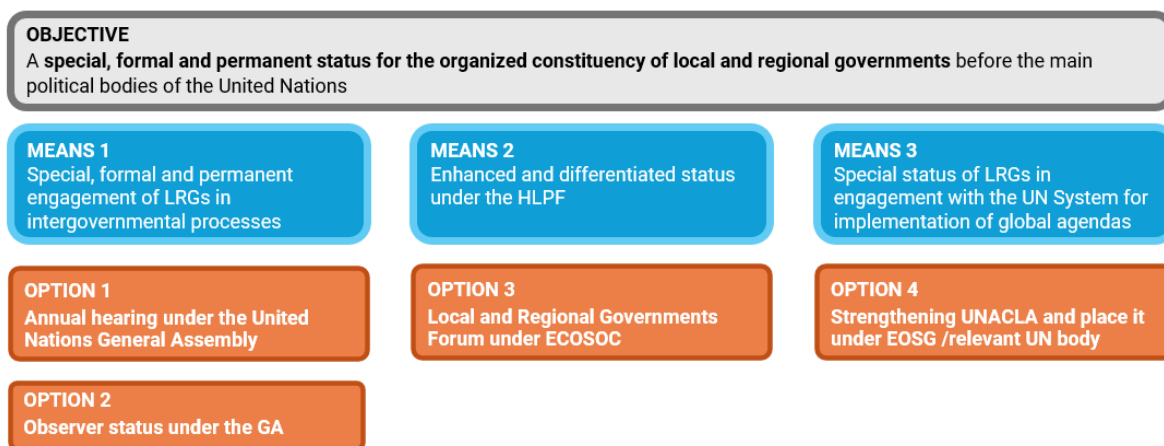


Figure 1- Means and options for a special, formal and permanent status of LRGs in intergovernmental processes

**To strengthen the engagement of local and regional governments in intergovernmental processes by formalizing the relationship with the UN General Assembly, steps could entail: Option 1), the arrangement of annual hearings under the General Assembly, as a step towards, Option 2), obtaining observer status under the General Assembly.**

The two options can be pursued in parallel, yet both could require several iterations of informal consultations among Member States.

**To enhance LRGs' participation, in developing policy recommendations under the UN Economic and Social Council and strengthening its role in reviewing and monitoring the implementation of the Agenda 2030, under the HLPF, the following option is proposed:**

**Option 3), a Local and Regional Government's Forum** under ECOSOC, which would fall under the category of informal ECOSOC meetings but could obtain an intergovernmental approval for its formal position and arrangements in the ECOSOC calendar, comparable to the Youth Forum. The less formalized nature of the Forum would have the advantage of creating a space within which States might be willing to give a direct representation for local government representatives and refrain from nominating participants. This informal body could send its report to the summary or conclusions of the Local and Regional Governments Forum, formalized under the HLPF, and keep feeding into the ongoing HLPF program. To this end, this option would formalize the Forum's special status under the ECOSOC, with acknowledgement as a specific and differentiated constituency beyond the current major group and other stakeholders category.

**To strengthen the LRGs' relationship with the UN system, the following option is proposed:**

**Option 4), expanding the existing UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA) and placing it under EOSG or another relevant UN body.** This will allow to move from an ad-hoc and case-by-case approach to advising the UN system to a more institutionalized engagement of the UN system with LRGs, which could be further formalized through a UN system-wide strategy.

The Advisory Group is of the opinion that all the consulted options meet the criteria. Together these options present a broad range of incremental parallel options for Member States and the UN Secretary-General's consideration.

## **2. Next steps on LRG's engagement processes**

This Guidance Note captures the long-term concerns of local and regional governments constituency and reflects both earlier and more recent discussions and aspirations of the constituency and their global networks. It constitutes a key output of the Advisory Group to strengthen the engagement and formal representation of LRGs in relevant intergovernmental processes of the UN system.

Moving forward, the Advisory Group will propose within the process of the Summit of the Future, **a call for action to define a special, formal, and permanent status** for the organized constituency of local and regional governments before the main political bodies of the UN.

The Note also provides proposals on cooperation within the UN system to strengthen engagement modalities between the UN Resident Coordinators, UN country teams, national governments and LRGs, especially within the UN Coordination Frameworks. Options for achieving closer country level cooperation between the UN system and LRGs include short-term actions that can serve as a springboard for more robust engagement, while also making recommendations for transformative measures requiring a longer implementation timeframe.