



The Twelve Principles of Good Democratic Governance at Local Level

→ Principle 1

Fair Conduct of Elections, Representation and Participation

- Local elections are conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud.
- Citizens are at the centre of public activity and they are involved in clearly defined ways in public life at local level.
- All men and women can have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate bodies that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.
- All voices, including those of the less privileged and most vulnerable, are heard and taken into account in decision-making, including over the allocation of resources.
- There is always an honest attempt to mediate between various legitimate interests and to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interest of the whole community and on how this can be achieved.
- Decisions are taken according to the will of the many, while the rights and legitimate interests of the few are respected.

→ Principle 2

Responsiveness

- Objectives, rules, structures, and procedures are adapted to the legitimate expectations and needs of citizens.
- Public services are delivered, and requests and complaints are responded to within a reasonable timeframe.

→ Principle 3

Efficiency and Effectiveness

- Results meet the agreed objectives.
- Best possible use is made of the resources available.
- Performance management systems make it possible to evaluate and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of services.
- Audits are carried out at regular intervals to assess and improve performance.

→ Principle 4

Openness and Transparency

- Decisions are taken and enforced in accordance with rules and regulations.
- There is public access to all information which is not classified for well-specified reasons as provided for by law (such as the protection of privacy

or ensuring the fairness of procurement procedures).

- Information on decisions, implementation of policies and results is made available to the public in such a way as to enable it to effectively follow and contribute to the work of the local authority.

→ Principle 5

Rule of Law

- The local authorities abide by the law and judicial decisions.
- Rules and regulations are adopted in accordance with procedures provided for by law and are enforced impartially.

→ Principle 6

Ethical Conduct

- The public good is placed before individual interests.
- There are effective measures to prevent and combat all forms of corruption.
- Conflicts of interest are declared in a timely manner and persons involved must abstain from taking part in relevant decisions.

→ Principle 7

Competence and Capacity

- The professional skills of those who deliver governance are continuously maintained and strengthened in order to improve their output and impact.
- Public officials are motivated to continuously improve their performance.
- Practical methods and procedures are created and used in order to transform skills into capacity and to produce better results.

→ Principle 8

Innovation and Openness to Change

- New and efficient solutions to problems are sought and advantage is taken of modern methods of service provision.
- There is readiness to pilot and experiment new programmes and to learn from the experience of others.
- A climate favourable to change is created in the interest of achieving better results.

→ Principle 9

Sustainability and Long-term Orientation

- The needs of future generations are taken into account in current policies.
- The sustainability of the community is constantly taken into account. Decisions strive to internalise all costs and not to transfer pro-

blems and tensions, be they environmental, structural, financial, economic or social, to future generations.

- There is a broad and long-term perspective on the future of the local community along with a sense of what is needed for such development.
- There is an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which this perspective is grounded.

→ Principle 10

Sound Financial Management

- Charges do not exceed the cost of services provided and do not reduce demand excessively, particularly in the case of important public services.
- Prudence is observed in financial management, including in the contracting and use of loans, in the estimation of resources, revenues and reserves, and in the use of exceptional revenue.
- Multi-annual budget plans are prepared, with consultation of the public.
- Risks are properly estimated and managed, including by the publication of consolidated accounts and, in the case of public-private partnerships, by sharing the risks realistically.
- The local authority takes part in arrangements for inter-municipal solidarity, fair sharing of burdens and benefits and reduction of risks (equalisation systems, inter-municipal co-operation, mutualisation of risks...).

→ Principle 11

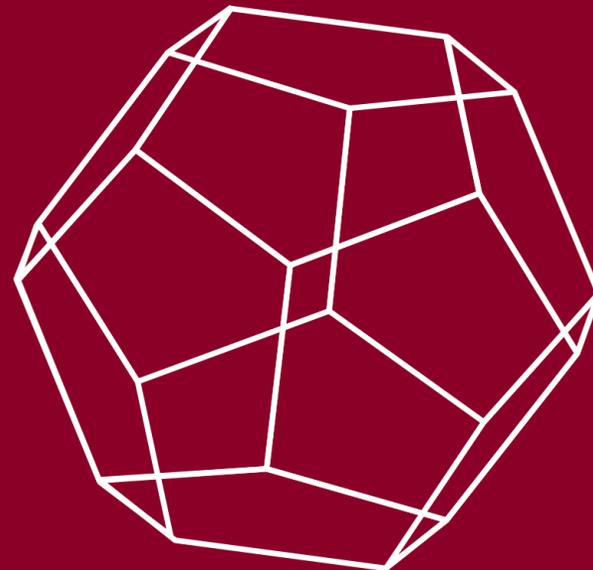
Human rights, Cultural Diversity and Social Cohesion

- Within the local authority's sphere of influence, human rights are respected, protected and implemented, and discrimination on any grounds is combated.
- Cultural diversity is treated as an asset, and continuous efforts are made to ensure that all have a stake in the local community, identify with it and do not feel excluded.
- Social cohesion and the integration of disadvantaged areas are promoted.
- Access to essential services is preserved, in particular for the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

→ Principle 12

Accountability

- All decision-makers, collective and individual, take responsibility for their decisions.
- Decisions are reported on, explained and can be sanctioned.
- There are effective remedies against maladministration and against actions of local authorities which infringe civil rights.



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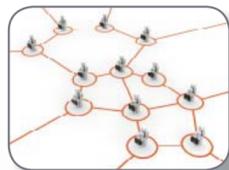


The Strategy for Innovation
 and Good Governance at Local Level



The Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level

Adopted in March 2008, the Strategy is a practical instrument which can be used to generate synergies between all stakeholders, be they local, regional, national or European, by working together with common instruments for improving the quality of local governance according to a shared vision defined by the twelve Principles of good democratic governance.



The Strategy can help local authorities improve their exercise of public power and the services they offer to citizens



People at the heart of local democracy

Wherever we choose to live, work and play, the quality of our lives will always be determined to a large extent by the quality of our local government.

We want and deserve a public authority that takes our needs and hopes seriously, that looks into the quality of our lives and tries to improve them. Participation should be accessible to all, enabling a variety of voices to be heard, not only in the run-up to elections, but throughout a local council's term of office, when public services are defined, organised and redefined.

We want our local authority to respect the law, but also to improve its services continuously, and to keep in step with the times. Many of the public services we use will be delivered by our local authority in return for local taxes. Good quality services provided by a local authority that is transparent, accountable and responsive are therefore our legitimate citizen expectations.

Local democracy is not a passing phase, but an essential component of the democratic fabric of our society, and evidenced as such by the 44 European countries having ratified the Council of Europe's European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Effective local democracy: a wise investment...

Effective, transparent, accountable local government is not a luxury but a wise investment. A local authority that listens to us, respects our diversity and caters for those of us in need shows that it cares about our community, our well-being and the results it delivers. We want to live in areas that are secure, clean, diverse, with good educational opportunities, safe roads, adequate public transport, recreational areas for our children, easy access to information, etc.

Effective democracy and good governance at all levels are essential for our societies. They help prevent conflict, promote stability, minimise waste, facilitate economic and social progress, and are necessary for creating sustainable communities where we all want to live and work.

The role of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe encourages the ongoing improvement of the quality of democracy at all levels, starting at the local level. It urges governments to put in place the policies and tools which help local authorities run their affairs more effectively. It supports local authorities that genuinely commit themselves to effective democratic governance. Through the Council of Europe, European local authorities and their associations can exchange experience and practice and learn from each other.

Moreover, the Council of Europe recognises authorities that meet the targets of good governance.

It does all this through "the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance", its own European Label, in which all local authorities can take part.

In 2007, in Valencia, the European Ministers responsible for local and regional government in the 47 member States of the Council of Europe declared the European Strategy to be their shared objective.

A European Strategy for quality local governance

"The Strategy's" 12 principles (see overleaf) encapsulate the fundamental values of European democracy and form the complete spectrum of requirements for good democratic governance.

By reference to the 12 principles, local authorities from all 47 Council of Europe member States can improve their governance on a continual basis. Working in parallel, their central government creates and maintains the institutional conditions for improving local authority governance, building on existing commitments under the European Charter of Local Self-Government and other Council of Europe standards.

The new European Label for Innovation and Good Governance is awarded to local authorities having achieved a high overall level of governance under "The Strategy's" 12 principles.

The Label is awarded nationally through an independent selection panel for assessing the overall quality of governance of applicant local authorities against the 12 principles.

How is it implemented?

1. Local authorities commit themselves to improving their performance, on a continuous basis. They are invited to adopt "The Strategy" and its 12 principles formally.
2. The Governments or Associations of Local Authorities, whichever level is the most appropriate, draw up and adopt national action programmes, highlighting the measures to be taken and breaking them down into the constituent steps for carrying them out.

3. A European Label prepared and accredited by the Council of Europe is awarded nationally to local authorities having achieved a certain overall level of good governance under the 12 principles.

What can central authorities do?

Across Europe, central authorities can discuss "The Strategy" with the national associations of local authorities. If they agree that "The Strategy" would help create the conditions for improving local governance, they can officially join and set about implementing it. They can invite municipalities to help take part.

Implementation usually follows the steps below:

- appointment of a project manager to co-ordinate implementation;
- a needs analysis in the light of all or some of the 12 principles, to see which ones need to be worked on to improve governance;
- discussion of the results of the needs analysis and sharing experience and know-how with other countries;
- adoption of a Programme of Action setting out specific activities for improvement (eg training and capacity building programmes, legal reform, offering incentives, ensuring exchange of experience).

What can local authorities do?

In countries having officially adopted "The Strategy":

At their own initiative or by invitation from the national association, local authorities can subsequently sign up and pursue implementation of the 12 principles.

In countries where it has still to be adopted:

Where "The Strategy" has not been officially adopted, a local authority may still:



Innovation, experimenting and learning from the others are highly effective ways for improving the quality of local governance.

- examine the 12 principles of good democratic governance, and formally acknowledge its commitment to them, preferably by a City Council Resolution;
- make its commitment public by informing citizens through the most appropriate means;
- inform the Council of Europe as well as the central and regional authorities of its commitment;
- select a number of priority principles that it can work on in the short to medium term;
- create a plan of action for improving its performance under the priority principles;
- evaluate, at least annually, its performance and results against the priority principles; this evaluation could be a report from the mayor of the council, a council committee or an independent body.

What can regional authorities do?

The decision to join may be taken at the regional level in countries where the regions have a major role in the running of local authorities and a valid interest, therefore, in improving how they are governed.

In addition, regions can

- promote "The Strategy" by informing local authorities about it, its benefits and how it is implemented;
- invite local authorities to join "The Strategy" officially;
- set up meetings for the region's local authorities to exchange experience;
- provide a platform for discussion;
- create, facilitate or support the conditions favourable for local authorities to improve the quality of their governance;
- encourage local authorities, where possible, to implement "The Strategy" by giving recognition to those showing the most commitment.

Finally, in their capacity as major political and administrative entities, with an interest in improving their own governance, regions may also want to take inspiration themselves from the guidelines offered by "The Strategy".

Who is looking after "The Strategy"?

The Council of Europe's Stakeholders Platform has overall responsibility for "The Strategy". The Platform comprises representatives from the Council of Europe statutory institutions: the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of International NGOs, as well as from Council of Europe's steering committee working in the field: the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR).

The Platform's brief is to follow and give guidance on how to implement "The Strategy" and further develop it in the light of experience. In so doing, it:



A symbolic dodecahedron with the 12 European Principles engraved on the 12 faces will be offered to local authorities awarded the European Label

- provides support, on request, to national and regional governments and local government associations as they develop initiatives and programmes of action for delivering good democratic governance in order to implement "The Strategy";
- endorses these programmes of action;
- promotes the European Label for Innovation and Good Governance across the continent;
- approves individual member states' arrangements for awarding the label to local authorities and, on request, provides any technical assistance necessary for developing these arrangements.

How can my local authority join "The Strategy"?

If you want your local authority to join "The Strategy" – whether you are the Mayor, a local authority manager, a political decision maker or a citizen – you can contact either the Association of Local Authorities in your own country or a representative from the Directorate of Democratic Institutions at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France (contact details overleaf). They will advise you on the first steps you can take for steering your local authority, region or association in the direction of good governance, increasing its respect for European principles and fundamental values, and making your community a better place to live in.