

THE 2030 AGENDA

Through the eyes of local and regional governments' associations



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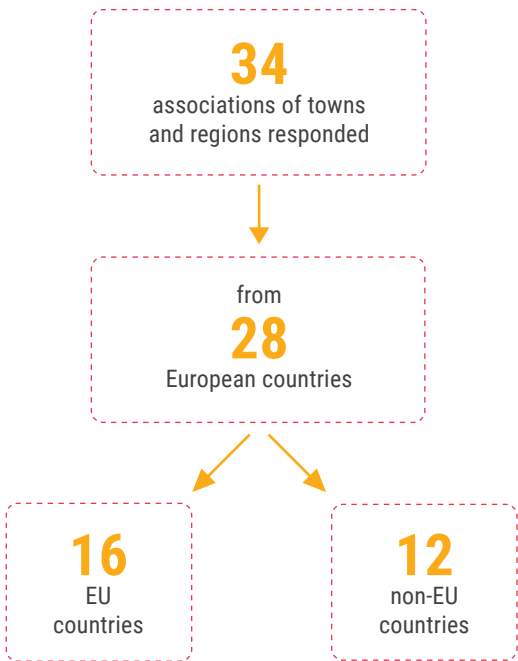
Our study's main findings



ABOUT THE 2030 AGENDA



ABOUT OUR STUDY



MAIN FINDINGS

AWARENESS

4/5

of the associations
are aware of and
make reference to
the SDGs

1/3

use the SDGs as an
important reference in
their local and/or regional
development strategies

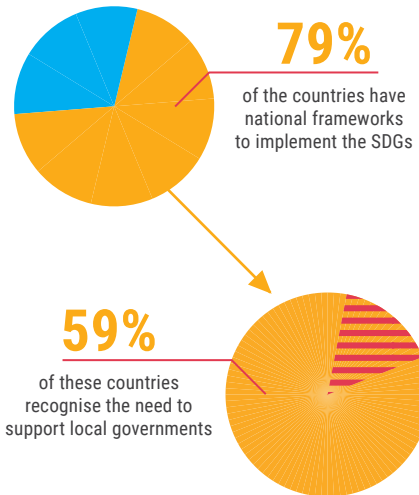
59%

deal with SDGs through
inter-departmental
working methods

Associations and their members

- ☒ Develop joint activities with external partner
- ☒ Work with political statements
- ☒ Support the alignment of local development plans with the SDGs

MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE



DECENTRALISED COOPERATION



39%

of the associations work with
non-European partners on
the SDGs



19%

of the associations
focus on
specific SDGs

International cooperation and the SDGs



more

exchanges & capacity building
are needed



www.platforma-dev.eu

more

citizens involved in public
policies



www.localsolidaritydays.eu

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MUNICIPALITIES & REGIONS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS



FOREWORD



Local Action for Global Goals

Everywhere around the world, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are increasingly gaining attention. More and more governments, businesses, schools, research institutions and civil society organisations are using the 2030 Agenda to guide their policies and actions. What's more, citizens are doing their part and are pushing the public and private sectors to do better.

As the government level closest to the citizens, local governments are key to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Without them, it is simply impossible to realise the SDGs. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are linked to the core responsibilities of local governments. Local and regional authorities worldwide face the same challenges and pursue the same objectives. They have been persistently claiming their spot on the international stage, through both words and actions.

Things are moving quickly at the local level. In Flanders (Belgium) for example, 60% of all municipalities have used the SDGs in their new multi-annual policy plans (2020-2025). In my own hometown of Kortrijk, we have linked the SDGs to our new policy plans and to concrete actions. For example, we have installed a huge cycling zone where cyclists have priority over cars (SDG 11), we have appointed a garden coach to make our (private) gardens greener and more sustainable (SDG 15) and of course we have a concrete poverty reduction plan to leave no one behind (SDG 1).

Through the 2030 Agenda, global challenges and international justice are reaching a whole new audience within the municipality and are taken up strategically. The SDGs further serve as a common language to initiate and strengthen multi-actor partnerships, they lead to more integrated working within the municipal administration and provide an impetus for data-driven policy making.

However, we are not there yet! As we are entering the decade of action, we need to move into a more profound and ambitious transition towards sustainable development. The COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath have made this very clear. Although the pandemic is primarily a health crisis (SDG 3), it affects all aspects of life. It reminds us of the importance of sustainability and of leaving no one behind. It uncovers the linkages – but also the trade-offs – between the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The policy approach to this crisis, and future ones, therefore has to be sustainable, with local Governments in the leading role and with attention to international justice.

The current crisis and the uncertain future are a call for action. Every player around the globe has to act now. Don't be afraid to take the leap! Our generation of politicians, civil servants and citizens is the generation that has to turn the tide. We cannot do this alone. We need solidarity and cooperation within and between countries and local governments, and with the private sector, civil society and educational and research institutions. This is also a call for action towards the United Nations, European institutions and towards national governments. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without the active involvement of local governments. Give us therefore not only a voice, but also an actual seat at the decision-making table.

Tine Soens

*Member of the City Council of Kortrijk, Belgium,
Member of VVSG political commission on international affairs,
CEMR and PLATFORMA Spokesperson on the 2030 Agenda*

This study is based on a joint survey conducted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), PLATFORMA and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). It was sent out in March 2020 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners. The purpose was to collect updated information on how and the extent to which local and regional government associations have been involved in the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Disclaimer: The analyses, results and recommendations set out in this study are those of CEMR and PLATFORMA. They do not necessarily reflect the official position of any local or regional government, their associations or the multilateral institutions whose case studies are presented herein.

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ACRONYMS

CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DEAR	Development Education and Awareness Raising
Decentralised cooperation	Development cooperation between sub-national governments
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
GTF / Global Task Force	Global taskforce of local and regional governments (facilitated by UCLG)
HLPF / UN HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (organised by the UN)
LRGs	Local and regional governments
LRGAs	Local and regional government associations
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews (local reporting on the progress made to achieve the SDGs)
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews (national reporting on the progress made to achieve the SDGs)

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Increased support and acknowledgment from national governments to localise the SDGs and promote learning between peers at EU and international level

Member States, the European Union (EU) and the international community need to officially acknowledge and support the role that local and regional governments (LRGs) and their national associations (LRGAs) play in the implementation process of the SDGs. This support should be both for European action and global cooperation, notably through peer-to-peer cooperation. Municipalities and regions need to be considered as hubs for experimentation, finding new partnerships, methods and strategies to effectively implement the SDGs.

2 Promote multilevel and multi-stakeholder partnerships as a prerequisite for the implementation of the SDGs

Increased recognition of the role of local and regional governments, and their national associations in bringing the 2030 Agenda to life, should be accompanied by increased involvement of LRGs and LRGAs in national and EU decision-making and reporting processes related to the SDGs. This means inclusive dialogues and active consultation of LRGs and LRGAs at each step of central governments' SDG strategies, including in Voluntary National Reviews, as well as at EU level in its work programmes. In this sense of partnership, LRGs should feel encouraged to reach out to different stakeholders to unite their strengths and create strong and long-lasting cooperation for SDG implementation.

3 Allocate funds and increase support dedicated to the localisation of the SDGs

More is needed than simply asking local and regional governments to implement the 2030 Agenda in their territories and with their peers: they need to be empowered to do so, with the right capacities, resources and enabling institutional environment.

4 Make the most of local and regional governments' associations to help bolster SDG awareness-raising initiatives and accelerate the localisation process

Municipalities and regions need to accelerate the SDG localisation process and, to do so, they need to continue spreading the word to their peers, to produce a surge in subnational government mobilisation all over the world. The role of national associations is key to informing and mobilising their members, coordinating the actions of local and regional governments and supporting the 2030 Agenda's localisation. This crucial role should be better recognised by international institutions, the European Union and national governments.

5 Provide relevant information to subnational governments, including support to collect transparent and open data to monitor progress

Better communication is needed to clarify the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda and help municipalities and regions understand the role they can play at different stages of the implementation process. Local and regional governments and their associations require support from an array of stakeholders, including national governments, the European Union, the research sector and academia, as well as the private sector. This support to the local and regional spheres is needed to collect disaggregated and open data to help them monitor their progress and continuously improve their strategies.

CHECKLIST

This checklist will enable national associations to better identify how and when they can support their members in the process of SDG localisation (through awareness raising initiatives, tools to help monitor progress and collection of disaggregated data, by connecting with the national level, etc.) both at local and European level but also by connecting with the international dimension.



Know where your members stand in the localisation of the SDGs!

- ☐ Our members are aware of and understand the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs
- ☐ Our members understand how they can play their part in helping citizens recognise what the SDGs represent for themselves and for local and regional governments. They have enough knowledge and the appropriate tools to engage citizens in the localisation process
- ☐ There is sufficient political will to start working on the 2030 Agenda at the territorial level
- ☐ My association inserts the 2030 Agenda in local election campaigns and trains new elected representatives on the SDGs
- ☐ Our members have developed a guiding SDGs framework (strategy, statement, action plan...) with their own priority SDGs
- ☐ Our members are engaging with other stakeholders (citizens, NGOs, academia, the private sector, peers in partner countries)
- ☐ Our members are actively integrating the SDGs framework into their daily work
- ☐ Our members are regularly monitoring progress to see if they are reaching our SDG objectives, thanks to local tailored indicators and targets
- ☐ Our members regularly produce their own local reports on their progress on the SDGs, with the support of our association
- ☐ Our members contribute actively to national reporting for the United Nations through our association
- ☐ Our association supports municipalities in reporting back to national governments and to develop their own voluntary local reviews

INTRODUCTION

Rome wasn't built in a day. Neither was the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹. This agenda is a "universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere"², setting out a 15-year action plan to achieve its ambitions. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace and partnerships to achieve the global ambitions.

Five years after its adoption, Europe and the world have now entered a new decade of action³. Today, progress is being made in many places and across different levels, but, overall, action to meet the global goals has yet to achieve the speed or scale required. The United Nations notably calls for the year 2020 to usher in a decade of ambitious action to deliver the Goals by 2030.

Local and regional governments and their national associations are already embracing the SDGs. They create new economic, social and environmental opportunities every day and are becoming fully pledged actors for the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. For them it is a transformative agenda that serves as a framework to guide long-term decision-making and strives to improve the delivery of public services to citizens. It enhances their engagement in public policy-making, by breaking silos across policy areas and improving connections with different stakeholders.

Local and regional governments are key players in contributing to the institutional coherence, continuity and coordination that is needed to implement the 2030 Agenda within and between countries across the globe, provided they have the necessary powers, resources and capacities. This, however, is not always a given. The role of national associations of local and regional governments is therefore very important, as they raise awareness to their member cities, municipalities and regions on the role of global agendas, including on the 2030 Agenda, and provide support to help localise the SDGs. They are crucial to help coordinate better with national governments, EU institutions as well as international partners, notably to centralise key messages and bolster LRG advocacy initiatives.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe and around the world has brought about unprecedented challenges for local and regional governments, including pressure on their finances, health care, education, food and safety systems, as well as on local economic development and jobs. In several countries, the pandemic has markedly deepened inequalities and has slowed



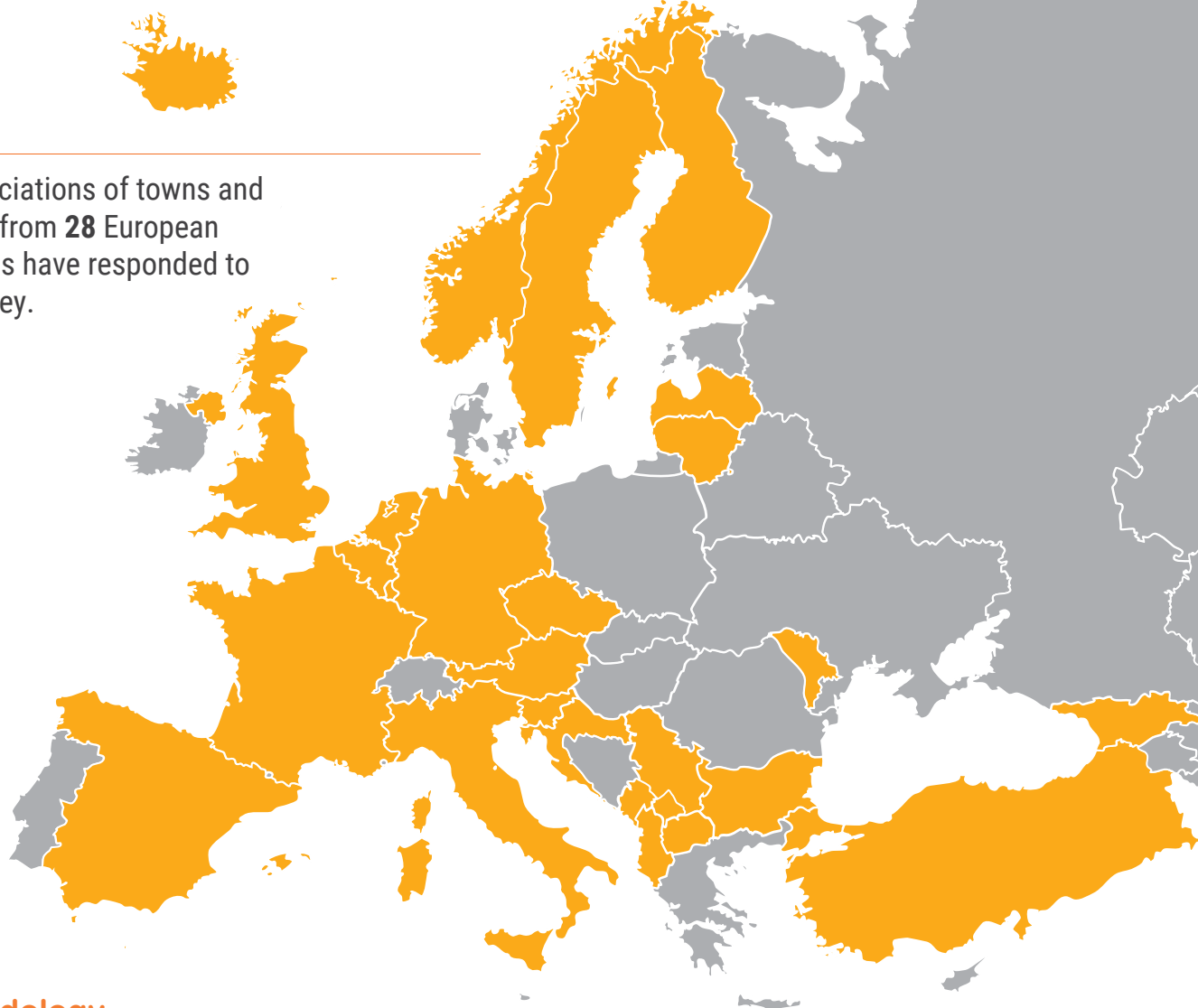
down efforts to raise awareness and promote the work of the 2030 Agenda at local level. Whilst local and regional leaders are facing one of the most urgent crises in their careers, the idea of meeting the SDGs on time should not seem irrelevant to their current priorities.

As the world gradually moves to the recovery phase, business as usual will not be up to the task. The pandemic represents an opportunity for all levels of government to 'build back better' in order to create inclusive, equal, safe, resilient and sustainable societies. For this to happen effectively, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has pointed to the 2030 Agenda as an "organising principle" for when the world shifts its focus to recovery. Making the most of the SDGs and the comprehensive framework it provides can help guide the world to make COVID-19 recovery policy choices that have a sustainable, inclusive and prosperous impact on people and the planet. The role of associations of local and regional governments in helping cities and regions navigate this process at the local level, together with their national governments and international institutions, will be essential.

¹ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 25 September 2015 "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development": <https://bit.ly/2Yw2qf8>

² More information on the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations (UN) can be found on the UN webpage: <https://bit.ly/3g9ddIN>

³ More information on the decade of action: <https://bit.ly/2Vhb8Mt>



34 associations of towns and regions from **28** European countries have responded to the survey.

Methodology

Geographical scope

This study's analysis is based on a survey run from March 2020 until mid-June 2020. The statistics and correlations are supplemented by desk research, information shared by PLATFORMA partners and CEMR member national associations of local and regional governments during a focus group meeting held on 30 April, to discuss the main conclusions of our survey. Additional online and phone interviews were conducted to validate and deepen our understanding of the survey's answers. Partner organisations also contributed with information, data and examples of local practices.

The respondents are mainly made up of technical experts from local and regional governments associations.

The questionnaire's results, and therefore the study's figures and graphics, are based on the responses of 34 national associations of LRGs, covering 28 countries including 16 EU Member States. The 28 countries represent 675.513.322 people⁴ and the associations represent 94,5% of this population, on average⁵.

Questionnaire

In order to collect as much data as possible and quantify progress on the SDGs in Europe, we adapted a survey launched for the first time in 2018. It specifically refers to the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at the local level⁶.

Designed in cooperation with the United Cities and Local Governments, the questionnaire also aims to assist UCLG and the Global Taskforce of local and regional governments in the preparation of the report on local and regional governments' role in the localisation of the SDGs. This information will be shared at the July 2020 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the United Nations' central platform for following up and reviewing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The questionnaire's target group of respondents includes both local and regional governments themselves and their national associations. The questions have been designed with this flexibility in mind. UCLG will include the 49 LRGs' answers in the data analysed, while CEMR and PLATFORMA focus on the role of the national associations (representing 34 responses). The LRGs' answers are used within this publication to showcase good practices. This year, the survey has been drafted to focus on the voluntary reporting process to the UN at the national, but with special attention to the local level.

The survey was divided up into several parts, designed to assess awareness of the SDGs within the organisation, the national context for SDG implementation and monitoring, and the actions taken by local and regional governments and their associations to accelerate SDG implementation and monitoring in Europe and with peers across the world..

⁴ Source used for the population of the 28 countries: Eurostat (10 July 2020).

⁵ Source used for the representativeness of the associations: CEMR study "National associations of Local and regional governments in Europe", January 2019. <https://bit.ly/3g0K5wD>

⁶ Results from previous surveys are collected and analysed in the following two editions of CEMR-PLATFORMA studies: How local and regional government associations bring the SDGs to life (2019) <http://bit.ly/33wt341> and Sustainable Development Goals, How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead (2018) <http://bit.ly/2NtFB43>



Trends

With respect to measuring progress, the objective is not to estimate changes in awareness and action in the same geographic area over a period of time but to have a sense of the general progress across Europe regarding awareness, implementation and reporting within as many associations of LRGs as possible.

We compared the statistics for 2020 with those from previous years and although there was a change in the list of respondents⁷, all things being equal, the sample remains representative. For instance, with regards to the general change in SDG awareness: out of the 34 respondents, 82% are aware of and make reference to SDGs and even use them as an important reference in their strategies, compared to only 31% in 2019.

In order to have a precise estimate of changes between 2018 and 2020 on certain issues, we made calculations based on the 14 respondents who are present in all these editions⁸. In these cases, we have chosen to use the percentage point difference for the proportion in question.

Comprehensiveness of the survey

It should be noted that those who respond to such a survey are generally already aware of the SDG framework to a certain extent, notably because they are part of CEMR and/or PLATFORMA, and therefore, are more inclined to complete it. Indeed, the majority of participating associations were already familiar with the goals.

However, we have also received answers from associations that had never worked with the SDGs or for which the global goals are far from being a priority, as well as from associations whose countries are reporting for the first time to the United Nations High Level Political Forum. Some participating associations were even overtly critical of the SDG framework. These responses are essential to ensuring that our analysis is as comprehensive as possible, which captures not only good practices, but also any constraints and reservations that still need to be addressed.

⁷ Compared to 2019, 10 new answers were received and there are 14 different respondents.

⁸ Geographical basis for 2018-2019-2020 comparisons: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

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AWARENESS AND ACTIONS: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS WORK WITH THE SDGs



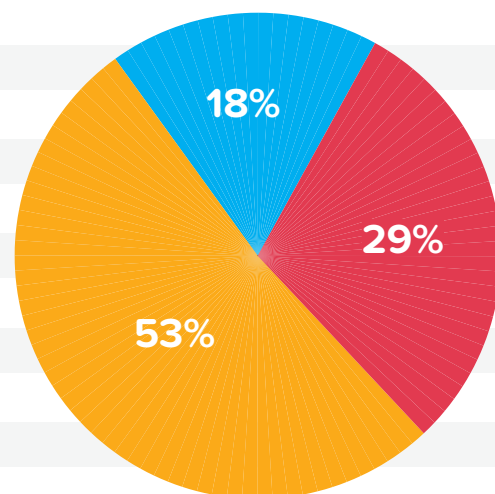
Five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the terms “Sustainable Development Goals” and “global goals” are becoming increasingly familiar and better understood, including among local and regional governments and their national associations. However, understanding is not synonymous with ‘adoption’ and so our key question with this year’s survey was to see progress made by Europe’s towns and regions in working with and towards achieving the SDGs. It was also important to us to discover the extent to which the SDGs have been integrated and embedded into the daily work of those who responded to our study, and how they use this opportunity to join forces with external stakeholders to achieve a common objective.

Level of awareness

Good news! Progress regarding the level of awareness of the SDGs within the organisations is definitely increasing. Out of 34 respondents, 82% are aware of and make reference to SDGs⁹, compared to 31% in 2019. What is even more impressive is the fact that out of all the answers received, one third¹⁰ grasp the global goals so well that they use them as an important reference in their local and/or regional development strategies. Only 19% did so in 2019 and 14% in 2018. Year after year, local and regional governments and their associations are increasingly making the efforts necessary to translate the global agenda into their territorial realities, fulfilling the true universal nature of the SDGs.

Out of the respondents who indicated that the SDGs are not a priority, answers indicate that it isn’t an issue of comprehension that is hindering them from working with the global framework. Rather, the issues are broader. For instance, the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova particularly highlighted their very limited interest on working with this framework, as it seems too abstract and represents an additional burden to their already heavy day-to-day workload. The 10-year planning horizon proposed by the 2030 Agenda does not help respond fast enough to the imperative priorities in some countries.

HOW FAMILIAR IS YOUR ORGANISATION WITH THE SDGs?



- The majority of our staff is aware and makes reference to the SDGs, but it is not high in our work priorities
- The SDGs are well known in our organisation and used as an important reference in our strategies
- Many have heard about the SDGs, but are not aware about their relevance

⁹ The remaining 18% correspond to the six associations where many staff have heard about the SDGs, but are not aware about their relevance, according to the respondent (the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Sweden).

¹⁰ Ten associations: France, Georgia, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain (Fons Mallorquí and FEMP).

“Transversality”

We observe a correlation in the way the work on the global goals is being coordinated within the various organisations. Increasing awareness and understanding of the added value of working with the SDGs, both by local and regional leaders and technical experts of local and regional governments associations, tends to lead to an increasing integration of the 2030 Agenda across different departments of their organisations. As a matter of fact, 59% of the respondents informed us that they deal with the SDGs through interdepartmental working methods, compared to 15% last year.

For the Swedish Association of Local authorities and Regions (SALAR, also known as SKR in Swedish), they notably created a working group for their SDG-related work, composed of representatives from all the different departments of their office. Their main SDG coordination remains within their department for planning and community development.

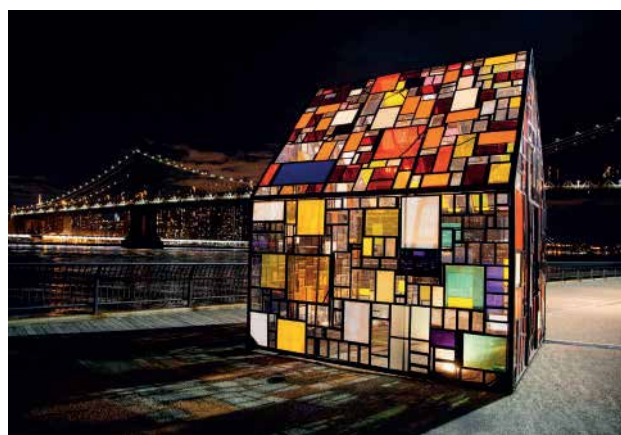
A growing number of associations of local and regional governments working with the 2030 Agenda actively implement the interlinkages between all 17 goals. These interlinkages have had a positive impact on the way local and regional governments and their associations collaborate with other organisations of stakeholders.

So far, national associations have essentially been working on the SDGs with their direct members: cities, municipalities, towns and regions. Key activities (in order of importance) include boosting exchanges and raising awareness, improving advocacy towards other tiers of government, support with reporting, helping to develop sustainability action plans, providing trainings and collecting data to monitor strategies. Political leadership at local and regional levels,

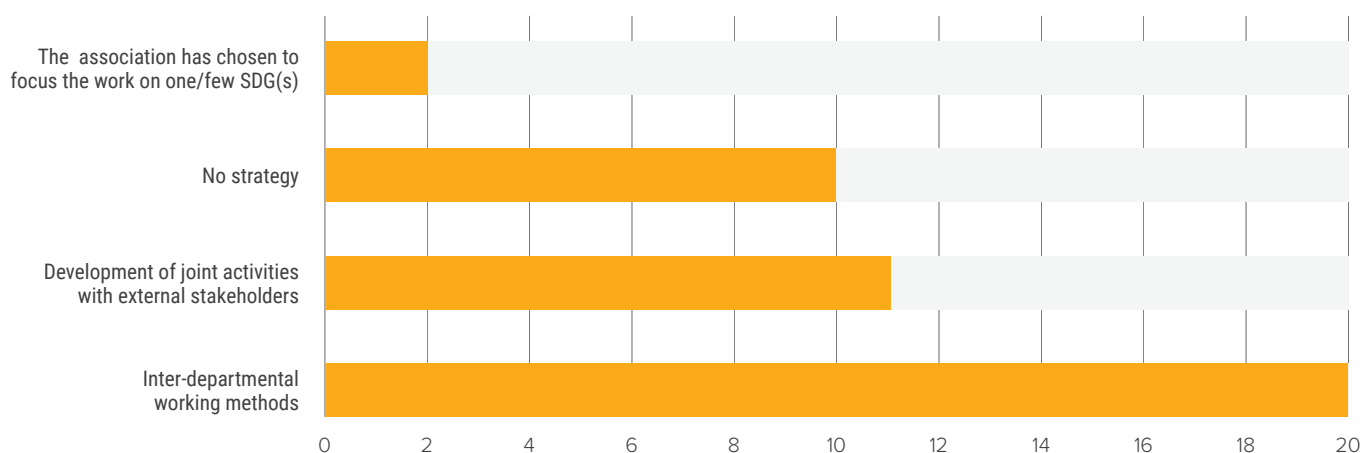
both in Europe and in partner countries, tend to need and benefit essentially from activities that can help increase their awareness of the SDGs and help them better understand how to use the framework within their local policies.

Working with national governments is also reported to be essential¹¹, notably for national associations’ advocacy-related activities.

European networks, such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), PLATFORMA and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) are also important stakeholders for national associations, as they allow for increased exchanges between peers actively working on the localisation the SDGs and can provide valuable support to associations and local governments just entering this process.



HOW DOES YOUR ORGANISATION DEAL WITH THE SDGs INTEGRATED APPROACH?



¹¹ National governments are listed as the 3rd most important stakeholder for LRGAs.



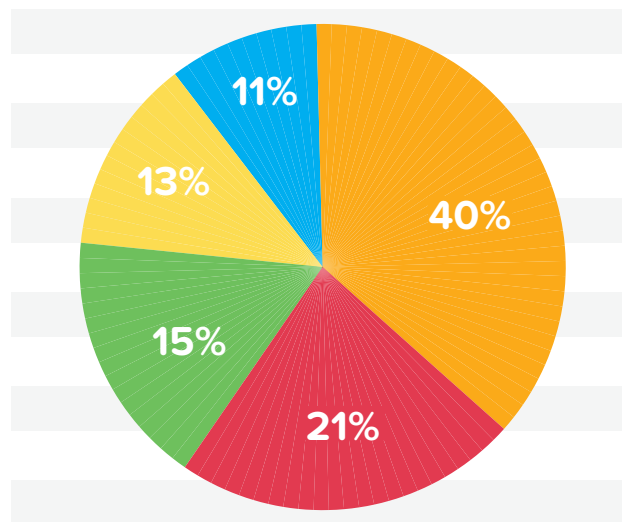
THE BRITISH EXAMPLE

In the English city of Bristol in 2016, a "Bristol SDGs Alliance" was formed by people wanting to promote the United Nations' newly agreed framework locally. This grew to include individuals from key Bristol institutions: its two universities, council officials, business representatives and voluntary organisations and networks. The Bristol SDGs Alliance is now a network of stakeholders representing more than 80 organisations, meeting every six to eight weeks to share best practice and information, and to advocate and adopt the SDGs in their own organisations.

In 2019, in Newcastle, another English city, the Council made a political commitment to mainstream the SDGs in its policies, activities and programmes. A team from Newcastle University is currently working with the Council and other partners to better understand the city from an SDGs perspective, with the potential to frame future collaboration and inform the city's Future Needs Assessment. In February 2020, the Council also committed to embed the SDGs in the new workplan of the city's Wellbeing for Life board. The health and wellbeing agenda is seen as an entry point for the SDGs, enabling greater engagement and the opportunity for mainstreaming across the city in the future.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

24 associations



- Civil society
- Professional or trade unions
- Private sector
- Schools, universities
- Other

Finally, national associations work the least directly towards the EU institutions and citizens, mainly because this touches upon the mandates of European networks and of their direct members: municipalities and regions.

More than two thirds of respondents¹² develop joint activities with external partner organisations to foster SDG implementation, encouraging a real sense of partnership and cooperation to reach the global goals together. In this case, civil society is clearly the key interlocutor for local and regional governments' associations when working on the 2030 Agenda, with 19 responses. However, not too far behind are also the private sector (ten responses), academia (six responses) and professionals of trade unions (five responses). The "Other" option (ten responses) covers sister organisations, international organisations and local, regional or national governments. There are many opportunities for stakeholders to engage one another, offering a wide range of opportunities for LRGAs and their members to bolster their efforts.

Working together on the SDGs is a key means to break silos, not only between departments of the same organisation, but also between different institutions and players, sometimes working in the same fields but in very different ways. The cross-cutting nature of the global goals makes for the strong added value of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to reinforce synergies between stakeholders, often even creating new opportunities to exchange and work together.



SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GLOBAL GOALS

"SDG 17, target 17: encourages and promotes effective public, public-private and civil society Partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships".

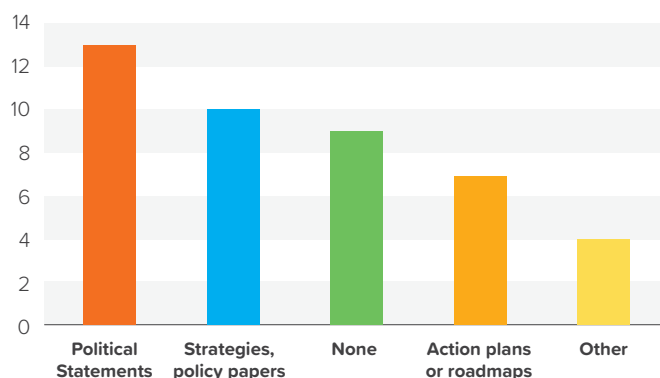
Local and regional governments and their associations are in the ideal position to encourage and facilitate partnerships between the public sector, businesses, academia and civil society across territories. Now more than ever, particularly with the COVID-19 outbreak across Europe and the world, local and regional governments have become key interlocutors and partners for local private businesses, including cooperatives, energy and sanitation providers, as well as NGOs and research institutes, to help ensure the smooth delivery of basic services to citizens in times of crisis. This will be even more crucial to ensure that recovery plans are inclusive and sustainable, leaving no one and no place behind.

¹² 24 associations: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Belgium (VVSG), Finland, France (CUF), Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia (SOS), Spain (FEMP, Euskadi and Fons Mallorquí), Sweden and the United-Kingdom (COSLA, LGA).

Implementation

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda officially declared that the signatory national governments are the ones accountable for its implementation. However, whilst it may not be a “compliance” agenda for cities, municipalities, towns and regions, the SDGs can play an important role as a policy tool for territorial development.

ASSOCIATIONS' SPECIFIC POLICY DOCUMENTS ON SDGs IMPLEMENTATION



Regarding the way that local and regional governments and their associations concretely convert their work on the SDGs in practice, over a third of the respondents¹³ work with political statements, which is a very important trigger for action on the SDGs. Where there is political will, there is a way! These statements often lead¹⁴ to action plans, roadmaps, strategies and other official documents¹⁵ and to open engagement to align local policies to the 2030 Agenda.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for local and regional governments and their associations' incorporating the SDGs in their local political process – we see new innovative ways of working at local and regional levels appearing every day.

Currently, 22 respondents have indicated that initiatives or projects are being developed to support the alignment of local development plans with the SDGs or the local implementation of the SDGs. Seven associations¹⁶ indicated the contrary and four associations¹⁷ indicated that they did not know. One association¹⁸ did not answer the question.

Awareness raising towards citizens is key to ensure that local SDGs policies and ambitions are implemented and understood by all. Informing and involving all stakeholders from the very start of the process creates a sense of ownership in bringing to life the SDGs ambitions, in particular for citizens. They feel involved in their local policies and understand better that through their active cooperation and implication, together their community can make sure that their ambitions and goals become reality. Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) on global agendas and decentralised cooperation is a pivotal component for an active and informed citizenship.



A GOLD-MINE OF AWARENESS-RAISING TOOLS

In Belgium, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has been working extensively with and for their members on the SDGs. They have developed a wide array of practical guidelines, tools and fun materials to help raise awareness on the SDGs, encourage local policymaking aligned with the global goals and also share examples of how to integrate the SDGs in international partnerships. A novelty in 2020 is their publication “Local Support for Global Challenges - a local translation of the SDGs”, sharing inspiring practical examples, enticing policy actions and surprising bits of knowledge to help towns, cities and municipalities better translate the 2030 Agenda into their local realities.

Find out more: <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-documents-in-foreign-languages>

¹³ This is the case for 13 associations: Albania, Austria, France (CUF), Germany, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain (Fons Mallorquí and FEMP), Sweden, United Kingdom (COSLA).

¹⁴ On the 13 associations mentioned above, six limited their work on the 2030 Agenda to the political level and seven used it to build action plans or strategies and policy papers.

¹⁵ Other documents and initiatives include a recommendation package (Georgia), guidelines and pilot development plans (Serbia), events co-organised with the central governments (Slovenia).

¹⁶ The seven associations are: Austria, Croatia, Finland, Georgia, Moldova, Spain (Fons Mallorquí).

¹⁷ The four associations are: Albania, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Lithuania. For the latter, the reason is that municipalities were still preparing at the time of the survey so there are no examples to cite yet.

¹⁸ France

SHARE YOUR ACTS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY!

Now, more than ever, what the world needs is solidarity, at all levels of governance and in all sectors of activity. The outbreak of the coronavirus beginning of 2020 made it clear that at a moment when a virus risks dividing and polarizing us, communities need to come together to be stronger. This will become even more of a necessity during the recovery phase, as the pandemic's aftermath means severe consequences for local and national economies, deepening inequalities between territories and citizens.

The European Days of Local Solidarity (14-29 November for the 2020 edition) is an annual two-week campaign run by cities and regions committed to inform and mobilise their citizens on global solidarity and sustainable development issues. Grounded on the European values of democracy, diversity and solidarity, the EDLS promote decentralised cooperation and city-to-city cooperation as a successful instrument for global sustainable development.

Find out more about how to participate in the 2020 edition of the campaign [localsolidaritydays.eu](https://www.localsolidaritydays.eu)

EUROPEAN DAYS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY

www.localsolidaritydays.eu
#LocalSolidarityDays



AWARENESS RAISING AND COVID-19

Within the framework of the Basque strategy for education for social transformation (H)ABIAN 2030, the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation, together with an array of partners, including provincial councils, municipalities, NGOs, educational centres and communicators, launched a communication campaign that aims to highlight international cooperation and solidarity in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. A joint statement entitled "Emerging from the crisis by cooperating" was published, highlighting the key role of decentralised cooperation in overcoming the existing challenges from a local and global perspective through the impulse of collaboration and complementary measures. The COVID-19 crisis has shown how interdependent and interconnected development issues are. The statement places a special focus on refugees. The declaration has been unique in its kind, due to the huge consensus created among all regional governments. Among its agreements, the declaration integrates the progression towards sustainability, the reduction of gaps, addressing climate challenge and the sustained commitment to the local level, among others.

The Basque Cooperation Fund/Euskal Fondoa has put in place very proactive and innovative initiatives concerning COVID-19, rights and decentralised cooperation, such as "Change the World and Play" (<https://bit.ly/2A00Eb1>) and a Local authorities statement (<https://bit.ly/3g2umxr>)

Global goals initiatives in the time of COVID-19 in Oss

In the Netherlands, the municipality of Oss is actively linking its COVID-19 response to the SDGs and launched a communication campaign raise awareness among citizens on how the municipality and the people of Oss, without knowing it, are actively contributing to the 2030 Agenda in times of the global pandemic. A series of activities, online dialogues, inspirational meetings and even door-to-door library book deliveries has been planned throughout spring 2020 to inform inhabitants about how basic services provided by Oss, is helping to contribute to the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

The national association, VNG, also launched a website to inform their members on different awareness-raising and knowledge exchange activities on COVID-19: <https://bit.ly/2Z6cyKR>

Initiatives from other stakeholders to support and inform SDG localisation

Whilst eleven answers informed us that no additional initiatives in the respondents' respective countries support and/or guide LRGs on their SDG-related work, 20 respondents indicated the opposite. The majority of these supporting initiatives were carried out by NGOs or foundations (as was already the case in 2019) as well as by the national Governments.

Academia, the private sector and international donors have also been mentioned as key supporters and promoters of local and regional governments' initiatives to implement the SDGs.

Local and regional governments and their associations have an array of partners that are ready to support their local actions and should make the most of all initiatives that are made available so as to bolster their visibility and action. This will also help create long-term partnerships between different stakeholders to achieve the SDGs, which is the foundation of the 2030 Agenda and the messages it aims to share.



WORKING WITH ACADEMIA TO RAISE AWARENESS ON SDGs

In Spring 2019, the Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI), together with the active participation of the Catalan Government and UCLG, the *Universidad Internacional de Andalucía* (International University of Andalusia) and the Regional Government of Andalusia, have launched online training courses on SDGs. These lectures tackle the questions of structures and challenges of the world network of cities, as well as international cooperation, active multilateralism and the role of local governments. Positive outcomes of this first edition of the course have led to consider further editions between university academic authorities and FAMSI. A new focus would be to train trainers on localising SDGs, from the global to the local, with a leading role of the experiences of SDG localisation on PLATFORMA partners.



2 GOVERNANCE IN PARTNERSHIP: WORKING HAND IN HAND AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE



Coordination mechanisms to implement the SDGs vary between local, regional and national levels, and can also be quite different from one country to another. Analysing the national institutional context can help determine if and how it influences local and regional policy-making on the 2030 Agenda.

How are local and regional governments and their associations involved in national reporting, and has the 2030 Agenda helped or not to encourage stronger partnerships in governance with the national levels?

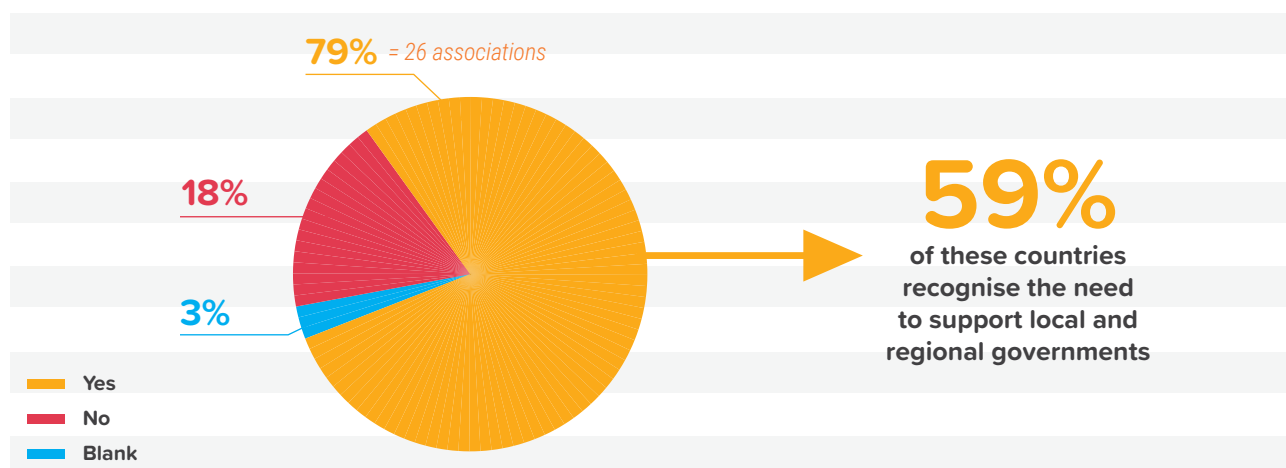
How are local and regional governments and their associations working on their own monitoring and reporting systems? How can they better highlight their innovative initiatives related to local reporting to other stakeholders, including to central governments?

Partnership mechanisms

The institutional environments, both national and international, are key enablers for local and regional governments' action. SDG strategies work best across a country when all levels of governance work hand in hand to create an enabling environment for SDG implementation for all, with clear coordination mechanisms.

The SDGs have been gaining traction at all levels, especially among central governments, where over 79% of respondents indicated that there is an official national strategy and/or roadmap to implement the SDGs, compared to 69% last year. Only four countries indicated that there is not any strategic official document at national level: Croatia, Latvia, North Macedonia and Norway. The Scottish as well as the Flemish associations mention that their territory has such a framework.

IS THERE ANY OFFICIAL NATIONAL STRATEGY OR ROADMAP TO IMPLEMENT THE SDGs?



In countries where a national strategy is in place, it is essential to see how inclusive these strategies are and whether local and regional realities are reflected in the process. For those who indicated that a national strategy has been set up, 59% specified that there is a clear mention of the need to support local and regional action in SDG implementation. Six associations indicate that there is no mention at all of the support LRGs might need to implement SDGs at the local level¹⁹. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro and the Association of Ukrainian Cities informed us that there are some mentions, but these remain vague.

Compared to 2019, there is an overall increase in the number of national strategies within our samples (from 69% to 79%). However, these new national strategies refer less to LRGs.

Other questions we asked were: how inclusive has the setting up of these national strategies been for local and regional governments and their national associations? How have central governments decided to allocate room for local and regional governments and their associations in the process and collaborate together? From the responses received in our survey, we identified three trends of consultation:

- Four associations²⁰ indicated being included throughout the entire process of the conception, implementation and monitoring phase of the national strategy. In Serbia, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities was involved in all phases of the national “Strategy of Sustainable Urban Development”, including the upcoming monitoring of the implementation of the strategy.
- A majority was consulted punctually throughout different phases of the implementation: Ten associations²¹ were consulted at the very beginning in the preliminary phase, eight²² were involved through ad-hoc consultations during the process and five²³ were invited to contribute at the very end in the monitoring phase.
- Ten associations indicated that whilst a mechanism has been put in place, they were not consulted at all (five associations²⁴) or the end results are not satisfactory enough for the respondents to consider the process truly inclusive, at least at the beginning (five associations²⁵). The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia mentioned that though they were invited to send comments and proposals to complement the national SDG strategy, their comments were not taken into consideration, leading to a final document which lacks any real connection to cities and local levels of government. For the Italian association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRe), even if there is a consultation process at subnational level, it is mostly limited to the regional level and did not represent sufficiently what is happening locally.

¹⁹ The six associations are: Austria, Germany, Iceland, Moldova, Slovenia, Turkey.

²⁰ Iceland, Kosovo, Serbia, Spain (FEMP).

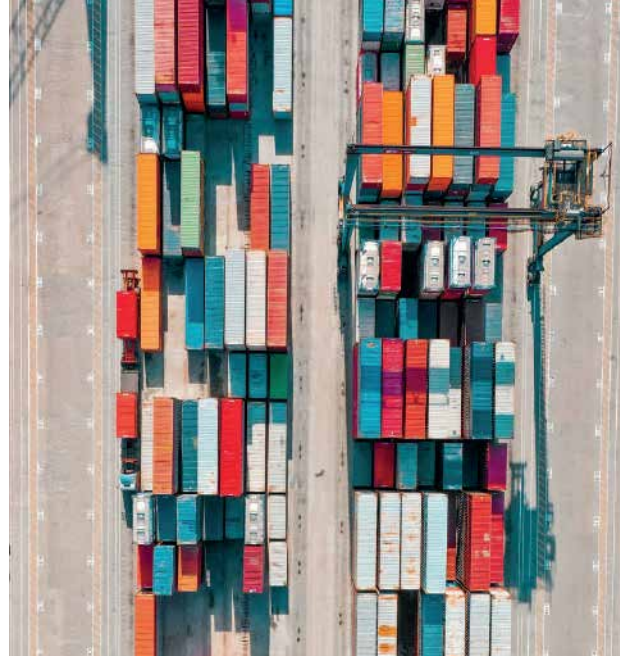
²¹ Ten associations: Belgium (VVSG), Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Georgia, Lithuania, Serbia, Spain (FEMP), Sweden, Scotland (COSLA).

²² Eight associations: Austria, Finland, France (CUF and AFCCRE); Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Turkey.

²³ Five associations: Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Serbia.

²⁴ Five associations: Albania, Germany, Slovenia, Spain (Fons Mallorquí), Ukraine.

²⁵ Belgium (VVSG), France (AFCCRE), Italy, Moldova, Slovenia.



Nevertheless, even if there is still considerable room for progress to enhance the partnership mechanisms between local and regional governments and their central governments in the elaboration and implementation of SDGs strategies, for some countries, positive developments have been taking place over the past 5 years.

For instance, in Belgium, local governments are under the legal coordination of the regional governments, not the federal and central level. In the preliminary phases of the SDGs' integration by regional and central governments, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) was consulted by the regional government, but in a limited way. SDG localisation has really started to pick up in Flanders, notably through increased local good practices, engagement from Flemish municipalities and activities launched by VVSG. These have been showcased and applauded at international level and have increased the level of attention paid by the regional and federal governments to SDG integration and cooperation led by the local level.

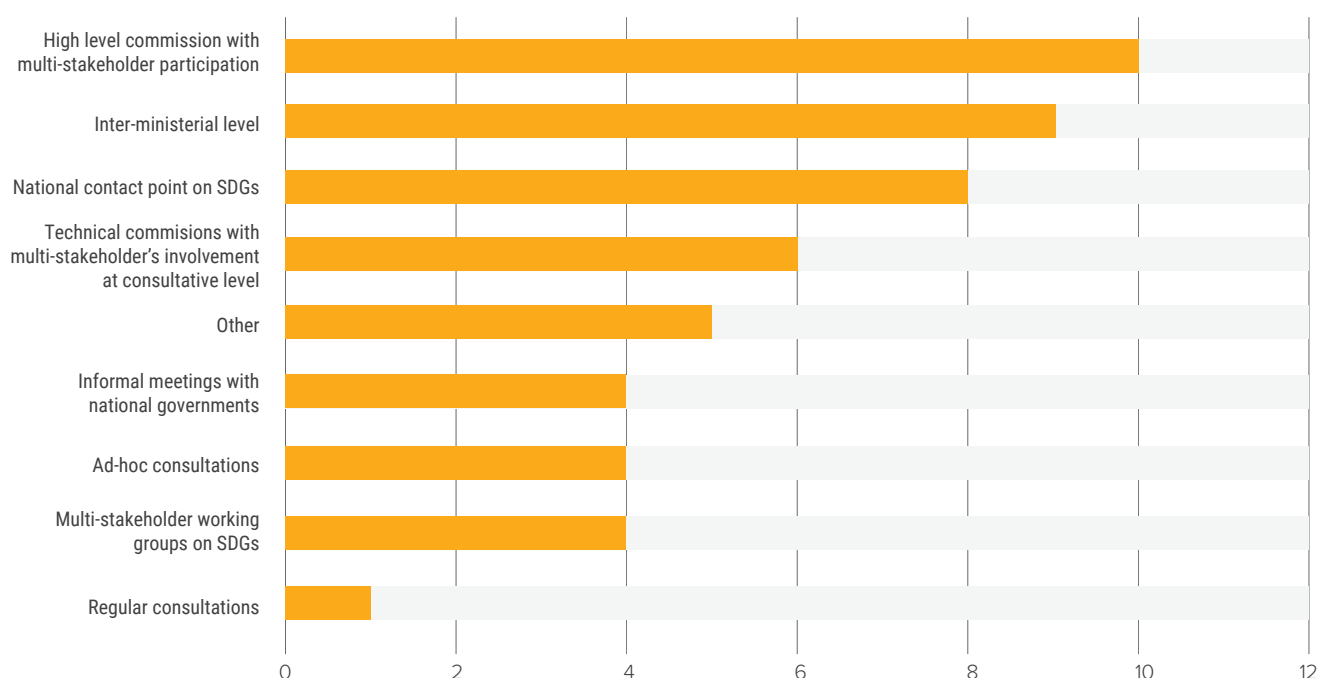
Similarly, whilst the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) was not fully involved in the first design phase of the strategic framework of the Czech Republic for the 2030 Agenda, it has now been invited to participate in the upcoming update of the implementation of the national strategy. Furthermore, SMO ČR and the ministries of environment and regional development are cooperating to better support local Governments' implementation of the SDGs.

When asked what type of mechanisms have been put in place for SDG coordination and follow up, several interesting and diverse answers came up²⁶. In our survey, a plurality of ten respondents out of 26 indicated that they take part in multi-stakeholder commissions organised by the central government. This type of mechanism can be an encouraging exercise, especially to help connect different stakeholders who do not usually exchange together and enable them to think together towards a common goal. However, these commissions need to be balanced and provide equal voices to all participants, whilst guaranteeing a specific separate space for local and regional policy-makers.

²⁶ UCLG's Global Report on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD V) on 'The Localization of the Global Agendas' examines in its regional chapter on Europe, the national strategies for integrating SDGs, including the coordination mechanisms and LRG participation. More information can be found here: <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-EUROPA%20REGION-WEB.pdf>

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR SDGs COORDINATION AND FOLLOW-UP

26 associations



Nine associations are also engaged at inter-ministerial level. In Bulgaria for instance, the national association is involved in the High level commission at inter-ministerial level.

Eight local and regional government associations go directly through national SDGs contact points in the central government or are engaged in inter-ministerial committees, which is another more bilateral way of exchanging with the national government. National contact points, also known in some countries as SDG ambassadors, such as in Spain, or an SDGs coordinator, are appointed by the government and are often in charge of ensuring an open and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders across the national territory on a specific topic. Six associations work with technical commissions.

Coordination mechanisms clearly vary from one country to the next, and depend very strongly on the relationship national governments have with their local and regional governments and their associations. Different types of mechanisms can be combined.

Working on the SDGs can also help LRGAs better approach their national governments. For instance, the national association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia uses the SDGs as an additional persuasion tool to influence national government decisions, notably to justify the need for additional funding at the local and regional levels, which will ultimately also serve the implementation of the SDGs.

As a matter of fact, a total of 16 associations use SDGs to improve advocacy towards their national governments. This helped enhance coordination across levels of government as well as receive additional support from national governments, notably in terms of administrative and financial support, capacity building and human resources. Respondents to our survey noted this positive outcome as the second top opportunity of working with the SDGs.





WORKING IN THE SPIRIT OF MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

For governance in partnership to truly be effective, national governments need to clearly recognise the role that local and regional governments play on the ground as policymakers, and the important role of coordination, information sharing and capacity building that national associations of local and regional governments play in the process. For this, national governments need to:

- Enhance and support effective decentralisation policies which are central to empowering local and regional governments to localise the SDGs in Europe and in partner countries.
- Systematically include LRGs and their national associations in all processes of implementation and monitoring of the EU overarching strategy on SDGs, from the design to the final evaluation, not only through ad-hoc consultations.
- Strengthen national associations' own capacities to play their role towards their members and towards the national government.



Monitoring progress: local and national reporting go hand in hand

National reporting

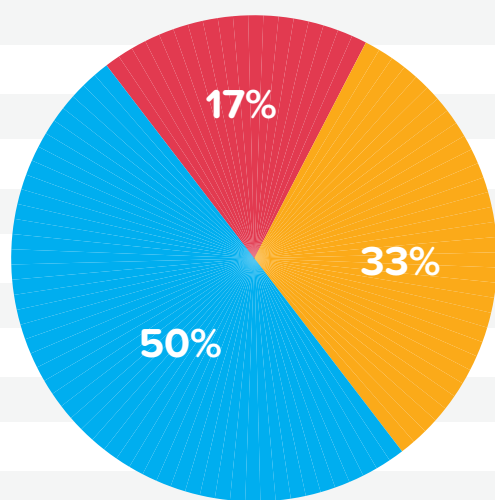
Up to now, reporting to the United Nations on progress towards SDG implementation is done on a voluntary basis. Until 2018, only national governments presented their reports to the UN. Whilst guidance is provided by the UN on how to propose a Voluntary National Report (VNR), each country is free to construct its report as it sees best, involving the stakeholders it considers most appropriate to contribute in the process.

This year, nine European countries officially report to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF): Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Ukraine and Slovenia. A total of eight countries (nine associations as there are two associations in Slovenia) answered our survey.

Regarding the role of local and regional governments' associations in the development of a national SDG progress report to the UN, the involvement of the nine associations in 2020 was quite weak. The majority did not participate in a reporting unit appointed by the national government or in the drafting process; they were not invited to attend bilateral meetings and there was not even a questionnaire or survey to answer to.

Here is the situation across Europe : the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia and the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia participated in national and/or regional conferences or workshops to debate the report (strong involvement), as did the Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia and the Finnish association, which also presented their own contributions to the reports. The Slovenian association notably participated in occasional information workshops, with limited room to contribute to the actual report, and has also been invited to the presentation of the VNR once this was finalised. The associations from Bulgaria, Ukraine and North Macedonia did not respond at all to the question.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF LRGAs IN THE HLPF REPORTING (2020) IS:



Weak Moderate Strong

In 2019, 58% of the associations of the twelve reporting countries were invited to contribute to their national reports for the UN High-Level Political Forum. In 2020, this number dropped to 50%²⁷.

Why this change? Firstly, out of the nine European countries reporting in 2020, five are doing so for the first time: Austria, Bulgaria, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine.

Countries which have already gone through a first experience of reporting to the UN are better including different stakeholders' perspectives in follow-up reporting processes, including those of local and regional governments. For instance, in 2019, the Union of Municipalities of Turkey noted that their involvement in the second Turkish Voluntary National Review (VNR) was taken into account much more seriously than in 2016²⁸. Practice does not always make perfect, but it definitely leads to progress.

It is also worth noting that five of the reporting countries this year come from Eastern Europe and the Eastern Partnership. In this region of Europe, awareness levels on the SDGs at both the local and national levels, as well as concrete activities linked to SDGs implementation, are still quite new. Within Eastern Partnership countries, on the one hand national governments are not sufficiently aware of what local and regional governments are doing on the SDGs. On the other hand, cities and regions are not always aware of how they can contribute to national reports and international discussions. Increased communication between the two levels through the national associations could help clarify some of these issues. Networks of local and regional governments, such as CEMR, PLATFORMA and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), can also help provide additional information and encourage knowledge exchange between LRGAs of the region.

A few years ago, this was also the case for western European countries reporting for the first time to the HLPF. To take back the example of Belgium, which reported officially for the first time in New York in 2017, VVSG was unsatisfied with the way local and regional governments were involved and represented in the national report at that time.

However, since then, a more structural consultation mechanism between VVSG and the Flemish government has been put in place on the SDGs. The current Flemish government specifically mentions the importance of local governments in achieving the SDGs, and VVSG receives funding from both the federal and the Flemish governments to help municipalities localise the 2030 Agenda and was invited to join the national delegation during the UN High level Political Forum of 2019. The next round of Voluntary National Reporting for Belgium is now expected to be a positive experience where associations of local governments could have a stronger role to play in the consultation process.

²⁷ 50% include both strong and moderate involvement of LRGAs in HLPF reporting, as indicated in the related graph.

²⁸ In 2016, the Union of Municipalities of Turkey identified only eight mentions of local governments in the VNR presented to the HLPF. In 2019, they were quite meaningfully mentioned throughout the report and were even granted specific paragraphs in the report to reflect efforts from various municipalities.



ROADMAP FOR ASSOCIATIONS OF TOWNS AND REGIONS:



Five steps to contribute to Voluntary National Reporting

- 1 LRGAs should contact their national government as soon as possible to know how they plan to proceed with their Voluntary National Review (VNR) in the coming months.
- 2 Identify the contact details of the team within the government in charge of producing the VNR – several Ministries may be concerned.
- 3 Enquire with the government whether a specific timeline for national reporting is already in place and what are the key milestones in the process.
- 4 Enquire with the government whether when and how local and regional perspectives will be included in the report, and whether and when the LGRA or LRGs can actively contribute to the process:
 - a. Enquire what type of coordination mechanism is foreseen: multi-stakeholder working groups, ad-hoc consultations, technical committee meetings, dialogue with a national SDGs contact point, etc.
 - b. If no coordination mechanism is foreseen, enquire if LRGs can send in their own local government reports to attach to national reporting as an annex.
- 5 Ask in general, how can local and regional governments help contribute more regularly to the implementation of the national SDG strategy and the monitoring of progress achieved.

Before starting this process, LRGAs can engage with their members to know:

- ☐ What policies for sustainable development have they recently developed?
- ☐ What is their level of awareness of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Goals?
- ☐ Have any of your members already produced a local government report on SDG progress? There is not a single template to follow in this process, it will truly depend on the level of local engagement and understanding of the SDGs:
 - This can be something quite simple, for instance: listing the existing local actions with the relevant SDGs, to make a first assessment on where they stand²⁹.
 - It can also be something more complex, linked to the monitoring of a local 2030 strategy implemented at the local level.
- ☐ Beyond sharing with the national government, are any of these members planning on sharing their local government report with the European Union or the United Nations?
- ☐ Do any of your direct members have any existing relations with the national governments? What types of problems have they encountered in dealing with national governments?
- ☐ Suggest to your member LRGs to include some recommendations in their local reporting on how they would propose to improve cooperation with national governments, so as to be as efficient as possible together when working on the 2030 Agenda.

²⁹ Several European cities have already presented in previous years or are presenting a VLR in 2020, such as Helsinki in Finland, Mannheim in Germany or Strasbourg in France, among others. A particularly good example to look at is the Voluntary Local Review made by the city of Bristol (UK) in 2019, presented to the United Nations' High-Level Political Forum in New York. More information on how this process has been done can be found on <https://bit.ly/3fY0d20>. This also includes their VLR handbook (<https://bit.ly/3i0Jq0e>) and report about how the city localised the SDGs/developed a local network of SDG actors (<https://bit.ly/3g0yttU>).



It is also interesting to look at local and regional government associations' level of involvement in national SDG progress reports, beyond official VNRs. Only 17% of the nine associations whose countries are presenting a Voluntary National Report in 2020, consider their involvement in the reporting to the UN HLPF as strong. Yet, out of the 10 associations who were invited by their central governments to contribute to a national report which is not shared at UN level, nearly half (42%) indicated playing a "strong" role. 37% feel they are moderately involved and 21% indicated that they play a weak role.

In any case, the main goal is to strengthen effective and long-term governance in partnership, no matter where these results are shared. Coordination mechanisms on the SDGs, whether it is for UN reporting or for national purposes, have proven to have had a positive impact on the relationship local and regional governments and their associations have with their central governments, as indicated by 44% of the 27 associations in which country there is an institutional mechanism.

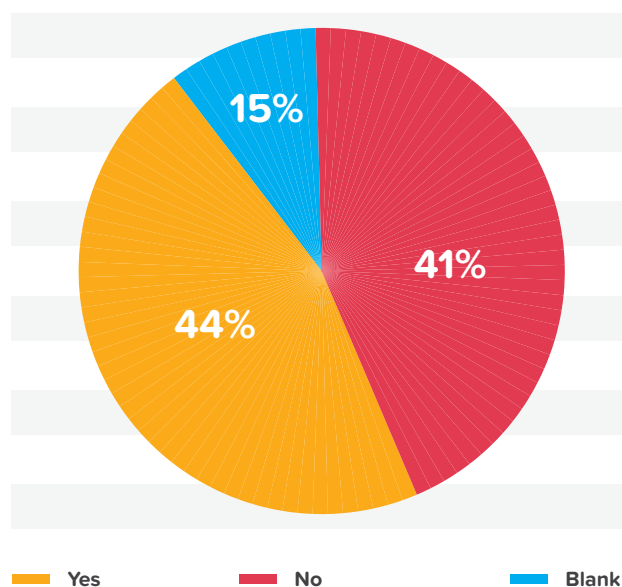
In the Netherlands, where consultation mechanisms such as an inter-ministerial focal point meeting (presided by a national SDGs coordinator) and as well as a platform for "SDGs Netherlands" have been in place from the beginning, the Association of Netherlands municipalities (VNG) has observed a clear evolution in the way they work with their national governments. It has notably enabled them to be much more involved in what the central level has been doing on the SDGs and to actively share the local perspective and needs.

The Norwegian Association (KS) has specifically noticed a strong added value on working on SDG 16 – a strong collaboration between local and regional governments and the national level has contributed to an understanding of the need for concerted action between all levels of government.

What's more, working more closely with national governments on

2030 Agenda reporting has also helped cities, regions and their national associations inform themselves better on the full extent of the role they can play in helping bring this Agenda to life. For instance, the contributions of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities in Serbia (SKGO) to the national reporting process in 2019 have proven to considerably increase the understanding of the 2030 Agenda and the meaning of localising the SDGs in everyday functioning and local strategic planning and monitoring, through assessments with multiple stakeholders.

IMPACT OF COORDINATION MECHANISMS ON MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE



Local reporting

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) are a fundamental instrument to monitor progress and sustain the transformative and inclusive action of local actors towards the achievement of the SDGs in general and competitive sustainability in particular³⁰.

Starting in 2018, local governments have decided to take the lead and the city of New York in the United States of America presented the first voluntary local review (VLR), which was a key milestone in the history of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, cities and regions started to prove that they can work on the SDGs on their own and achieve concrete results that are relatable to all, much faster than at national level.

Since then, motivation to do the same started to increase among Local and regional governments across the world, and in 2019, the cities of Helsinki and Bristol presented their first VLRs to the HLPF. Within less than a year, more than 20 other cities across the world have committed to or completed a VLR, with half of them coming from European cities. Several have already started to prepare a possible report to present in 2021. At the UN HABITAT World Urban Forum³¹ in February 2020, multiple sessions and discussions focused on scaling VLRs to every continent and hundreds of cities.



HOW CAN A TOOL ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED SDG LOCAL STRATEGY?

The municipality of Saint-Fons, France, was one of the first cities to use the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities³²(RFSC), a free online toolkit for European local governments, to develop a local sustainable development strategy aligned with the 17 SDGs: the Saint Fons 2030 Agenda. The RFSC was used to conduct an evaluation and a prospective scenario for 2030.

The RFSC showed that 70% of the actions currently implemented in the territory were focused on five SDGs, which challenged the municipality to find a better balance towards a more integrated approach, particularly by giving greater priority to the SDGs involving environmental issues. Throughout the process of developing the 2030 Agenda, which included surveys and workshops with local stakeholders to collect ideas and co-create the strategy, the RFSC proved quite useful to visualise areas with room for improvement and raise awareness of the SDGs. A monitoring and evaluation system based on a selection of indicators provided in the RFSC tool was proposed and should constitute the basis for an annual assessment and tracking progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

More information on www.rfsc.eu and Twitter [@rfsc_eu](https://twitter.com/rfsc_eu)
RFSC Publication *Towards Green, Inclusive and Attractive Cities*: https://issuu.com/rfsc/docs/towards_green_inclusive_and_attractive_cities



WHAT CAN HELP MAKE A STRONG VLR³³?

- Include both quantitative and qualitative data: it is essential to illustrate the various collected data with concrete examples, stories and outcomes, that can be replicated by others.
- The data mentioned should be as disaggregated as possible, to be able to reflect on the territorial reality of the reporting municipality, city or region.
- Establishing interconnections between the 17 SDGs is key, but can be very difficult to make. For this, it is important that a VLR reflects on at least three of the five "P's": People (citizens), Planet (environment) and Prosperity (local economy). Peace (governance) and Partnerships (multi-stakeholder / international relations of a municipality or a region) can be the guiding principles across the whole report.
- Consultation with various stakeholders is essential to ensure a comprehensive report that also showcases external actions by city partners, such as from the private sector and civil society. It reinforces the partnership dimension of working with the 2030 Agenda.
- Showcase a balanced mix of results between positive and negative trends, to make sure that no one is left behind.
- Identify tangible outputs: when producing a VLR, it helps to understand what will be the next steps and how this VLR will be used in the near future for the city and its partners. This will help convince city staffers of the utility of the goals, and strengthen accountability of those contributing to the report.

Yet, the question of producing a VLR remains a tricky one, especially if the results are not taken into account in the national reporting process. Would national governments consider it unnecessary to include the local and regional perspective in their national reporting, if local governments have already committed to producing their own local report? Is there a possibility that this may become just another "box-ticking" exercise for local and regional governments? Are some cities following a "trend" to go up on the UN stage and showcase their work, without the long lasting will to actually work on the 2030 Agenda?

While this may sometimes be the case, the essential step is to kickstart a real process of transformative change. By making a regular assessment of where local and regional governments stand in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with multiple actors, they can gradually feel encouraged and inspired to re-design or better align their urban strategies and planning to allow for their actions to better meet their ambitions.

³⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/european-handbook-sdg-voluntary-local-review>

³¹ <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/node/145>

³² The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) is coordinated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, with the support of the French government. This open online tool helps local and regional governments start a process of integrated and sustainable urban development.

³³ Recommendations from the city of Bristol in the United Kingdom. The city of Bristol was one of the first European cities to present a VLR in 2019 at the UN HLPF.

VLRs represent a problem-solving tool that facilitates the use of evidence and a common language to “multi-solve” and articulate a coherent vision, “enabling exchanges with other cities, partnerships with other sectors, and opportunities for investors”³⁴.

The development process for a VLR is also an interesting one for other stakeholders: it is a way to gather people and organisations on the ground for a common assessment and determine together the way forward to help their actions better meet the ambitions set in the 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, VLRs represent a rich bank of examples of initiatives led by local and regional governments to implement the SDGs, that can be replicated by other municipalities and regions across the world with similar situations. It is a great communication tool to showcase the work done on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, including the challenges met and the solutions found from year to year. Sharing this information at a global level between local and regional governments can help increase curiosity of what is being done elsewhere, and foster new contacts and partnerships to find out more.

Indicators to measure local progress

With increasing collective awareness of the importance of monitoring progress, the question of data collection and indicators has received significant attention in local and national SDGs discussions. Indeed, the UN 2030 Agenda puts forth a set of 169 targets, accompanied by 247 indicators, 231 of which are unique. This UN framework is tailored however to suit the national level and does not respond to the needs of local and regional governments, whose specificities not only vary from country to country, but also within the borders of a nation and even within regions.



THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HANDBOOK FOR VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS

Launched in February 2020 on the occasion of the United Nations' 10th World Urban Forum, the European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews, produced by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), offers policy makers, researchers and practitioners an inspirational framework to set up Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). The Handbook provides key examples of official and experimental indicators useful for setting up an effective SDG local monitoring system specifically targeted for European cities. For each Goal, the Handbook highlights examples of harmonised and locally collected indicators so that local players can both benchmark themselves with other cities and monitor their own specific needs and challenges.

More information: <https://bit.ly/3i0X2so>

To be able to measure accurately the impact and degree of progress at the local and regional levels, it is critical for stakeholders to regularly monitor where they stand, so that they can introduce the necessary changes in their strategies and realign their actions to better meet their ambitions.

16 associations indicated that they use indicators to monitor the SDGs. Just as in our analysis of 2019, 15 of the responding associations indicated that they are aware of initiatives of local and regional governments to monitor and report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

As in previous years, the key issue our 2020 analysis again highlights the lack of available and up-to-date local data for cities and regions to be able to monitor progress effectively. This is a growing source of hesitation and questioning for municipalities who want to start working on the SDGs and properly commit themselves to the 2030 Agenda by showcasing the progress they plan to make. Currently, this is not possible, which means that efforts achieved will not be properly communicated.

Another matter that local and regional governments struggle with, is the issue of combining the local and global dimensions of the 2030 Agenda (as indicated by the Dutch). How to truly go from mere SDG-labelling to a real and transformative change? Where to start? Furthermore, for municipalities who are already engaged in sustainable territorial development plans, such as Agenda 21 in France, how to reconcile both Agendas and effectively monitor progress achieved everywhere?

For smaller-sized cities, this is even more complicated, due to limited resources. The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns indicated that for most of its members monitoring, promoting and reporting SDGs is perceived as too time-consuming compared to the final results achieved.

SDGs activities organised by smaller cities are very rarely reported on in a structured way. The Austrian association itself sometimes only discovers by chance what is happening on the ground, often through informal contacts or discussions with mayors or civil servants. This is not expected to change in the future as municipalities (especially smaller ones) have very limited staff-capacities and voluntary monitoring/reporting is not a priority.

Finally, the lack of leadership from the national administration (as mentioned by the Moldavians), and the lack of a multilevel approach (as mentioned by the Germans) means that cities, regions and their national associations often feel alone in having to find solutions to the above-mentioned struggles. Incentives are missing.

The Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova indicated that in their country the SDGs are still too vague a concept to identify verifiable indicators. What's more, the interpretation of such results would likely be distorted. As a matter of fact, an additional burden in some countries is the frequent lack of data and the data that is collected is often incomplete. Above all, the biggest

³⁴ As indicated by Anthony F. Pipa, Senior Fellow for Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institute in his blog article on “City leadership on sustainable development in the era of COVID19” (20 April 2020) : <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/20/city-leadership-on-sustainable-development-in-the-era-of-covid-19/>

problem is the issues of localising indicators, but how to collect this data, especially from the most remote areas.

However, when national support is lacking, local and regional governments and their associations should not forget to look to their peers in neighbouring and partner countries for co-creation and support. Global agendas related to the issues of sustainability affect and are the concern of all countries around the globe. Eight of our respondents³⁵ are currently working on indicators with international peers outside Europe, which proves that experimentation and innovation can happen all across the world. Inspiration can sometimes be found for those who look for it!

Furthermore, whilst local and regional governments do face certain constraints in properly conducting their local and regional monitoring, a substantial majority of the surveyed associations (82%) remain interested in working on specific indicators and/or initiatives to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Two associations³⁶ did not answer the question and four³⁷ declared they are not interested.

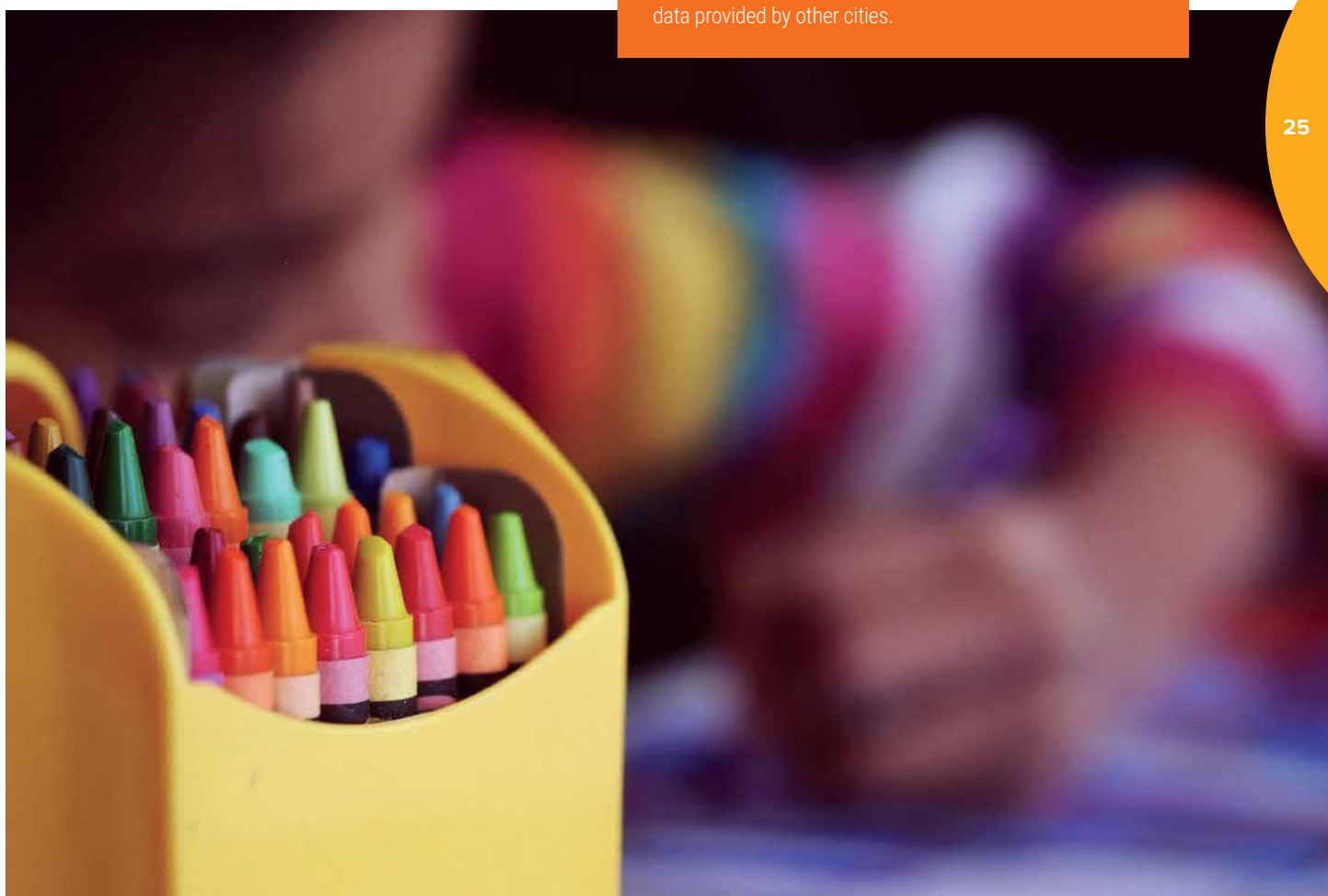
There is a clear need for more experimentation, exchange of practices and multi-level and multisectoral support and cooperation from different stakeholders, including the national level, as well as from academia and the private sector.



ITALIAN INDICATORS FOR SDG LOCALISATION: RESULTS OF EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICE

Inspired by the launch of the German SDGs-portal³⁸ in 2018, the Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) launched an innovative and practical tool for aligning SDGs in local planning, under the PLATFORMA umbrella. This activity aims at compensating the lack of data coming from municipalities, by starting collecting data at local level to provide cities and towns a sustainable tool.

The Italian SDGs Portal Indicators for Municipalities, which is free and open, was built in collaboration with the CEMR's German Association (RGRE) with the same platform and with the same scheme of private-public partnership that guarantees free access and implementation with data from cities and regions all over the world. It became a tool for exchange between cities on activities for SDG implementation at local level and especially a monitoring tool for development cooperation activities. The portal provides a set of SDG Indicators available for Italian cities in line with UN indicators and could soon be implemented with international data provided by other cities.



³⁵ Belgium (UVCW, VVSG), France (CUF), Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Spain (Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació), United-Kingdom (COSLA).

³⁶ Croatia and Slovenia (SOS).

³⁷ Bulgaria, Moldova, Slovenia (ZMOS), and Luxembourg.

³⁸ German local and regional associations, along with the federal government, other political bodies, research institutes and agencies, have set up an interactive website to provide stakeholders with suitable indicators.

3 FROM THE LOCAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL: BOOSTING EFFORTS ON THE SDGs

Collaboration with and between cities and regions across the globe is showcasing positive results in the development of urban and territorial policies. City-to-city and region-to-region initiatives, also known as decentralised cooperation, now take many forms and take advantage of the new opportunities provided by the 2030. The SDGs notably provide a common language for LRGs across the world to work even closer and more efficiently together. It also is a key framework that helps to ensure that policies around the globe are aligned and coherent with each other.

Decentralised cooperation is embedded in the modern process of internationalisation of cities, being one of the main factors for a city to search good practices and solutions on the international stage to solve its own domestic challenges.

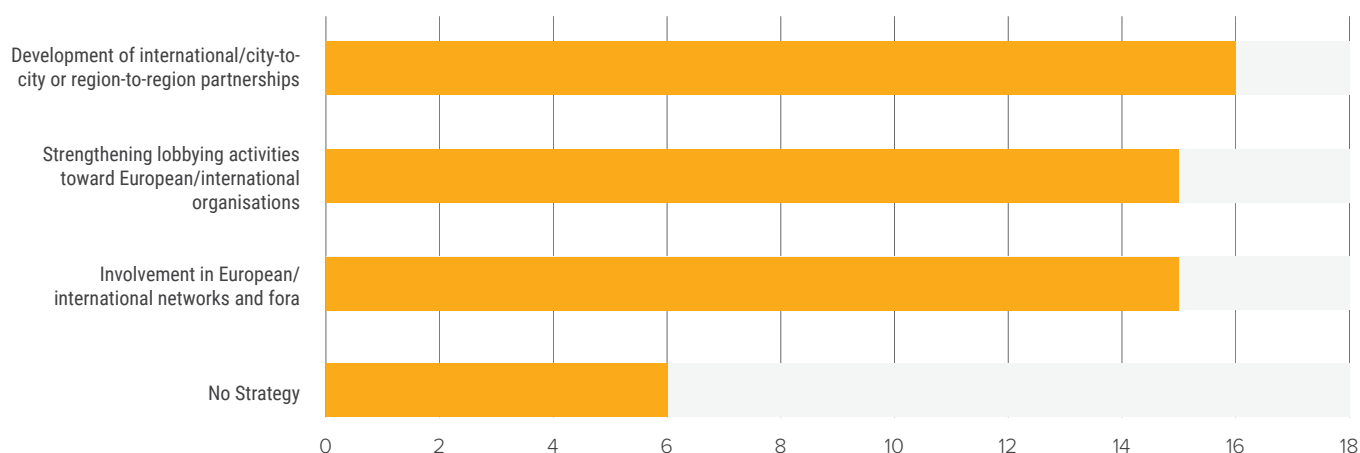
This part will highlight the international dimension of working with the SDGs at local and regional level. Analysis will be made on the level of awareness of international partners on the global goals, how peers work together using the 2030 Agenda framework and what types of activities are conducted to help support international municipal and regional partnerships.

Awareness at international level

Working with and towards the 2030 Agenda is starting to bear its fruits at the local and regional levels across Europe, but not only there. 16 local and regional government associations have indicated that it also encourages their members to reach out to peers beyond European borders and to develop or enhance international city-to-city and/or region-to-region partnerships. The beauty of this global agenda is in offering a comprehensive overview of shared ambitions to all stakeholders. It helps to create an entry point for local and regional governments to connect, by working together towards common objectives, using a place-based approach and embracing different cultures, political contexts and environmental frameworks. It offers "a common universal language" on which to base cooperation and inspire a new sense of solidarity, which goes beyond the traditional "donor-recipient" partnerships of the past³⁹. It also helps to reflect on the impact of one's own policies on partner countries.

Working with SDGs at international level also helps to strengthen advocacy activities that enhance the role of LRGs in international and national institutions, as indicated by 15 respondents. It also

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANISATION DEAL WITH THE SDGs ?



³⁹ As suggested in the previous UN Agenda for Development, the "Millennium Development Goals" (MDGs), which preceded the SDGs from the year 2000 to 2015: <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>



allows to mainstream the international cooperation agenda to other departments.

Cooperating at international level increases the overall presence and involvement of LRGs and their associations on the European and international scenes. Working on the 2030 Agenda opens up an additional door, inviting municipalities, regions and national associations to showcase success stories and share experiences at the global level, notably at EU or UN high-level events. LRGs are becoming increasingly proud and willing to share their innovative partnerships with the world, as well as to encourage their partners to do the same.

On the other side of the partnership, peers across the globe are aware of the existence of the 2030 Agenda and are increasingly using the SDGs as a point of reference (six respondents⁴⁰) or a willing to work with them (three respondents⁴¹). Two associations⁴² indicated that their partners fully align their work priorities with the global agenda. In all cases, all partners know about the existence of the SDGs. Last year's analysis revealed the contrary: knowledge of the existence of the SDGs by the non-European partners of the responding associations was low.

There is a positive global trend of increasing awareness of and interest in working with the SDGs, leading to more opportunities to connect across continents to share best practices and inspiration. This is essential to safeguard the policy coherence required to make sure that trade-offs and undesirable spill-over effects from one local, regional or national policy don't impact negatively another across the globe.

⁴⁰ Albania, Austria, France (CUF), Lithuania, Spain (Fons Mallorquí), Ukraine.

⁴¹ Kosovo, Latvia, Spain (FEMP).

⁴² Belgium (VVSG), Slovenia (SOS).



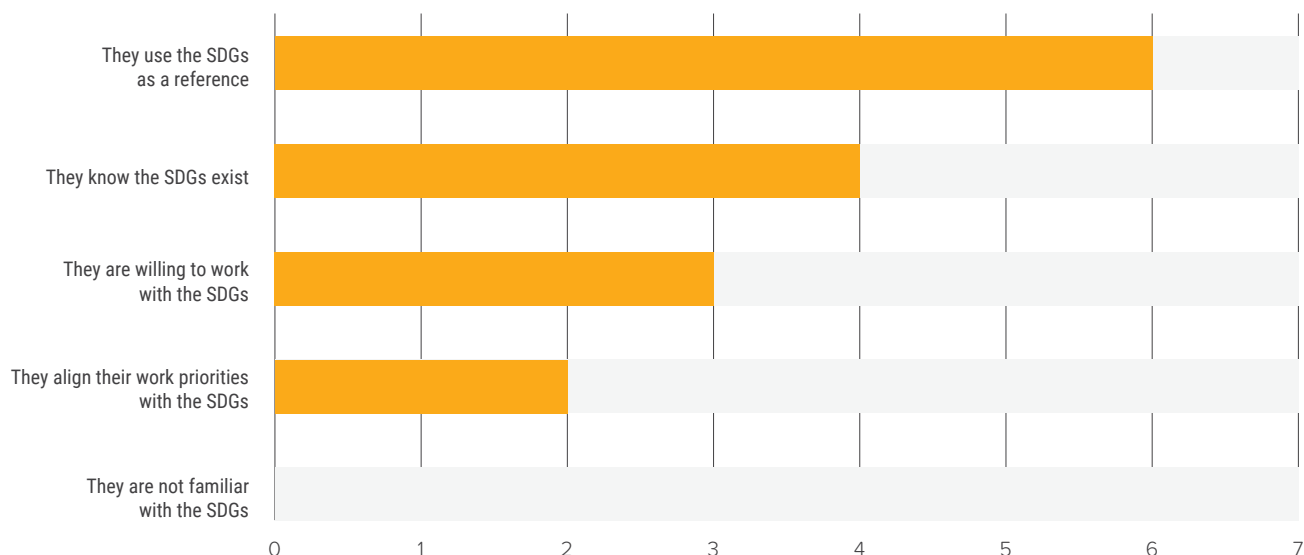
POLICY COHERENCE

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is not a new concept, dating to before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015⁴³. This concept assumed that domestic policies from developed countries in areas with important cross-border dimensions such as trade, investment and agriculture could undermine development co-operation objectives and negatively impact the development prospects of developing countries. This angle is now a key focus of the 2030 Agenda with its global aspiration to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

Governments and stakeholders are increasingly recognising the need to work differently to effectively address the integrated nature of the SDGs. This means breaking out of institutional and policy silos to fully realise the benefits of synergistic actions, identifying unintended negative consequences of policies, and effectively managing unavoidable trade-offs across the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda, however, does not provide guidance on how to ensure an integrated and coherent implementation of the SDGs. And according to many of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented by UN members to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), enhancing policy coherence is one of the most difficult challenges to implementing the SDGs. Local and regional players are significant partners to help central governments achieve this goal.

⁴³ <https://www.unssc.org/news-and-insights/blog/why-policy-coherence-essential-achieving-2030-agenda/>

HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR NON-EU/NON-EUROPEAN PARTNER ABOUT THE SDGs? *19 associations*



How peers across the globe work together

The link between the 2030 Agenda and international cooperation can be made in several ways: on the one hand, we can look at how working with peers across the globe can help strengthen the implementation of the SDGs in a coherent and inclusive manner. Decentralised cooperation for example can help local communities in Europe find inspiration on how to work with the SDGs from their peers in partner countries, and vice versa. Capacity building, support, peer-reviewing and co-planning are all essential elements of international partnerships that, in the end, strengthen the impact achieved at local level. By using the SDG framework as a guiding blueprint, peers across the globe can launch co-evaluations, better identify common priorities and work together to overcome their shared concerns. Together, they can support each other in the implementation of their jointly created strategies and review each other's progress.

On the other hand, working together towards a common objective, such as the 2030 Agenda, can help create new ties across the globe or revitalise existing partnerships that had lost their impetus. Sharing the experience of having to understand, implement and monitor progress on the SDGs together, can create an additional cross-border bond and a new sense of solidarity, that is at the heart of development cooperation.



STAY TUNED FOR OUR UPCOMING TRAINING MODULE ON DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AND THE SDGs!

UCLG Learning⁴⁴ and PLATFORMA are preparing in 2020 a new training module, built on the realities of local governments, associations and organisations that work with decentralised cooperation and the SDGs. It will consider their experiences and/or problems and be a didactic guide and learning tool to train of new trainers, proposing a new integrated approach for decentralised cooperation with the principles of the 2030 Agenda, as well as the 17 SDGs. The training module will be made available at the end of 2020. In the meantime, have a look at UCLG's three other SDG learning module on introducing the SDGs (module 1), focusing on the alignment of public policies on SDGs (module 2) and supporting the SDG localising reporting process (module 3).

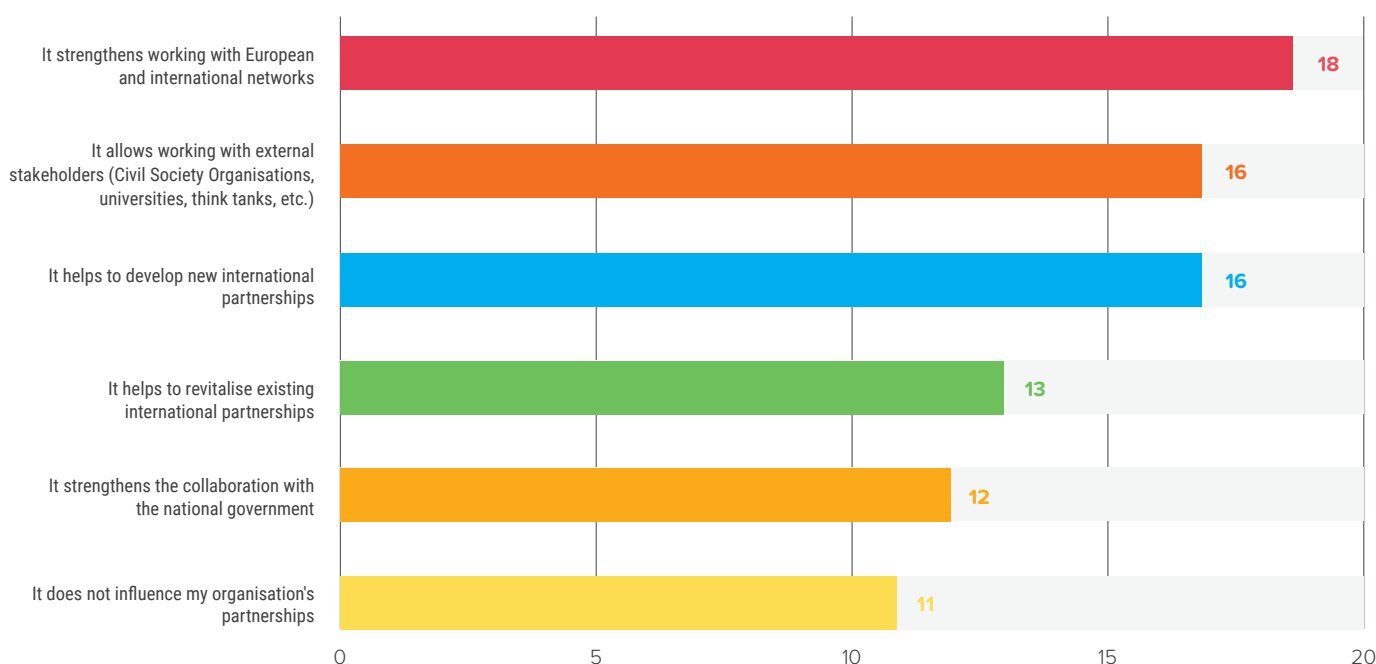
More information: <https://bit.ly/2Vinh3K>



When asking our members this question, two key trends came up: 18 associations indicated that the SDGs framework strengthened their organisation's partnerships and their collaborations, while 16 associations informed us that it helped to further develop new partnerships. Eight associations⁴⁵ indicated that it does not influence their cooperation at all. The Association of Finnish Local and regional Authorities, CUF and CEMR's French Association (AFCCRE) opted for multiple answers. 37% responded that they work on all the SDGs with their international peers.

Four out of the 34 associations responded that they do not work with international peers⁴⁶, three did not answer the question⁴⁷, and four declared working with international peers but not in relation to the SDGs⁴⁸. 44% of the remaining 31 associations prefer working with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and do not necessarily refer to a set of SDGs specifically. AFCCRE notably specified that whilst they do not label their activities with their peers as "SDG" activities, the themes of their cooperation and discussions do cover key issues linked to the 2030 Agenda and sustainability.

HOW IS THE SDG FRAMEWORK CONTRIBUTING TO THE ORGANISATIONS' PARTNERSHIPS?



⁴⁴ <https://www.learning.uclg.org/>

⁴⁵ Belgium (UVCW), Bulgaria, Croatia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Slovenia (ZMOS).

⁴⁶ Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Serbia (SKGO), Slovenia (ZMOS).

⁴⁷ France, Moldova, Scotland (COSLA).

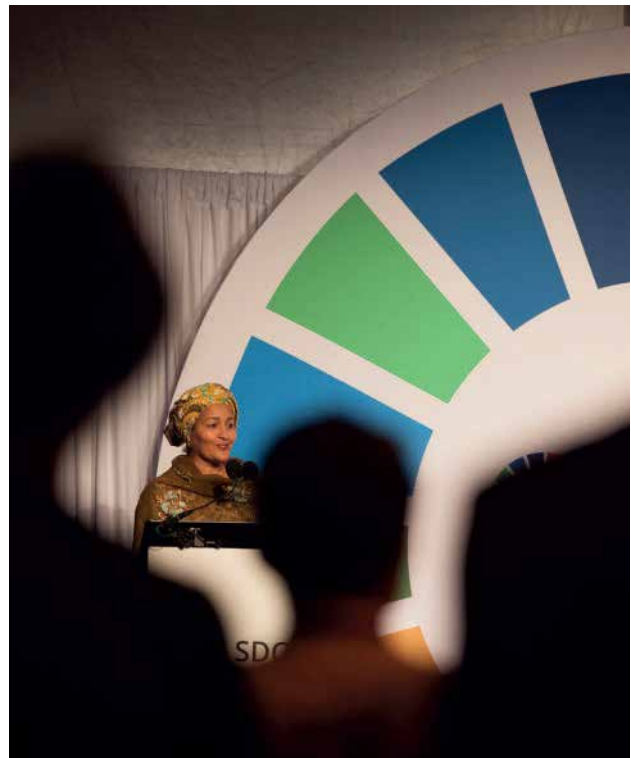
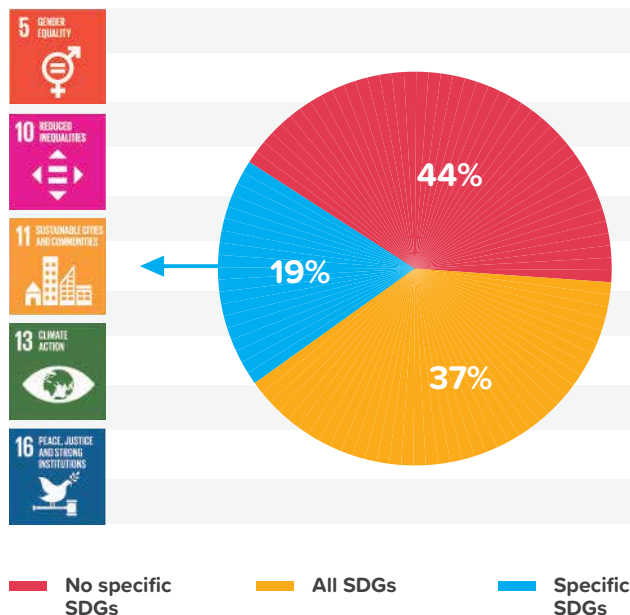
⁴⁸ Bulgaria, Georgia, Iceland, Montenegro.

It is also interesting to analyse how the 2030 Agenda is being used at international level – we wanted to know notably if decentralised cooperation has a tendency to focus on a specific set of SDGs or if they work on the Agenda as a whole.

And 19% have chosen to focus their cooperation around certain goals representing joint diagnosis, common objectives and needs: the selected SDGs focus notably on very transversal goals, such as gender equality (SDG 5), fighting inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

ON WHICH SDGS ARE YOU FOCUSING YOUR WORK WITH YOUR INTERNATIONAL PEERS?

31 associations



Through mirroring public policies between partners, coupled with both technical as well as political dialogues on local policies between peers, the exchange and learning process goes both ways. There is a clear paradigm shift supported by the implementation of the SDGs towards achieving common goals together, based on a shared diagnosis. Improving its own policies is also at the heart of the process.

Related to the question of monitoring and co-reviewing SDG progress at local level between international peers, the vast majority responded that their organisations are not working on any local indicators with their international partners. Eight responded positively.



HOW TO WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL PEERS, USING THE 2030 AGENDA

Fons Mallorquí in Spain started developing in 2019 a pilot project⁴⁹ based on peer exchange with international partners. They chose to focus on one SDG of universal concern to all partners: SDG 6 on water and sanitation, notably on access to water due to scarcity issues (droughts) or aquifer situations (chemicals and over-exploitation). What started out as a project of three municipalities (Municipalities of Mallorca, the city of Tenado in Burkina Faso, the city of Pocona in Bolivia) has already grown to

add another country in the mix, in less than a year: the municipality of La Arena, in Peru. Objectives of the project include:

- To implement SDG 6 “water and sanitation”
- To bring an exchange of good practices between northern and southern local governments
- To implement a common framework to develop decentralised cooperation projects based on the SDGs
- To raise awareness on the different ways to face challenges on SDGs

⁴⁹ Specific Grant Agreement DCI-CSO-Ia/2019/405-168: “Working together towards empowering local and regional governments for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes in EU partner countries”.



LBSNN PILOT PROJCT ON SDGS IN SCHOOL CURRICULA

In the context of events organised on SDGs and decentralised cooperation, the National Council for Netherlands-Nicaragua City Partnerships (LBSNN), took part to a pilot-project in Spring 2019 with a special focus on SDG 4 (education) and awareness raising on decentralised cooperation in primary schools. The project "*Drieluik Mondiaal Burgerschap*" (Triptych Global Citizenship in English), supported by PLATFORMA, aimed at promoting global citizenship among children in the age of 6-12 years directly within the schools' curricula. These activities included the participation of local elected officials, story-tellers, mobile homes and wall painters.

By the end of 2019, the great success of this initiative encouraged the Dutch national coordinator of Global Goals 2030 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and main actors of the national education sector to join the project, now known as the "*National pilot project on primary education and global goals 2030*". This is the first time that, under the Dutch educational policy framework, SDGs and decentralised cooperation are officially included in school curricula.

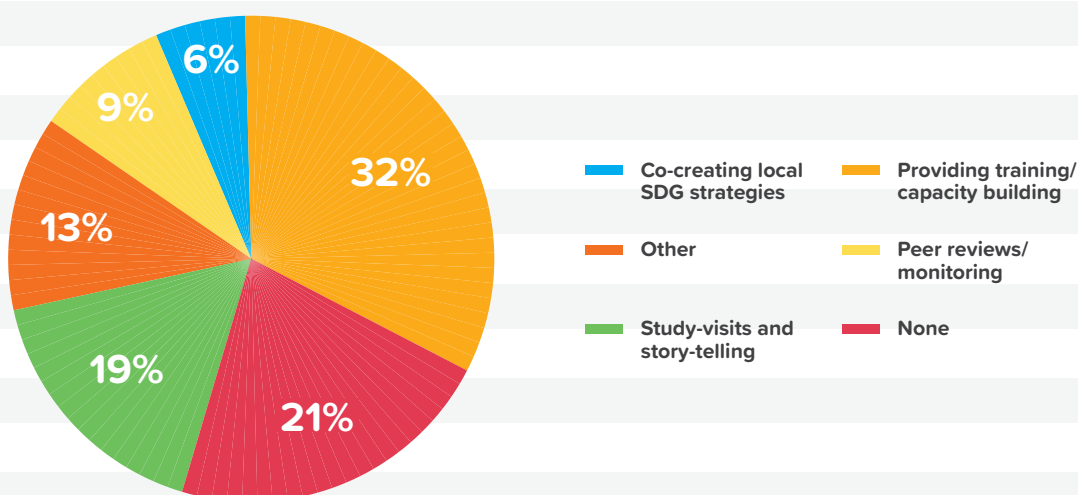
Innovation and creativeness to support international partnerships

Decentralised cooperation, above all, is the expression of local openness across borders and continents. It is a tool and a means that allow local and regional governments to learn from each other, help each other and support each other to achieve together common objectives.

The SDGs framework considers every stakeholder equally, and aims to put all key implementers on a similar playing field. Moving past the donor-recipient relationship of previous development agendas, the 2030 Agenda encourages all continents to explore and learn from their partners across the world.

This makes quite clear why 15 associations indicated that their core activities to support their international peers concern trainings and capacity building. Nine associations⁵⁰ use decentralised cooperation to organise study visits and exchange stories related to LRG competences together with their partners. Four associations⁵¹ even do peer-reviewing and monitoring of the SDGs progress together with their partners. Co-creation of local SDGs strategies is still relatively new, but is also gaining traction with three associations⁵² co-designing their territorial sustainable development plans together.

DEDICATED ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT NON-EU/NON-EUROPEAN PARTNERS TO LOCALISE THE SDGs



⁵⁰ Belgium (VVSG), Bulgaria, France (CUF), Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Ukraine.

⁵¹ France (CUF), Kosovo, Slovenia, Ukraine.

⁵² France (CUF), Italy, Spain (EUSKADI).

Decentralised cooperation has proven to be an efficient way to build and strengthen institutions and enhance local democracy at the local level in the EU and in partner countries. City-to-city and region-to-region cooperation, including exchanges between local and regional elected representatives and national associations of local and regional governments, particularly in the framework of PLATFORMA and UCLG is a good way to advance and address collectively our common challenges. In an era of a global pandemic, such cooperation helps better know about the different approaches to fighting COVID-19 in various contexts (local, regional, urban, rural) and circumstances (stages and levels of alert), the challenges faced, the resources mobilised and the measures applied for containment, but also for the way forward to rebuilding societies. Sharing of experience and expertise is

all the more useful for peers to effectively adapt their strategy and choose political and operational options according to each particular situation.

However, for these actions to be truly effective, adequate financial support should be provided for decentralised cooperation between EU and partner countries' municipalities and regions, based on local needs assessments and context, and targeted appropriate local solutions. Now, more than ever, with the urgent need to contain efficiently the COVID-19 outbreak and to find a global approach to manage the socio-economic consequences, the EU must devote part of its response to financial support for decentralised cooperation between EU and partner countries' municipalities.



PLATFORMA AWARDS: GET INSPIRED!

For the second time, PLATFORMA rewarded the best practices in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation, with a special focus this year on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 26 applications received by PLATFORMA represented a total of 74 local and regional governments from 11 EU member states and 19 partner countries in Africa, Latin America and the European eastern and southern neighbourhoods.

The 2020 laureates focused on "Strengthening citizens' participation and promoting gender equality at the local level", a project developed by the Province of Barcelona (DIBA), the districts of Ménara-Marrakech and Guéliz-Marrakech, and the municipalities of Benguerir, Had Ras Elain, Sidi Rahal and Zarktan, together with the Moroccan Institute for Local Development (*Institut marocain pour le développement local – IMADEL*). The participating local governments from the province of Barcelona are Cerdanyola del Vallès, El Prat de Llobregat, Igualada, Sant Boi de Llobregat, Sant Feliu de Llobregat, Sant Pere de Ribes, Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Vallromanes and Vilafranca del Penedès. (<https://bit.ly/3i0EWGU>).

The municipalities of Bornem in Belgium and Nquthu in South Africa won second place for a joint project named "Waste for Employment" (<https://bit.ly/2Vgo1pT>).

Third place was taken by Lille in France and Oujda in Morocco for their "Decentralised Cooperation Project for Sustainable Energy" (<https://bit.ly/3hXuPm5>).

Ranking just after the top three, Bordeaux Metropole in France and Guanajuato State in Mexico received a "Special Prize of the Jury" for their UNEBUS project on intermodal transport systems (<https://bit.ly/31hWXdM>).

Check out the PLATFORMA Awards website for more information and inspiration: <http://platformawards.eu/>

PLATFORMA AWARDS





4 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WORKING WITH THE SDGs

When it comes to localising the SDGs, local and regional governments and their associations continue to encounter some persisting challenges that can sometimes slow down progress.

However, curiously enough, these challenges have also opened up doors to new opportunities for municipalities, regions and LRGAs, helping them to overcome obstacles and encouraging the local and regional levels to continue moving forward.

Support from national governments



Whilst we note an improvement in the role that national governments are playing to help support local and regional action for SDG implementation, this support still needs to be reinforced. Administrative and financial barriers continue to hinder municipalities, regions and their national associations from implementing and sustaining properly their 2030 Agenda ambitions.



However, on top of national subsidies, working on the SDGs has opened up new opportunities for LRGs and their associations to find financial support to help implement their sustainable initiatives. Funding from the EU for instance is becoming increasingly interesting for cities, encouraging them to propose innovative SDG partnerships and projects. Nevertheless, this needs to be aligned with the proper recognition of LRGs and LRGAs in the different calls for proposals sent out by national Governments and EU institutions.

Coordination across levels of governance



Governance in partnership is not as easy as it seems: national interests regularly come into conflict with local and regional needs and coordinating the two to find a balance can be challenging. This already applies to several policy areas and initiatives, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda does not seem to be any different. SDGs are born and end at local level. Citizens are at the heart of it all. National governments need to better understand this crucial role and go beyond one-off information sharing and ad-hoc exchanges: coordination needs to be ongoing and should take place at all steps of the process, from start to finish.



With that being said, success stories of local and regional governments working on the SDGs have started to gain traction and attention, not only from their peers but also from national and international institutions across the globe. The 2030 Agenda notably calls for cooperation in partnership to achieve the 17 goals, opening up new opportunities for local and regional governments, and their associations, to connect with central governments, exchange with them and even become part of the planning and/or monitoring process of the work done on the ground. National Governments are increasingly recognising the key role that cities and regions play in implementing the 2030 Agenda, with over 68% of the 17 Goals needing to be achieved at local level. The SDGs are an opportunity for enhanced multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral working across all levels of governance.

Human resources and capacities



As mentioned above, limited human resources and/or the lack of proper skills and capacities to work on the 2030 Agenda hinder local and regional governments and their associations from properly launching their SDGs activities, even if the political will and inspiration is there. When there is a necessity to upgrade capacities, local and regional governments and their associations should continue to turn towards their peers, both in Europe and beyond, notably through decentralised cooperation. They should also foster alliances with other stakeholders, such as research centres or universities. Support from the European Union is also essential to help overcome these barriers.



The silver lining is that, the more LRGs and LRGAs work on the 2030 Agenda, the more they learn by doing and learning from their peers. This helps to enhance their capacities and identify new opportunities where local and regional governments can make a difference. By realigning their strategies and local policies, additional human resources can start growing, also with the help from supporters such as central governments, international networks such as the EU or the UN, as well as civil society.

Local interest and/or awareness



Several municipalities and regions across Europe still do not fully understand what the 2030 Agenda means and how it can apply to their territorial realities. Some continue to perceive the SDGs as a new burden, an additional weight and agenda they have to integrate into their planning, which leads to very little buy-in and motivation to work on the SDGs. Also, some cities continue to consider that the SDGs are not adapted to local priorities, which makes it hard to integrate them fully in urban planning. For those who do work to some extent with the SDGs, a key challenge is knowing how to go from mere "SDG-labelling" to real transition and transformation.



Chin up! Year by year, the SDGs are becoming increasingly well-known and understood. Local and regional governments are slowly identifying the benefits of working with the 2030 Agenda and its universal framework, as demonstrated in this study, notably the opportunities to create new partnerships with peers inside and outside of Europe as well as with different stakeholders. The localisation process is remarkably gaining traction at international level, inviting more and more municipalities and regions to join the SDGs movement.

Access to information



Finally, trickling down information from the international, to the national, to the local level to fully grasp the SDGs framework is not always easy. Regarding the monitoring of progress and reporting, local and regional governments and their associations struggle to receive the relevant information from their national governments, regarding the possibilities to contribute with their territorial perspective. Concerning local reporting, seen previously throughout our analysis, difficulties lie in the collection of the necessary and relevant data to monitor local and regional progress.



Curiously enough, this important challenge has also been indicated as the top opportunity by local and regional government associations when answering the survey. Whilst more can be done to better communicate between stakeholders, as well as find missing information, LRGAs do note that this has been improving since 2015 and that the opportunities to have access to data, trainings and opportunities are slowly but surely growing.



CONCLUSION

Prior to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, local and regional leadership was increasingly gaining traction and demonstrating the importance of local contributions to sustainable development and to the 2030 Agenda. Local and regional governments, with the precious support from their national associations, continue to play an increasingly important role in the localisation process of the 2030 Agenda. Whilst old constraints still remain and new challenges are appearing, municipalities and regions continue to innovate, experiment and work hand in hand with key partners, including with their peers across the globe, to find new solutions and achieve their ambitions.

Whilst it is still too early to know the full extent of the economic, social, and psychological dislocation the COVID-19 crisis will cause, what has been reaffirmed and will remain clear in the near and distant future, is the key role that local and regional governments play in ensuring accessible, inclusive and effective public services to all citizens, no matter the environmental or sanitary context. They continue to put their citizens first, which is at the very heart of the SDGs, proving that local and regional leaders will remain fundamental to achieving global progress on sustainable development.

A post-COVID-19 recovery, whenever it begins, will take place in a chaotic environment marked by uncertainty and disruption. Perhaps this may affect the way and the speed with which the SDGs will be implemented. But this will not be able to negate the importance of ensuring that the key messages of the 2030 Agenda remain at heart of all actions: a prosperous present and future for the people and the planet, in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity. Innovation and experimentation are at the very core of the SDGs, both in Europe and abroad, with peers in partner countries.

Navigating through the crisis should call however for strengthened partnerships, leaving all political differences behind to make sure in the end that no one and no place is left behind. These partnerships need to be above all reflected in stronger multi-level governance, with increased support from central Governments, as well as the EU and the international institutions. Multi-sector cooperation is also necessary, to make sure that socio-economic recovery solutions proposed are inclusive, long lasting and will protect the people and the planet, for now and for generations to come.



The Council of European Municipalities and Regions is Europe's most senior organisation of towns and regions, founded in 1951. It brings together 100,000 local and regional governments through 60 national associations.

CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through which it represents European local and regional governments at international level.

CEMR promotes the construction of a united, peaceful and democratic Europe founded upon local self-government and respect for the principle of subsidiarity.

CEMR advocates on behalf of local and regional governments to make sure their voice is heard in Europe, shifting the focus to local democracy and autonomy. This advocacy work stands on CEMR member associations' experience and expertise.

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PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of towns and regions – and their associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation. All are engaged in international cooperation for sustainable development.

PLATFORMA is a hub of expertise on local and regional governments' international action, gathering towns and regions, their European and global networks, and regional and national associations. With its partners,

PLATFORMA defends the role of towns and regions in EU development policies, promotes international cooperation between cities and regions across the world and facilitates knowledge exchanges and peer-learning between towns and regions and their associations.

In 2015, PLATFORMA signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) with the European Commission. Its signatories commit to take action based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

The PLATFORMA secretariat is hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

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Five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the terms “Sustainable Development Goals” and “global goals” are becoming increasingly familiar and better understood, including among local and regional governments and their national associations.

However, understanding is not synonymous with ‘adoption’. Let’s discover the progress made by Europe’s municipalities, regions and their national associations in working with and towards achieving the SDGs.



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