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– EU Global Leadership –
TIA 2030

Research report with policy recommendations

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Definitions

The following table represents the abbreviations used in this document.

Term/Abbreviation	Definition
EU	European Union
WP	Work Package
UN	United Nations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
NGO	Non-governmental organization
US	United States

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Executive Summary

This report examines the organisational and social conditions through which Agenda 2030 is translated into action within the European Union and in selected international settings. It contributes to Task T3.4 of TIA2030 - *Analysis and preparing policy recommendations*. It connects expert interview evidence with policy recommendations for European, macroregional, national, regional and local actors, alongside EU public diplomacy actors, relevant UN bodies and stakeholders in third countries. **Its central proposition is that strategic alignment becomes practically meaningful when responsibilities, resources, relationships and locally relevant purposes are connected**. This results from an interpretation of the interview material collected during the project implementation.

The deliverable D3.4 should be read together with the project documentation, in particular Deliverable D3.2 Methodology – tools and D3.3 Dataset. The empirical material comprises 18 semi-structured interview transcripts. Interview 2 contains two respondent voices, which are treated within one interview context. The main collection period is M13-M27. The report uses the SOFIA social fields approach established in D3.1 Literature review with meta-analysis and D3.2 Methodology – tools, examining institutions, social networks and cognitive frames and their interrelationships.

The first substantive finding concerns **the distance between formal strategic alignment and changes in decisions and practice**. Respondents describe programmes, strategies and organisational activities that refer to sustainable development, but also circumstances in which existing plans are adjusted to match funding language. Such accounts identify a problem for interpretation: a reference to an SDG does not, by itself, establish additional action or improved outcomes.

The second finding concerns implementation capacity. **Accounts from administrative, programme and intermediary settings identify unclear responsibilities, discontinuity following leadership changes, paperwork, limited staff and uneven access to expertise**. These are different constraints and require different responses. The evidence therefore supports a diagnosis of specific bottlenecks rather than an undifferentiated demand for more resources.

The third finding concerns the quality and accessibility of cooperation. **Programme actors describe established partnerships and functioning participation arrangements, while other respondents describe newcomer barriers, unequal representation and consultation without visible follow-up.** These accounts need not contradict one another: a programme may work well for participating organisations while remaining difficult to enter. Intermediaries appear important in connecting funding requirements, technical knowledge and local needs, but their reported activities have not been independently evaluated in this study.

The fourth finding challenges a simple assumption that implementation becomes progressively weaker towards the local level. Some respondents emphasise local resource constraints and

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difficulties with policy language. Others describe proximity, ownership and tangible problem solving as sources of stronger implementation. The interpretation advanced here is that **local implementation depends on the relationship between responsibilities, available capacities and the relevance of the proposed activity, rather than on governance level alone**.

Technology and innovation are discussed as resources for implementation, particularly through digital services, education, industrial change and knowledge exchange. However, **respondents also identify skills requirements, exclusion, data concerns and the need to move beyond research outputs towards use**. The policy implication is to assess adoption conditions and public value alongside development and deployment.

The public diplomacy component is more inferential. The interviews provide perspectives on external partnerships, multilateral cooperation and ownership, but do not compare public diplomacy campaigns or measure foreign audience responses. The report therefore proposes approaches for contextual assessment: **listen before selecting messages, agree practical problems with partners, connect communication to credible cooperation, and provide feedback on how contributions shape decisions.**

The recommendations prioritise six connected actions: **assign responsibilities and resources together; review unnecessary procedural burdens; sustain intermediary functions and widen entry routes; explain strategic objectives through tangible public concerns; connect technology support with skills and safeguards; and assess partnership quality through participants' experience and documented follow-up**.

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1 Introduction and policy context

1.1 Purpose and scope of the report

Deliverable D3.4 brings together the research dimension of TIA2030 in a report intended to inform implementation of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals. TIA2030 requires recommendations for policymakers at European, macroregional, national, regional and local levels, as well as in the United Nations and third countries. It also explicitly requires consideration of EU public diplomacy towards third countries in connection with the SDGs, European values and strategic vision. The report approaches that mandate through the evidence available. The interviews contain accounts of strategy implementation, programme management, organisational practices, cooperation and perceived barriers. They do not constitute a representative survey, an audit of national SDG performance or an evaluation of all relevant EU instruments. The contribution is to identify implementation problems and opportunities as understood from different professional positions, examine relationships between them, and develop recommendations whose evidential basis remains visible.

The report distinguishes three kinds of statements. Empirical findings describe what participants report or how accounts differ. Analytical interpretations explain possible relationships between those accounts using SOFIA approach. Policy recommendations specify actions that the analysis suggests should be considered. An interview can establish that a respondent experienced a requirement as burdensome; it cannot alone establish that the requirement is legally unnecessary. Similarly, an account of a successful partnership identifies an experience worth examining but does not establish comparative effectiveness.

Policy audiences can therefore use the report as a diagnostic resource. EU institutions may use it to consider how strategic ambitions interact with programme requirements. National and territorial authorities may use it to review responsibilities and participation arrangements. Public diplomacy actors may use it to formulate questions about ownership, credible engagement and the relationship between messages and cooperation. These uses require attention to the mandates and circumstances of the organisation concerned.

1.2 Agenda 2030 and the EU strategic context

Agenda 2030 is a United Nations framework adopted in 2015, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. Its economic, social and environmental dimensions are integrated, and its application takes account of national circumstances. The Agenda2030 gives importance to country ownership, inclusive review and cooperation across levels (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). This establishes the international setting for the present report; the EU is an actor contributing to that framework rather than its originator.

The European Commission’s 2023 EU Voluntary Review provides a documented institutional account of the Union’s contribution to SDG implementation within and beyond its borders (European Commission, 2023). The New European Innovation Agenda, adopted in 2022, is relevant to the

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project's focus on technological development and innovation (European Commission, 2022). These sources are used for their stated scope, without treating them as evidence that all implementation arrangements described by participants currently operate as reported.

D3.1 Literature review with meta-analysis also discusses the Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020. They provide historical context for the project's concern with ambitious strategies and their practical implementation. The present report does not evaluate those earlier strategies afresh. Their relevance is analytical: they encourage attention to the relationship between overarching objectives and the institutional arrangements through which action is organised (TIA2030, 2024a).

1.3 Research questions

The report is organised around four questions. First*, how do respondents describe the institutional arrangements, social relationships and interpretations that enable or constrain Agenda 2030 implementation?* Second, *how do these dimensions interact when strategic objectives are translated into organisational and territorial activities?* Third, *what roles are attributed to technology and innovation, and what conditions are considered necessary for their application?* Fourth, *what implications can reasonably be drawn for EU public diplomacy and cooperation with actors in third countries?*

These questions direct attention to implementation processes without assuming a single explanation for an implementation deficit. They allow the analysis to examine both difficulties and functioning arrangements. They also leave space for disagreement, including cases where respondents reject an assumption embedded in a question or state that an issue lies outside their expertise.

2 Analytical framework and research methodology

2.1 The SOFIA analytical framework

The analytical foundation is the SOFIA social fields approach developed in the project's literature review and methodological deliverable. D3.1 Literature review with meta-analysis draws on Beckert's account of the interrelationship between institutions, networks and cognitive frames. The report uses this framework as a means of asking how implementation becomes organised, connected and meaningful. It does not treat the presence of the three dimensions as a predictive model whose validity is established by the interviews (TIA2030, 2024a).

Institutions are understood here as formal and informal rules, responsibilities and established practices that structure action. Relevant questions concern who is authorised to decide, how resources are allocated, what requirements actors must meet and how conflicts are resolved. Organisations are examined as settings within which these arrangements operate. The analysis avoids using the word institution indiscriminately to mean a rule, a ministry and an entire governance system. *Social networks* refer to relationships through which actors exchange knowledge, mobilise resources, coordinate activities and gain access to opportunities. A network is not assumed to be beneficial merely because many organisations participate. The analytical questions concern who enters, who

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remains outside, who can influence decisions and what the relationship enables participants to do. This permits attention to both cooperation and unequal access. *Cognitive frames* concern the interpretations through which actors understand sustainability, define practical problems and judge proposed responses. They include meanings attached to strategy language, perceptions of responsibility and assessments of acceptable costs or benefits. Familiarity with SDG terminology is one possible expression, but it is not equated with substantive commitment. A respondent may contest a policy instrument while supporting the underlying objective, or undertake relevant practices without using the SDG vocabulary.

The dimensions are examined in relation to one another. An administrative rule may privilege established applicants, shaping network participation. An organisation's location within an environmental ministry may influence whether other departments regard sustainability as their responsibility. A locally credible intermediary may help translate unfamiliar objectives into activities that participants consider useful. These are interpretive mechanisms to investigate in the accounts, not causal effects estimated by this study. The analysis also permits material that does not fit neatly within the framework. War-related staffing losses, perceived household costs and technological dependencies cannot be reduced to vocabulary alone. They are examined through the relevant institutional and relational circumstances while preserving the substantive issue reported. The framework organises the inquiry; it does not replace contextual explanation.

2.2 Research design and interview dataset

The empirical corpus consists of the 18 transcript files supplied with D3.3. Dataset. The interview index is provided in Annex A. The identifiers run from Interview 1 to Interview 17, with two separate Hungarian interviews labelled 8.1 and 8.2. The empirical unit used for comparison is the interview context. Interview 2 includes Respondents A and B; their contributions are attributed within that interview and are not counted as independent territorial cases. The remaining transcripts use a single respondent label. Speaker labels are not used to infer the number of unique people beyond what the documentation establishes.

The main collection period is recorded as M13-M27. D3.3 Dataset documents English-language online interviews, mainly through Zoom and Google Meet, recorded with participants' prior agreement. It describes digitally assisted transcription followed by researcher review and anonymisation. The report works from those supplied transcript versions rather than from recordings, and it does not independently audit transcription accuracy (TIA2030, 2026). D3.2 Methodology-tools describes expert selection through relevant professional roles and key informants, with snowball recruitment available as an option. Accordingly, the method is described as purposive expert sampling as documented in the project design (TIA2030, 2024b).

The index covers an EU institutional setting, three macroregional or transnational settings, nine EU Member State contexts, and selected perspectives associated with the United States, Ukraine, Thailand, and United Nations perspective (international level). Hungary has two interview contexts at the national or regional level. This is a deliberately varied collection of perspectives, as proposed by

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the Application form. Neither an equal number of respondents nor equivalent expertise is available for each governance level or territory.

The terms *core, semi-peripheral and peripheral* appear in D3.2 and D3.3 as sampling descriptors. The present analysis retains their documentary role but does not operationalise them as independent explanatory variables. Comparisons therefore follow the implementation situations described by respondents rather than a presumed hierarchy of countries.

The empirical analysis in D3.4 is consequently interview-based. Project and policy documents provide conceptual and contextual material, not a second body of observed implementation behaviour.

2.3 Coding comparison and supporting documentary evidence

This report presents an initial structured thematic analysis with a passage-based evidence register. It begins with the three SOFIA dimensions and the interview guide's substantive concerns. It also permits additional categories such as newcomer access, qualified staffing, participation costs, administrative proportionality and contested transition costs. The annexed codebook states the meaning and boundaries of these codes. It is a working analytical instrument developed through authors' review.

The initial procedure distinguishes interviewer questions from respondent statements and records the transcript paragraph locations supporting substantive claims. Passages were retrieved around the analytical topics and examined in their available context. The register records supporting examples and important counterpoints across the 18 transcript files. This is not presented as an exhaustive, independently replicated line-by-line coding of every passage. The report does not include code frequencies, intercoder agreement, saturation or quantitative differences between settings. The comparative method used for this draft is thematic and interpretive.

Selected official UN, EU and EEAS sources establish the policy framework and the meaning of public diplomacy. Interview statements about ownership of companies, eligibility rules, current legal requirements, national positions, budget allocations or numerical performance are not adopted as established facts unless independently supported.

2.4 Ethics and methodological limitations

The consent template provides for research use in project reports and later publications while protecting participant identity. D3.3 Dataset documents anonymisation. Interview evidence is predominantly paraphrased. This reduces unnecessary reproduction of distinctive biographical or institutional details while preserving the analytical content. Interview identifiers and passage references support traceability within the research materials. They do not authorise re-identification, and no attempt is made to reconstruct redacted names, institutions or exact locations.

Several limitations affect the report. Respondents occupy different roles and answer with different degrees of familiarity. An actor who manages a cooperation programme sees selected applicants and

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funded partnerships, whereas a potential newcomer may encounter difficulties before entering that system. Accounts of civil society are often provided by institutional or expert respondents rather than by a broad range of civil society organisations themselves.

The study cannot establish causal effects, national implementation rates, changes over time or the effectiveness of particular public diplomacy campaigns. This is not even the purpose of research. No external stakeholder validation has been documented for the recommendations in this draft. The findings can inform diagnostic questions and proportionate proposals, but their transfer to a new setting requires additional contextual assessment. These limits are particularly important where the report addresses audiences whose own perspectives are only indirectly represented.

3 Research findings on Agenda 2030 implementation

3.1 Institutional conditions and implementation capacity

Strategic alignment and changes in practice

The research material distinguishes several ways in which Agenda 2030 can enter organisational activity. Interview 8.2 describes connections between institutional objectives, national priorities and EU co-financed programmes. Interview 1 contrasts territorial approaches that integrate SDGs into planning or budgets with approaches organised around reporting. Interview 9 offers a more critical account of adjusting descriptions to fit external requirements while retaining an already preferred course of action. Taken together, these accounts suggest that strategic references serve different functions and should not be interpreted through a single indicator of compliance.

The distinction is consequential for evaluation. A strategy document may create a common reference, provide access to resources or confer legitimacy on a contested activity.

Interview 10 illustrates a related ambiguity. The respondent describes everyday resource-saving measures and organisational initiatives while expressing scepticism about broader policy costs and communication. The existence of criticism does not erase the reported practices; the practices do not demonstrate endorsement of the entire strategic agenda. Implementation analysis should therefore allow partial alignment, pragmatic adaptation and disagreement within the same account.

This is also relevant to the project's interest in transformation. The interviews can identify reported changes in routines, relationships and organisational priorities. They do not establish a threshold beyond which those changes constitute systemic transformation. The report uses implementation as the primary empirical term and reserves broader transformation claims for future research capable of examining sustained changes in resources, authority and outcomes.

Responsibilities authority and organisational location

Interview 6 offers a particularly clear account of how an organisation's location can influence the interpretation of its remit. The respondent describes sustainability coordination situated within an environmental ministry and argues that this encourages other departments to view it as an environmental responsibility. The account links that framing to difficulties in cross-departmental cooperation and uncertainty about who can decide or require action.

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The analytical issue is wider than the location of one office. A coordinating body may be expected to deliver an integrated strategy without authority over the departments controlling relevant decisions. A responsibility exists on paper, but the resources or competencies required to discharge it are distributed elsewhere. The interview does not establish that relocating the unit would necessarily resolve the difficulty. It supports examining the fit between the coordination mandate, decision rights and the willingness of other actors to participate.

Different arrangements appear in Interviews 11 and 8.2. The former describes regional actors with limited power in a nationally directed system; the latter describes strong national coordination alongside a more restricted autonomous programming role for regional authorities. These accounts caution against assuming that every regional body can undertake the same policy tasks. Recommendations for territorial implementation must identify the powers actually available, rather than treating the regional label as evidence of equivalent authority.

Interview 13 adds an account of difficulties navigating responsibilities between services. The respondent describes seeking assistance and being redirected without a clear contact point. This is evidence of experienced organisational distance, not proof that no formal coordination exists. Its practical importance lies in what an applicant or intermediary must do to resolve a problem. A system can have formally allocated responsibilities while leaving users unable to identify the responsible service.

Funding staffing and administrative proportionality

Resources are discussed in several distinct forms. Interview 15 identifies qualified staffing as a central constraint in a wartime setting, even where project opportunities and international partnerships are available. Interview 16 describes pressure on the resources needed to sustain external cooperation. Interview 12 describes administrative work as consuming capacity that could otherwise support beneficiaries. These accounts indicate that an implementation constraint cannot be diagnosed adequately from the existence of a funding programme alone.

The proportionality issue is especially explicit in Interview 12. The respondent contrasts the effort required to process smaller interventions with the effort associated with larger support arrangements and argues that procedural demands are poorly matched to scale. The report does not adopt the respondent's numerical estimates of time spent or their interpretation of the hierarchy of regulations. The evidential claim is narrower: an implementation actor experiences the requirements as diverting staff attention from delivery and proposes a more proportionate approach.

Interview 5 raises concerns about large and complex funding instruments advantaging organisations with substantial resources. Interview 13 describes the difference between an experienced applicant and a newcomer confronting unfamiliar procedures. Interview 8.1 discusses difficult permitting and proposal evaluation. These are different access problems. They should not be combined into an unsupported statement that EU funding is generally inaccessible, but they warrant examining the capacities demanded before an organisation can benefit from an opportunity.

The positive programme perspective provides a counterpoint. In Interview 4, the respondent reports

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no major application difficulties from their vantage point and identifies scarcity of resources as the more visible problem. Interview 3 describes cooperation and functioning arrangements alongside limits in available funds. The interpretive implication is that reported adequacy depends partly on where the observer sits in the implementation process. The experience of funded participants cannot reveal all barriers facing organisations that never apply.

Political continuity and strategic endurance

Interview 1 describes an engagement arrangement whose usefulness depended on senior leadership and a credible expectation that recommendations would be used. The respondent reports a loss of continuity when political priorities changed. Interview 6 similarly describes the vulnerability of longer-term sustainability work to changes in leadership and short-term deliverables. These accounts identify continuity as an implementation concern within both policy dialogue and administrative practice.

The evidence does not imply that strategies should be insulated from democratic revision. Political responsiveness is a legitimate part of governance. The issue raised is whether changes leave responsibility, accumulated knowledge and ongoing commitments without a workable transition. A practical response would preserve records and feedback obligations while allowing elected or appointed decision makers to revise priorities explicitly.

Interview 2 complicates an exclusively negative account of governance complexity. Respondent B describes a structure that is difficult to communicate but also sufficiently stable and flexible to continue operating during disruption. Complexity can therefore provide institutional connections and resilience as well as impose costs. The policy question is which functions a requirement or coordination layer performs and whether they justify its burden, rather than whether complexity should simply be removed.

3.2 Social networks intermediaries and collective action

Cooperation opportunities and unequal entry

Programme respondents describe cooperation as a central organising principle. Interview 3 discusses partnership requirements and the involvement of relevant stakeholder groups. Interview 4 describes encouragement to form partnerships suited to the project's needs and to engage wider communities. Interview 2 presents macroregional cooperation as connecting different types and levels of actor. These accounts show that collaboration is built into the reported implementation arrangements, rather than being absent from them.

Other accounts concern uneven access to these arrangements. Interview 7 calls for farmers and youth to participate alongside academics. Interview 9 contrasts the capacity of major businesses to follow consultation processes with the more limited capacity of smaller firms. Interview 13 emphasises the learning burden for first-time applicants. These observations shift attention from whether a platform exists to who can use it and on what terms.

The combined finding is that cooperation opportunities and exclusionary effects can coexist.

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Participation may require professional language, administrative time, pre-existing contacts or the ability to co-finance work. Actors already inside a network can acquire further experience and visibility, making later participation easier. The interviews identify this possibility through situated accounts; they do not establish the extent of cumulative advantage across the funding system.

This distinction has implications for how participation is monitored. Counting partner organisations or events cannot show whether new or less-resourced groups have entered, whether their role is substantive or whether their contributions affect decisions.

Intermediaries as translators and connectors

Intermediaries appear in the accounts as actors that connect strategic requirements to practical activities. Interview 11 describes work linking businesses, authorities and communities and calls for simple tools and guidance. Interview 7 describes mapping firms and communicating knowledge about regional capabilities. Interview 12 discusses the provision of digitalisation support within a wider funding and administrative setting. These examples concern functions rather than a single organisational model.

The analytical interpretation is that intermediation combines several kinds of work. It can involve interpreting funding rules, identifying a relevant contact, articulating a local problem, finding technical expertise or making an opportunity understandable. These functions cross the SOFIA dimensions: they engage institutional requirements, activate relationships and translate meanings. Their usefulness depends on the intermediary's own capacity and its relationship with the intended participants.

Intermediation also creates questions of access and accountability. If opportunities depend on knowing a particular organisation or contact, actors outside that relationship may remain disadvantaged. An intermediary may represent the organisations it already knows more effectively than those it has not reached. The interviews do not evaluate intermediary neutrality, coverage or performance.

The financing of this work is part of the issue. Interview 1 describes the costs organisations incur when preparing contributions that may not be used. Interview 12 argues that also civil society requires resources to engage. Interview 8.1 describes complementary but unevenly distributed capacities across public authorities, academia, business and NGOs. Participation and translation require time; expecting them to occur without any organisational provision may weaken the very relationships on which delivery depends.

Consultation trust and feedback

Consultation is presented both as an opportunity and a possible source of frustration. Interview 1 emphasises leadership and an expectation that recommendations will influence policy. Interview 14 describes broad stakeholder meetings while also explaining that decision makers cannot promise to reproduce every contribution in legislation. Interview 17 places trust, transparency and accountability at the centre of useful engagement.

These accounts support a distinction between being invited to speak and understanding how a

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contribution is considered. A process may legitimately reject a proposal, but participants need to know the decision, the reasons and the constraints. Equally, organisations preparing contributions need sufficient information to formulate relevant and realistic proposals. Feedback is therefore an element of the relationship, not simply a final communication task.

Trust is not measured directly in this study. The finding is that respondents use it to explain the perceived quality of cooperation and the willingness to take another actor's arguments seriously. Interview 17 explicitly warns that more conversation does not necessarily mean more effective cooperation. The report consequently avoids recommending additional meetings as an end in themselves. The relevant question is what problem an interaction resolves, how it affects decisions and whether participants consider it worth sustaining.

3.3 Cognitive frames strategic relevance and ownership

Understanding the strategy and recognising the problem

Several accounts distinguish familiarity with strategy terminology from support for practical objectives. Interview 9 argues that citizens may support a cleaner environment without understanding long or abstract policy documents. Interview 11 calls for normal language and practical guidance. Interview 7 describes difficulties understanding policy wording and the value of connecting expertise with particular sectors. These accounts do not establish a general public awareness rate. Most respondents are speaking as professionals about people outside the interview sample. Their observations nevertheless identify a communication problem relevant to implementation: language can make an activity harder to connect with everyday decisions. A document may be technically comprehensive while leaving a potential participant uncertain about what it means for their organisation, locality or household.

Interview 8.2 provides a complementary perspective. It links professional awareness to working with funding and project development. This suggests that familiarity is partly produced through engagement with an implementation system. It is not simply an individual attitude that precedes participation. A system that relies heavily on specialised vocabulary may reward experienced participants while remaining distant from those who have no reason or capacity to master it.

A useful distinction is therefore between recognition of a label, understanding of an objective and the capacity to act. The report recommends communication linked to practical choices and available support, while retaining accurate connections to the broader framework. It does not recommend substituting promotion for resources or assuming that simpler language alone will resolve an authority gap.

Ownership through tangible purposes

The proposition that implementation necessarily weakens towards local levels is not supported consistently by the accounts. Interview 6 describes proximity as making sustainability less abstract and easier to identify with. Interview 4 argues that locally expressed demand can strengthen commitment. Interview 16 links local participation with ownership and legitimacy in external cooperation.

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Capacity concerns remain present. Interview 2 discusses limited local technical and financial resources alongside the advantages of specific action. Interview 12 describes immediate local problems as distant from broad strategic language. These differences suggest that ownership and capacity should be considered together. A locally valued activity may still be difficult to deliver, while a well-resourced activity may lack relevance for the intended participants. Ownership is used here in a specific sense: participants have a meaningful role in defining the issue and regard the activity as relevant to their purposes. It is not inferred merely because a project proposal has been submitted or a consultation has occurred. Statements from programme actors provide insight into how ownership is understood by those actors, but direct accounts from a wider range of local participants would be needed to assess the experience independently.

Contested costs and different views of sustainability

The material includes disagreement over the costs, priorities and credibility of transition policies. Interview 10 combines resource-saving organisational practices with critical views about energy costs and the appeal of EU communication. Interview 14 discusses political contestation in an international setting. Interview 17 describes trust and competing narratives as difficulties in multilateral engagement. The report does not verify causal claims about particular policies raising bills, the global effects of national action or current government positions. The analytical relevance lies in how participants connect sustainability with affordability, institutional credibility and competing priorities. These perceptions can affect willingness to support an initiative even where technical information is available.

It would therefore be inadequate to interpret every objection as a lack of awareness. Some concerns may relate to distribution, timing, perceived fairness or uncertainty about benefits. The interviews do not establish how prevalent these concerns are, but they support their inclusion in policy diagnosis. A credible response should make room for disagreement and explain choices, including where costs are immediate and benefits are uncertain or unevenly distributed.

4 Technologies and innovation in Agenda 2030 implementation

4.1 Reported contributions of technology and innovation

Respondents associate technology and innovation with several kinds of implementation activity. Interview 12 discusses digitalisation and industrial development; Interview 13 points to digital applications in healthcare and other fields; Interview 15 describes remote education and digital public services in a wartime setting. Interview 16 emphasises education and research cooperation as enabling capacities for investment and wider development objectives. These examples occupy different positions in a process of change. Digital services may support continuity or access. Research may generate knowledge or a prototype. Organisational innovation may alter how a service is delivered. Commercialisation may enable wider production and use. They should not be grouped indiscriminately as equivalent outcomes. The report records the functions attributed by respondents while keeping the development, adoption and effect of an innovation separate.

Interview 5 explicitly stresses that innovation must be followed by production and commercialisation.

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Interview 17 similarly distinguishes technology from its practical use and the capacities required to apply it. This supports attention to the organisational pathway between a technical possibility and a useful activity. It does not mean that every research output should immediately be commercially viable; it means that the intended form of use must be specified when a policy claims implementation benefits.

Some interview material also concerns social and organisational innovation. Interview 8.1 discusses an initiative connecting farmers with nearby consumers, while Interview 11 describes basic digital education and local coordination work. These examples show that respondents' practical concerns are not limited to frontier technology. An implementation policy may involve new arrangements for collaboration or access even where the underlying technology is familiar.

The interview guide prompted attention to technological solutions, which must be considered when interpreting their prominence. Interview 6 explicitly states that technology and innovation are relatively distant from the respondent's daily work, and Interview 4 limits its ability to provide substantive evidence on technological effects. Interview 16 acknowledges limits to specialist assessment of risks. These boundaries are retained rather than filled with assumptions about universal agreement or expertise.

4.2 Conditions for access adoption and application

Skills are a recurring concern in the selected technology passages. Interview 3 describes the need to connect technological development with education, employers and requalification. Interview 7 emphasises links between researchers, policymakers and sectoral actors. Interview 11 describes introductory digital courses, and Interview 15 identifies shortages of qualified staff. The accounts direct attention to the people and organisations expected to use an innovation.

The relevant capacity is more specific than general awareness. An organisation may need to identify a suitable application, assess its limitations, maintain it and integrate it into an existing service. Interview 9 emphasises understanding how algorithms work and using them appropriately before relying on their outputs. The concern is not evidence of a particular technical failure rate, but it illustrates why training should address judgement and organisational use as well as access to a tool.

Infrastructure and administrative access are also part of adoption. Interview 8.1 discusses permitting and possible shared testing arrangements. Interview 12 describes implementation support constrained by paperwork. Interview 13 raises concerns about technological dependence and data location, although factual claims about particular companies and ownership are not adopted here. These accounts identify questions for project design: who can test, who can obtain assistance, which rules apply and who carries continuing responsibility.

The report's interpretation is that innovation support requires an adoption pathway tailored to the intended user. A small firm, an educational institution and a municipal administration may face different constraints even where the same tool is available. The study does not establish which

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pathway performs best. It supports documenting the user, application, skills, infrastructure, operating responsibilities and intended public benefit before treating deployment as an implementation result. This also changes how success should be described. Equipment purchased, licences issued and demonstrations delivered are outputs. Continued use; changed service practices; and access by intended participants are different observations. Effects on environmental or social objectives require additional outcome evidence. The proposed monitoring framework distinguishes these levels so that an innovation project is neither credited nor dismissed solely on the basis of an initial technical deliverable.

4.3 Risks trade-offs and responsible innovation

Respondents identify data protection and privacy concerns, possible digital exclusion, questions about accountability and the environmental costs of digitalisation. Interview 7 raises concerns about personal data and reduced human interaction. Interview 8.2 explicitly discusses unequal access, data protection, digital environmental footprints and responsibility for failures. Interview 15 describes a perceived tension between fast technological use and the development of safeguards.

These are reported concerns rather than an audit of compliance or a measurement of harm. The report does not infer the legal status of a technology from a respondent's remarks, and it does not use interview statements to establish the current application of EU legislation in a third country. Their relevance is to implementation design: benefits and access depend partly on whether users can understand, question and safely use the systems introduced.

A trade-off also appears between speed and deliberation. Interview 13 stresses the pace of technological development and experiences regulation as slow. Interview 16 describes participation as time-consuming while presenting it as important to ownership. The report does not resolve these accounts through a general rule that faster is better or that additional process is always warranted. It recommends identifying which safeguards protect substantive interests and which requirements duplicate work without a clear function.

The connection with SOFIA approach is direct. Institutional rules allocate responsibility and define permissible uses. Networks influence who can access expertise and whose needs inform development. Cognitive frames shape which benefits, risks and uncertainties are regarded as important. Treating responsible innovation as a separate checklist after deployment would miss these relationships. The policy proposals therefore integrate skills, access, accountability and user feedback into the design of technology support.

5 Comparative discussion across governance levels and contexts

5.1 Multilevel coordination and territorial translation

The interview material is difficult to reconcile with a simple cascade model in which an objective is defined at the top and progressively implemented below. Respondents describe interactions between EU priorities, national programming, regional capabilities and local purposes. Interview 6 explicitly

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questions whether daily administrative activity can be understood only as a direct transmission of European strategies. Interview 4 describes projects arising from territorial needs, while Interview 3 emphasises coordination between funding streams.

The comparative interpretation is that implementation involves translation between distinct responsibilities and problem definitions. A strategic objective may supply legitimacy or funding, while a local actor supplies the specific issue to address. A programme may require alignment, but the organisational capability to deliver it comes from staff, partnerships and established routines. These relationships can be productive without being linear.

Macroregional and transnational arrangements appear as possible interfaces. Interviews 2, 3 and 4 describe structures for cooperation, exchanges and shared programming that connect actors across borders and levels. Their role is not equivalent to that of a government with comprehensive territorial authority. They can convene, coordinate and support activities within their remit, but the interviews also identify dependencies on funding arrangements and participating organisations' capacities.

The differences between these accounts are informative. Programme actors can see functioning partnerships and shared procedures. National or regional actors may see limited discretion, difficult rules or missing capacity. Neither perspective alone describes the whole chain of implementation. A practical diagnostic exercise should therefore examine the handovers between actors: where information is interpreted, where a decision is required and where responsibility for the next step is unclear.

This approach avoids turning territorial coverage into country rankings. Broader claims about national systems require additional and comparable evidence.

5.2 Interactions shaping implementation

The findings support four provisional interpretive propositions. They are presented as ways of organising the accounts, not as tested types or causal configurations. Each connects institutional arrangements with relationships and meanings. Their purpose is to make the policy implications more specific and to identify questions for further investigation.

The first proposition concerns alignment without demonstrated operational change. When strategic language is principally encountered through application and reporting requirements, actors may learn to describe existing activities in the required terms. Interview 9 provides an explicit account of this tendency, while Interviews 1 and 8.2 show that alignment can also be embedded more extensively in planning and institutional objectives. The second proposition concerns responsibility without sufficient implementation capacity. A unit may possess a coordination mandate but lack authority over other departments, as described in Interview 6. An organisation may have project access but insufficient qualified staff, as described in Interview 15. An intermediary may have a service mandate but experience administrative work as displacing delivery, as in Interview 12. These situations require different remedies even though all can be described loosely as capacity problems. The third

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proposition concerns participation without a credible decision link. Consultation may be formally open yet difficult to access, costly to prepare for or disconnected from visible follow-up. Interviews 1, 9 and 14 illuminate different parts of this problem, while Interview 17 emphasises trust and accountability. The relevant outcome is not agreement with every participant, but a process in which contributions can be understood, considered and answered. The fourth proposition concerns locally grounded action supported by wider connections. Interviews 4 and 6 describe ownership and proximity as advantages. Interviews 2 and 11 describe resources, exchange and intermediary support as important complements. This combination suggests that decentralising an obligation without support is different from enabling local actors to shape and deliver a relevant initiative. It also suggests that uniform requirements may need adaptation to different powers and capacities.

These propositions should not be treated as mutually exclusive categories. The same organisation may experience ownership in one activity, procedural overload in another and weak consultation in a third. The dataset does not provide a consistently measured outcome through which to assign each interview to a single implementation pathway. The value of the synthesis is diagnostic precision, not classificatory completeness.

5.3 Lessons from selected third countries and international perspectives

The external and international material illustrates different kinds of situations rather than providing three comparable country cases and a UN assessment. Interview 14 discusses United States context and political contestation and draws on European institutional experience; Interview 15 offers an account rooted in Ukraine; Interview 16 explains EU external cooperation associated with Thailand; Interview 17 concerns a United Nations-related multilateral setting (E26–E30). The roles and evidential reach of these accounts differ substantially.

The United States-associated interview is useful for examining perceived political divergence and the limits of institutional engagement. The respondent also explicitly declines to give a qualified assessment of some US civil society questions. This limits the report's ability to infer the views of US publics, the capacity of American partner organisations or the effects of EU public diplomacy. No current US policy position is established from the account, and it is not used to represent the country as a whole.

The Ukraine-related account centres on the coexistence of implementation activity and acute constraints. It describes digital education and services, inclusion initiatives, qualified staffing shortages and local cooperation. It also raises concerns about the relationship between rapid technological use and safeguards. These observations suggest that support should be sensitive to the capacity to sustain an activity under disruption. They do not establish national outcome measures or justify treating the wartime setting as comparable to routine programme implementation elsewhere.

The Thailand-associated interview provides a perspective from within EU external cooperation. It describes the intermediation of EU Delegations, the selection of shared priorities and links between investment, education and research. Local participation is presented as contributing to ownership and

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legitimacy. This is evidence of how an EU institutional actor understands the approach. It does not establish that Thai institutions, communities or beneficiaries experience the partnership in the same way.

The United Nations-related interview emphasises the multilateral ownership of Agenda 2030 and the importance of trust, transparency and accountability. It also distinguishes technology from the ability to apply it effectively and explicitly labels some comments on local governance as deduction rather than direct experience. These features make it analytically valuable while requiring careful attribution. The account is not presented as an official UN position.

The comparative lesson is therefore conditional. Partnerships need to be understood through the roles, constraints and expectations of the actors involved. Political disagreement, acute staff shortages, programme alignment and multilateral negotiation are not interchangeable implementation problems. Recommendations for third countries should begin with an assessment of that situation and should include partner-side evidence before claiming mutual ownership or effectiveness.

6 Implications for EU public diplomacy

6.1 Public diplomacy objectives and relevant actors

The D3.4 identifies possible approaches to public diplomacy supporting Agenda 2030 in third countries. The European External Action Service (EEAS) describes public diplomacy through informational, reputational and relational dimensions (EEAS, 2026). For this report, the informational dimension concerns how objectives and opportunities are explained; the reputational dimension concerns how conduct and cooperation may shape credibility; the relational dimension concerns engagement sustained with publics and partner organisations.

Relevant audiences may include research and educational organisations, businesses, civil society groups and communities affected by cooperation activities. Relevant EU actors may include the EEAS, EU Delegations, Commission services and implementing partners within their respective responsibilities. These are proposed addressees, not a claim that every organisation has the same mandate or resources. A specific recommendation should identify which actor can undertake it and which others must be involved.

Public diplomacy also needs to be distinguished from adjacent activities. A research partnership or an education programme can create opportunities for engagement, but it is not automatically a public diplomacy intervention. Development cooperation has substantive purposes that cannot be reduced to improving the EU's reputation. Likewise, intergovernmental negotiation does not on its own establish engagement with foreign publics.

6.2 Dialogue partnerships and knowledge exchange

The *first proposed approach* is to begin with a joint definition of the problem. Interviews 11 and 12

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point to the distance between strategic language and local concerns, while Interview 16 presents local involvement as a source of ownership. Applied to external engagement, the inference is that a dialogue about a specific issue can provide a more useful starting point than a request to endorse an overarching strategy. The issue and language should be identified with partners rather than assumed from headquarters. A practical sequence would begin by mapping the organisations and publics affected, identifying missing perspectives and holding a proportionate listening exercise. The EU actor and its partners would then specify the issue, the cooperation available and the decisions that participants can influence. The output should be a shared account of the problem and a record of differences. Consensus should not be claimed merely because an event occurred or an institutional partner agreed to participate.

The *second proposed approach* is to connect communication to useful opportunities. Interview 16 describes education, research and investment-related cooperation, while Interviews 5 and 17 emphasise the difference between a technical or research resource and its actual use. The inference is that public diplomacy can draw credibility from explaining specific opportunities and their limits. Communication should specify who is eligible, what assistance exists and what participation requires, rather than promise benefits that the programme cannot deliver.

The *third proposed approach* concerns continuity and feedback. Interviews 1 and 14 show the importance of credible expectations about how contributions are used; Interview 17 emphasises trust and accountability. A relationship should therefore include a named contact, an agreed follow-up point and an explanation of decisions. Where a proposal is not adopted, participants should receive reasons. This is a proposed organisational practice, not an obligation established by the interviews or an evaluated guarantee of trust. Knowledge exchange should be designed around reciprocal needs. An EU partner may contribute expertise, but partner organisations also hold knowledge of local institutions, constraints and priorities. The present dataset has limited direct evidence from those organisations, particularly in the Thailand-associated material. Any application should therefore include partner-side assessment before describing the relationship as mutually beneficial. Evidence of a planned partnership is not evidence of reciprocity in its operation.

6.3 European values credibility and strategic priorities

The Union’s foundational values include respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities (Treaty on European Union, Article 2) (European Union, 2016). These provide a reference for the deliverable’s contractual concern with European values. They should be expressed accurately and connected to the conduct of cooperation rather than presented as qualities whose recognition by external audiences is presumed.

The interpretation advanced here is that credibility requires consistency between the stated values and participants’ practical experience. If an initiative emphasises inclusion, its participation arrangements should be accessible and permit meaningful contributions. If it stresses accountability, participants should be able to understand who makes decisions and how concerns are considered.

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These are recommendations derived from the findings on participation and trust; the study does not measure the EU's overall credibility.

Agenda 2030's multilateral status matters for this purpose. Interview 17's distinction between a UN framework and an EU strategy suggests care in how EU contributions are presented. The report proposes explaining the specific European contribution within a shared international undertaking. It does not imply European ownership of the agenda or assume that partner priorities are already identical to EU priorities. Strategic interests and partner needs may overlap, but their relationship should be examined rather than declared. Interview 16 describes selection of areas of mutual interest from an EU institutional standpoint. Partner-side evidence would be required to assess that mutuality. A transparent approach would state the objectives of each participating organisation, recognise differences and record where interests converge or remain unresolved.

Political contestation requires similar care. Interview 14 describes perceived international disagreement, but it does not provide evidence on which communication approach would succeed with a particular foreign public. Where the political context is contentious, the report proposes verifying conditions, listening to different audiences and distinguishing policy disagreement from misunderstanding. No recommendation is made to bypass scrutiny, conceal sponsorship or treat critical publics as a communication obstacle to be overcome.

The possible best approaches are therefore presented as context-sensitive proposals. Dialogue, useful partnerships, accessible information and visible follow-up are plausible responses to the problems identified. Their comparative effectiveness remains unconfirmed. A later evaluation would need the perspectives of intended audiences and evidence on how the engagement changed understanding, participation or cooperation.

7 Policy recommendations

7.1 Recommendations for EU institutions and macroregional actors

R1 Connect strategic commitments with operational responsibilities

Relevant Commission services and other EU bodies should identify the decisions, implementation responsibilities and resources attached to the SDG-related commitments within their own remit. A proportionate mapping exercise should show how a strategic objective connects to a programme requirement, a responsible service and an operational activity. Where several services are involved, the mapping should identify a lead for resolving cross-service questions.

The evidence base is the distinction between alignment and practical change in Interviews 1, 8.2 and 9, together with the coordination concerns in Interviews 6 and 13. The proposed response is an analytical recommendation; the study does not establish that a single mapping instrument is the best solution. It should begin with existing planning and reporting processes to avoid duplicating requirements.

Implementation requires agreement on the scope of the exercise and access to relevant programme

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and budget information. A useful initial output would be a small set of documented links, accompanied by unresolved responsibility gaps. Subsequent review should examine whether these links helped resolve decisions, rather than counting the number of objectives mapped. This preserves the distinction between an administrative record and operational use.

R2 Review procedural burdens in proportion to the intervention

EU programme authorities and responsible services should review selected procedures that applicants or intermediaries identify as duplicative, difficult to navigate or poorly matched to the scale of support. The review should compare the requirement's legal or accountability function with the practical work needed to fulfil it. Simplification proposals must be checked against applicable rules and should preserve substantive safeguards.

Interviews 5, 8.1, 12 and 13 provide accounts of access and administrative difficulties; Interview 4 supplies a positive programme counterpoint. This evidence supports a targeted review, not a general conclusion that regulation should be removed. Unverified claims about eligible costs or the legal precedence of particular rules should be referred for competent review rather than repeated as findings.

Potential measures include clearer guidance, accessible contact points, less repeated submission of the same information where permissible, and assistance suited to first-time applicants. These are options for testing within a particular instrument. The relevant evidence of improvement would be reduced avoidable effort and more usable guidance without loss of accountability. Baselines should be established before any claim of burden reduction.

R3 Use macroregional and transnational cooperation to connect implementation settings

Macroregional coordination bodies and transnational programme authorities should focus learning activities on identifiable implementation problems, with explicit links to the actors able to act on the lessons. A useful exchange should specify the problem, the conditions under which an approach operated and what a participating organisation would need to adapt it. Generic dissemination of good practice should not substitute for this assessment.

Interviews 2, 3 and 4 describe cooperation structures, shared management, funding coordination and partnership development. The proposed action is to use those connecting functions within the organisation's remit, rather than assign macroregional bodies comprehensive implementation responsibility. Where non-EU partners participate, organisers should assess procedural, financial and staffing conditions that may limit their role.

An initial activity could connect a small number of organisations facing the same practical obstacle, record their differences and identify a responsible organisation for each follow-up step. Existing meetings and technical assistance may provide an appropriate setting where their rules allow. The output should include an adaptation decision or a documented reason why a practice cannot be transferred, not simply another list of examples.

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7.2 Recommendations for national regional and local authorities

R4 Review the authority and continuity of national coordination
National governments should review whether the body responsible for SDG coordination can obtain contributions, resolve responsibility gaps and connect sustainability objectives with departmental decisions. The review should examine authority and working arrangements before assuming that a new body or relocation is necessary. It should also establish how records, responsibilities and ongoing commitments are transferred when political leadership changes.

Interview 6 identifies difficulties connected to organisational location, overlapping responsibilities and political cycles, while Interview 1 describes discontinuity in stakeholder dialogue. The evidence does not establish that centralisation or a particular institutional location is universally preferable. The recommendation is to assess the actual decision process and choose an arrangement proportionate to the national system.

An implementation step would be to select an unresolved cross-departmental issue and document who can decide, which information is required and how disagreements are escalated. Success would be demonstrated by a clearer and usable decision route. Periodic review should preserve the possibility of democratic policy change while making its implications for delivery explicit.

R5 Support regional intermediary functions and accessible entry routes
Regional authorities should identify which organisations provide practical translation, referral, partner search and implementation assistance, and where access is missing. Support should be linked to clearly defined services and intended users. An intermediary should make routes into assistance visible to organisations without existing personal contacts and explain how referrals and priorities are determined.

Interviews 7, 11, 12 and 13 support the focus on translation, regional knowledge and newcomer access. The recommendation concerns functions rather than a presumption that one type of organisation should receive a permanent mandate. Regional authorities should work within their powers and coordinate with the national or programme bodies controlling relevant resources.

Practical implementation could start with a public description of available support, a referral protocol between organisations and a review of questions that repeatedly remain unresolved. Service monitoring should include whether intended users reached appropriate expertise and could proceed with a relevant activity. It should also examine who was not reached, so that existing networks do not become the sole route to support.

R6 Translate local priorities into deliverable activities
Local authorities should identify a manageable set of tangible problems through engagement with affected groups and connect the proposed activities to relevant sustainability objectives. For each activity, they should specify responsibility, available capacity and the next decision required. Where capacities are insufficient, the authority should seek regional or national support rather than adopt an

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unsupported obligation.

The recommendation draws on the contrasting accounts of local capacity and ownership in Interviews 2, 4, 6, 11 and 12 (E04, E08, E12, E21, E23). It does not require every municipality to create a separate comprehensive SDG strategy. Existing service plans may provide a more workable entry point where they permit meaningful integration and review.

Participation should include accessible explanations of what can be influenced and how decisions will be reported. Local actors should be able to describe disagreement as well as agreement. A practical result would be an activity with a clear implementation route and evidence of how participant input affected its design. A reference to an SDG logo or a consultation attendance list is insufficient by itself.

R7 Connect innovation support with user capacity and public value
National, regional and local authorities commissioning or supporting technological applications should require an appropriate account of the intended use, the users' capacities and the responsibilities for operation. Support should consider training, assistance and access alongside development or procurement. The level of assessment should match the intervention and the risks involved.

The basis is the material on skills, use, exclusion and accountability in Interviews 3, 7, 8.2, 9, 15 and 17. The proposed policy response is an interpretation of these concerns, not a technical standard or legal compliance assessment. Specialist review remains necessary where a proposed application raises technical, ethical or legal questions.

An initial implementation record should distinguish the output delivered, evidence of actual use and the intended sustainability outcome. It should identify how users obtain help and how failures or exclusions are addressed. Evaluation should examine whether the application remains useful after initial deployment and whether people lacking digital access have an appropriate route to the service.

7.3 Recommendations for EU public diplomacy actors

R8 Begin external engagement with partner priorities and audience understanding
EU Delegations and other relevant public diplomacy actors should establish the specific issue, intended audience and available cooperation before selecting a communication approach. This should include direct input from partner organisations and affected groups, especially where the available institutional account is predominantly European. Listening should record different needs and expectations, not merely seek confirmation of a pre-selected message.

The recommendation combines the ownership perspective in Interview 16 with the communication and trust concerns in Interviews 11, 12 and 17. It is an implication for public diplomacy rather than a finding about campaign effectiveness. The study cannot confirm which channels or messages work best for a particular third-country audience.

Implementation should produce a short account of the audience; the practical issue and the decisions

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open to influence. The responsible EU actor should explain its own objectives and acknowledge differences with partners. Review should ask participants whether their priorities were understood and document how the activity changed in response. Communication reach should remain a separate output measure.

R9 Connect public communication with credible cooperation and feedback
Public diplomacy actors should make clear how the opportunities they communicate connect to existing cooperation, who can access them and what their limits are. Where education, research or innovation partnerships form part of the engagement, the relationship should have a named follow-up route and an appropriate account of partner contributions. Claims of mutual benefit should be checked with partners.

Interviews 1, 14, 16 and 17 support attention to expectations, feedback and the distinction between engagement and policy adoption. The proposal does not turn development programmes into publicity instruments or promise that cooperation will automatically generate a favourable reputation. It aims to make the public-facing account consistent with what participants can actually experience.

Practical measures include explaining eligibility and assistance in accessible language, reporting how contributions were considered and revisiting unresolved concerns. An evaluation should distinguish improved understanding, participation and continued cooperation. Any conclusion about reputational change would require a separate design and evidence from the intended audience.

7.4 Recommendations for UN actors and stakeholders in third countries

R10 Use mandate appropriate convening and technical cooperation
Relevant UN bodies should consider using existing convening, analytical and technical cooperation functions to help participating actors identify implementation bottlenecks and share context-sensitive lessons. Any activity should remain within the body's mandate and respond to requests or agreed priorities. This report does not propose a new UN-wide mechanism established solely on the basis of this dataset.

The recommendation draws indirectly on the UN-related account and on the report's broader finding that cooperation requires usable information, trust and capacity. It is also consistent with the agenda's emphasis on country-led review and partnership (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Because the United Nations related interview does not establish an official UN perspective, the institutional relevance of a proposal must be assessed with the intended body.

A proportionate activity could identify a shared technical problem, bring together actors with relevant experience and record what support is required for application. Reporting should distinguish knowledge exchanged from a subsequent change in capacity or practice. Additional evidence is needed before claiming that an international exchange improved national SDG outcomes.

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R11 Define joint responsibilities in third country partnerships

Authorities and partner organisations in third countries, together with their EU or international counterparts, should agree what each participant is expected and able to contribute. The agreement should identify staffing, operational resources, local decision rights and the arrangements for raising concerns. Where a setting is affected by severe disruption, continuity and realistic workload should be considered explicitly.

Interviews 15 and 16 provide different grounds for this proposal: the former stresses staffing and implementation under war-related constraints, while the latter describes the alignment of instruments and local participation in external cooperation. These accounts do not support a uniform template for all countries. They support a joint assessment that is responsive to the circumstances and evidence available.

Partners should be able to review the public description of the cooperation and state where their experience differs from the intended design. A useful outcome would be a shared implementation record with unresolved issues visible and assigned to an actor who can address them. The report does not assign obligations to governments or organisations that have not agreed to participate.

8 Implementation priorities monitoring and conclusions

8.1 Recommendation matrix and implementation priorities

An organisation should select the recommendations relevant to its remit and circumstances.

Action	Proposed lead audience	Initial step
R1 - Operational responsibilities	Relevant EU services	Map a selected commitment and decision route
R2 - Procedural proportionality	Programme authorities	Select and review a reported burden
R3 - Transnational learning	Macroregional and programme actors	Agree a specific shared implementation problem
R4 - National coordination	National coordinating authorities	Test an unresolved cross-departmental decision route
R5 - Intermediary access	Regional authorities and service providers	Map assistance and missing entry routes
R6 - Local activities	Local authorities with partners	Agree a tangible problem and feasible activity
R7 - Innovation use	Public innovation funders and commissioners	Define use responsibilities and support needs
R8 - Audience understanding	EU Delegations and engagement partners	Undertake a proportionate listening exercise
R9 - Credible cooperation	Public diplomacy and programme actors	Agree an accessible offer and feedback route

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R10 - Technical cooperation	Mandate-relevant UN bodies	Assess demand and remit for a shared activity
R11 - Joint responsibilities	Partner-country organisations and counterparts	Agree resources responsibilities and concerns route

No new commitments, budget allocations or institutional mandates are established by this matrix. A lead audience indicates a potentially suitable addressee; it does not mean that the organisation has accepted responsibility. Recommendations that require a change to rules or new funding should undergo the relevant institutional decision process. Limited trials should be assessed before wider adoption.

8.2 Conclusions and further research

This report identifies implementation as a relationship between strategic commitments and the organisational situations in which action is expected. The interviews describe formal alignment, practical initiatives, administrative difficulties, cooperation and disagreement. They show why an implementation diagnosis must distinguish resources from authority, participation from influence and technology availability from usable capacity. These distinctions are the main contribution of the initial thematic analysis.

SOFIA approach helps organise these relationships by connecting institutions, networks and cognitive frames. The reported difficulties are rarely described as belonging to only one dimension. A rule may shape who participates, an organisational location may narrow a strategic interpretation, and a trusted intermediary may connect practical needs with an otherwise distant programme. These are plausible interpretive relationships supported by particular passages; their causal strength is not established.

The comparative material also qualifies common assumptions. More meetings are not necessarily more effective cooperation. Local delivery is not consistently described as weaker. Funding is important in some accounts, but its availability does not resolve all staff, authority or coordination problems. Technological optimism coexists with concerns about skills, access and accountability. The recommendations address these distinctions rather than prescribe a universal governance model.

For EU public diplomacy, the evidence supports cautious implications centred on ownership, clear purposes, useful cooperation and credible feedback. It does not establish which campaign, channel or message is most effective in a third country. Partner-side and audience research would be required to assess those questions. The report therefore contributes a grounded basis for designing engagement and evaluating it, with explicit limits on what has already been demonstrated.

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Annex A: Interview corpus and contextual coverage

Annexes

- Annex A: Interview corpus and contextual coverage
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Interview corpus and contextual coverage

The index below follows D3.3 while generalising city labels where they are unnecessary. The territorial context identifies the sampling context; it does not make the respondent a representative of that territory. Institutional group labels describe the documentation and do not certify official status. The report does not disclose personal or exact institutional identifiers.

Interview №	Country / territorial context	Implementation level	Respondent group*
1	Bruxelles, Belgium	The EU institution in Bruxelles – international level	EU institution
2	Vienna, Austria	Central Europe – macroregional level	EU institution
3	Budapest, Hungary	Danube region – macroregional level	EU institution
4	Bologna, Italy	Adriatic-Ionian region – macroregional level	EU institution
5	Belgium	National and/or regional level in a core developed EU Member State	Expert and/or Developmental Institution
6	Germany	National and/or regional level in a core developed EU Member State	Administrative institution
7	Ireland	National and/or regional level in a core developed EU Member State	HEI and/or Research institution
8.1	Hungary	National and/or regional level in a semi-peripheral EU Member State	Expert and/or Developmental Institution
8.2	Hungary	National and/or regional level in a semi-peripheral EU Member State	Expert and/or Developmental Institution
9	Poland	National and/or regional level in a semi-peripheral EU Member State	HEI and/or Research institution
10	Slovenia	National and/or regional level in a semi-peripheral EU Member State	Expert and/or Developmental Institution
11	Bulgaria	National and/or regional level in a peripheral EU Member State	Expert and/or Developmental Institution
12	Romania	National and/or regional level in a peripheral EU Member State	HEI and/or Research institution
13	Croatia	National and/or regional level in a peripheral EU Member State	HEI and/or Research institution
14	The USA	The third country, where the European	Expert and/or

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Annex A: Interview corpus and contextual coverage

		Union has a representation as a testing case	Developmental Institution
15	Ukraine	The third country, where the European Union has a representation as a testing case	HEI and/or Research institution
16	Thailand	The third country, where the European Union has a representation as a testing case	EU institution
17	United Nations - Geneva	International level	UN institution

* Respondent groups were standardised in accordance to anonymisation needs, as follows*: HEI and/or Research institution* = University researchers, think-tank researchers, etc.; *Expert and/or Developmental Institution* = regional developmental agencies, chambers of commerce, expertise providers, etc.; *EU institution* = institutions and organisations affiliated with and/or operating in close cooperation with EU; *Administrative institution* = public authorities, governance structures, etc.; *UN Institution* = institutions operating under UN mandate.

The corpus total is 18 transcript files: four interviews at EU or macroregional settings, ten interviews in the nine sampled EU Member State contexts, three associated with third countries, and one United Nations-related international interview. Interview 2 contains two speakers.

The core, semi-peripheral and peripheral categories remain documented sampling descriptors. Their retention does not imply agreement with a fixed developmental classification, and the present report does not compare category means or assign causal effects to these labels.

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Annex B: Working codebook

Working codebook

The codes below organise and guide the initial thematic analysis. More than one code may apply to a passage. Codes identify the subject discussed and do not automatically indicate a positive or negative evaluation.

Code	Scope	Boundary and use
I1 Strategic alignment	References connecting SDGs with strategies programmes or organisational aims	Do not infer operational change from a reference alone
I2 Responsibility and authority	Mandates decision rights coordination and organisational location	Distinguish formal authority from perceived influence
I3 Resources and staffing	Finance qualified personnel time and implementation infrastructure	Specify the resource and its reported constraint
I4 Procedures and access	Applications reporting compliance navigation and permitting	Record perceived burden without accepting legal claims unverified
I5 Continuity	Political cycles leadership changes handovers and persistence	Do not assume all policy change is implementation failure
N1 Cooperation	Partnerships exchanges joint programmes and networks	Record function and actors rather than assume benefit
N2 Entry and representation	Newcomers participation costs missing actors and unequal voice	Separate access to an event from influence on decisions
N3 Intermediation	Translation referral partner search and practical assistance	Identify function and limits of the intermediary perspective
N4 Feedback and trust	Follow-up expectations accountability and credibility	Distinguish respondents' explanations from measured trust
C1 Interpretation	Understanding of SDGs policy language and practical relevance	Separate awareness of terminology from substantive activity
C2 Ownership	Role in defining problems identification and local relevance	Attendance or submission alone is insufficient evidence
C3 Contestation	Perceived costs fairness competing priorities and disagreement	Preserve critical accounts without adopting factual allegations
T1 Technology and use	Technical applications research commercialisation and organisational innovation	Separate expected benefit from documented use and outcomes
T2 Adoption capacity	Skills support readiness and access to infrastructure	Specify intended user and organisational circumstances
T3 Risks and accountability	Data exclusion environmental costs safeguards and redress	Concerns are not proof of harm or legal non-compliance
X1 External cooperation	Third country partnerships international engagement and multilateral work	Distinguish institutional viewpoint from partner experience
X2 Public diplomacy implication	Interpretation relevant to publics communication and credibility	Label derived proposals and avoid claiming campaign effectiveness

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Passage based evidence register

Entries in present evidence register paraphrase the passages from interviews to reduce unnecessary repetition of potentially identifying detail. They do not reproduce the entire transcript or claim to exhaust its content.

E01 Territorial differences and alternative ways of embedding SDGs, Interview 1
The respondent contrasts integration into budgets and strategies with reporting exercises; examples concern several territories beyond the sampling label.
Interpretive limit: Reported comparison, not independently verified country assessment.

E02 Continuity and the consequences of consultation, Interview 1
A stakeholder platform is described as useful when senior leadership promised to use its recommendations; discontinuity and unused feedback discouraged participation.
Interpretive limit: Retrospective experience; current platform status not verified.

E03 Governance complexity and resilience, Interview 2
Respondent presents complex governance both as a communication challenge and as a source of stability during disruption.
Interpretive limit: Within-interview counterpoint.

E04 Different advantages at different governance levels, Interview 2
Respondent A emphasises capacity limits locally while Respondent B stresses tangible local implementation and the risk of abstract transnational action.
Interpretive limit: Two speakers in one interview; not two independent cases.

E05 Coordination and access to transnational funding, Interview 3
The respondent advocates coordination between funding streams and describes pooled resources as facilitating participation by non-EU partners.
Interpretive limit: Programme perspective; reported arrangements require programme-specific verification.

E06 Cooperation programmes and selected participation, Interview 3
Programme participants are described as knowledgeable and cooperative; programme capacity support is distinguished from developing civil society as a whole.
Interpretive limit: Participants selected through programme access.

E07 Skills and technological change, Interview 3
The respondent links technological change to skills gaps and advocates cooperation between education, employers and policymakers.
Interpretive limit: Perceived needs; no measured labour-market effects.

E08 Local demand and shared management, Interview 4
The respondent presents bottom-up needs and shared management as supporting commitment; local

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implementation can become stronger.
Interpretive limit: Programme account, not independent impact evaluation.

E09 Partnership design and a positive programme assessment, Interview 4
Partnership breadth and outreach are described as encouraged; the respondent does not perceive application problems from the programme vantage point.
Interpretive limit: Explicit counterpoint to other respondents; mandate limits acknowledged.

E10 Unequal access and useful project results, Interview 5.
The respondent associates' large complex grants with advantages for major organisations, stresses commercialisation, and questions projects with little added value.
Interpretive limit: Evaluative account; allocation figures not adopted.

E11 Institutional location and political continuity, Interview 6
The respondent links an environmental ministry location to a narrow interpretation of sustainability and describes coordination and leadership changes as difficulties.
Interpretive limit: A particular administrative setting, not Germany as a whole.

E12 Ownership and relational capacity, Interview 6
Local proximity and established associations are described as facilitating engagement; the respondent questions whether funding alone would resolve constraints.
Interpretive limit: Reported experience with explicit uncertainty about additional funding.

E13 Translation and wider stakeholder participation, Interview 7
The respondent describes mapping regional firms, difficulty with policy language, and the need to include farmers and youth alongside academics.
Interpretive limit: Sector-specific experience; not a population survey.

E14 Data protection and human interaction, Interview 7
The respondent raises concerns about personal data and the social effects of technology use.
Interpretive limit: Perceived risks, not documented incidents.

E15 Complementary capacities and innovation access, Interview 8.1
The respondent discusses permitting, a local food initiative, complementary sectoral capacities, and frustration with proposal evaluation.
Interpretive limit: Examples and proposals; allegations about evaluation not verified.

E16 Professional awareness and strategic alignment, Interview 8.2
The respondent describes links between institutional and higher-level priorities and associates professional awareness with funding and proposal work.
Interpretive limit: Practitioner account; no independent assessment of implementation outcomes.

E17 Digital exclusion and institutional fragmentation, Interview 8.2
The respondent identifies exclusion, environmental costs, accountability, administrative complexity

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and weak feedback as concerns.
Interpretive limit: Evaluative concerns; magnitude not measured.

E18 Accessible language and formal compliance, Interview 9
The respondent distinguishes support for substantive objectives from familiarity with strategy language and describes fitting existing plans to requirements.
Interpretive limit: Interpretation by one respondent; no general compliance rate inferred.

E19 Consultation access and issue-based mobilisation, Interview 9
The respondent contrasts business representation capacities and describes practical and issue-driven participation alongside distrust of consultation.
Interpretive limit: Mixed account; national cultural generalisations not adopted.

E20 Organisational practices and contested transition costs, Interview 10
The respondent reports resource-saving practices but questions policy costs and the appeal of EU communication.
Interpretive limit: Practices and critical perceptions distinguished from factual cost attribution.

E21 Intermediation and practical guidance, Interview 11
The respondent calls for practical tools and describes connecting firms, authorities and communities and offering basic digital courses.
Interpretive limit: Organisation's reported activities, not evaluated effectiveness.

E22 Administrative burden and proportionality, Interview 12
The respondent describes paperwork as crowding out beneficiary support and compares requirements for small and large interventions.
Interpretive limit: Time shares, budgets and legal interpretations are unverified and omitted.

E23 Local priorities and civil society resources, Interview 12
The respondent describes weak links between strategic language and immediate local problems and argues for resourcing civil society engagement.
Interpretive limit: No inference that all civil society depends on these incentives.

E24 Navigation and newcomer access, Interview 13
The respondent describes difficulty identifying responsible services and barriers facing organisations unfamiliar with project applications.
Interpretive limit: Experience and interpretation; factual programme claims require verification.

E25 Technological opportunity and perceived dependence, Interview 13
The respondent combines optimism about digital applications with concerns about infrastructure, data and rapid regulatory change.
Interpretive limit: Corporate ownership and industrial claims not treated as established facts.

E26 Political contestation and limits of expertise, Interview 14

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Annex C: Passage based evidence register

The respondent discusses a perceived US policy shift, refuses to generalise local performance, explains consultation limits and acknowledges limited US civil society knowledge.
Interpretive limit: Not a US country study or an official position; current US policy not inferred.

E27 Implementation under wartime capacity constraints, Interview 15
The respondent describes digital continuity, qualified staff shortages, inclusion needs, regulatory concerns and positive local cooperation.
Interpretive limit: Situated account; no independent verification of national outcomes or legal claims.

E28 External partnerships and locally grounded ownership, Interview 16
The respondent describes delegation intermediation, education and research cooperation, instrument alignment and participation as a source of legitimacy.
Interpretive limit: EU institutional perspective associated with Thailand; not partner-country testimony.

E29 Resources and bounded technical expertise, Interview 16
The respondent describes funding pressures and explicitly limits their ability to assess technology risks.
Interpretive limit: No current spending trend or specialist risk assessment inferred.

E30 Multilateral ownership and trust, Interview 17
The respondent distinguishes the UN agenda from an EU strategy, stresses trust and accountability, and links technology to usable capacities; local-level comments are explicitly deductive.
Interpretive limit: United Nations-related international perspective; speaker describes EU affiliation despite UN category in index.

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