Municipality of Maia: International Affairs Strategy 2026-2029



*Position Maia as a **European**, innovative and **sustainable** city, recognised for the excellence of its **international** action*

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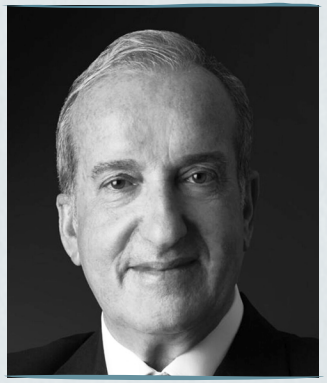
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The International Affairs Strategy 2026-2029 was approved by the Local Council on the 30 April 2026.

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Maia, 2026

CONNECTING MAIA TO EUROPE AND THE WORLD





We are committed to increasing the Municipality of Maia's participation in the European project and in global urban governance, with the aim of strengthening local democracy, quality of life, territorial resilience and economic development.

We recognise that cities and local leaders are the most pragmatic and effective actors in addressing complex problems, with city diplomacy serving as a key tool to enhance organisational knowledge, mobilise critical resources, build partnerships and generate public value.

In this frame, culture is a soft power dimension with a central role for promoting dialogue, communicating values, and support development.

Between 2017 and 2025, the Municipality of Maia significantly expanded its international engagement. Maia was awarded the title of European Volunteering Capital 2026, provided political and humanitarian support to Ukraine, joined Eurocities, hosted the Portuguese headquarters of Eixo Atlântico, produced its first Voluntary Local Review, participated in European innovation projects and mobilised over 100 million euros in European funding for local development projects.

The internationalisation of culture was also improved, with the consolidation of international partnerships, outreach and audiences, to position Maia as a creative hub and pave the way for an UNESCO Creative Cities application.

These milestones provide a foundation for our first city diplomacy strategy, which aims to position Maia as a European, innovative and sustainable city.

This transformative project recognises that local and global governance are mutually reinforcing and places culture as a central field of policy to continue enhancing the development, influence and visibility of our community.

António Domingos da Silva Tiago
Mayor of Maia

Mário Nuno Alves de Sousa Neves
Deputy-Mayor for International Affairs

THE PUBLIC VALUE OF CITY DIPLOMACY

City diplomacy is framed within the external cooperation competences of Portuguese municipalities[1] enabling the ability to participate in urban governance networks and build partnerships with foreign municipalities.

Our International Affairs Strategy 2026–2029 sets out a roadmap to ensure the coherence, effectiveness and impact of the Municipality's international action, and the alignment with European Union priorities, United Nations agendas, the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 21 for Culture. It aims to create public value across three interconnected and mutually reinforcing dimensions:

1 *Legitimacy and Political Support*

Align local policies with EU and United Nations agendas; expand cooperation and partnerships with national bodies, European institutions and foreign municipalities that share common values and goals; and broaden international visibility.

2 *Organisational Capacity*

Strengthen internal planning, coordination and the participation in European projects to support peer-learning, build EU engagement across the city administration, share international best practices, and mobilise resources.

3 *Public Value for Citizens*

Translate international learning into public innovation to strengthen rights and well-being. Support active European and global citizenship as a means of protecting democracy and strengthen collective action for sustainable development.

1. Law 75/2013, Articles 23, 2), p), 25, 1), t) and 33, 1), aaa).

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The International Affairs Strategy 2026–2029 recognises that the major contemporary challenges – climate action, protection of democracy, inclusive economic development, demographic dynamics, social justice and human security – have their greatest impact on urban areas. The United Nations estimates that 70% of the world's population will be living in cities by 2050.

Therefore, solutions require a coordinated, multilevel response that integrates local action with a global perspective. Cities are key actors in mobilizing action and testing policies.

In this context, Maia stands out for its track record of robust and sustained growth over the last four decades. With around 144,000 inhabitants, political stability, a dynamic and diversified economic profile and a privileged location within the Porto Metropolitan Area, north of Portugal, west coast of Europe, Maia has ideal conditions to act as a public innovation lab and promote European values.



Regarding our international action, participation in city networks serves to share knowledge on urban governance and enhance policies for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable community. Partnerships with municipalities in Canada, Cape Verde, China, France, Mozambique and São Tomé e Príncipe were established between 1998 and 2015, based on cultural and economic cooperation.

The Municipality is adopting global agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and «Eurocities Leipzig Declaration on Local Democracy». Maia is the European Volunteering Capital 2026 and holds the title of European City of Sport in 2014. Nevertheless, the engagement in European agendas and projects can be strengthened.

Overall, culture shows the potential to enhance all these dimensions, to foster dialogue, collective action and mutual trust.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOREIGN MUNICIPALITIES



Twinnings
Tarrafal de São Nicolau (Cape Verde)
Sault Ste. Marie (Canada)
Andrézieux-Bouthéon and Mantes-la-Jolie (France)
Nampula (Mozambique)

Cooperation agreements
Sal (Cape Verde)
Nan'An and Jiangmen (China)
Água Grande (São Tomé and Príncipe)

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

European Agendas

Engagement with EU institutions is essential to strengthen the knowledge of European priorities, policies and programmes, uphold european values and support active european citizenship. The establishment of Europe Direct Maia creates a direct link between the European Union and the citizens and organisations from the 28 municipalities of Porto Metropolitan Area and Tâmega and Sousa Intermunicipal Community.

International Networks and Forums

Consolidating the participation in city networks and urban governance forums strengthens the ability to defend local interests and improve local policy. The Municipality aims to deepen its participation in Eurocities and the German Marshall Fund – City Directors of International Affairs, join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network and strengthen its presence in major EU and UN events dedicated to urban governance.

Partnerships with Foreign Municipalities

Partnerships with foreign municipalities must create value for the community, through active citizenship, cultural creation, economic development or local policy innovation. The Municipality should assess its current partnerships and develop new goal-oriented agreements capable of supporting peer-learning, European projects, cultural initiatives, youth mobility or business missions.

Sustainable Development Goals

Maia aims to take a leading national role in local SDG action, namely on SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities – and the Agenda 21 for Culture. This requires strengthening the integration of the SDGs into municipal administration practices, including capacity-building, data, planning and investment. Progress reporting through Voluntary Local Reviews must be systematised to ensure analysis, comparison and the reassessment of priorities.

Economic Diplomacy

Engagement with embassies, consulates, investment agencies, chambers of commerce and industry and the diaspora, the organisation of business missions to foreign municipalities, and the identification of international investment forums can support the mobilisation of foreign direct investment and talent and the internationalisation of local businesses. Cultural and creative industries are a strategic sector for 2026-2029.

GOALS AND TARGETS

Field of action	Goal	Indicators	2025	2029
European agendas	Strengthen dialogue with European institutions	Implementation of Europe Direct communication plan	0%	100%
		Citizens engaged in activities	0	4.000
		Website visitors	0	2.000
		Instagram followers	0	500
		LinkedIn followers	0	250
International networks and forums	Increase the participation in international networks and forums	International forums attended	3	20
		International agendas adopted/endorsed	1	4
		UNESCO Creative City Network membership	-	1
Partnerships with foreign municipalities	Strengthen the exchange of local governance experiences	Incoming visits from foreign municipalities	0	4
		Outgoing visits to foreign municipalities	1	8
		European projects with a cultural dimension	0	3
Sustainable Development Goals	Lead local SDG action at national level	Publication of Voluntary Local Reviews	0	2
		Actions developed to integrate the SDGs into municipal administration practices	1	4
Economic diplomacy	Position Maia as a destination for foreign investment	New foreign investment requests received	0	20
		Actions developed to support the internationalisation of local businesses	0	5

GOVERNANCE

The coherence, effectiveness and impact of Maia's first city diplomacy strategy rely on a governance model that ensures internal coordination, democratic scrutiny and organisational learning.

- ***Local Council***
  Approves the strategy
  Approves revisions to the strategy
  Approves partnerships with foreign municipalities
  Evaluates progress

- ***Mayor***
  Authorises international missions

- ***City Executive***
  Approves the annual activities plan and budget for international affairs
  Approves the membership in international networks
  Approves the adoption or endorsement of international agendas
  Approves international cooperation projects
  Evaluates progress

- ***Deputy-Mayor for International Affairs: political coordination***
  Sets annual goals
  Validates strategic and operational proposals, including international missions
  Ensures high-level institutional representation

- ***International Office: technical coordination***
  Reports directly to the Deputy-Mayor for International Affairs
  Designs strategic and operational planning
  Implements the activity plan for international affairs
  Promotes internal coordination
  Acts as a contact point with national, European and international and foreign organisations, regarding city diplomacy
  Ensures technical representation in international networks, forums and missions
  Collects information on global and EU agendas
  Reports progress quarterly

- ***Organisational alignment***
  Internal units must align international activities with the 2026-2029 strategy, seek the approval of the Deputy-Mayor responsible for their policy field and the Deputy-Mayor for International Affairs, and communicate them to the International Office.

  - The culture unit is responsible for the entire cultural component.
  - The EU funding unit is responsible for identifying programmes, preparing applications and monitoring funded projects.
  - The communication unit is responsible for communication and protocol.
  - City branding is managed by the communication and tourism units.

  The International Office team organises quarterly meetings with internal units to report progress, identify synergies and align priorities.

  Key actions and results are communicated internally and externally.

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MAIA





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