



**How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life**

# How local and regional government associations bring the SDGs to life

Our study's main findings



## ABOUT THE 2030 AGENDA

**17**  
**SDGs**

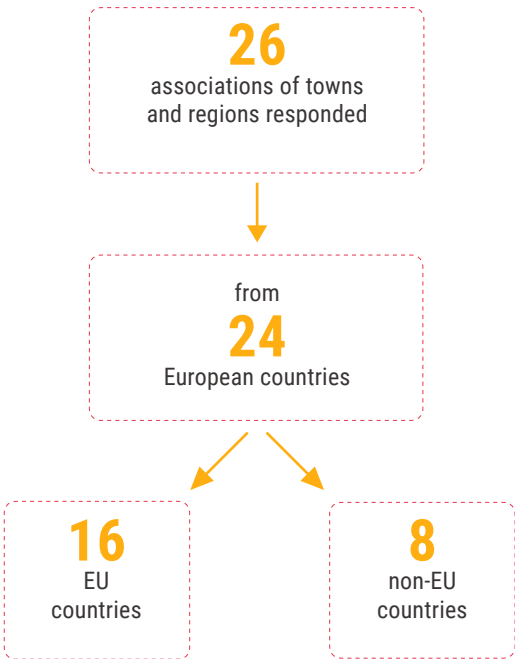
= Sustainable Development Goals

= 17 UN universal goals adopted in 2015 by world leaders

**5**  
**Pillars**

**P**eople  
**P**rosperity  
**P**eace  
**P**artnership  
**P**lanet

## ABOUT OUR STUDY



## MAIN FINDINGS

### AWARENESS

**2/3**

of the associations have a good knowledge of the SDGs

**73%**

of the associations organise activities linked to the SDGs

Who deals with the SDGs within the associations?

**1/3**

international offices



**1/3**

transversal team

Which type of activities are organised by the associations?

**exchanges**  
**awareness raising**  
**advocacy for multi-level governance**  
**reporting**  
**data**  
**action plans**  
**monitoring**

### MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

**69%**

of the countries have national frameworks to implement the SDGs

**78%**

of these countries recognise the need to support local governments

### MONITORING

from **50%** → **58%**  
in 2016-2018 today

of the associations were invited to contribute to national reporting at UN HLPF

**73%**

of the countries are developing local indicators



**10**

countries have annual national reports on SDG implementation

**BUT only**

**5**

associations have been consulted by national governments to contribute

### CHALLENGES FOR TOWNS & REGIONS

**NOT ENOUGH**



financial resources



support from national governments



local awareness

### DECENTRALISED COOPERATION



**1/3**

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

**more**

exchanges & capacity building are needed



[www.plattform-a-dev.eu](http://www.plattform-a-dev.eu)

**SDGs**



framework for decentralised cooperation



win-win partnerships



common language

**more**

citizens involved in public policies



[www.localsolidaritydays.eu](http://www.localsolidaritydays.eu)



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.

[www.cemr.eu](http://www.cemr.eu) | [@CCRECEMR](https://twitter.com/CCRECEMR)



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).

[www.platforma-dev.eu](http://www.platforma-dev.eu) | [@Platforma4Dev](https://twitter.com/Platforma4Dev)



## FOREWORD

Since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda was first launched by the United Nations in 2015, it has inspired new ways of thinking, speaking and acting when it comes to sustainable development. The main strength of the 2030 Agenda lies in its universality. It aspires to involve all stakeholders at all levels, both from developed and developing countries, in a global common partnership to ensure *"peace and prosperity, for the people and the planet, now and into the future"*.

In 2018, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA – the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments and their associations, working for decentralised cooperation – issued a publication entitled "SDGs: How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead". This study focused on the growing role of local and regional governments and their associations in the process of implementing the SDGs. Each of the 17 goals has a territorial dimension, and the strategies best suited to reach them vary from place to place. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda therefore depends on full ownership by communities, cities of all sizes, regions and their national associations. Most importantly, the implementation of appropriate policies requires a close partnership between all spheres of governance across all continents, to ensure that no one and no place is left behind.

One year on, local and regional government associations have not just been implementing policies in service of the goals, they are tailoring, mainstreaming and living them. Local and regional government associations are increasingly being recognised as the torchbearers in embracing the 2030 Agenda. The 2019 edition of our CEMR and PLATFORMA publication therefore goes one step further by also taking stock of the rapid progress made by these associations in "localising the SDGs". There are a myriad of success stories and innovative good practices just waiting to be shared.

In order to continue moving forward swiftly, it is also important to work out the nuts-and-bolts of the SDG implementation process. Associations face different constraints; however, these can often be resolved by applying similar solutions. No one can do this all on their own. The clock is ticking – we only have around ten years left before we hit 2030. We need all hands on deck!

Until then, we should be proud of what Europe's cities and regions have already achieved. We should also look forward to our future accomplishments: CEMR and PLATFORMA want to ensure that the voice of European local and regional governments is heard at all levels of governance, in Europe and beyond.



**Stefano Bonaccini**

President  
CEMR | AICCRe | Emilia Romagna Region (Italy)



**Frédéric Vallier**

Secretary General  
CEMR, lead partner of PLATFORMA

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 early 2019 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners. The purpose was to collect information on the extent and ways in which local and regional government associations have been involved in the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Publisher:** PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

**Managing editor:** Frédéric Vallier

**Authors:** Sarah Bentz, Nathalie Noupadja, Lisa-Marie Oevermann, with the precious help of Benoit Chambon (CEMR & PLATFORMA)

**Publication coordination:** Nathalie Noupadja (CEMR), Marlène Siméon (PLATFORMA)

**Copy editing:** Penny Yim-Barbieri

**Publication date:** September 2019

**Participating associations:** Albanian Association of Municipalities (SHBSH); Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (STAEDTEBUND) and Austrian Centre for Public Administration Research (KDZ); Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG, Belgium); Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SOGFBiH); Croatian County Association (HRVZZ); Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR); Local Government Denmark (KL); Danish Regions (REGIONER); French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE); Association of German Cities (DST); Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE); Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (SAMBAND); Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE); Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LPS); Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (LSA); Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM); Union of Municipalities of Montenegro (UOM); Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG); Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS); Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia (SKGO); Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS); Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP); Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL); Union of Municipalities of Turkey (TBB); Local Government Association (LGA, United Kingdom) and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA, United Kingdom)

**Participating regions:** Basque Government (EUSKADI); Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya)

**Participating organisations:** the Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI); Fons Mallorquí; Cités Unies France (CUF)

**Liaison with graphic design team:** Hervé Devavry (PLATFORMA), with the precious help of Jeremy Herry & Pierre Vander Auwera (CEMR)

**Design:** Paf!, Brussels, September 2019

**Photos:** Cover & page 30: © Bernal Revert/BR&U for PLATFORMA; page 2: © Yiqun Tang - Unsplash; page 4: © Omar Flores - Unsplash; pages 6, 7, 15, 23 & 29: © EDD 2019 - European Union; page 9: © Liana De Laurent - Unsplash; pages 11 & 19: © Inga Kjer - UN; page 12: © Shane Rounce - Unsplash; pages 13 & 25: © PLATFORMA; pages 17 & 18: © UCLG; page 20: © Chema Photo - Unsplash; page 27: © Jon Tyson - Unsplash; page 31: © UN Ukraine; page 32: based on a photo by Marliese Brandsma - Unsplash

**Acknowledgements:** PLATFORMA and CEMR would like to thank all the associations and their member local and regional governments who answered the survey, as well as our CEMR Secretariat colleagues who contributed to the production of this publication.

**Disclaimer:** The analyses, results and recommendations expressed 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.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACRONYMS</b>	<b>P.04</b>
<b>10 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>P.05</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>P.07</b>
<b>1. AWARENESS: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS ALIGN WITH THE SDGs</b>	<b>P.10</b>
A. State of play: it's getting better	p.10
B. The impact of the institutional environment	p.13
<b>2. IMPLEMENTATION: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS WORK IN PRACTICE</b>	<b>P.16</b>
A. From cooperation to advocacy	p.16
<i>FOCUS - COOPERATION WITH LOCAL PLAYERS AND LEADERSHIP, SIMPLE RECIPES FOR SUCCESS</i>	p.20
B. Opening doors to the international scene	p.24
<b>3. CONSTRAINTS AND SOLUTIONS: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS DETERMINE THEIR PATH</b>	<b>P.28</b>
A. Financial and technical constraints	p.28
B. How can success be measured? The starting point	p.29
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>P.33</b>



## ACRONYMS

**CEMR** Council of European Municipalities and Regions

**CSOs** Civil Society Organisations

**DG DEVCO**

Directorate-General for International Cooperation and  
Development of the European Commission

**EC** European Commission

**EP** European Parliament

**EU** European Union

**GTF / Global Taskforce**

Global Taskforce of local and regional governments  
(facilitated by UCLG)

**HLPF / UN HLPF**

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development  
(organised by the United Nations)

**LRGs** Local and regional governments

**LRGAs** Local and regional government associations

**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



# THE WAY FORWARD

## 10 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Universal agenda

Better communication is needed to clearly elucidate the universal nature of the SDGs, coupled with more concrete examples of how **the 2030 Agenda can become a fully integrated element** across the full spectrum of policy work already being carried out by local and regional governments (p.10 and p.16)

### 2. Innovation and experimentation

National governments need to consider **towns and regions as innovative hubs for efficient and rapid implementation of the SDGs**. Associations of towns and regions can help play a key role in the process of mobilisation, coordination and communication. (p.14)

### 3. Multilevel partnership

**Inclusive dialogue between all levels of governance and consultation of local and regional governments and their associations** at each step of the central government's decision-making processes pertaining to the SDGs, backed up by the EU, will enable associations to become active key players in the implementation and monitoring and reporting processes, including in the Voluntary National Reviews. (p.14 and p.23)

### 4. Peer-to-peer cooperation

**European towns and regions and their associations should increase exchanges with non-European partners** through decentralised cooperation and continue to exchange best practices on sustainable territorial development. (p.23)

### 5. Strengthening local capacities in Europe and in partner countries

**Additional support is needed from national governments and the European Union**, grounded on the continued **recognition of decentralised cooperation** as an effective tool that will help **strengthen local capacities** to achieve the 2030 Agenda. (p.25)

### 6. Local and regional movement

**There is a need to accelerate the localisation process**, and to do so, it is necessary to join forces to produce a surge in subnational government mobilisation all over the world. (p.26)

### 7. Empowerment

**Much more is required than simply asking that local and regional governments implement SDGs on their territories:** they need to be empowered and have the adequate means to do so. (p.28)

### 8. Align local development and SDGs

**Adequate accompanying measures** should be in place to allow towns and regions to rethink their budgetary processes in light of the SDGs and in view of sustainable and long-term investments. (p.29)

### 9. Disaggregated data at local level

**The collection, disaggregation and accessibility of data to help monitor progress needs to be improved.** This work requires support from the national and international spheres, including working closer with academia and observatories, to provide the resources and tools and to make sure that the collected data, both aggregated and disaggregated, is coherent and regularly updated. (p.30)

### 10. Indicator frameworks

**Encourage the exchange of good practices among peers** to avoid/reduce the duplication of tools to implement and monitor SDGs (p.30)

# Global Village City Hall

## ENSURING BASIC SERVICES TO ALL IN CITIES



## BUILDING A WORLD WHICH LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND



### Why inequalities matter for sustainable development

#### How localizing the SDGs leaves no one and no place behind

More than 100 developing countries don't have well-functioning systems in place to register key life events, like births, deaths and marriages!



The new digital platform **Platform** (SDG) is a joint venture of the **Platform** (SDG) and the **Platform** (SDG) and is a joint venture of the **Platform** (SDG) and the **Platform** (SDG).

The **Platform** (SDG) is a joint venture of the **Platform** (SDG) and the **Platform** (SDG) and is a joint venture of the **Platform** (SDG) and the **Platform** (SDG).



## INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by world leaders at United Nations' level in 2015, presents a universal framework for action by the public and private sectors as well as civil society. It is an unprecedented opportunity to improve people's everyday lives and ensure a sustainable present and future for all. By setting a universal objective, the SDGs provide a global framework with a common and inclusive methodology.

Even though it was launched by the United Nations, the targeted beneficiaries of this Agenda are citizens and its primary implementers are local and regional governments. The SDGs create a path for all. Local and regional governments are the ones who will transform it into reality by walking the talk.

As rightfully stated by the Global Taskforce of local and regional governments, for the Agenda to be achieved, nearly two-thirds of the SDGs need to be implemented at the local level. Although only one goal specifically targets cities and local communities (SDG 11), the other 16 goals do possess a significant territorial dimension.

Municipalities, regions and their associations are the ones responsible for delivering the vast majority of relevant and qualitative public services, taking into consideration People,

Planet, Peace, Prosperity, and Partnerships. They are essential partners in achieving and delivering on the aspects of awareness-raising, design, implementation and monitoring of SDGs. Thus, the leadership of municipalities and regions is one of the most significant driving forces in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In this sense, the role of Local and Regional Government Associations (LRGAs) is crucial, as they represent a united voice as well as the face of the local and regional levels before the national, European and international spheres.

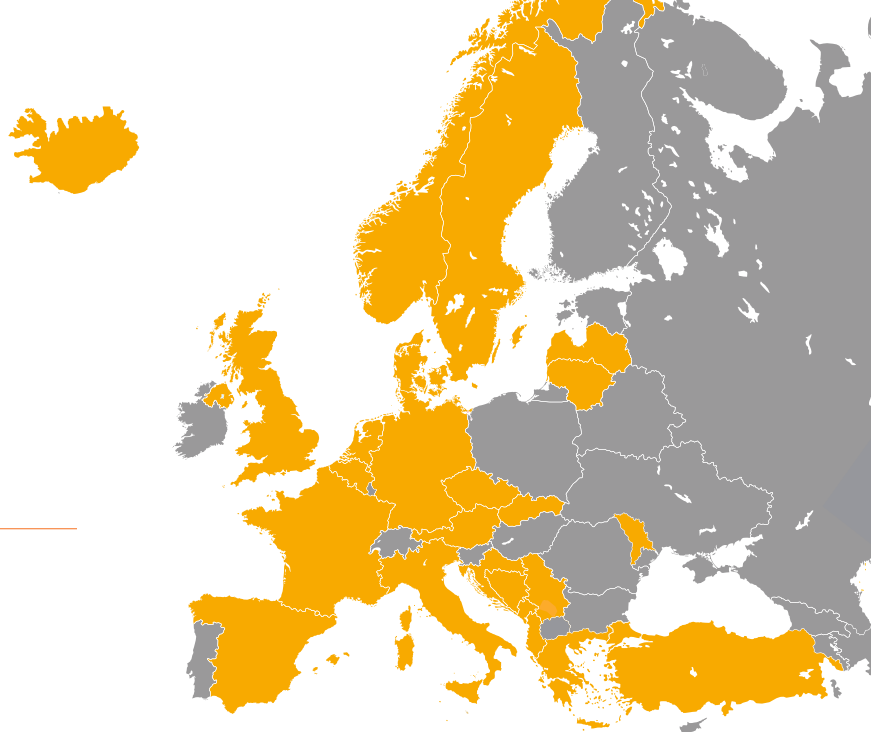
As representatives of LRGAs, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), together with PLATFORMA, have decided to focus primarily on this group of stakeholders to better understand their role and how they perform it, and to collect experiences and practices.

Special attention has been paid to the link between an effective multilevel and/or multi-stakeholders' collaboration and SDG implementation, the role of awareness-raising actions and their power to mobilise, the capacities of local governments and their associations and how these could be built up further in partnership with other spheres of governance. Local and regional governments cannot do it all on their own.





26 associations of towns and regions from 24 European countries have responded to the survey.



## An ongoing process

A first edition of this study was published in 2018 entitled "Sustainable Development Goals - How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead"<sup>1</sup>. It confirmed that the SDGs are a relevant and effective way of engaging municipalities and other local and regional government associations in different forms of cooperation at the local, regional, national and international levels. The results also stressed that some of the biggest challenges in carrying out the localisation<sup>2</sup> of the SDGs were insufficient human and financial resources, as well as the difficulty in collecting and accessing data at local level. Respondents also emphasised the need for greater harmonisation with national action plan frameworks as well as the importance of pursuing joint activities further through European and international networks.

For the 2019 edition, the objective has been to take stock of the progress already made. It notably aims to showcase and analyse the involvement of towns and regions and their associations in the national, European, and international spheres, for example, during the reporting process to the High-Level Political Forum of the United Nations<sup>3</sup>. For the first time this year, and every four years thereafter, the EU is reporting to the United Nations. The study has also contributed to the European chapter of the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralisation (GOLD)'s fifth report<sup>4</sup> on the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the other global agendas<sup>5</sup>.

## Methodology

In coordination with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF)<sup>6</sup>, a survey of 31 questions was conceived. It specifically addresses knowledge, awareness and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at the local level. The survey questions were divided into four parts, each one focusing on a distinct topic.

The four main parts assess different elements and phases of the localisation process: awareness of the global agendas; knowledge of the national context for SDG implementation and monitoring; initiatives by LRGs and their associations to support SDG implementation and monitoring; and finally, the practical commitment of the organisations to the SDGs with a focus on decentralised cooperation<sup>7</sup>. The survey was then sent out in early 2019 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners.

The present PLATFORMA-CEMR study is based on 26 responses from national associations of local and regional governments<sup>8</sup> encompassing 24 countries<sup>9</sup> from all across Europe, eight of which are non-EU members. The 24 countries represent 51,840,000 people<sup>10</sup> and the associations represent 90% of this population, on average<sup>11</sup>.

Eight more responses were received (ones from the 18 associations had contributed previously, representing a total of 15 countries). This results in a far more comprehensive and representative study, and makes it possible to track the evolution of answers from one year to the next by analysing those from the 15 countries that took part in both<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> CEMR-PLATFORMA, "Sustainable Development Goals - How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead", August 2018, [bit.ly/2NtFB43](https://bit.ly/2NtFB43)

<sup>2</sup> Localisation refers to the process of adapting, implementing, and monitoring the SDGs at the local level. It is key to ensuring that no one and no place are left behind in the course of developing a more sustainable future.

<sup>3</sup> [sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019)

<sup>4</sup> [www.gold.uclg.org](https://www.gold.uclg.org)

<sup>5</sup> Such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Habitat III, The New Urban Agenda for the EU, Agenda 21, etc.

<sup>6</sup> UCLG's analysis is available at [www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/towards\\_the\\_localization\\_of\\_the\\_sdgs\\_0.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/towards_the_localization_of_the_sdgs_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Decentralised cooperation is understood as development cooperation between sub-national governments from the European Union and partner countries. For more information on the definition of Decentralised cooperation, check CPMR-PLATFORMA study "Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation - For enhanced effectiveness and accountability", October 2017, [bit.ly/2FIEG0Z](https://bit.ly/2FIEG0Z)

<sup>8</sup> For the complete list of participating associations, see page 2

<sup>9</sup> 2019: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom

<sup>10</sup> Source used for the population of the 24 countries: Eurostat (12 August 2019)

<sup>11</sup> Source used for the representativeness of the associations: CEMR study "National associations of local and regional governments in Europe", January 2019. [ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_study\\_association\\_local\\_government\\_EN.pdf](https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_study_association_local_government_EN.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Geographical basis for 2018-2019 comparison: Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom

The results and data presented in this year's study are based on this rather geographically balanced sample of 24 countries.

In terms of positioning relative to the SDGs, the collected data can also be considered relatively balanced. There is of course a natural bias: those who respond to such a survey are generally aware of the SDG framework to a certain extent and are therefore more inclined to take part. Indeed, the majority of participating associations were already familiar with the goals. Several see them as an opportunity to position themselves closer to the EU and global scene, and some have even fully integrated the SDGs into their strategies and daily work.

Yet, we have also received answers from associations that had never worked with SDGs or for which the SDGs are far from being a priority. 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 imparts not only good practices but also any constraints and reservations that still need to be addressed.

## What drives our research

With the 2019 UN-HLPF in mind, CEMR and PLATFORMA wanted to ensure that the voice of European local and regional governments would be heard at the national, European and global levels. The crucial role they play in the SDG implementation and monitoring process at the local level is notably highlighted through: initiatives by LRGs and their associations supporting SDG implementation and monitoring, their practical commitment and their involvement in national coordination plans or mechanisms following up on the SDGs, and their work reflecting on how to rethink their decentralised cooperation in relation to the SDG framework.

Yet, this study also aims to evaluate challenges LRGs and their associations face in their efforts progressing towards the 2030

Agenda. CEMR and PLATFORMA also present some policy recommendations in view of the ultimate goal of achieving the SDGs through advocacy and raising-awareness activities aimed at different stakeholders (EU institutions, tiers of government and the like).

So, how and to what extent do LRGs and their associations, if they can, play a significant role in achieving the SDGs in Europe and in partner countries?

### OUR STUDY FOCUSES ON THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- What is the current situation in LRGs and their associations in terms of SDG awareness?
- What is the national context for SDG implementation and monitoring? Is it favourable?
- Is any change/evolution perceptible in comparison with last year's study?
- How do LRGAs address the different aspects (dimensions, cross-cutting issues and interlinkages)<sup>13</sup> of the SDGs?
- What means do LRGs and their associations use to support SDG implementation and monitoring?
- What challenges do LRGs face in fulfilling their SDG commitments?
- What role do international partnerships play, if any, in achieving the SDGs?



<sup>13</sup> Cross-cutting issues and interlinkages: the putting in place of policies or application of principles or methods that are transversal (from Latin transversus "lying across"), and the use of interlinkages (the joining or connecting of two or more things together).

# 1

## AWARENESS: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS ALIGN WITH THE SDGs

**B**efore being able to walk the talk on the 2030 Agenda, one needs to know about it - and understand it. To what extent are associations of towns and regions aware of the SDGs? The survey results provide a quick glimpse into LRGAs' current level of SDG awareness, which has clearly been impacted by the national situation.

### A. State of play: it's getting better

First, it is important to underline that the responses here reflect the views of local and regional government associations that are already quite familiar with, or at least fairly inclined to learn more about the SDG framework and the importance of its localisation. Some respondents are still in the early stages of their "SDG experience". Their answers therefore reflect the needs and priorities of associations not very active yet in this area, but willing to make a change to support their members in this direction.

If we look at the individual point of view of the respondents, nearly half of them align their work priorities with the SDGs (38%); the other half use the SDGs as a reference, but do not consider them high work priorities (58%). One respondent<sup>14</sup> indicated knowing about the existence of the SDGs but being unfamiliar with their particulars.

From an organisational point of view, nearly two-thirds of the associations (65%) were familiar with and/or involved in the implementation of the SDGs, compared to 60% in our 2018 survey; and five (19%) could demonstrate an active commitment to implementing the SDGs at the local and regional level, with significant references to SDGs in their strategies, compared to only 14% in 2018. Almost half of the respondents indicated that the majority of their staff were aware of and made reference to the SDGs, but that the goals did not rank high in the organisation's work priorities. In six associations<sup>15</sup>, many had heard about the SDGs but were unaware of their relevance. And in three associations<sup>16</sup>, only a few individuals knew about the SDGs.

From comments, we understand that SDGs are still perceived as an additional and external framework that does not necessarily concern or impact realities on the ground, especially in the eastern part of Europe. In their view, the SDG framework is linked more to a supplementary international and/or European agenda.



Better communication is needed to clearly elucidate the universal nature of the SDGs, coupled with more concrete examples of how they can be integrated into current work plans (for instance, when local and regional governments are developing territorial development policy), in order to help increase the involvement and active implementation rate of LRGs and their associations across Europe.



### MDGs vs. SDGs

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000 by the United Nations, were the first of their kind: a global strategy with quantifiable targets to help eradicate poverty. They represent a historic and effective method of global mobilisation brought about to achieve a set of important social priorities worldwide. They were directed however towards the poorest regions of the world and the need to focus on developing countries first.

In contrast, since 2015, the SDGs have been considered to be transformational, reflecting the growing urgency of sustainable development for the entire world. They represent a new universal Agenda, removing the "developing" versus "developed" dichotomy and the notions of "donors" and "recipients". Now, everyone has been called upon to act and play their part in helping to secure a more prosperous and sustainable future. Only four years into the 2030 Agenda, transferring from the MDGs to the SDGs has prompted a shift in mindset and perspective.

<sup>14</sup> The Moldovan association

<sup>15</sup> The Croatian, Dutch, English, Greek, Moldovan and Swedish associations

<sup>16</sup> The Czech, Montenegrin and Serbian associations





### AWARENESS RAISING

Many local and regional government associations have already developed means to raise awareness within their organisations and also among their members.

The **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (VVSG) has put together a number of practical examples to introduce the SDGs to a wider audience: within municipal organisations, in external communications and during events. From SDG stress balls to SDG chocolates and even an SDG time capsule, this selection of awareness-raising strategies offers a wide range of campaigns, initiatives and activities.

**More info:** [bit.ly/331YVxl](https://bit.ly/331YVxl)

**The international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG), VNG International, launched a campaign revolving around the Global Goals for Sustainable Development called "The Global Goals Municipality Campaign" (Gemeenten4GlobalGoals). This campaign is dedicated to raising awareness of the SDGs and aims to inspire and mobilise Dutch municipalities to achieve the goals. VNG International offers assistance and facilitates the exchange of knowledge and best practices between municipalities. By now, almost 75 municipalities have officially joined the campaign.

**More info:** [vng.nl/global-goals-gemeenten-sustainable-development-goals-sdg](https://vng.nl/global-goals-gemeenten-sustainable-development-goals-sdg)

For the associations already active in the field of SDG implementation (i.e. associations that have already organised conferences or seminars on the topics, training for their members, etc.), there has been a slight but interesting progression in how the goals are perceived and have been incorporated into their policy work. The 2018 study highlighted that SDGs were mostly linked to an international agenda, generally handled by one specific department. This is still the case today, with nine associations<sup>17</sup> responding that they view the SDGs as an international issue and have assigned SDG-related policies to their international department; nevertheless, there is a growing range of specific departments coordinating and performing SDG-related work: environmental departments (the Montenegrin and Lithuanian associations), top-down management services (the Bosnian and French associations) or as a section within the regional developmental services (the Czech association).

That being said, we have noticed that since 2018, an increasing number of LRGAs have started to dispatch the SDGs across to their local governments' departments. Some have even created an interdepartmental SDG team<sup>18</sup>. This highlights the increasing recognition of the goals' transversal dimension, demonstrating that they are interrelated and not necessarily linked to only one specific theme but concern several existing priorities of local and regional governments.

Six<sup>19</sup> out of twenty-six associations stated that several or all departments dealt with SDGs, revealing a clear understanding and commitment to SDG-inclusiveness. In contrast to 2018, we can observe a positive trend towards mainstreaming of the SDGs through cross-sectoral approaches and a broader commitment overall.

<sup>17</sup> The Czech, English, Flemish, German, Greek, Latvian, Dutch, Slovak and Spanish associations

<sup>18</sup> The Austrian, Norwegian and Swedish associations

<sup>19</sup> The Danish (KL), Icelandic, Italian, Scottish, Serbian and Turkish associations

On another note, other respondents, such as the Association of Albanian Municipalities, have not yet assigned the SDGs to a specific department as they have just begun taking on the SDGs. Our respondents from Moldova commented that the SDGs were still perceived as a framework imposed by donors, distant from what they referred to as the “realities on the ground, especially for developing countries”. To the Moldovan association, there is a widening gap regarding what the notion of “development” means to developing countries and what it means to donors; the priorities, objectives, even vocabulary and effectiveness of global agendas have all been called into question. In their opinion, there is a sort of frustration and even mistrust and irritation when the association is called on to address the topic of SDGs with central and local public administrations, civil society and even with some international organisations.

This account, described in the comments sections of the survey, is also telling of the importance of the national commitment and context and how critical it is to effectively communicate results and impactful practices.

## POLICY CONCLUSIONS

General awareness of the SDGs has increased amongst European LRGAs. This is also the case with respect to their (international) relevance, as attested to by the high number of associations that now refer to the SDGs in their work and that have assigned them to the international or other departments.

Yet, the figures also show that SDGs are still perceived as overly disconnected from realities on the ground, and many stakeholders remain unsure of their value. Some associations consider the 2030 Agenda too unwieldy and difficult to grasp and continue to associate it with a donor-recipient framework for development instead of viewing it as a universal aspiration.



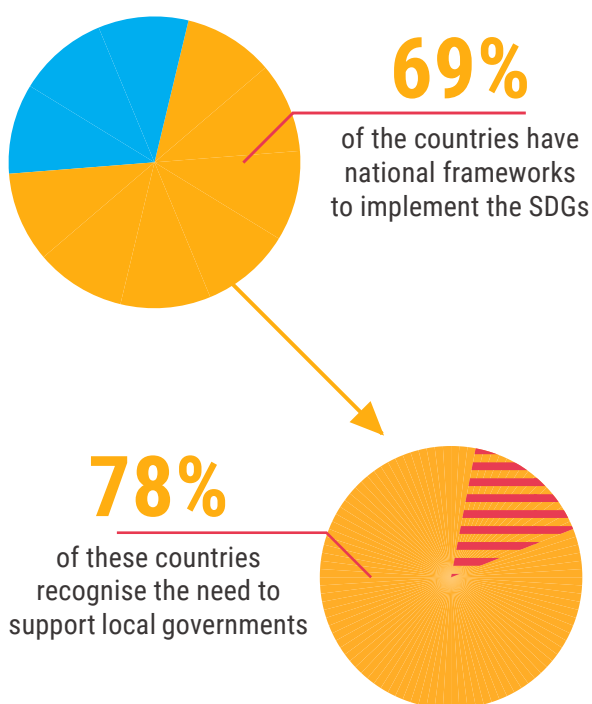


## B. The impact of the institutional environment

When evaluating the awareness of LRGs and their associations regarding the SDGs and other global agendas, it is crucial to also take into consideration their particular cultural environment and national context. The national context is a decisive element in fostering an environment conducive to local action in this field. Yet, as we have noted, there is still a gap between what is being done at the national and local levels. The national situation is not always optimal, nor does it necessarily support the local sphere adequately enough to develop SDG-related policies efficiently and as quickly as possible.

In the majority of the respondent associations' countries (69%), a national framework or strategy to implement the SDGs and other global agendas (i.e. New Urban Agenda, Paris Climate Agreements, Sendai Framework, Global Compact for Migration) is in place. However, this was not the case for eight countries<sup>20</sup>.

For instance, in the United Kingdom, the SDGs are addressed under Single Departmental Plans. These are documents drafted by UK governmental departments and are valid for the duration of the Parliament. They set out each governmental department's objectives and how they will achieve them. Together, they show how departments are working to deliver the government's programme.



Among the countries with national frameworks for SDG implementation, 78% mention the need to support LRGs.

<sup>20</sup> The Austrian, Bosnian, Croatian, Netherlands, English, Latvian, Moldovan and Norwegian associations



In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the national framework has not yet been finalised, even if national authorities have "agreed to design, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme, a Framework for the SDGs that will define a common position for governments in the Bosnian association on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs". The resulting document will then be endorsed at all federal echelons, including at the levels of the Republic of Srpska (RS), the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Brcko District. This SDG Framework of BiH is also expected to impact subsequent strategic planning processes at the sub-national level, with a rollout planned for the second half of 2019.

The associations from Greece, Iceland and Turkey indicated that their national framework (or equivalent document) does not take into consideration the need to support the local level at all. And in the Czech Republic, the national framework only partially takes into account the need to support the local level.

Furthermore, only half of all the respondent organisations<sup>21</sup> were consulted by their national governments regarding the design, implementation or monitoring of national SDG strategies. However, the French, Icelandic, Lithuanian and Norwegian associations were able to contribute to preliminary talks in view of setting up national frameworks of SDG implementation. It is interesting to note that, in Norway, on account of the SDG framework, territorial reforms have been taking place. Notably, some municipalities, as well as some regions, which are in the process of merging, have chosen to use the SDGs as the framework to plan and develop strategies for their newly merged entities.

<sup>21</sup> Thirteen associations: the Flemish, Czech, Danish (KL and REGIONER), French, Icelandic, Latvian, Norwegian, Scottish, Serbian, Spanish, Slovakian and Swedish associations





77%

of the countries have established institutional mechanisms for coordination and follow up on SDG implementation

With regard to institutional mechanisms to ensure coordination and follow-up on SDG implementation, 77% of the respondent associations indicated that their national governments had established such a structure.

Furthermore, the vast majority (80%) of the associations in these cases were invited to help ensure the success of such a mechanism. This highlights the fact that some LRGs are increasingly being taken into consideration by their national governments at last.

Where it exists, has the new SDG framework or institutional mechanism had an impact on the governance in partnership? Has it improved

the cross-level governance relationships and national policies affecting local and regional governments (as might be expected from the inclusive approach of the SDGs)? Yes, but only for seven<sup>22</sup> of the responding associations.



#### CHANGES IN MULTI-LEVEL DIALOGUE

In **Germany**, the local and regional associations, along with the central federal government, other political bodies, research institutes and agencies, have set up an interactive website to provide stakeholders with suitable indicators to display and review SDG implementation in German cities, districts and communities and to collect corresponding data. The [www.sdg-portal.de](http://www.sdg-portal.de) initiative was honoured as one of the three finalists for the UN SDG Action Award 2019.

In the **Netherlands**, to boost the implementation of SDGs, a roadmap has been created presenting concrete actions to help key stakeholders achieve the SDGs.

**More info:** [sdgroutekaart.nl](http://sdgroutekaart.nl)

There is a clear need for inclusive dialogue and consultation of local and regional governments and their associations at each step of the central government's decision-making processes pertaining to the SDGs, which will enable associations to become active key players in the implementation and monitoring process.



National governments need to take LRGs and their associations more into account and increase the effective cooperation between the national and the local and regional governments in order to ensure the inclusive implementation of SDGs and support for LRGs as hubs for efficient and rapid implementation and innovation. LRGs can help play a key role in the process of coordination and communication, promoting policy coherence between all spheres of governance within a country as well as between different localities, thus guaranteeing territorial balance.



<sup>22</sup> The Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian, Montenegrin, Swedish and Turkish associations

## POLICY CONCLUSIONS

The first part of this study is aimed at assessing the national context in which SDG implementation and monitoring occur and its relevance to the role of LRGs. This allows us to evaluate the working challenges facing LRGs when taken in connection with their own awareness of the SDGs.

LRGs are increasingly becoming aware of and recognise SDGs much more frequently, even though the way in which they perceive their relevance varies among EU partners and non-European partners. The latter seem more likely to be unfamiliar with the SDGs or to consider them as a donor framework instead of a universal one.

The rise in interest in SDGs can also be observed at the national level and a national framework has been adopted in the majority of the respondents' countries. Moreover, these national SDG frameworks mention the need to support LRGs in their efforts to implement the SDGs at the local level (up to 82%), thus acknowledging the crucial role that LRGs play in the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

However, only half of the associations were consulted by the national governments with regard to the design, implementation or monitoring of national SDG strategies. This suggests the danger of the LRGs only being included on paper.

Finally, most LRGs do not believe that coordination mechanisms and SDG implementation strategies have had an impact so far on cross-level governance relationships and national policies aimed at LRGs.

Working on the 2030 Agenda directly or indirectly encourages LRGs to take action at the local or regional level and reassures them that progress is being made. However, they believe that the local level is still not taken enough into consideration by their national governments. National governments should place greater value on the work that is being done by the LRGs, and the LRGs by extension, and strengthen the consultation and dialogue with them in order to successfully implement the SDGs and ensure policy coherence, not to mention a positive spill over effect from each other's policies.



# 2 IMPLEMENTATION: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS WORK IN PRACTICE

The second part of this study analyses the practical commitments taken so far by the LRGAs in their work on the SDG framework. Taking into account their level of awareness and their institutional framework, what have they done? And what impact has it had on their international work, especially on their city-to-city and region-to-region work with partner countries, i.e. decentralised cooperation?

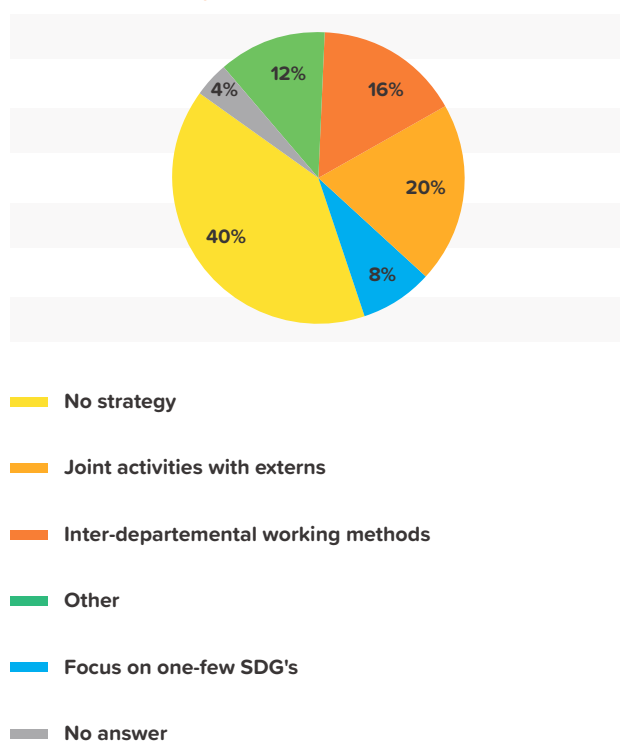
## A. From cooperation to advocacy

The first challenge when working on the SDGs is understanding that they represent a transversal and inclusive agenda.

Whilst the 2030 Agenda is global in nature, it is universally applicable, adaptable to different realities, levels of development, while respecting national policies and priorities.

It is a shared agenda that requires a collective response – all countries and all stakeholders, acting in a collaborative partnership – to implement this plan.

### How do you deal with the SDG's interlinkages and transversality?



With this in mind, it is encouraging to see that nine respondent organisations have developed joint activities with external stakeholders<sup>23</sup> such as CSOs, universities, think tanks, etc.

In addition, six LRGAs have set up inter-departmental working methods<sup>24</sup>.

In seven LRGAs, there has been collaboration with colleagues from other departments on thematic issues.

Four associations have chosen to focus their work on only one or a few SDGs. Nine associations have been combining these different approaches<sup>25</sup>.

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities emphasised in particular that working on the SDG framework has strengthened the collaboration between its various departments.

This is a clear sign of a growing consciousness of the cross-sectoral dimension of SDGs. These figures indicate a positive trend towards mainstreaming the SDGs at the local level, fostering cooperation between different fields of activity and across sectors.

To ensure an integrated and transversal approach to the SDGs, it must be recalled that the 2030 Agenda is more than just another international programme to implement, that it is universal and concerns all stakeholders, from all levels and all regions of the world. It can become a fully integrated element across the full spectrum of policy work already being carried out by local governments. One of the major aims of this Agenda is to be transformative, including in the way we approach policy.



<sup>23</sup> The Austrian, Croatian, Dutch, Flemish, Greek, Italian, Latvian, Scottish and Spanish associations

<sup>24</sup> The Danish (KL), Dutch, German, Icelandic, Italian and Norwegian associations

<sup>25</sup> The Dutch, Flemish, French, Greek, Italian, Scottish, Serbian, Spanish and Swedish associations





### ASSOCIATIONS, CITIES AND REGIONS ARE TAKING THE NEXT STEP IN THE 2030 AGENDA

**Mannheim:** In a broad-based participatory process, with the help of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and Engagement Global, the city of Mannheim has worked together with more than 2,500 residents, companies, institutions, initiatives and associations, universities, self-help groups and others to develop a large number of proposals and suggestions for the "Mannheim 2030" mission statement<sup>26</sup>. From this, Mannheim 2030 has compiled a list of strategic goals and local targets and indicators tailored to the city's capacities and needs. These targets are linked to the city's budget.

Very early on, **the Basque Government** made good on its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, and its aim of strengthening cooperation and collaboration with European and international partners and stakeholders. In 2018, under the guidance of the Basque Policy Coherence for Development (April 2016), the Basque region developed a plan entitled "Agenda Euskadi- Basque Country 2030"<sup>27</sup>, and issued a first monitoring report<sup>28</sup>, an example of a territory, including public authorities and regional stakeholders, fulfilling its joint responsibility and commitment. A second SDG report was published in 2018.

**Catalonia:** in 2017, the Government of Catalonia officially decided to design an overall strategy<sup>29</sup> for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Catalonia, which would align the 2030 Agenda targets with all public policies in Catalonia. This strategy contains over 750 commitments for implementing the UN Agenda targets in Catalonia (to be carried out in Catalonia and beyond).



### POLICY COHERENCE AND THE 2030 AGENDA

Policy coherence aims to minimise contradictions and build synergies between different EU policies to benefit developing countries and increase the effectiveness of development cooperation at the local and national levels. The concept of "policy coherence for development" was first enshrined as an EU fundamental law in 1992 with the Treaty of Maastricht and was further strengthened in the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 (Art.208 TFEU). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents an optimal opportunity to tackle the interlinked challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development amongst all spheres of governance, especially the local and regional levels. At the international level, all countries will need to advance policy coherence as an important means to ensure that all policies support progress towards reaching the global goals.

One third of the respondents indicated however that they still did not have a strategy in place to address these interlinkages. This result is not surprising given that these associations have also stated that their staff's level of awareness of the SDGs' relevance is rather low and that the goals were not ranked very high in their working priorities. The lack of a strategy might also be linked to there being a less than favourable atmosphere for SDG implementation at the national level.

Nevertheless, in order to successfully implement the SDGs at the local level, more action has to be taken overall. More specifically, any such actions would need to be cross-sectoral and diversified to ensure harmonious work, what is referred to as "policy coherence".

Policy coherence must be understood with respect to all of its dimensions:

- **Vertical coherence** refers to the need for different levels of governance at local, regional, national and EU levels to work closer together and coordinate their policies. This also calls for monitoring with regard to the extent to which the EU and national levels have an impact on the local and/or regional ones.
- **Horizontal coherence** refers to the alignment between different stakeholders, including public, private and civil society. The 2030 Agenda calls for increased partnerships amongst these groups in order to achieve the global goals.
- This is also true of **global partnerships**, through which all actors are expected to cooperate to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Policy decisions taken in Europe can affect municipalities in developing countries, notably concerning trade, procurement, worker rights, agriculture, etc. There is a need to ensure internal and external policy coherence.

<sup>26</sup> [www.mannheim.de/en/shaping-the-city/strategic-controlling-office/mission-statement-mannheim-2030](http://www.mannheim.de/en/shaping-the-city/strategic-controlling-office/mission-statement-mannheim-2030)

<sup>27</sup> [bideoak2.euskadi.eus/2018/04/11/lhk\\_agenda\\_basque\\_country/AGENDA\\_EBC2030.pdf](http://bideoak2.euskadi.eus/2018/04/11/lhk_agenda_basque_country/AGENDA_EBC2030.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [www.euskadi.eus/2030-agenda/monitoring-2017](http://www.euskadi.eus/2030-agenda/monitoring-2017)

<sup>29</sup> [cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Agenda\\_2030/agenda2030\\_flyer\\_caraB.pdf](http://cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Agenda_2030/agenda2030_flyer_caraB.pdf)

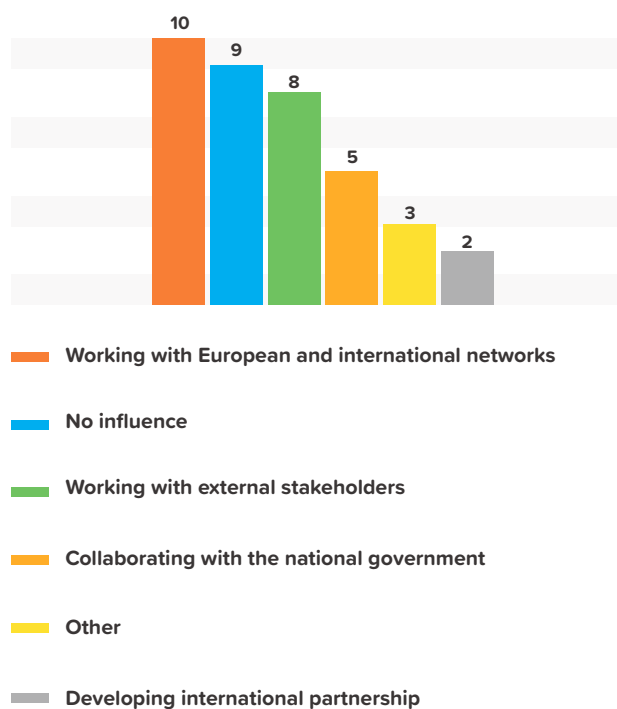
## SDGs and Partnerships

For more than one-third (38%) of the respondent associations of towns and regions, the SDG framework has bolstered their work with European and international circles: obtaining information, instruments for training and other tools; experimenting, sharing information and practices with other associations or members of the same network, etc.

However, nine respondents<sup>30</sup> (35%) did not believe that the SDG framework had helped their organisation develop their partnerships at all. Yet, it must be noted that the SDGs were not a high priority for any of these associations. With the exception of the French association, none of the eight remaining associations had adopted specific policy documents (e.g. statements, papers, declarations, roadmaps, etc.) pertaining to the implementation of the SDGs or any other global agenda.

Eight associations<sup>31</sup> felt that the SDG framework had strengthened their work with external stakeholders, one of the primary purposes in fact of this inclusive framework: to foster horizontal collaboration with civil society organisations, academia, businesses, etc. Vertical collaboration is also key: five associations<sup>32</sup> of towns and regions used the SDGs to also build up their collaboration with the national government and strengthen lobbying activities. However, only two<sup>33</sup> used them to develop their international partnerships.

### How has the SDG framework helped your organisation to develop your partnerships?



<sup>30</sup> The Bosnian, Czech, English, French, Moldovan, Montenegrin, Norwegian, Serbian and Slovak associations

<sup>31</sup> The Austrian, Danish (REGIONER), Dutch, Italian, Scottish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish associations

<sup>32</sup> The Dutch, Icelandic, Italian, Scottish and Spanish associations

<sup>33</sup> The Italian and Greek associations







# FOCUS

## COOPERATION WITH LOCAL PLAYERS AND LEADERSHIP, SIMPLE RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

Cooperation with an entire local ecosystem is vital but challenging. It calls for a new way of looking at the way policies are developed at local level, and including groups that are not usually given a voice in public policy-making.

More than half of the responding LRGAs (15)<sup>34</sup> support current initiatives or projects, which focus on the alignment of local and regional development plans in their municipality or region with the SDGs and/or the local implementation of the SDGs, that have been developed by a local player. A 'local player' in this case can refer to enterprises, universities, local civil society associations, etc.

Three-quarters (19) of the respondent organisations promote or take part in activities run by local players to support SDG implementation and dissemination among local governments<sup>35</sup>. The vast majority (77%) of the respondent LRGAs<sup>36</sup> also reported being aware of other initiatives in their country that aimed to inform or support local governments with respect to the SDGs and other global agendas.

Of the 19 associations that knew of other initiatives underway in their country, 10<sup>37</sup> identified several initiatives that were being promoted at the national level. The Spanish and Norwegian associations confirmed that the promoters of such initiatives included the national government, international, local and regional networks, institutions and/or agencies, as well as NGOs and foundations, all of which points to a strong and healthy multilateral environment for multi-stakeholders.

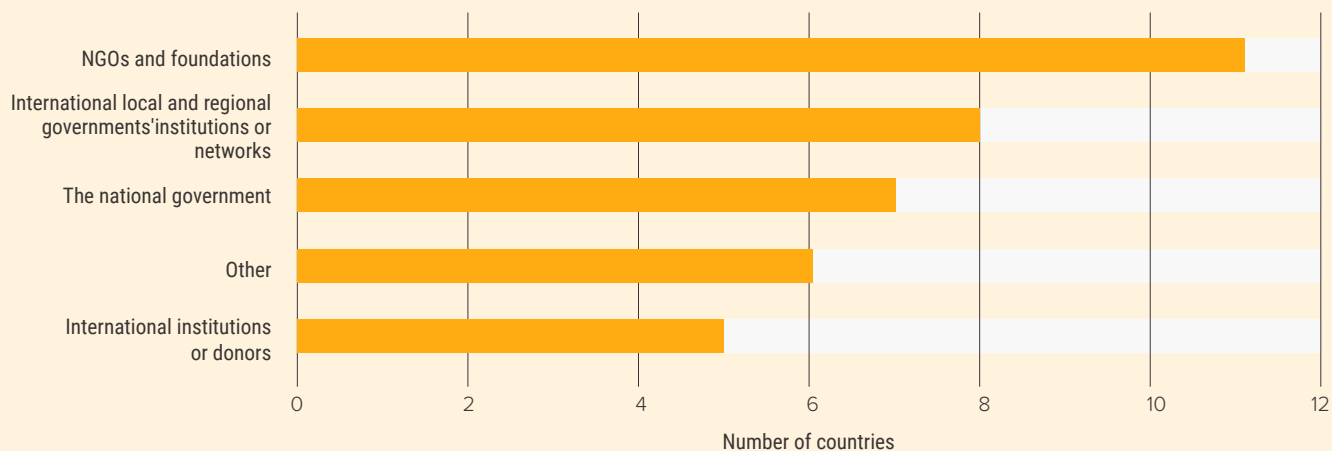
It is interesting to note that the most widespread promoters of SDG-related initiatives are NGOs or foundations, which substantiates the importance of civil society organisations.

Next in number are international local and regional governments' organisations or networks, followed by the national government, and finally international institutions or donors. In addition, the Czech association mentioned the national association of local governments, "Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic".

Thus, from all this, we can detect a diversification in stakeholders and, ultimately, more potential future partners for LRGAs, a fitting trend given that this transversal and inclusive approach is the "raison d'être" of the SDGs.



Main promoters of SDG Initiatives



<sup>34</sup> The Austrian, Danish (REGIONER), Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Icelandic, Italian, Latvian, Norwegian, Scottish, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish associations

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the following associations answered 'no' to this question: the Albanian, Greek, Lithuanian, Moldovan, Montenegrin, Slovak and Serbian associations

<sup>36</sup> All except the Danish (KL), Greek, Icelandic, Latvian, Moldovan and Montenegrin associations

<sup>37</sup> The Croatian, Dutch, English, Flemish, French, Norwegian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish associations



## THE LATVIAN EXPERIENCE

Since 2016, the **Latvian association** (LPS) has been an active partner in the project "Working together towards empowering local and regional governments for effective development outcomes in EU partner countries". This long-term action is being implemented under the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) that was signed between the European Commission and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) on behalf of PLATFORMA.

The promotion of a multi-stakeholder approach, both in development cooperation and in the implementation of the SDGs in Latvia, is an important leitmotif underlying all of LPS' activities carried out under this project.

To this end, the LPS has organised a series of discussions focusing on the most topical SDGs for Latvian municipalities. For example, the seminar "The way of Latvia towards sustainable development: flashing lights for 2030" was organised in cooperation with the Association of Executive Directors of Latvian Local Governments. It was dedicated to SDG 11 "Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and discussed what had been already achieved as well as future challenges and tasks, how to facilitate joint work with citizens, local governments and state institutions and get them involved in the national planning and financing framework.

The seminar "It's not rocket science! Innovation and digitalization in municipalities and development cooperation" was devoted both to SDG 9 "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure" and to the topic of development cooperation. The seminar participants discussed how to promote innovation ecosystems, i.e. cooperation between municipalities, universities and entrepreneurs to drive innovation.

## Some initiatives:

The **Croatian County Association** (HRVZZ) put together a brochure on SDGs at the end of 2015 in cooperation with ODRAZ, a sustainable development NGO. HRVZZ printed an additional 500 copies for distribution to their members.

Together, they organised joint events twice a year on topics linked to sustainable urban development, including one held during the European sustainable development week that was dedicated to SDGs (e.g. SDG 11, Sustainable Cities and Towns).

The **Czech association** (SMO ČR), in cooperation with the NGO Caritas Czech Republic, implemented a project called "Sustainable cities and municipalities for development". It focused on raising awareness and promoting the involvement of cities and municipalities in development cooperation in connection with the 2030 Agenda.

It mobilised local public interest in the new development framework set forth by the Sustainable Development Goals. The organisation of joint events also made it easier for representatives of NGOs and the private sector to make new connections.

The **international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG), VNG International, together with BNG Bank (a municipal bank), organised a Global Goals Social Impact Challenge in the Netherlands. They invited socially responsible entrepreneurs (who aim to make a social impact with their businesses) to develop sustainable ideas and concepts that could help municipalities meet Global Goal 12: 'Responsible consumption and production'.

The Global Goals Municipalities chose the focus of the challenge. Then all Dutch municipalities invited their local entrepreneurs to take part in it.



## THE ROLE OF NGOS AND FOUNDATIONS

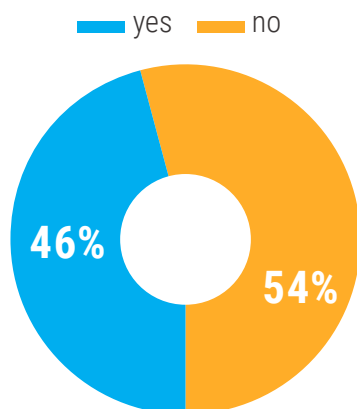
As acknowledged by the 2030 Agenda, NGOs and foundations play critical roles in SDG implementation: they raise awareness and mobilise; engage in capacity-building; design and implement projects; monitor and review policies; collect data; provide technical expertise; and both support and hold governments accountable to their commitments. Both NGOs and local governments have the same ultimate goal: to serve citizens, build local ownership, strengthen civic engagement, and work for the public interest/good.

In areas where local and regional governments are finding it difficult to reach citizens, NGOs and foundations sometimes have an easier and more direct access. However, to successfully achieve all this, an environment conducive to civil society organisations (in terms of infrastructure, administration and official support) effectively being able to do their work on the ground is essential. This can only be ensured with the help of local and regional governments. Working together can therefore help increase the impact of the work being carried out to advance the 2030 Agenda, in a cost- and time-efficient manner.

## Work in practice

What do we mean when we say that LRGAs have been working with the SDG framework? First, we can report that more than half of the respondent associations (54%) have adopted SDG-specific or other global agenda-related policy documents, which even includes associations where SDGs have not been given high priority, or where the staff have heard about the SDGs, but are not aware of their relevance.

### Has your association adopted specific SDG policy documents?



Second, it means that even amongst those that have not adopted specific documents concerning SDGs, such as initially indicated in the survey by the English association (LGA), some associations have promoted activities (e.g. campaigns, conferences, communications, training activities, etc.) to support SDG implementation and dissemination among local governments. This is the case for 18 of them. The Serbian association did not respond to this question.



### RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SDGs

Following continued engagement with the Voluntary National Review that the United Kingdom presented for the first time to the

HLPF in 2019, the **English association** passed a motion at its General Assembly in July of the same year that recognised the importance of the SDGs and committed them to playing their part in enabling local government to develop locally led contributions. Following the passing of this motion, the English association has progressed several strands of work relating to the SDGs, including:

- A review of the association's Business Plan to strengthen alignment with the SDGs
- A comprehensive mapping exercise to explore the alignment of existing policy priorities with the SDGs, the findings of which will inform proposals for future work in this space
- Initial dialogue with local and national stakeholders on monitoring progress towards the SDGs and improving the availability of data to develop relevant local indicators.

Besides LRGAs encouraging and providing support to their members to develop their international partnerships, the SDG framework is used by organisations for different purposes and is designed to help reach out to different target groups (including the central government, other stakeholders, citizens themselves, etc.). So far, its main objectives have been to bolster exchanges and to raise awareness, followed closely by reporting and advocating to other tiers of government.

Other activities have also been established: collect data and monitor strategies, develop action plan frameworks on sustainability and organise training.

This shows that more and more LRGAs are working to advance the 2030 Agenda, notably by making efforts to spread the word – amongst themselves and within their administrations, to their members and citizens – as well as by increasing exchanges and cooperation actions between their members and their partner countries.

Concerning the target groups of the actions undertaken by the associations, a clear priority has been established to work with: 1) their members (municipalities and regions); 2) European networks of local and regional governments and 3) national governments. This mirrors the need to strengthen collaboration with European networks and build up lobbying activities aimed at national governments, as well as to work closer together. This also includes organising exchanges within European networks on national advocacy practices, which can then be carried out by associations in their own country.

However, there seems to be a major incongruity between the targeted beneficiaries and the targeted results arising from the principal challenges facing LRGAs. Even though limited local interest and awareness was ranked first among the main challenges LRGAs are facing in meeting the SDGs, citizens were ranked as last in the target group and seemed to be only considered secondarily, insofar as they could be used in exchanges.

Even though citizens should be at the heart of every political action taken at the local level, they are not the direct target of associations. Nevertheless, twelve associations specified that they were undertaking actions in view of encouraging their members to raise citizens' awareness.

## EDLS THE EUROPEAN DAYS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY

**The European Days of Local Solidarity** promote the commitment of cities and regions to increasing citizen awareness of global sustainable development issues. In 2018, a growing number of elected representatives signed the EDLS Charter and some 120 activities were organised across Europe by city councils in partnership with civil society organisations and educational centres.

In 2019, the EDLS are taking place from 15 to 30 November. Sign the EDLS Charter, propose an EDLS action, use the EDLS promotion toolkit (available in seven languages), join this campaign!

**More info:** [localsolidaritydays.eu](http://localsolidaritydays.eu)





In addition to the above, cooperation with non-European LRGs and decentralised cooperation in particular to achieve the 2030 agenda remains an area of untapped potential.

Eight associations indicated that they have set up specific activities to support their non-European partners in their efforts to localise the SDGs<sup>38</sup>. An example of a good practice of this was carried out by Cités Unies France (CUF). This organisation of united French local governments is a federation of French local and regional governments involved in international relations and decentralised co-operation in particular. In May 2018, at the request of its members, CUF set up a working group "SDG and decentralised cooperation" made up of several components:

- A component that shows the in-house dynamic of work on this SDG to mobilise communities in view of the High-level Political Forums, particularly the Forum of Local and Regional Authorities, which is part of the Global Task Force. This group will be working notably on a census to determine the extent of capitalisation of LRA tools for localising the SDGs in France (public policies, collaboration between different LRG departments, budgets for SDGs, etc.). The results of the census work will then be used as input for the UCLG GOLD report;
- A component that aligns the work of the various working groups set up by the Ministry of Ecological and Solidarity Transition with the goal of increasing a sense of ownership of the SDGs in France;
- A component focusing on exchanges and how to benefit from the results of discussions, experiments and actions carried out in France and within the European and global networks of territorial authorities (Platforma and UCLG in particular);
- A component that specifically focuses on SDG 17 and its targets 9, 14, 16, 17, 19 in particular in order to support local governments in the CUF network in defining specific indicators, staying informed about exchange programs as well as making the most of decentralised cooperation actions (peer exchanges) and the external actions of local governments.



Local and regional governments and their associations should increase exchanges with non-European partners through decentralised cooperation. European towns and regions should continue to exchange best practice on sustainable territorial development, known common territorial challenges, capacity-building and development of a common language with citizens and non-European partners centred around the SDGs.



Additional support is needed from national governments and, more importantly, the European Union that is grounded on the continued recognition of decentralised cooperation as an effective tool that will help strengthen local capacities to achieve the 2030 Agenda, namely by:

- 1) creating spaces for the exchange of experiences and practices;
- 2) addressing specific administrative, territorial and urban challenges,
- 3) fostering multilevel governance and multi-stakeholder alliances, and
- 4) creating strong links between the territories and local and regional stakeholders and communities.



## DECENTRALISED COOPERATION

Decentralised cooperation is essential to being able to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. It is key to maximising the possibility of achieving the 2030 Agenda not only in Europe but also in partner countries through cooperation and by creating opportunities to share good practices, provide support and enable peer-to-peer monitoring of progress. We need inspiration and collaboration for this as it cannot be accomplished alone by LRGs in Europe.

The 2030 Agenda also appears to be an efficient tool for addressing territorial development issues, in Europe and beyond. In this sense, the process of localising the SDGs using the framework of decentralised cooperation provides a common language and a shared set of objectives, allowing local governments to act in a collaborative partnership all over the world.

Read PLATFORMA's study on how decentralised cooperation can help achieve the 2030 Agenda<sup>39</sup>.

The survey revealed that the non-European partners of the respondent associations do not seem to be familiar with the SDGs: nine associations indicated that their partners knew about the SDGs but were unfamiliar with any of the particulars. The Slovak association reported that their international partners were not familiar with the SDGs. The Austrian, German, Italian and Dutch associations replied that their non-European partners used the SDGs as a benchmark, but that they were not considered a high work priority. The Spanish association's partners, however, have been aligning their work priorities with the SDGs.

<sup>38</sup> The Austrian, Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Lithuanian, Spanish and Turkish associations  
<sup>39</sup> CPMR-PLATFORMA, "Decentralised cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda - Towards a new generation of multi-stakeholder partnerships", November 2018, [bit.ly/2S7iChx](http://bit.ly/2S7iChx)



## PEER EXCHANGES FOR THE LOCALISATION OF COMMON SDGs

**Fons Mallorquí**<sup>40</sup>, working with PLATFORMA and with EU financial support, is currently implementing a pilot project based on peer exchange involving the municipalities of Mallorca, Tenado (Burkina Faso) and Pocona (Bolivia). Its aim is to strengthen their respective capacities for mainstreaming the SDGs in local public policies, including decentralised cooperation.

The first phase of this project is focused on raising local elected and public officials' awareness of the 2030 Agenda and their role in localising the SDGs. In the coming year, peers will hold exchanges on how to align municipal plans with SDG 6 (water and sanitation), a priority identified as a common challenge by the four municipalities. Moreover, this work will help shape a new framework for decentralised cooperation projects that can ensure measurable results in terms of implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The peer exchange methodology, case studies and results from this pilot project will be recorded by Fons Mallorquí and shared as a set of guidelines around the Spring of 2020. For example, the municipality of Zoersel and its city-to-city link Bohicon (Benin) both signed the Covenant of Mayors. Together, they have been working on ways to carry out climate actions, exchanges of experience and joint training sessions.

We can see many actions being carried out, notably in the areas of awareness-raising and increasing the number of exchanges. Continuing efforts need to be made in order to monitor SDG implementation by the national associations and then, as a next step, training must be provided to their members, as indicated by ten respondents.

There is also room and need for improvement regarding advocacy work aimed at other tiers of government.

Last but not least, twelve associations have been working on developing an action plan framework on sustainability, eight of them<sup>41</sup> with their members and four<sup>42</sup> with the national government.

## B. Opening doors to the international scene

Since 2015, out of the 23 countries covered by this study, 19<sup>43</sup> of them have already officially presented a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Moreover, two of the three remaining countries, Austria and Moldova, have already expressed their intent to present a VNR in 2020.

In 2019, twelve associations<sup>44</sup> felt concerned by the reporting to the HLPF. Of these twelve, five associations<sup>45</sup> had not been informed about or involved in the national reporting process. In addition, the Moldovan association pointed out that they were unaware of the existence of both a national SDG framework and the UN HLPF.

In order to differentiate between several degrees of involvement with respect to the HLPF report, we asked the 14 respondents who confirmed their participation to specify the extent of their contributions. Nine of the LRGAs<sup>46</sup> were highly involved, either through the reporting unit appointed by the national government and as a participant in the drafting process or by presenting their own contribution (chapter) to the report. The Serbian and the English associations attended bilateral meetings, whereas the Lithuanian association and the Flemish associations were moderately involved by occasionally participating in informational workshops and/or by being invited to comment on the VNR once it was finalised.

Consequently, this shows what can occur when national governments place greater stock on the work being done by LRGAs, and therefore LRGs, and proves the need to strengthen their consultation and dialogue with them in a timely manner in order to successfully monitor SDG implementation.

## MONITORING



<sup>40</sup> Fons Mallorquí, the Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation, is a non-profit organisation that was established in 1993 by local (town councils, associations of municipalities and the Island Council of Majorca) and regional institutions (Government of the Balearic Islands) to coordinate and channel annual contributions towards development cooperation. Fons Mallorquí is a partner of PLATFORMA.

<sup>41</sup> The Austrian, Danish (REGIONER), Dutch, Flemish, German, Italian, Norwegian and Spanish associations

<sup>42</sup> The Dutch, Icelandic, Italian and Slovakian associations

<sup>43</sup> France (2016), Germany (2016), Montenegro (2016), Norway (2016), Belgium (2017), Czech Republic (2017), Denmark (2017), Italy (2017), Netherlands (2017), Sweden (2017), Greece (2018), Latvia (2018), Lithuania (2018), Slovakia (2018), Spain (2018), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2019), Iceland (2019), Serbia (2019), Turkey (2019) and United Kingdom (2019)

<sup>44</sup> The Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Danish (KL), English, French, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Montenegrin, Scottish, Serbian, and Turkish associations

<sup>45</sup> The Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, French and Montenegrin associations

<sup>46</sup> The Danish (KL), Dutch, Icelandic, Latvian, Norwegian, Scottish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish associations



### HOW INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS CAN OPEN NATIONAL DOORS

Since the beginning of the new Italian Government's mandate in June 2018, there have been no consultations or discussions about the National Strategy in Italy.

The Government, at the State-Regions and State-Cities Conference in 2017, consulted the environmental commissions on both sub-national bodies, but only once each.

As was the case with the implementation and presentation of the National Voluntary Report, local governments were not invited to be involved at all in the national strategy, not even with regard to SDG 11.

The academic institutions and the civil society organisations that are leading the Alliance AsViS (in which LRGA are included but represent less than 2% of

the members) have recently begun working on the official statistics provided by ISTAT. However, this data only concerns the country's current situation at national level, and does not cover local government actions on SDGs. Even the complex regional indicators provided by ISTAT are very broad in their focus. There is no data concerning any of Italy's 7,954 municipalities, 14 metropolitan cities or 84 provinces.

For its part, with the help of Platforma and the successful organisation of the event **"Venice City Solutions 2030"**, AICCRE managed to attract the attention of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which began consulting the Italian Association on the 2030 Agenda in 2019. The consultation was successful and the national government, for the first time, decided to promote the AICCRE-UCLG – UN-Habitat-UNDP-UNCDF recommendations issuing from the Venice City Solutions at the 2019 HLPF in NYC as a HLPF side event.

AICCRE is the only LRGA currently in a dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the subject.



The Member States and the European Union should work closer together with local and regional governments and their associations during the reporting phase of SDG implementation. Consultation mechanisms should be put in place at national level, backed by the EU, to ensure the timely and productive contribution of local and regional governments to the Voluntary National Reviews.

This exercise can serve as a promising first step for initiating a dialogue between different levels of government and different stakeholders on a regular basis – around SDGs – providing a new framework to work together more effectively on common goals.



**10****countries have annual national reports on SDG implementation****5****BUT only****associations have been consulted by national governments to contribute**

We wanted to assess whether the associations' national governments had any plans to prepare an annual progress report on the implementation of the SDGs for its own purposes, even if the country did not report to the HLPF in 2019. Of the 14 respondents whose countries did not report to the HLPF in 2019, eight (57%)<sup>47</sup> are still preparing reports on SDG implementation. The Scottish and the Icelandic associations, whose countries reported to the HLPF this year, also gave a positive response to this question, which shows that SDG monitoring is starting to take place independently of international incentives. The respondents who stated that their governments would not be preparing any annual report are generally from countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Of the eleven associations responding to the previous question, only five<sup>48</sup> were invited to contribute to a national report.

Working on the 2030 Agenda directly or indirectly encourages local and regional governments and their associations to take action at the local level. The high number of survey respondents whose countries have already reported to the HLPF indicates that they increasingly seize this opportunity to become visible on the international scene and to hold exchanges with others, thus inciting reluctant national governments to act as well. It is also a way to associate with the EU and be involved in EU reporting to the HLPF (every four years).



There is a need to accelerate the localisation process, and to do so, it is necessary to join forces to produce a surge in LRG mobilisation in regions all over the world.

<sup>47</sup> The Austrian, Danish (REGIONER), Dutch, German, Italian, Norwegian, Spanish and Swedish associations

<sup>48</sup> The Dutch, Icelandic, Norwegian, Scottish and Swedish associations

<sup>49</sup> The EU delegation of local elected representatives at the 2019 HLPF came from: Belgium (VWSG), Finland, France (Cités Unies France – CUF), Germany (RGRE), Italy (AICCRE), Latvia (LALRG), Lithuania (ALAL), the Netherlands (VNG), Portugal, Spain (EUSKADI, FEMP and the Generalitat of Catalonia) and Sweden (SALAR).

<sup>50</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019/local2030>

## POLICY CONCLUSIONS

The second part of this study focuses on analysing the practical commitment of the LRGAs in working with the SDG framework to date. The overall trend has been positive, with much work underway, especially in terms of activities to raise awareness and increase exchanges. After studying the way in which LRGAs have been addressing the cross-cutting issues and the different dimensions relating to the SDGs, a growing consciousness of the cross-sectoral nature of SDGs can clearly be seen. The data points moreover to an encouraging development towards mainstreaming the SDGs at the local level and fostering cooperation between different fields of activity and across sectors. More and more LRGAs are working to promote the 2030 Agenda, especially by spreading the word and escalating exchanges and cooperation.

Although still in the early stages, innovative approaches are continually being developed to ensure that strategic planning involving decentralised cooperation is more aligned with SDGs, shifting from domestic policies to international cooperation. Achieving the Agenda also presents great potential for experimenting with working methods and developing cooperation based on identified common challenges facing European and non-European territories.

Finally, LRGs and LRGAs have become increasingly aware of the global and universal dimension of SDGs and have accordingly increased their participation in international fora such as the UN HLPF.

As reporting to such fora also presents an opportunity for international action and greater visibility, LRGAs active in this field use these occasions to full advantage and can get very involved. In July 2019, PLATFORMA, with the help of its partners and CEMR members, assembled a delegation of 17 European local elected representatives from 11 countries<sup>49</sup> to take part in the full week of activities scheduled in New York, USA. Together, they represented a strong united front of European local and regional governments working hard on the implementation and localisation of SDGs on their territories. They were also part of the wider international delegation of elected representatives from LRGs led by the Global Taskforce facilitated by UCLG. As a result of the United Nations Local2030 network's efforts, a two-day session for LRGs was made possible, "Local2030"<sup>50</sup>, which underlined the growing importance of the international sphere for the local level.

However, responses from our survey indicated that there is a Northern-Western and Central-Eastern Europe divide in terms of levels of engagement regarding the SDGs. This was also mirrored in the participation of elected representatives from LRGs at the 2019 HLPF in New York: other than two mayors (out of a total of 17 representatives) from the Baltic States (Latvia and Lithuania), there were no other elected delegates present from Central or Eastern Europe.







# 3 CONSTRAINTS AND SOLUTIONS: HOW THE ASSOCIATIONS DETERMINE THEIR PATH

The third part of this study highlights the main challenges that towns and regions, and their associations, come across when localising SDGs. The global and universal framework provided by the Agenda also presents an opportunity for structural and budgetary adaptation. How should success or change be measured? This chapter will discuss the main tools available to LRGAs and their members, as well as current initiatives.

## A. Financial and technical constraints

Our survey gave us the chance to evaluate various persistent or evolving challenges that LRGAs and their members have been facing in their efforts to achieve the SDGs and fulfil other global agendas. Whilst in 2018, it was technical difficulties, such as the lack of training or available transparent and disaggregated data at the local level that were prevalent, a shift towards more structural challenges can be detected.

In 2019, limited local interest and/or awareness was ranked as the first or second most important challenge that LRGs and their associations were facing, along with limited financial and technical support from national governments.

On a list of general challenges, the limited coordination across levels of governments was ranked third, as well as the insufficiency of financial resources for developing new policies and instruments, without increasing the debt.

Given the already limited resources of LRGs, localising SDGs will also require rethinking the local or regional administration's budget in order to be able to mainstream sustainability across all policies<sup>51</sup>.

In general, the lack of financial resources remains one of the biggest problems preventing LRGs from implementing the SDGs in their local and regional development plans (ranked first in 2018 and second in 2019).

Finally, another core challenge is the limited backing from national governments, both financial and technical, which is necessary for capacity-building, training and awareness-raising at the local and regional levels.

<sup>51</sup> The European Commission has set out to work on an EU Taxonomy for sustainable activities, aimed at fostering investment in the most sustainable activities and infrastructures. Local and regional governments have been identified as potential users of the taxonomy. [ec.europa.eu/info/publications/sustainable-finance-teg-taxonomy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/sustainable-finance-teg-taxonomy_en)

### CHALLENGES FOR TOWNS & REGIONS



More is required than simply asking that local and regional governments implement SDGs on their territories: they need to be empowered and have the adequate means to do so. This can only occur with the help of intergovernmental financial frameworks and regulatory reforms that give sufficient margin for manoeuvre to local governments' investments. Devolution of competences also requires appropriate fiscal decentralisation. This requires enhanced institutional support from the national and European levels.





Adequate accompanying measures should be in place to allow LRGs to rethink their budgetary processes in light of the SDGs and in view of sustainable and long-term investments.

The Flemish association also listed other municipal priorities, such as the merging of municipalities; whereas the Scottish association could envision the danger of SDG localisation becoming a mere reporting exercise whereby LRGs would be viewed as just a delivery body for the national government. Fierce criticism was expressed by the Moldovan association regarding what they saw as the main challenge, namely the low credibility of SDGs and people's frustration with what they perceived to be the lack of any concrete results brought about by SDG policies. The Swedish association pointed out that the existing challenges of SDG implementation varied amongst the 290 municipalities and 20 regions in Sweden.

These responses demonstrate the need for increased financial capacities, as well as the required expertise to better exploit any available funds and to reinvest in smarter and more sustainable choices, thereby unlocking additional funds for the 2030 Agenda.



#### THE EUSKADI SUSTAINABILITY BONDS

A good example is the issuance of the "Euskadi Sustainability Bonds" by the Basque Government (EUSKADI) to raise funds for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda which will be distributed in the following way: 81% will go to social projects and 19% to green projects. All of these projects will have an impact on one or several SDGs. The compliance is supported by an external review.

**More info:** [bit.ly/33LPFhj](https://bit.ly/33LPFhj)

Finally, increased support from national governments is also crucial in order to give LRGs the necessary tools, such as being able to provide training and build the capacities of civil servants and politicians so as to continuously update their skills for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

## B. How can success be measured? The starting point

Being able to accurately measure the impact and degree of progress at the local and regional levels is another challenge that needs to be met. The 17 SDGs are part of a list that also sets forth 169 targets for global development. If we are to be sure we are on the right track to achieve all of these goals and targets by 2030, it is critical that all stakeholders regularly monitor where they stand, so that they can introduce any necessary changes in their procedures and strategies straightaway.

For this, transparent reporting on goals and successes with indicators using straightforward paths of communication between the citizens and local administrations, is necessary. Through continuous evaluation, monitoring and further development of the indicators, the process for measuring success can come to life.

Fifteen of the respondent associations knew of LRG initiatives to monitor and report on the implementation of the SDGs<sup>52</sup>, which is promising for the process of localising the global goals, at least in Northern and Western Europe<sup>53</sup>.

Furthermore, all but three organisations (88%)<sup>54</sup> are interested in working on specific indicators and/or initiatives to monitor the implementation of the SDGs at local level. The Italian association commented that they would be creating "local indicators and collecting data from the cities and provinces". Meanwhile, the English association commented that this was "not something we've been involved with or considered in-depth to date". In the cases of the Czech and the Slovakian associations, it seems to be more a question of awareness-raising than monitoring as they reported that only a few individuals were familiar with the SDGs in their organisations. Yet, the high number of initiatives also seems to signal a possible risk of unnecessary duplication of similar or identical indicators.

Additionally, 73% (19) of the respondent associations stated that initiatives are underway in their countries to help develop local indicators for monitoring the SDGs and/or disaggregating data collection. In all but six cases<sup>55</sup>, these associations are located in countries in which it has been acknowledged that the LRGs require support from the national level to implement the SDGs. In England, the local government association reported that "this is limited at present but further work on this has been prioritised through a Geography Accelerator Project led by the Office for National Statistics".

<sup>52</sup> The Albanian, Austrian, Czech, Danish (REGIONER), Dutch, English, Flemish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Scottish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish associations

<sup>53</sup> Exception: the Turkish association

<sup>54</sup> Except for the Czech, English and Slovak associations

<sup>55</sup> The Austrian, Bosnian, Dutch, Icelandic, Latvian and Norwegian associations

**73%**  
of the countries are  
developing local indicators



In order to avoid a surplus of indicators, CEMR and PLATFORMA have been encouraging and fostering cooperation between the different LRGs at the international level to create a common framework for local SDG implementation. This is all the more important as the vast majority of the organisations responding have expressed interest in exchanging best practice examples. It is important to keep in mind that "localisation is about political will, co-creation with our communities and finding solutions at the local level to global challenges and objectives."<sup>56</sup>

However, to conclude, indicators are not an end in themselves and most of the time do not tell the full story. They should always be used in conjunction with qualitative and up-to-date data. The 2030 Agenda aspires to bring about a transformative change in society and should not be relegated to a "Yes or No" process, or a tick-box exercise.



## THE RFSC

Several tools exist to help cities and regions develop their SDG strategies and monitor progress. For example, the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC), coordinated by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), is an online toolkit for local European authorities that are involved in or are willing to start a process of integrated and sustainable urban development. The main objective of the toolkit is to assist cities in developing integrated territorial development strategies, enhancing the dialogue within a city, as well as with peer cities or other stakeholders tackling the same issues all across Europe. It assists local authorities in developing a local strategy to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in monitoring the progress of any such strategy over a period of time.

**More info:** [app.rfsc.eu/](http://app.rfsc.eu/)



The collection, disaggregation and accessibility of data to help monitor progress, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind, needs to be improved. This work cannot be done by local and regional governments alone. It requires support from the national and international spheres to provide the resources and tools and to make sure that the collected data is coherent and regularly updated. LRGs, Member States and the European Union should work closer together, as well as with academia and observatories, to combine efforts to collect data, both aggregated and disaggregated.



Encourage the exchange of good practices among peers to avoid/reduce the duplication of tools to implement and monitor SDGs – no need to reinvent the wheel each time!

<sup>56</sup> Statement adopted by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments at the Local and Regional Authorities Forum, held within the framework of the High-Level Political Forum, in New York at the UN Headquarters, 16 July 2018, [https://www.global-taskforce.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/gtfstatement\\_HLPF\\_2018.pdf](https://www.global-taskforce.org/sites/default/files/2018-07/gtfstatement_HLPF_2018.pdf)





## KEEP AN EYE OPEN NEW INITIATIVES COMING SOON!

**European Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)** – to be issued by the Joint Research Centre and the European Commission's Directorate-General

for Regional and Urban Policy. Targeting local and regional authorities, this handbook aims to compile and propose a set of indicators existing at local level across the European Union to support monitoring of local SDG implementation, providing a methodology on how cities can integrate SDGs into local activities.

**When:** February 2020, at the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi

**OECD localised indicator framework** – spearheaded by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This project aims to develop new data and identify local SDG experiences in cities and regions, as well as in some pilot cities in OECD member countries in view of presenting their findings regarding local SDG indicators. It will also collect information on actions and best practices carried out by other institutions in the field of SDG implementation.

**When:** end of 2019 to early 2020

**Comparative study on existing local level indicators** – conducted by UNDP and UCLG in cooperation with the Region of Andalusia and the Provincial Council of Barcelona. In the second half of 2019, a complete and comparative study on existing local level indicators and monitoring systems will be carried out that explores applied methodologies and approaches from a local point of view. Once they have completed the mapping of existing monitoring initiatives, the study also plans to conduct a comparative analysis and systematisation of already implemented methodologies and approaches. The study will be used to help advance the development of ideas and enrich the exchanges and collaboration on SDG monitoring among LRGs, local governance stakeholders and development partners.

**When:** end of 2019 to early 2020. For more information, contact the UCLG Secretariat.

## POLICY CONCLUSIONS

In the third part, we identified initiatives undertaken by LRGs and their associations to promote SDG implementation and monitoring, pointing out the main challenges faced by LRGs in their work to achieve the SDG goals.

Different types of challenges persist, though there has been a shift from the rather technical to more structural difficulties for LRGs in implementing the SDGs. In addition, associations struggle with different elements to varying degrees, depending on political context and/or the extent of their engagement with the SDGs. Limited support from national governments is perceived as being the most recurrent challenge, whereas limited local interest and/or awareness is considered the most important one. Finally, LRGs still face the obstinate problem of a lack of financial resources to launch or sustain their projects and strategies for SDG implementation.

These results prove the need for greater expertise and financial capacities as well as increased support from national governments to procure the necessary tools, such as training to cope with inadequate human resources for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Our study results show that LRGs are taking the lead in SDG monitoring, notably the case of the associations from Northern and Western European countries. A large number of LRGs have begun or have already developed indicators to measure SDG implementation progress at the local level. This is indeed a positive development and attests to the motivation and action-oriented mindset of LRGs across Europe.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing the SDGs, and local authorities are rightfully tailoring and adapting the international framework to suit their local needs and realities. However, these aspirations need to be measured and maintained, as an excess of indicators, methodologies and monitoring processes can end up producing a countereffect.





11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



14

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



15



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



REDUCED INEQUALITIES





## CONCLUSION

Local and regional government associations are playing an increasingly important role in localising the SDGs. Their proximity with both citizens and different levels of governance, national and European, is both ideal and strategic. They are also active beyond their own borders, and can work efficiently with partner municipalities and regions across the globe on concrete issues such as climate action plans, economic development, gender equality policies, infrastructures, access to basic services, circular economic, etc. When empowered with the appropriate tools, they represent the heart of governance in partnership, local and global, which is fundamental for the localisation of the SDGs.

A number of the associations that responded to this survey already play an active role in SDG localisation. Others are just starting to walk down this path. This study demonstrates the need for all spheres of governance – national, European as well as international levels – to take into consideration and foster the initiatives of LRGs and their associations, and help facilitate these actions if we want to make this Agenda really transformative in our communities.

That being said, towns and regions are also taking the lead and, consequently, are the ones often moving their national government into action. In the end, this is what the SDGs are about: vertical as well as horizontal partnerships in Europe and beyond.

This becomes all the more obvious when analysing the implementation of SDGs and the concrete work done by the associations and their members. We were able to identify a diversification in stakeholders, which translates into more potential future partners for LRGAs. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are slowly starting to take off, as it becomes clearer that achieving the 2030 Agenda depends on the active involvement of all actors – from the public, private and civil society sectors – working together hand-in-hand.

Citizens themselves lie at the heart of the SDGs' global and universal framework. Accordingly, associations of towns and regions, with their members, have increasingly embraced all means to enhance citizens' awareness and have also adapted local public services to reflect this aspiration.

On a different level, local action is becoming increasingly internationalised. Momentum is building for sub-national actions on a wider scale in support of the SDGs: LRGs and their associations continue to champion the implementation process of the goals through localisation. This goes beyond local and national borders and extends to the international scene. Local and regional governments have been growing in visibility and presence at international events such as the UN HLPF. Voluntary Local Reviews are gaining traction alongside national reporting, with the cities of New York and Helsinki opening the path. SDGs are definitely seen as an opportunity to take a step closer to the EU and international scene.

Finally, through decentralised cooperation, local and regional governments are bridging the gap of national support by working together – city-to-city and region-to-region – across the globe. Together, they mutually provide capacity-building, resources, experimentation and inspiration to continuously go one step further in achieving the 2030 Agenda. They are also using the Sustainable Development Goals framework to improve and strengthen their existing partnerships and development cooperation actions, making sure they remain coherent in their words and actions.

Despite all this, the survey data also reveals a certain dichotomy between the Northern/Western and Central/Eastern European countries, in terms of awareness, perception of the SDG framework, as well as with regard to the implementation and monitoring efforts. Constructive criticisms must be heard and taken into account. The persisting misconception of a donor-recipient framework needs to be addressed.

The 10 recommendations of this study are meant to take us one step closer to better localise the SDGs. Associations of towns and regions can and must take the lead: SDGs are a global and universal framework transporting us all in the same direction: thanks to efficient and inclusive Partnerships, with the People, we can achieve Peace and Prosperity across our Planet.

*Four years into Agenda 2030, it is clearer than ever that a global shift requires local action. But how are local and regional governments, and their associations, paving the way towards sustainable development?*

*Find out about how they are bringing international ambitions to territorial realities. By overcoming constraints, exchanging innovative practices and working together in Europe and around the globe, towns and regions are striving to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.*



Square de Meeûs 1  
1000 Brussels - Belgium  
+32 (0)2 265 09 30  
platforma@ccre-cemr.org  
@Platforma4Dev  
www.platforma-dev.eu



Square de Meeûs 1  
1000 Brussels - Belgium  
+ 32 (0)2 511 74 77  
info@ccre-cemr.org  
@CCRECEMR  
www.cemr.eu

This project is co-funded  
by the European Union



This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of PLATFORMA & CEMR and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.