

EUROPEAN TERRITORIES LOCALISE THE SDGs

# Continuity and Change in Times of Covid-19



2021

# European Territories Localise the SDGs | C

OUR STUDY'S



## ABOUT THE 2030 AGENDA

**17  
SDGs**

- = Sustainable Development Goals
- = 17 UN universal goals adopted in 2015 by world leaders

**5  
Pillars**

People  
Prosperity  
Peace  
Partnership  
Planet

## ABOUT OUR STUDY

**39**  
associations of towns  
and regions responded

from  
**29**  
European countries

**18**  
EU  
countries

**11**  
non-EU  
countries

# Continuity and Change in Times of Covid-19

## MAIN FINDINGS

### AWARENESS & COORDINATION

**76.9%**

of the associations have **sound knowledge** of the SDGs

**35.9%**

of the associations use the SDGs as a **guiding reference**

**83.8%**

of the associations are involved in some way in **national coordination mechanisms** for the SDGs

**15.4%**

of the associations have become **more involved** than in previous years

### REPORTING

**57.9%**

of the associations have set up some sort of indicator or reporting mechanism

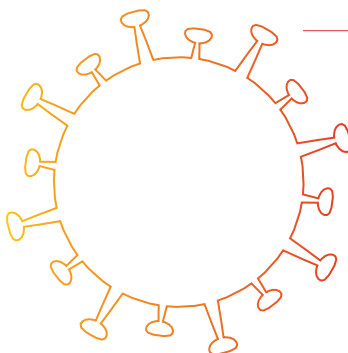
#### How ?

- ✓ **14** associations (36.8%) collaborate with other institutions
- ✓ **11** associations (28.9%) work or have worked with the national or regional statistics office
- ✓ **9** associations (23.7%) are revising (or have revised) specific SDG-related indicators, in accordance with the official set of SDGs indicators, in order to adapt them to local level realities

### COVID-19

**Most common actions taken by associations of municipalities and regions to support their members consist of:**

- ✓ providing municipalities and regions with information and facilitating access to informational resources
- ✓ advocating for financial support for municipalities and regions



- ✓ advocating for municipalities and regions' participation in national consultations
- ✓ promoting capacity-building activities
- ✓ boosting municipalities and regions' initiatives

### DECENTRALISED COOPERATION



**79.5%**

of the associations have taken some sort of action with regard to the international dimension of the SDGs



**77.8%**

of the associations find that the SDG framework does help, strengthen or enable the development of partnerships with peers in some way



**62.9%**

of the associations have set up some type of activity dedicated to supporting partners



**48.6%**

of the associations do not follow any specific SDGs, but adhere rather to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda; 22.8% focus on specific SDGs; 17.1% on all SDGs

### CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

#### Challenges

- ⚠ Inadequate human resources
- ⚠ Limited coordination across levels of governments
- ⚠ Limited local interest and awareness
- ⚠ Limited support from national governments
- ⚠ Insufficient financial resources

#### Opportunities

- ✓ Increased local interest and awareness
- ✓ Greater support from national governments
- ✓ Improved planning mechanisms at local level
- ✓ Enhanced multilevel coordination



## FOREWORD

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has changed the world, and we have yet to grasp the full ramifications. This crisis, which has no borders, makes it glaringly evident that we need to cooperate worldwide at the local and regional levels. New everyday actions are called for if we are to create a better world for future generations. We need to undertake joint efforts to build back better.

A Harvard Business Study found that, a mere ten years after receiving their diploma, the 3% of graduates who had written down their goals ended up earning ten times as much as the other 97% put together. Similarly, other scientific studies have shown that setting goals leads to impressive results: developing a clear strategy helps to induce the hard work necessary to achieving goals. But what does a Harvard study have to do with our work to building back a better post-Covid world? To successfully manage the recovery, a plan needs to be in place. The Agenda 2030 already provides us with written goals. It is now time for us to step up our efforts to make this decade one of action. The pandemic has taught us that we need to work even harder to reach our goals, but it has also shown us that we are not alone! CEMR plays an important role in supporting us, as local leaders, through networks, facts and data that keep us aware of where we stand and where we are heading. We, the local political leaders in Europe, must come together, cooperate and take action to rebuild our societies in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The importance of the 2030 Agenda lies in its creation of inclusive democratic societies where no one and no place is left behind. We need to act now to transform our written strategies into reality and we need to support each other in walking the talk!

**Carola Gunnarsson**

*Lord Mayor of Sala (Sweden), CEMR Spokesperson on  
International affairs and UCLG Vice-President*



**S**ustainable development is increasingly being linked with a new trending concept: sustainable recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic which hit Europe so hard, and continues to affect us, still requires local and regional governments to be at the forefront of crisis management and recovery planning, touching not only upon health issues but also social, environmental and economic priorities for citizens and local governments.

For us to build back better together towards a stronger and more resilient Europe, we need to fully harness and foster the power of the 2030 Agenda and all the values it showcases: inclusiveness and diversity; fostering new multi-sectoral and multi-level partnerships; policy coherence; gender equality; and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on depopulated Europe. For effective localisation to take place, it is imperative to address all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a whole, as an indivisible set of objectives that need to be achieved from the bottom-up.

New localisation strategies need to be addressed to promote synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, as this political commitment will lay down the foundations for the holistic urban and rural design of Europe 2030: i.e. territories for better lives.

This year, Spain is presenting a Voluntary National Review at the United Nations High Level Political Forum that includes the recently approved Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, recognising and promoting the essential role of Spanish local governments to make the Sustainable Development Goals possible in the decade of action that lies ahead. At the local level, periodical reports have been published (such as the Voluntary Local Review by Valencia, Barcelona, Diputación de Córdoba and Málaga, among others). Progress has been made in the definition of indicators, both with the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda of the Spanish Government and with a national think tank (*Red Española para el Desarrollo Sostenible*). All this with the strong support our national association, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP).

Local and regional governments in Spain and across Europe are paving the way to the active implementation of the global goals, but we need to have a dedicated space in these national and international reports and decision-making processes to showcase the realities of our territories: our differences, our challenges and most of all our strengths.

This study conducted by CEMR and PLATFORMA informs us on the state of play of what is happening at the local and regional levels. It highlights the way we coordinate and collaborate with our national associations to involve citizens and bring the 2030 Agenda to life equally across all territories.

**Carlos Martínez Mínguez**

*Mayor of Soria (Spain), CEMR Vice-President & CEMR Spokesperson  
on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals*



This study is based on a joint survey conducted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), PLATFORMA and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). It was sent out in February 2021 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners. The purpose was to collect the most recent information on how and the extent to which local and regional government associations and networks have been involved in the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>CEMR</b>	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DEAR</b>	Development Education and Awareness Raising
<b>DECENTRALISED COOPERATION</b>	Development cooperation between sub-national governments
<b>DG DEVCO</b>	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission (until 15 January 2021)
<b>DG INTPA</b>	Directorate-General for International Partnerships (former DG DEVCO, new name as of 16 January 2021)
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GTF / GLOBAL TASK FORCE</b>	Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (facilitated by UCLG)
<b>HLPF / UN HLPF</b>	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (organised by the UN)
<b>LRGs</b>	Local and Regional Governments
<b>LRGAs</b>	Local and Regional Government Associations
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>NDICI</b>	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – now also referred to as “Global Europe”
<b>UCLG</b>	United Cities and Local Governments
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>VLRs</b>	Voluntary Local Reviews (local reporting on the progress made to achieve the SDGs)
<b>VNRs</b>	Voluntary National Reviews (national reporting on the progress made to achieve the SDGs)
<b>VSRs</b>	Voluntary Subnational Reviews (SDG progress reports produced by associations of local and regional governments)

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

## for whom?



EU  
Institutions



National  
governments



Local and regional governments  
and their national associations



### **1. Increase in funds and support from the European Union and national governments dedicated to localising the SDGs**

to encourage real systemic change from the bottom up. When entering into a multi-financial framework that will govern their budgets and programmes for the next seven years, the European Union, its delegations in partner countries and national governments should ensure that the key role played by municipalities, regions and national associations as well as the process of SDG localisation itself (both in Europe and in the partner countries beyond) is not overlooked when geographic and thematic priorities are being defined.



### **2. Promotion of multi-level governance, multi-stakeholder partnerships and policy coherence**

by European institutions, national governments and local and regional governments and their national associations for successful SDG implementation. All stakeholders are encouraged to identify critical interdependencies between action areas and different actors in order to pursue a coherent approach to SDG implementation and limit any negative spillover effects. Getting citizens engaged in the SDG process is key and, in this regard, development education and awareness raising is essential. Explore synergies thoroughly and ensure the links between all policymaking levels on the SDGs are clear. Local and regional governments can and should be consulted by their national governments and by the European Union institutions at each step of the decision-making process.



### **3. Local and regional governments and their national associations should continue sharing and learning from their peers both from within and outside of Europe**

to gain ever more expertise, including through decentralised cooperation. Use to advantage the shared vision and universal language of the SDGs to boost peer-learning, experimentation and innovation. Linking the SDGs to decentralised cooperation can help revitalise and kick-start partnerships and vice-versa, and lead to solutions to common challenges, such as successfully navigating the post-Covid recovery. These exchanges also deserve greater acknowledgement and support from the national governments and the European Union for their critical role in accelerating SDG action and crisis-response initiatives.



### **4. Increase in recognition and support from national governments to localise the SDGs.**

Make the most of the role of national associations of local and regional governments to help facilitate this exchange and centralise and promote local and regional SDG progress across the territory. Greater recognition and inclusion by national governments of the role of LRGs and their associations in monitoring and reporting progress on the implementation of SDGs (notably through Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews) are also essential. Providing accessible disaggregated data is key to showcasing the impact made by LRGs in accelerating the localisation process. However, focus should also be placed on monitoring the impact that SDG localisation has on LRGs, LGAs and local policies, as well as providing clear guidelines on how to use the data collected to move forward.



### **5. Strengthening of human resources and capacity building to work on SDG localisation.**

Local and regional governments and their national associations facing the challenge of insufficient budgets for hiring additional human resources for their SDG activities can mobilise additional staff by encouraging interdepartmental working methods, drawing on the 2030 Agenda spirit in their daily work. Capacity building for this is key – exchanging practices and forming stronger partnerships with academia, civil society and the sciences to continue acquiring knowledge in this field should also be urged.







## INTRODUCTION

**2020** was a special year, to say the least. The spread of Covid-19 all over the world hit municipalities and regions unexpectedly and hard, particularly in Europe, which officially surpassed 1 million confirmed Covid-19 losses in the WHO European Region and where 1.6 million new cases were reached every week.<sup>1</sup> Priority was first given to responding to the crisis and then protecting and providing essential services for citizens above all else.

Efforts to stabilise the situation, to deal with the most urgent matters while ensuring that delivery of public services to citizens continued uninterrupted before moving on to a swift sustainable recovery were and still remain key. Priorities have been reshuffled and funds have been necessarily reallocated to more local, concrete and urgent needs. Whilst this has had an impact on the speed at which local and regional governments and their national associations have been progressing on international agendas, such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it did not bring the process to a halt. On the contrary, whilst some municipalities and regions have had to put their SDG efforts on hold temporarily, others seized the opportunity to use the framework and vision of the 2030 Agenda to help develop, plan and follow-up

on recovery strategies that are sustainable, inclusive and coherent, and advance endeavours to “build back better”.

National associations of local and regional governments continue to play an essential role in facilitating cooperation among their member municipalities and regions to work better together, get access to needed resources and adequate support as well as safeguard their interests in the national, European and international spheres. With over 65%<sup>2</sup> of the SDGs requiring implementation at the local level for the 2030 Agenda to be achieved, national associations are discovering new ways in which they can play an increasingly important part in bolstering their members’ sustainability efforts, from planning to implementation and even monitoring and reporting.

National associations continue to be essential in helping to connect the dots between the realities on the ground and engaging in multi-level and multi-stakeholder discussions with national, European and international partners. This unique annual study aims to take stock and shed light on the evolving and growing role that the national associations of local and regional governments play in localising the SDGs, bringing the international framework to life, in Europe and beyond.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/statements/statement-surging-pandemic-surpasses-1-million-deaths-in-the-who-european-region>

<sup>2</sup> As per the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development: <https://www.oecd.org/about/impact/achievingthesdgsincitiesandregions.htm>

## Methodology

### Geographical scope

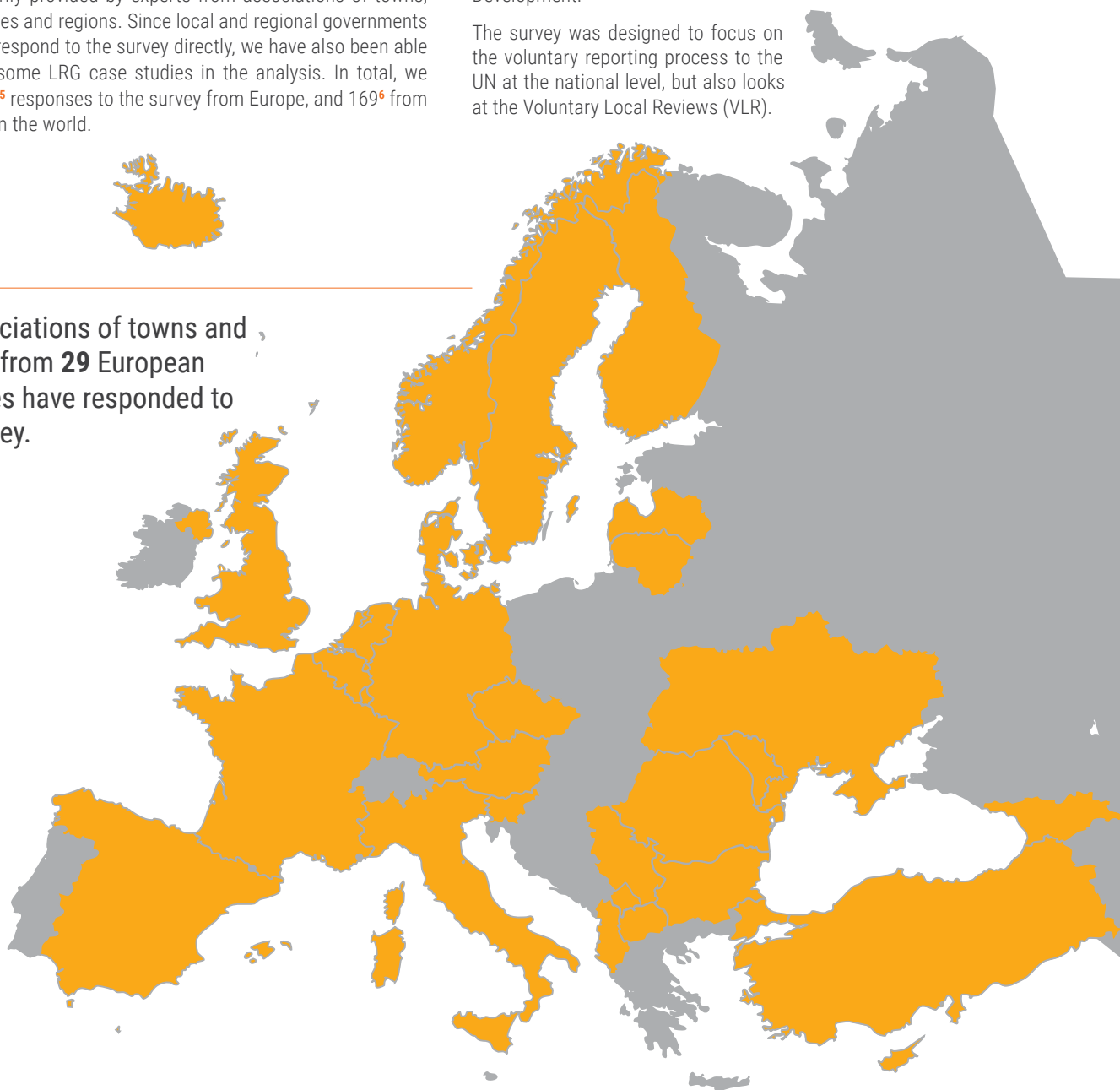
The questionnaire's results, and thus the figures and graphics included, are based on the responses received from 39 national associations of LRGs encompassing 29 countries, including 18 EU Member States. The 29 countries represent nearly 580 million people<sup>3</sup> and the associations represent, on average, 94% of this population.<sup>4</sup> The data for this study was mainly compiled through a survey conducted in March 2021 as well as from phone interviews. Our analysis also relied on desk research and information shared by PLATFORMA partners and CEMR member national associations of local and regional governments during a focus group meeting held in Spring 2021. The statistical data were primarily provided by experts from associations of towns, municipalities and regions. Since local and regional governments could also respond to the survey directly, we have also been able to include some LRG case studies in the analysis. In total, we received 80<sup>5</sup> responses to the survey from Europe, and 169<sup>6</sup> from elsewhere in the world.

### Questionnaire

In order to collect as much data as possible and identify trends relating to the SDGs in Europe, we adapted an annual survey first used in 2018. It specifically addresses the issue of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs at the local level.<sup>7</sup> Developed in cooperation with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG GOLD team), the questionnaire was also designed to assist UCLG and the Global Taskforce of local and regional governments in preparing their report on the role of local and regional governments in localising the SDGs. This information will be shared in July 2021 at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), the United Nations' central platform for following up and assessing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The survey was designed to focus on the voluntary reporting process to the UN at the national level, but also looks at the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR).

**39** associations of towns and regions from **29** European countries have responded to the survey.



<sup>3</sup> Source used for the population of the 29 countries: Eurostat (April 2021)

<sup>4</sup> Source used for the representativeness of the associations: CEMR study "National Associations of Local and Regional Governments in Europe", January 2019. [bit.ly/3q0K5wD](https://bit.ly/3q0K5wD)

<sup>5</sup> The direct respondents consisted of 39 national associations and 41 local and regional governments, mainly from Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium; and to a lesser extent, from Germany, Italy, Sweden, Cyprus, and France.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the UCLG presentation from the SDG Focus Group Meeting held on 20 April 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Results from previous surveys were first collected and analysed in the three earlier CEMR/PLATFORMA studies: "The 2030 Agenda through the eyes of local and regional governments' associations" (2020) [bit.ly/3fXYHQq](https://bit.ly/3fXYHQq), "How local and regional government associations bring the SDGs to life" (2019) [bit.ly/3push3f](https://bit.ly/3push3f), and "Sustainable Development Goals, How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead" (2018) [bit.ly/3z9sSM6](https://bit.ly/3z9sSM6).



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

This year, questions relating to SDG localisation also addressed the Covid-19 crisis response. The next HLPF will assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the SDGs and the type of measures taken to “build back better” in view of a more sustainable and greener recovery. There were 21 closed questions and five open questions, divided into five sections and two annexes (listing the main local programmes or projects for SDG localisation and actions developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic). There was also a fifth section, addressed to European LRGs and/or their national associations (CEMR members, European local and regional governments and PLATFORMA members) with additional questions pertaining to decentralised cooperation.

### Trends

Another objective aimed to identify tendencies across Europe in terms of SDG awareness, implementation and reporting through the responses of as many associations of LRGs as possible. To accomplish this, we first compared the statistics for 2021 with those from previous years. All things being equal, the sample remains representative in spite of there being slight differences in the list of respondents.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, in order to more precisely measure any progress made between 2018 and 2020 on certain issues, we based our calculations on a smaller sample: the twelve respondents who have participated in every edition.<sup>9</sup> For these cases, we opted to use the percentage point difference for the proportion in question.

### Comprehensiveness of the survey

First, it is important to note that even though additional desk research was conducted on certain points, all statistics mentioned in the analysis come from the survey responses. It should also be noted that some responses are entirely conditional upon the respondents’ subjectivity (e.g. “How would you assess the knowledge of your non-EU / non-European partner about the SDGs”).

In addition, it is worth stating that any respondents to such a survey are generally already aware of the SDG framework to one degree or another, notably because they are part of CEMR and/or PLATFORMA and thus more inclined to complete it. Indeed, the majority of participating associations were already familiar with the goals.

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

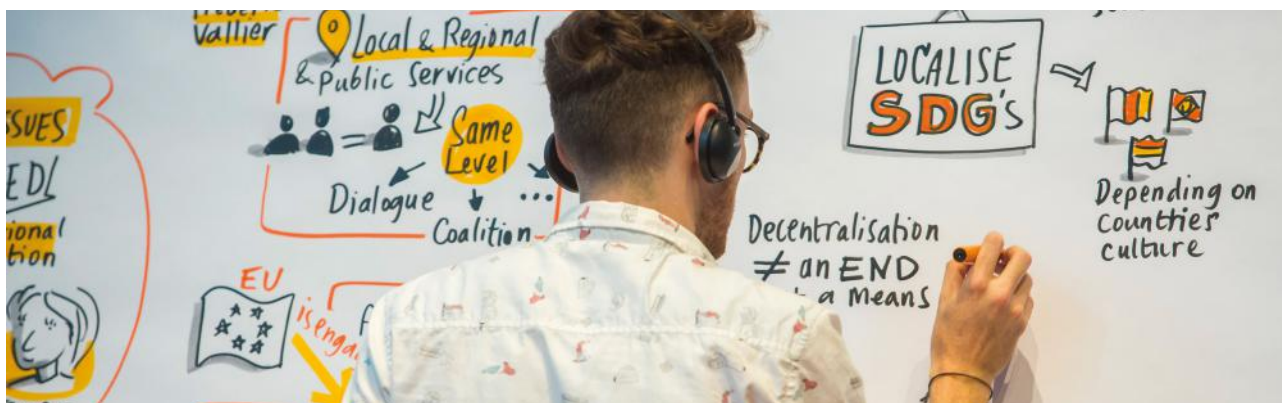


<sup>8</sup> Since 2020, two additional countries have been included (Cyprus and Romania) with four new respondents overall (Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU), the National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands Nicaragua (LBSNN), the Association of Municipalities from Romania (AMR), and the Union of Cyprus Municipalities(UCM)).

<sup>9</sup> Geographical basis for 2018-2019-2020-2021 comparisons: Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom.



# 1 RECOGNITION, AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT



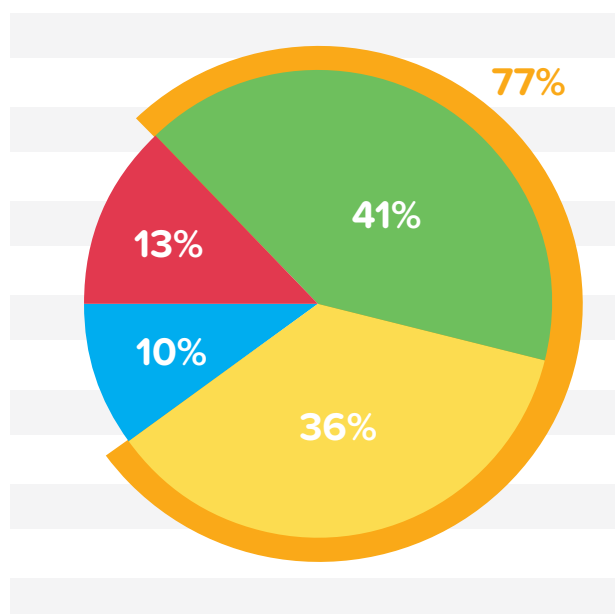
With every passing year, we are able to bear witness to an evolution in the ways in which municipalities, regions and their national associations work on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as a whole. We consider this development to be a positive one and a clear exercise in shared responsibility and engagement, with a corresponding increase in the level of awareness of the content of the 2030 Agenda, what it truly represents for local and regional governments and what kind of commitment and actions are required to effectively contribute to these global ambitions. Whilst the outbreak of Covid-19 may at first have shifted priorities away from actively promoting the SDGs at all levels of governance to instead focus on immediate crisis responses, municipalities and regions are now increasingly taking the 2030 Agenda into account in their recovery plans. Spurring on this process, local and regional SDG trailblazers have increasingly begun sharing their success stories and experiences on SDG implementation with their peers and partners, both in Europe and around the world and showing how they intersect with the opportunities and challenges that arose during the outbreak. We noticed that this has also encouraged more and more national associations to do the same, inducing those less engaged with SDGs to join the discussion and get more information from their peers.

## How aware are Europe's associations in 2021?

Raising awareness is the first step to localising the SDGs. The idea revolves around communicating to local and regional representatives, and their national associations, the importance of the new agenda and apprising them of the critical impact their decisions can have in achieving the SDGs. The first promising news is that, out of a total of 39 associations responding, over three-quarters of them knew about and understood the 2030 Agenda. One-third (36%<sup>10</sup>) actually used the SDG framework as an important benchmark in their strategies, compared to 29% of only 34 respondents in 2020.

### ASSOCIATIONS' FAMILIARITY WITH THE SDGs IN EUROPE

FIGURE 1.



- Majority of staff are aware and refer to SDGs in their work but not high work priority
- SDGs well-known and used as an important benchmark for strategic planning
- Many have heard of the SDGs but unaware of any relevance
- Very few individuals familiar with the SDGs

<sup>10</sup> Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, NALAS, Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI and FEMP), Turkey (TBB and MMU).

Nearly half of the associations (41%<sup>11</sup>) informed us that their staff were aware of and made references to the SDGs even if they did not rank them as high in their work priorities.

Nevertheless, 10% (four associations<sup>12</sup>) indicated that only a few staff members were familiar with the SDGs and 13% (five associations<sup>13</sup>) had heard of the 2030 Agenda but were unaware of any territorial applicability from working with the SDGs, compared to 18% the previous year. We can thus see that local SDG awareness has been rising and that this new knowledge often results in a decision from local and regional government associations to work in one way or another on the 2030 Agenda, as can be seen in Figure 1.

## From awareness to commitment

Transforming ideas and aspirations into concrete actions requires commitment. But how do local and regional governments bring this about? After deciding to work on the 2030 Agenda, 18<sup>14</sup> respondents indicated that they had produced a strategy, a policy paper or had a specific roadmap to help guide their work on the SDGs. For municipalities and regions, these documents were officially adopted at the political level by the councils, with concrete political commitments taken by mayors or presidents of regions. This is a big step up from previous years – in 2020, only ten respondents indicated that they had strategic documents.

Two respondents<sup>15</sup> indicated that their work on the SDGs had been made possible through dedicated and externally-funded innovative projects, which seems to be another interesting short-/medium-term way of guaranteeing funding and concrete outputs for the SDGs, forming the basis for a longer-term political commitment down the road.

## How history can affect today's perception of the SDGs: examples from South-East Europe

Generally, goals set at the international level are widely known by national associations and their LRGs. We wanted to use the results collected from our survey, with additional feedback from individual interviews with the partners from Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Kosovo, to analyse how history, deeply entrenched geopolitical contexts and administrative cultures can affect the perception and management of international agendas, the 2030 Agenda of course in this particular case. We observed that, in varying degrees among the associations from post-communist countries of wider Europe, the SDGs were perceived differently than in Western countries. Several associations highlighted the lack of legislative, human and financial resources to transmute their international motivation into concrete local actions. In addition, the adoption of international targets by central governments often took place without LRGs being consulted to any great extent or involved at all.

With regards to the SDGs, local and regional governments found that the goals lacked clear implementation mechanisms for their level of governance. The following points are worth highlighting. The countries being analysed here are post-communist ones, in which the past political organisation extensively limited the competences

of local and regional levels. Therefore, any consideration of the SDGs or work on them represented a substantial extra workload that did not really correspond to the resources at their disposal. Moreover, the terminology of the SDGs was described as constituting a language of its own or as specialised communication among experts, thus further limiting the LRGs' capacity for action. It is important to underline how a lack of resources and difficulties in grasping the 'jargon' represent barriers to communication between LRGs and the public. Citizens in these countries often viewed the goals set by international agendas as being far removed from their everyday needs. Moreover, the UN's 2030 Agenda timetable was regarded as too remote and not likely to address their most pressing requirements. Their priorities were more focused on extant or immediate issues whereas 2030 seemed too remote.

However, as already mentioned above, these perceptions varied from country to country in the region. There was no discernible trend per se, but some observations did help us to better understand certain differences in the way SDGs have been included in local policymaking in Eastern partnership countries. For instance, while associations from Moldova and North Macedonia highlighted how the language technicality was not easily adaptable to the local context, NALAS emphasised the need to break down the scope and complexity of the SDGs. In contrast, respondents from Serbia and Kosovo declared that there was a sufficient level of understanding and interpretation of the SDGs at the local level. This can also be seen as the direct result of increased efforts to translate documents and distribute guidance materials in both countries in recent years. At the same time, the public and citizens also became much more involved in planning and implementation.

Although progress has been made in some countries, this study briefly shows how successfully localising the SDGs in South-East Europe calls for further adjustments. Respondents from national associations in the region shared the following recommendations:

- 1 First, LRGs need assistance to promote greater awareness of the SDGs. This is vital in being able to implement effective policies and to explain them when communicating with citizens. This can be done by adapting the language to the local context and by providing clear guidelines.
- 2 Successfully navigating the first recommendation is pivotal to securing greater human, financial and legislative resources for LRGs. As pointed out by some associations, the relationship with the national government can play an important role in determining the reference framework for the localisation of the SDGs. Better coordination between levels from the top down helps in identifying strategies suitably tailored to local needs. However, this generally only applies in cases where the central government classifies the SDGs as priorities in the national agenda as well.
- 3 Third, awareness-raising activities such as regional conferences, workshops, project implementation and network activities among peer countries help in highlighting the importance of the SDGs for LRGs.
- 4 Finally, exchange activities with both neighbouring countries and more developed countries are crucial in boosting the above-mentioned recommendations.

<sup>11</sup> Albania, Austria (Städtebund und Gemeindebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France (CUF), Luxembourg, Slovenia (ZMOS-SI and SOS), Spain (EUDEL and Fons Mallorquí), Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

<sup>12</sup> Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania.

<sup>13</sup> Cyprus, France (AFCCRE), Iceland, Netherlands, United Kingdom (LGA).

<sup>14</sup> Albania, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, NALAS, Netherlands (LBSNN), Norway, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey (TBB and MMU), United Kingdom (LGA).

<sup>15</sup> The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and Kosovo.

## Coordination mechanisms – how do associations work on the SDGs in their own offices?

Commitment to a new framework involves introducing new ways of working within an organisation or a team. The added value of the 2030 Agenda lies in its call for stronger intersectional cooperation, not only between policy departments of an association but between different stakeholders across a territory. It aims to connect the dots between policies and people, to ensure that decision making is coherent and limits any negative spillover effects as much as possible, both within the organisation, as well as with external partners. This is also known as Policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD).<sup>16</sup> The Basque Country region (Euskadi) used PCSD as a first step in building their 2030 strategy (2016–2020), recently updated and expanded with the adoption of the Basque Social Transition Agenda and Agenda 2030 (2021–2024), a clear statement of where their priorities lie. However, more than just a public authority's priority and commitment, their transversal and multilevel agenda also represents a regional engagement involving their citizens and socio-economic stakeholders as well.

The German cities of Bonn and Chemnitz<sup>17</sup> have undertaken actions to change local practices that affect sustainable development and also joined forces to develop fair-trade purchasing practices. For

example, Bonn's long-term partnerships with cities like Bukhara (Uzbekistan), Cape Coast (Ghana), Chengdu (China), La Paz (Bolivia), Minsk (Belarus) and Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) all focus on projects and expert exchanges that are aimed at strengthening resilience, moving forward with renewable energies, introducing recycling systems or reforesting sensitive biodiversity spots.



### UPDATE ON THE BASQUE GOVERNMENT'S SUSTAINABILITY BONDS

In June 2018, the Basque Government issued sustainability bonds amounting to a total value of € 500 million on the Bilbao Stock Exchange. Since then, there have already been five issuances of Basque Bonds. The net proceeds will be used to finance projects in line with the Basque Country 2030 Agenda, which reflects the degree of alignment and contribution of this governmental programme to the goals and objectives stemming from the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Issuances of green bonds, social bonds and sustainability bonds adhere to the Green Bond Principles (GBP) and the Social Bond Principles (SBP) established by the International Capital Market Association. Adhering to the principles that allow these types of bonds to function, the drafting of annual reports on the allocation of funds and impact will be made available.



### POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (PCSD)

This concept, which precedes the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, is nothing new. It originally referred to domestic policies in developed countries where it was assumed that areas with significant transboundary dimensions such as trade, investment and agriculture could undermine development cooperation objectives and negatively impact development prospects in these countries. As a result of the 2030 Agenda, this perspective, which has become a central consideration under the global agenda, calls for citizens, civil society, governments and businesses to adopt an approach that looks within their own borders and offices to ensure that internal decisions and policies are first of all coherent, but also that they do not negatively affect stakeholders (People and Partnerships), local economic development policies (Prosperity), the environment (Planet) or internal good governance (Peace). Local and regional governments and their national associations have proved to be vital partners in monitoring this at territorial level and even help central governments achieve this goal at the national level. However, measuring the degree of spillover effects is not an easy task; exchange of experience in this area is essential. Public procurement is often seen as a fundamental tool for local and regional governments to shape and ensure this coherence, while also incentivising the private sector.

### Policy coherence must be fully 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 implies monitoring the extent to which the EU and national levels have an impact on local and/or regional ones.
- **Horizontal coherence** refers to the alignment between different stakeholders, including public, private and civil society as well as within these groups (i.e., alignment between different departments). The 2030 Agenda calls for increased partnerships amongst all these groups in order to achieve the global goals.
- This also applies to **global partnerships**, through which all actors are expected to cooperate to hasten the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Policy decisions taken in Europe can affect municipalities in developing countries, notably with regard to trade, procurement, worker rights, agriculture, etc. There is a need to ensure internal and external policy coherence.

<sup>16</sup> This concept is best explained by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s website where a wide range of publications and research discussing it are available, including the local and regional dimensions: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/#:~:text=The%20OECD%20Recommendation%20on%20Policy,social%20and%20environmental%20goals%2C%20and>

<sup>17</sup> Example provided in EUROCIETIES' Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at local level "Paving the way for sustainable cities": [https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCIETIES\\_SDG\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCIETIES_SDG_report_2020.pdf)

Whilst this sense of “transversality” and need to ensure coherence between office departments have grown in importance for some associations, we notice that others continue to work on the 2030 Agenda from within one specific department or area of expertise alone. Indeed, whereas in 2020, 59% of respondents informed us that they dealt with the SDGs through interdepartmental working methods, only 26% (10 associations<sup>18</sup>) enlisted several or all departments to work on SDG-related matters in an intermittent and uncoordinated manner in 2021. One association indicated that their approach varied according to the thematic field in question but that they had not introduced any interlinkages between thematic SDGs and specific departments.

As seen in Figure 2, in general, 36% (14 associations<sup>19</sup>) of our respondents worked in 2021 on the global goals within specific departments, such as the international department, the environmental department,<sup>20</sup> etc. Some local and regional governments and their associations also created specific positions, e.g. “SDG officers”,<sup>21</sup> to more efficiently implement their local SDG plans. The Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia informed us that at their office, the SDGs were mainly covered through work relating to urban development, EU funds and spatial planning. Whilst some have attempted to introduce shared coordination between different departments, it still does not seem to be a natural direction for several respondents.<sup>22</sup>

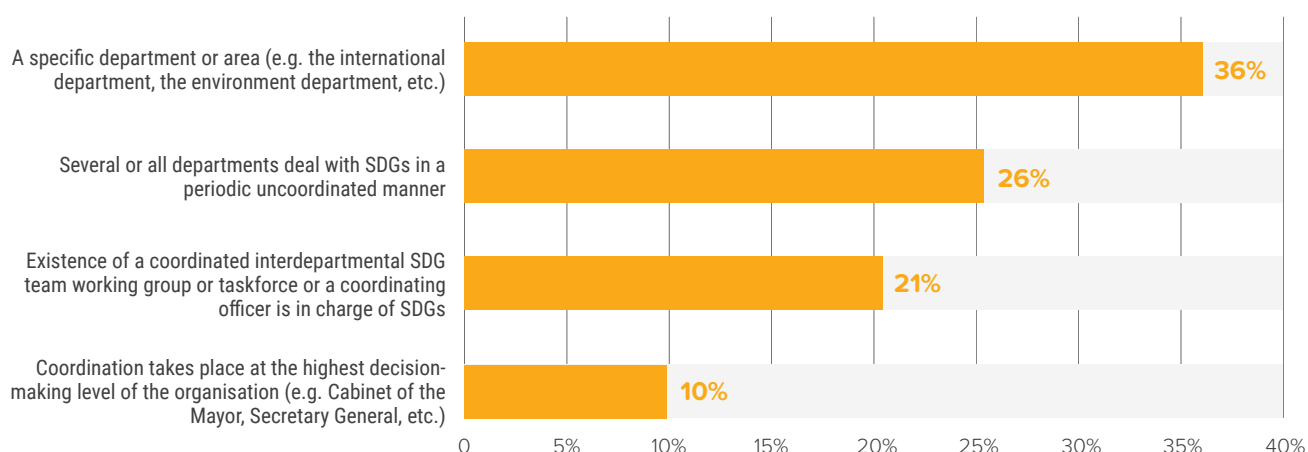
21% (8 respondents<sup>23</sup>) reported having dedicated SDG teams, working groups or taskforces that work directly and exclusively on SDG-related matters. Only 10% (4 respondents<sup>24</sup>) informed us that their SDG work is coordinated at the organisation’s highest executive level, e.g. at Director or Secretary General level. In the case where SDGs are explicitly integrated into strategic and sectoral documents at national level, as is done for instance in Bulgaria,<sup>25</sup> specific coordinators may be designated to manage

contributions from the association to help inform the national government’s work. In the Bulgarian case, however, this did not go beyond the top-down requirements, and SDGs were not coordinated in any other way within the national association. Moldovan and Romanian associations did not have any specific department or person working on the 2030 Agenda and the issue had not been included among their members’ priorities.



## ASSOCIATIONS’ COORDINATION OF SDG-RELATED WORK

FIGURE 2.



<sup>18</sup> Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Luxembourg, NALAS, Slovenia, Spain (FAMSI), Turkey (TBB), Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA).

<sup>19</sup> Austria (Städtebund and Gemeindebund), Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France (AFCCRE), Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, Netherlands (VNG), North Macedonia, Spain (Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, United Kingdom (COSLA).

<sup>20</sup> One association specified for instance that the SDGs are dealt with indirectly, but sometimes directly, by staff members who work on internationally funded projects. In the Czech Republic, the sustainable development agenda is the responsibility of the SMO ČR regional development and international relations section.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the city of Strasbourg in France.

<sup>22</sup> As noted in particular by VVSG, the Association of Flemish Municipalities in Belgium

<sup>23</sup> Finland, France (CUF), Iceland, Lithuania, Netherlands (LBSNN), Norway, Spain (FEMP), Turkey (MMU).

<sup>24</sup> Georgia, Italy, Serbia, Spain (EUDEL).

<sup>25</sup> Including the National Development Programme of Bulgaria 2030.



## An indivisible Agenda

Even though it may be broken down into 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 unique indicators, the 2030 Agenda has been designed to invite us on a journey of discovery, to find and make our own connections. Whilst the previous section has shown us that the path forward may remain hazy for local and regional governments and their national associations, the SDGs' biggest strengths are that, as a whole, they remain indivisible, thus calling for an integrated development approach that breaks down any existing silos.<sup>26</sup>

This is one issue and one policy area that should not be dealt with alone. Connecting different office departments, different stakeholders within a territory as well as different levels of governance can help in coming up with genuine long-lasting, sustainable and inclusive solutions. But exactly how is "everything connected" at the level of national associations working on the SDGs?

In response to this query, 22 of the member associations<sup>27</sup> reported having developed joint activities with external stakeholders, such as civil society organisations, universities, think tanks, etc.

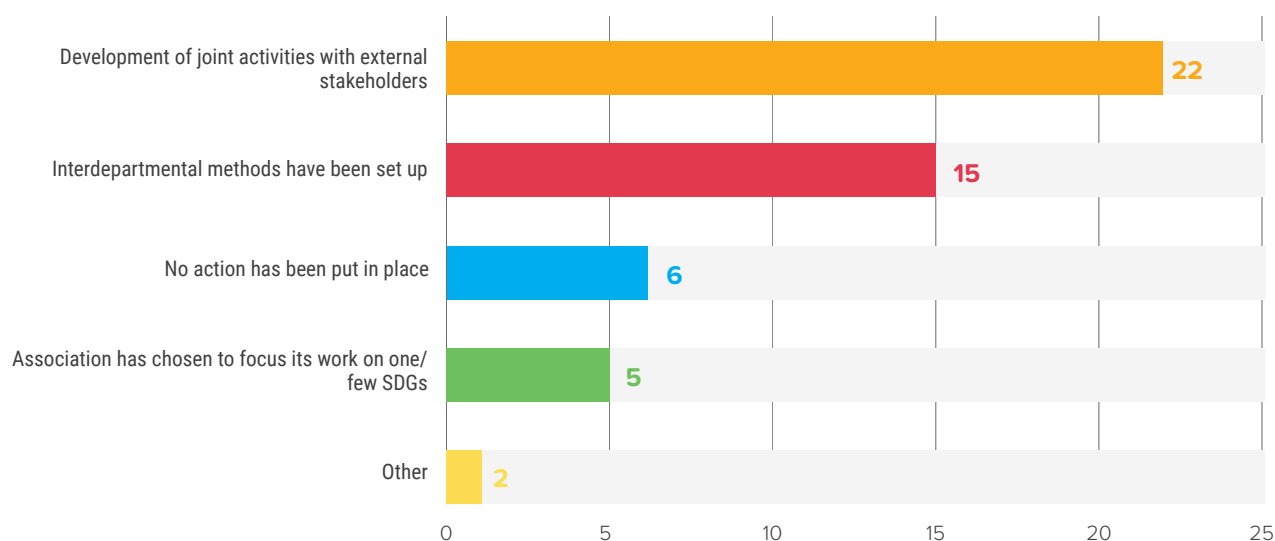
Fifteen respondents<sup>28</sup> set up interdepartmental working methods for working on the SDGs, consisting of, for instance, collaboration with colleagues from other departments on thematic issues. Six respondents<sup>29</sup> had not instituted any actions in this regard.

Examples of different approaches include the Association of Netherlands Municipalities' (VNG) tactic of using the SDGs as a "checklist" or "compass" to encourage more integrated policies throughout the association. Cités Unies France (CUF) have been progressively and increasingly taking the SDG framework into consideration in all of their geographic and thematic working groups. Looking to multi-level governance and horizontal development, the Basque Country region jointly launched the Basque Country 2030 Agenda initiative with 17 public and private organisations. Their aim is to promote the 2030 Agenda in all socio-economic sectors.



### INTERLINKAGES AND THE INTEGRATED APPROACH OF THE SDGs WITHIN ASSOCIATIONS

FIGURE 3.



<sup>26</sup> For additional reading on this, see: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/sustainable-development-goals-are-indivisible>

<sup>27</sup> Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Luxembourg, NALAS, Netherlands (LBSNN) Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI, FEMP, Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, Turkey (TBB and MMU), United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>28</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo, NALAS, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey (MMU), Ukraine, United Kingdom (COSLA).

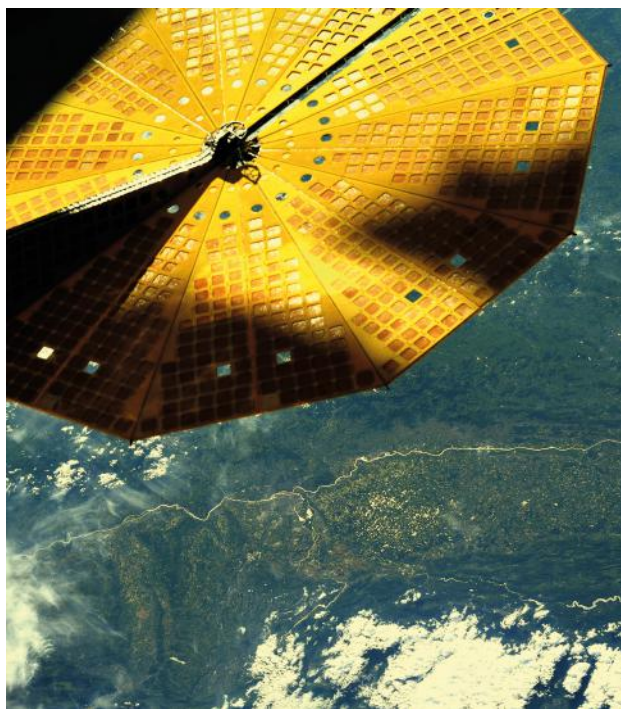
<sup>29</sup> Albania, Austria (Gemeindebund), Cyprus, Lithuania, Romania, Spain (EUDEL).

## Reaching out to citizens

As primary agents of developing the Sustainable Development Goals as well as being their ultimate beneficiaries, citizens' efforts and actions will play a pivotal role in their achievement. For this reason, and as the level of governance closest to citizens, local and regional governments are well-placed and ideally positioned to keep their citizens informed and their population engaged regarding the importance of working towards this agenda. As strategic architects of social cohesion, local and regional governments and their associations collaborate with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and cultural or educational sectors on a regular basis to bolster crucial citizen engagement on sustainable development issues across their territories and even beyond.

Nevertheless, all too often, the 2030 Agenda is perceived as too "sophisticated", "complex" and/or far removed from the real needs and realities of citizens. This makes it difficult for some to become actively engaged. However, as already well documented in PLATFORMA's 2020 publication<sup>30</sup> on "Raising citizens' awareness through development education", this does not necessarily mean that a simplification of the 2030 Agenda is called for; rather, the case needs to be made to the population that SDG actions in fact empower them as citizens.

For example, the National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands Nicaragua (LBSNN) works with and supports local governments and local civil society organisations, including educational institutes and companies, by jointly organising a series of large public events to raise awareness on the SDGs, particularly through the educational sector, including schools. This allows them to connect not only with a wide range of stakeholders from academia, the private sector and even the central government, but more importantly, to establish a direct connection with young citizens and inspire deep-rooted change for the future of our societies.



<sup>30</sup> Albania, Austria, France (CUF), Lithuania, Spain (Fons Mallorquí), Ukraine.

<sup>31</sup> Check out PLATFORMA's 2020 publication "Raising Citizens' Awareness Through Development Education – Success Stories Collection": [bit.ly/3sqJ3Aw](https://bit.ly/3sqJ3Aw)

<sup>32</sup> The PLATFORMA network is an active member of the European Commission DEAR Multi-stakeholder group.

<sup>33</sup> Managed by DG INTPA, the DEAR programme's overall objectives are to apprise EU citizens about global development issues, mobilise greater public support for action against poverty



### LEARN FROM THE VVSG SDG ACADEMY!

Organised for the first time in 2020 and scheduled to take place again in 2021, the Association of Flemish Municipalities (VVSG) launched a series of videos and webinars to mobilise municipalities on familiarising themselves, and eventually their citizens, with the SDGs. In cooperation with provinces and the Flemish government, these webinars also include workshops on SDG methods, using for example circle exercises, as well as one-day training sessions for local governments that are further along, focusing for instance on culture for sustainability, SMART ambitions and goals and indicators.

#### Learn more here:

<https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-academie>

Innovative progressive actions at the municipal level could capitalise on SDG localisation as one way to tackle global challenges locally through a critical, global, and connected vision, bringing with it profound and long-lasting transformative behavioural change. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how we are all interconnected – not only did the fear of catching the virus affect every single person, municipality, region or country, it also demonstrated that we all need to work together to a greater extent to find common long-term and viable solutions, on vaccines for example. For this kind of effort to be successful, restoring citizens' trust in their public institutions is a prerequisite. Local and regional governments represent the starting point. National associations of municipalities and regions can help collect and encourage the sharing of practices, tools and experiences to better engage with citizens and reinforce their trust in their elected representatives.

Sustainable development narratives and projects are increasingly moving in the direction of adopting a shift towards a more systemic understanding of interconnected problems rather than a linear one of cause-and-effect. The transformative power of intermunicipal cooperation is enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and in the eyes of the EC. "Development Education and Awareness Raising" (DEAR)<sup>31</sup> activities implemented by LRGs<sup>32</sup> are also recognised as vital in bringing global challenges closer to the forefront of people's eyes and minds.<sup>33</sup>

At EU Member State level, the development of DEAR activities aimed at raising awareness on climate issues or global inequalities is typically undertaken using the SDG framework. DEAR initiatives help keep the focus on interdependencies and inequities during the SDG localisation process, when partnerships built through decentralised cooperation can help to deepen the understanding of the interconnections between the local levels in Europe and abroad. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) refers to awareness raising as "Global Citizenship Education (GCE)", aimed at empowering learners of all ages to assume active roles, both locally and globally, in building more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure societies.<sup>34</sup> "Global Citizenship Education" is an approach conceived to support the integration of the SDGs.

and positively shift attitudes towards active and critical engagement. Since 2006, the EC DEAR programme has provided LRGs with dedicated funds. DEAR terminology has been expressly conceived to promote awareness raising, development of understanding and skills, and public engagement with global development issues and processes.

<sup>34</sup> The connections between DEAR, GCE and the SDGs is discussed in greater detail in an analysis featured in PLATFORMA's 2021 publication on Municipalities and regions take action on Global Citizenship Education - The road towards 2030 [bit.ly/2T6GuY2](https://bit.ly/2T6GuY2).

## Engaging youth through the SDGs

According to the United Nations,<sup>35</sup> there is an estimated 1.8 billion people today between the ages of 10 to 24, representing the largest generation of youth in history.

More interconnected than to ever before, young people wish to and indeed have already contributed to the resilience of their communities, proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress and inspiring political change. Far from being mere beneficiaries of the 2030 Agenda, young people are active architects<sup>36</sup> in the development of this global Agenda. Every single one of the 17 SDGs is in fact critical to youth development.

Youth movements such as Fridays for Future, which started in Europe, have become a global trend and have clearly shown young people to be natural agents of change, capable of mobilising their peers and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet.

When equipped with the skills and opportunities necessary to reach their potential, young people can be a driving force for supporting development as well as strategic partners for local and regional governments. Together, they can help ensure peace, an active citizenry and help accompany the transformative and behavioural changes needed for the SDGs and its framework to be fully embraced for generations to come. As the level of governance closest to citizens of all ages, local and regional governments play a key role in helping to encourage and empower youth-led projects that can translate the 2030 Agenda into local, national and regional policies. Furthermore, working hand-in-hand with younger generations is also an important way in which to help keep local and regional governments, and even national authorities, accountable in terms of their promises and actions.

In recent years, we have witnessed an increase in young high-profile newly elected officials and mayors who have taken prominent stands for their generation's beliefs, providing ready inspiration for sustainable and innovative change in their communities. This new generation of young local politicians needs to be supported and heard. Working on the 2030 Agenda can provide them with a comprehensive framework to guide them as they design their local policy plans, ensuring that no one, no place and no issue is left behind, both within their constituency and at European and global levels. National associations can play an essential role in helping to join these young voices together and amplify them further afield, in imparting relevant information to young newly elected representatives and sharing their success stories as well as concerns with their counterparts both in Europe and beyond.



### ENGAGE WITH YOUR CITIZENS AND JOIN THE EUROPEAN DAYS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY

### EUROPEAN DAYS OF LOCAL SOLIDARITY

The 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the EDLS campaign, coordinated by PLATFORMA, will take place from 15 to 30 November 2021. The EDLS campaign calls on cities and regions to help raise citizen awareness on the role played by LRGs in global sustainable development through positive messaging on the added value of decentralised cooperation. For the 2020 edition, 70 municipalities, regions and provinces organised more than 60 events held over two weeks. Over 20 local and regional elected officials actively took part in the different events, which inspired more than 770 tweets and retweets of the hashtag #LocalSolidarityDays.

More numbers concerning the campaign can be found in this video: <https://youtu.be/j9016fN5ajg>.

Learn more about EDLS on its website:  
<https://localsolidaritydays.eu/>



<sup>35</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/>

<sup>36</sup> As referred to in the World Youth Report on "Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019): <https://www.local2030.org/library/view/695>



## A ROAD TO RECOVERY THROUGH THE SDGs

The initial official United Nations (UN) response<sup>37</sup> to the current Covid-19 crisis recognised the lack of preparedness for its consequences and also recognised that, “had we been investing more in the SDGs, we would have a better foundation for withstanding shocks”. Whilst it may have seemed primarily a health crisis at first, directly affecting efforts linked to SDG 3 on the health and well-being of citizens straightaway, the passage of time has taught us that Covid-19 affects all the SDGs. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has piled on unprecedented challenges for municipalities and regions, exerting pressure on their educational systems, local finances, emergency management, housing, transport, digitalisation, cultural sector, waste, food, local business and employment, not to mention safety systems, among so many others. This reinforces once again the indisputable transversality of the goals and the need for a comprehensive recovery policy that encompasses the 2030 Agenda

as a whole, leaving no one and no goal behind. A new horizon now lies opens before us to recover stronger, more capable and resilient and to include the remedy of more sustainable strategies for a better future.

Local and regional governments have been at the forefront supporting their communities as well as the continuity of basic services. In their crisis response and recovery plans, local governments have in fact already incorporated a great deal of the SDGs at the local level without even being aware of it. National associations play a key role in helping to connect the dots and raise awareness on the bigger picture of local governments’ work, simultaneously keeping them informed and in touch with what is happening at the national and international levels.

### COVID-19 AFFECTING ALL SDGs



<sup>37</sup> Original graphic published in the UN report Shared responsibility, global solidarity. <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/shared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-socioeconomic-impacts-covid-19>



## Role of national associations in helping to build back better

National associations provide essential guidance to their members and provide a vital link between them and the national, European and international levels of decision-making. Moreover, very importantly, they facilitate municipalities and regions' contact with their counterparts, both in Europe and elsewhere, offering them a wide range of options for supporting subnational governments in recovering from the crisis. Respondents to our survey informed us that, since the beginning of the outbreak, their principal actions have consisted of delivering information to their local and regional governments and facilitating access to informational resources as well as assembling and compiling local government initiatives (26 respondents<sup>38</sup>). In addition, they have been busy as advocates to secure financial support for their members (25 respondents<sup>39</sup>), ensure local and regional governments' participation in national consultations, particularly those regarding pandemic-related measures such as lockdowns. National associations have helped frame the real needs and expectations of citizens, not only in relation to national governments but international networks and institutions as well. Last but not least, they have contributed to cultivating and facilitating the exchange of practices between their members and peers as well as different stakeholders to foster inspiration and innovation.

In all, 22 associations<sup>40</sup> indicated that building capacities, supporting peer learning, providing technical assistance and distributing material resources (such as face masks, technological equipment, etc) were and still are a key priority in the work aimed at their members.

Another 18 associations<sup>41</sup> reported working on promoting their members' initiatives and encouraging the exchange of best practices. A further 8 associations<sup>42</sup> spoke of working on coordinating and/or contributing to new initiatives, such as voluntary work to provide assistance.

One example of this is the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia's (STCM) endeavours to support local businesses and employment by preserving as much as possible the heretofore existing working conditions of local employees whose jobs had been affected by the crisis.

Similarly, COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, redeployed a very significant part of its staff to deal with Covid-19 contingencies. It is important to recall that social services such as residential care facilities, schools and waste collection services fall under municipal jurisdiction and all have been impacted by Covid-19, not to mention overall financial support for businesses. Building upon its previous role in major environmental crises, e.g. major snowstorms (as local roads are also a municipal competence), COSLA integrated the Scottish Government crisis centre known as the Resilience and Recovery group (SGoRR) during the first phase of the pandemic. At political level, they shifted very quickly to online meetings and, at the height of the crisis, meetings of their leadership were organised with ministers and senior officials and emergency meetings of the 32 Scottish Leaders (mayors) took place almost every week. To a certain extent, it can be said that this crisis may have actually improved the level of cooperation both among municipalities and with the Scottish Government.<sup>43</sup>

The French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE) also engaged in active exchanges with other European associations; for example, to receive additional information on how to overcome the first lockdown.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions set up a taskforce to manage issues linked to Covid-19, convening over 20 active associations every two months to exchange ideas with their European peers, including all the topics addressed by the 2030 Agenda, with a view to finding common solutions to shared challenges. Another of the taskforce's objectives was centralising and promoting key messages aimed at European institutions to ensure that local and regional perspectives were kept in mind in the EU's Covid-19 response and recovery plans.



<sup>38</sup> Albania, Austria (Städtebund and Gemeindebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Georgia, Latvia, Luxembourg, NALAS, Netherlands (VNG), North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain (EUDEL, FEMP and Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA), United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>39</sup> Austria (Gemeindebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Georgia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, NALAS, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain (EUDEL and FAMS), Sweden, Turkey (TBB), Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>40</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Georgia, Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, NALAS, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Spain (EUDEL, FAMS and Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>41</sup> Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Italy, NALAS, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia, Spain (EUDEL, FAMS, FEMP and Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>42</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Norway, Serbia, Spain (Fons Mallorqui), Sweden

<sup>43</sup> More information: <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/covid-19-information-for-councils>



### ACTIVITIES IN LATVIA TO RAISE AWARENESS ON COVID-19 AND THE SDGs

During the spring of 2021, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) carried out several activities in connection with the 2030 Agenda targeting municipal representatives (politicians and administrative staff) and focusing in particular on the context of Covid-19 and SDGs. Specifically, they are planning a webinar on SDG 5 (gender equality) to discuss the gendered impacts that Covid-19 is having on our society. The second webinar will focus on SDG 13 (climate action) and ways to bring about a green recovery in the aftermath of the pandemic. Similarly, LALRG also plans to tackle the topic of psychological distress among children and youth during the pandemic and to promote cooperation between partner municipalities in Latvia and in Eastern Partnership countries in the creative field (e.g., cooperation between music and art schools, animation studios).

However, such initiatives are not always easy to implement among all associations in all countries, particularly when it is a question of connecting them to the 2030 Agenda. In a pandemic and post-pandemic world, partner countries and their national associations from the Eastern Neighbourhood like Moldova barely have enough resources to cover the most basic support and maintain the existing public services and infrastructure. Notions like “building back better” using the “principles of the 2030 Agenda” ring hollow to the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and are not sufficiently clear to be understood at local level.



### TEAM EUROPE APPROACH

The European Commission and EU development ministers agreed in the spring of 2020 on an EU global plan against the coronavirus. It mobilised up to €40 billion in support for partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe to fight the pandemic. The pandemic is global, but towns and regions, as we all know, have been on the front lines of the crisis, managing lockdowns, health services and waste and “building back better”. PLATFORMA made eleven recommendations in this regard, pointing out the need to give LRGs a seat at the table (read it on <https://platforma-dev.eu/11-recommendations-coordinated-global-response-covid-19/>).

One important change has been the new “Team Europe” Approach, which enhances coordination among EU stakeholders at country level, to deliver more effective support to partner countries. This has had an impact on the way EU support is now planned and delivered. Under the new system, EU Member States and EU delegations work together on one Team Europe initiative. In general, the initiatives concerned have some component link to LRGs. For example, an initiative can address “developing big municipalities by the end of the programming period” or cover a more general topic such as the green transition, digitalisation or agricultural transformation. It is important to get in touch with your European Union delegation for up-to-date information about Team Europe Initiatives as LRGs have an essential role to play in this process.



## 2 MONITORING SDG PROGRESS: FROM THE LOCAL TO THE GLOBAL

The 2030 Agenda is a means for LRGs and their associations to conduct an assessment of where they stand on a wide range of policy issues. It is important to have a baseline, to be able to ascertain progress from Year One and gauge any spillover effects for the purpose of policy coherence. However, besides providing a regular review of one's progress, SDG reporting is also conducive to galvanizing the involvement of local and regional governments and their associations in the process of SDG localisation, building sustainable paths and promoting different reporting methods. It has become an essential means for establishing a national institutional-enabling environment and mainstreaming SDGs in national and local budgets. Furthermore, it helps foster and improve governance in partnership between different decision-making levels, from the local to the national.

One of the core lessons that Covid-19 has exposed is the need for greater coordination across government and for multi-level governance approaches. Given the pandemic's multi-dimensional impacts, a core requirement of an effective response is to ensure integrated and systemic approaches. The 2030 Agenda builds on the interdependencies among multiple sectors and levels of government to enable transformative change.

Nearly six years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the different initiatives, projects and plans have been bearing fruit. Through more effective reporting, organisations can better understand, communicate with and engage various stakeholders, improving the coordination and sharing of contributions, regardless of whether it involves the national level, the international community or just among themselves at the local level.

Reporting is a transformative exercise, manifesting a clear sign of political vision that helps trigger policymaking at subnational level. It encourages municipalities, regions and their national associations to connect with their national governments to enhance multi-level, multi-stakeholder dialogues and partnerships that grow beyond the SDG framework.

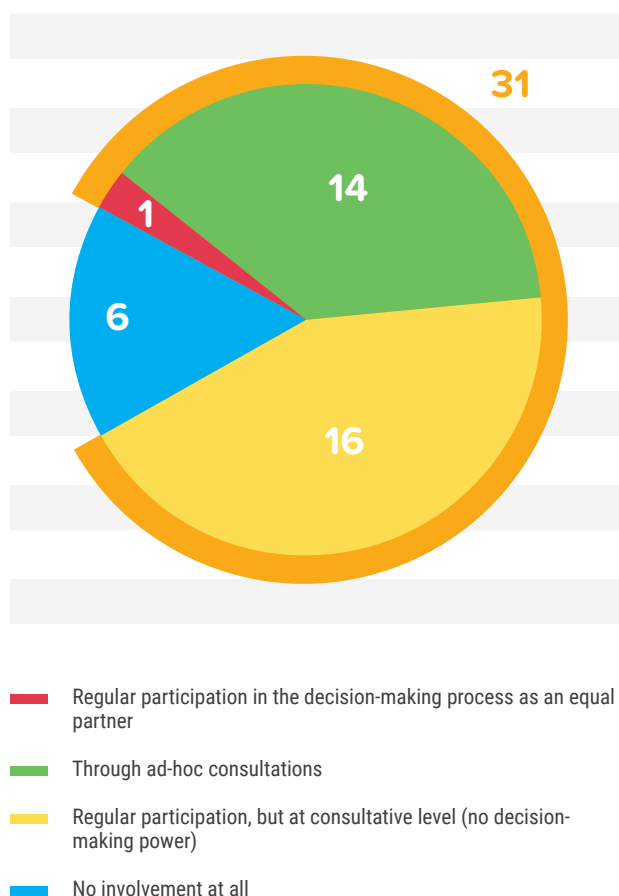
The newly updated United Nations guidelines for Member States for preparing their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) have increased the number of references to the local level, actively suggesting that national governments "outline how stakeholders, such as national and local governments (...) were continuously involved in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, including its Goals and targets<sup>44</sup>". Reporting countries could notably "consider outlining how cities, local authorities and communities have been pursuing the 2030 Agenda and how they have supported their efforts". Information on how responsibility was divided up among

the various levels of government (national, subnational and local) for a coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda may also be provided.

When looking at the level of contribution to national reporting mechanisms in 2021, we realised that over half of the respondents (31 associations) were involved in some way in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation.

### INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

FIGURE 4.



<sup>44</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27171SG\\_Guidelines\\_2021.final.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27171SG_Guidelines_2021.final.pdf)



Although this is very encouraging, we also have to look at how this involvement takes place and what is its actual import in the final decision-making process. Does it amount in the end to more weighty involvement or is it a mere box-ticking exercise?

Sixteen associations<sup>45</sup> responded that they participate on a regular basis, but only at consultative level with no decision-making power. Fourteen<sup>46</sup> indicated that they take part via ad-hoc consultations, consisting of a couple meetings or on an ad-hoc basis. Six associations<sup>47</sup> reported not having any involvement in the institutional mechanisms established by their national governments.

Only one association from Austria<sup>48</sup> informed us that they contributed through regular participation in the decision-making process as an equal partner. This tells us that whilst the numbers are still low for now, real change is happening. However, efforts still need to be made both by the national governments and the national LRG associations to ensure the systematic inclusion, and at the right level, municipalities and regions' endeavours regarding SDG monitoring and reporting to the central government. Sustainability is a common challenge involving the shared efforts of all stakeholders and all levels of governments. There is an obvious need to engage all partners in this transformation process. More than simply implementers of the 2030 Agenda, local and regional governments are also the policy and decision makers at their levels.

When determining whether any progress has been achieved in this cooperation compared to previous years, or if in fact new setbacks have been identified, over half of the respondents (20 associations<sup>49</sup>) informed us that there had been no change at all, for better or worse, over the past two years. Whilst this may not be an improvement, it is decidedly not a setback, implying that relations established with central governments around SDG implementation, however weak they may be for some, are still a work in progress, which can hopefully continue to grow in the near future. Six associations<sup>50</sup> confirmed that they had indeed witnessed positive developments in their relations with central governments.



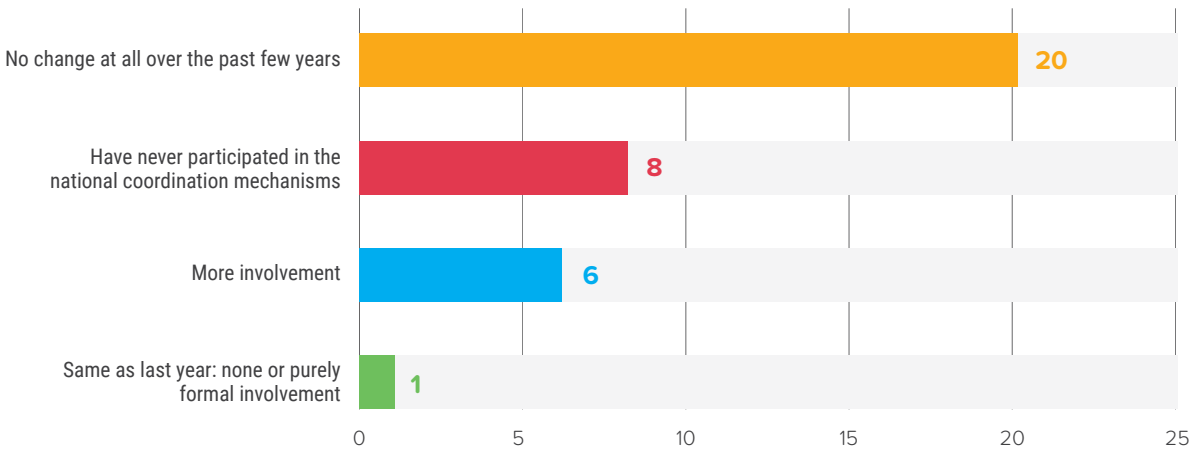
### NALAS AND THE 2030 AGENDA IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Connecting with national governments can take place through different means and can also occur via less conventional reporting mechanisms. For instance, NALAS passes on input from local governments and local and regional governments' associations in North Macedonia and Kosovo to the public entities responsible for drafting the national reports on SDG progress. This is done under a project supported by the German Development Agency (GIZ), called "Regional learning for the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in SEE", with NALAS as the main implementing partner.



### EVOLUTION OF ASSOCIATIONS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

FIGURE 5.



<sup>45</sup> Albania, Czech Republic, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands (VNG and LBSNN), Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI), Spain (FAMSI and FEMP), Sweden, Turkey (TBB), United Kingdom (COSLA).  
<sup>46</sup> Austria (Gemeindebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, France (CUF), Georgia, Germany, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Moldova, Slovenia, Turkey (MMU), United Kingdom (LGA).  
<sup>47</sup> A Italy, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Spain (Fons Mallorqui), Ukraine.  
<sup>48</sup> Austria (Städtebund).

<sup>49</sup> Austria (Städtebund and Gemeindebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France (CUF and AFCCRE), Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain (FAMSI and FEMP), Ukraine, United Kingdom (COSLA).  
<sup>50</sup> Germany, Kosovo, Netherlands (LBSNN), Norway, Serbia, Turkey (TBB).



## Local contributions at international level

In terms of reporting, in a turnabout of the usual order of things, before even looking to strengthen the place of national and European reviews of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the UN has in fact already gone ahead and broadened the scope of local and regional participation and LRG reports in particular. In the United Nations (UN) Political Declaration adopted at the 2019 UN SDG Summit, Member States reaffirmed the critical role of municipalities, local and regional governments and communities in implementing and realising the SDGs and pledged to empower and support them in pursuing the 2030 Agenda. What was viewed as quite unprecedented in 2018, when the first municipalities like New York or Helsinki presented their 'Voluntary Local Reviews' (VLRs), is now part of our everyday "SDG jargon", and has taken on valuable importance in all discussions both at EU and international levels.

VLRs are also used now to better assess the impact of Covid-19 on local and/or regional governmental efforts, to understand where energies / priorities have been focused at local level in the past year as well as providing recourse to a more evidence-based awareness of the true suffering of different areas.



## Indicators for developing a Voluntary Local Review – what is needed?

A new generation of VLRs cropped up very quickly and has now expanded considerably both in Europe and across the globe. It is no longer a question of who is doing a VLR, but how are they doing it, with which set of indicators and data, what new existing tools and methodologies are being used to improve this process and how can they be scaled up.

To conduct a proper VLR, it is often a matter of having access to the right set of indicators or developing a mechanism to monitor the progress made in achieving the SDGs and their different targets across a given territory. In response to our query, 15 of our associations (40%<sup>51</sup>) confirmed that they had not worked on this at all, while 22 associations had set up some sort of mechanism; and 14<sup>52</sup> out of 22 associations had collaborated with other institutions, such as academia, CSOs, think tanks and international peers on developing local progress indicators of SDG achievement.

Eleven<sup>53</sup> associations worked (or have been working) with the national or regional statistics office to adapt local indicators to the national monitoring system. One such case was the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS), which collaborated with the Norwegian Official Statistics Office (Statistics Norway) on developing a taxonomy to sort the data available in relation to SDG indicators and targets. In Luxembourg, the national government facilitated local reporting by providing a guide to help evaluate SDG initiatives undertaken by municipalities.

The city of Bristol (UK), which warrants acclaim for having produced one of Europe's first Voluntary Local Reviews, tested and developed 75 targets, which were then mapped into the six themes of Bristol's One City Plan. The plan objectives were devised to help deliver the SDGs and provide sustainability checklists that make it easier to communicate priorities in a concrete manner.

Malmö in Sweden used a total of nearly one hundred local indicators to assess their progress towards the 17 SDGs in the update of their annual Sustainability Report. By highlighting strengths and challenges, their report is intended to lay the groundwork for future political prioritisation, strategic partnerships and local action.<sup>54</sup>

Inspired by the impressive example of the German local SDG-index portal<sup>55</sup> launched in 2019, the Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) replicated and created the first Italian SDG portal for local indicators<sup>56</sup> to monitor SDG implementation by over 100 municipalities in Italy at the end of 2020. Developed by AICCRE in partnership with the Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei and the Italian Network for Sustainable Development (SDSN Italia), the Italian City Index includes indicators for 16 out of 17 SDGs (Goal 14 (Life Below Water) excluded for comparability reasons). One of its aims is to bridge the existing gap in the national context by a) establishing a connection between the Italian reality as a whole and the local sphere, and b) ensuring the economic, social, geographical and demographic heterogeneity of the country. This project is currently being expanded as well as replicated in a joint project with the Kingdom of Morocco.

<sup>51</sup> Albania, Austria (Gemeindebund), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France (AFCCRE), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, NALAS, North Macedonia, Romania, Turkey (TBB and MMU), Ukraine.

<sup>52</sup> Austria (Städtebund), Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France (CUF), Germany, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI and FEMP), United Kingdom (COSLA).

<sup>53</sup> Denmark, Kosovo, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Spain (EUDEL, FAMSI and Fons Mallorqui), Sweden, United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>54</sup> Example provided in EUROCITIES' Report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at local level "Paving the way for sustainable cities": [https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITIES\\_SDG\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EUROCITIES_SDG_report_2020.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> <https://sdg-portal.de/de/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://sdg-portal.it/en/-/project>

Reporting is as much about the process as about the results; i.e., how to make it participatory at local level in order to extrapolate the right input from all citizens and stakeholders concerned, while simultaneously instilling them with a sense of greater ownership. Municipalities and regions should seize this opportunity to formalise their efforts to achieve the SDGs by setting up a Voluntary Local Review that can look further than existing policies and strategies to uncover critical implementation gaps as well as pathways for real change.

Finally, VLRs also function as an analytical planning tool that can encourage municipalities to reflect on policies capable of tackling current global challenges while also working to raise awareness on achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among public bodies, stakeholders and civil society.



### THE SWEDISH EXAMPLE

In Sweden, the Council for Municipal Analysis ("Rådet för främjande av kommunala analyser", RKA in Swedish), developed a set of 50 key indicators for municipalities and 50 key indicators for regions, on behalf of SALAR and the Swedish government, to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local and regional level. The set of key indicators were grounded on statistics and data already available in Sweden. The key figures were made available in March 2019. In September 2020, SALAR launched an "Open Comparisons" on the 2030 Agenda based on this data. The purpose of the Open Comparisons was to encourage local and regional authorities to analyse results, learn from each other and improve standards of quality and efficiency. Open Comparisons could be described as a soft power governance method using data collected from the municipalities and regions to benchmark their activities. RKA/SALAR have also provided municipalities and regions with guidelines on how to use the Open Comparison for the 2030 Agenda.

**More information:** <https://www.ssb.no/en/natur-og-miljo/artikler-og-publikasjoner/a-taxonomy-for-indicators-related-to-the-sustainable-development-goals>

However, care must be taken to ensure that monitoring and reporting are not relegated to a mere follow-up exercise of indicators. More work is needed to determine the direct impact of reporting for local governments. Currently, available data mostly covers local geographical areas (context information), where a local government is just one of the actors that can influence a given indicator. Such information is therefore useful in evaluating the context of a municipality but is lacking when it comes to determining any direct correlation to local policy. Looking at such indicators alone, local and regional governments and their national associations would be unable to gauge whether their policies did in fact contribute to positive or negative developments in implementing the 2030 Agenda.



## The added value of local SDG reporting

- It brings together diverse stakeholders in the process, including civil society and the private sector, spurring discussion on local policies and fostering joint creation and innovation
- It helps stakeholders connect to broader societal tendencies by producing active links to the different SDGs
- It provides a baseline for measuring progress on an annual basis and ensures any progress is publicised at the local, national and even international levels
- It makes it possible to set up a long-term sustainable way of reporting, independent of political coalitions or a focus on policy plans. The latter may change, but by adhering to the SDGs, a consistent way of reporting is assured
- It helps to realign local strategies towards the 2030 Agenda by identifying new synergies between policies (interlinkages and the power of the 5 Ps<sup>57</sup>: pushes authors of reports to connect the dots; e.g. between the work done in different city council departments, etc.) in each report
- It ensures a coherency among the different actions and limits spillover effects
- It provides an entry point for better engagement with national and international institutions, including central governments



On top of this, we have noticed a growing number of projects throughout Europe and around the world aimed at involving and supporting LRGs in their efforts to localise and report on the SDGs.

For example, in Europe, it has been enlightening to follow the progress, among others, of the URBAN 2030 project by the European Commission Joint Research Centre<sup>58</sup> or the OECD programme on a territorial approach to the SDGs.<sup>59</sup> These projects all tend to highlight the importance of creating and sharing experiences and results. Sharing the tools available can help LRGs better monitor their progress and present coherent reports.

One future that we could envisage might consist, in our opinion, of a surge in city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation partnerships across the globe (also known as decentralised cooperation) built on SDG reporting: municipalities and regions mutually supporting each other from a distance, sharing methodologies and peer-reviewing reports. National associations would also benefit from this, by supporting each other in a national reporting process that transcends different countries and continents around the globe.

Localisation is increasingly spiking interest on the international scene and, just recently, the newly created GTF-UN taskforce on the future of cities began looking at localisation as the very line of reasoning for including cities in the UN process. However, looking solely at VLRs can limit the capacity for other local and regional actors to play a role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A comprehensive overview of all other types of subnational actions needs to be included in the process.

<sup>58</sup> More information on the European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/science-update/european-handbook-sdg-voluntary-local-review/> and updates on the Urban 2030 project: [https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/event/urban-2030-monitoring-reporting-urban-territorial-dimensions-sdgs\\_en](https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/event/urban-2030-monitoring-reporting-urban-territorial-dimensions-sdgs_en)

<sup>59</sup> More information on the newly launched reports of this project <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>



### LOCALISING THE SDGs WITH THE RFSC

The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC), promoted by CEMR with the support of the French government, is a free online tool designed to help European local and regional governments already involved in or that are looking to start a process of integrated and sustainable urban development. It provides support through every phase of SDG localisation, from customized mapping to multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral implementation, but also effectively monitors a city's SDG strategy, regardless of its size or location. Several local governments have already showcased successful results and there is increased interest among European LRGs, and their associations as well, in finding new innovative tools that can assist them in this process.

In response to this growing interest, URBACT (the European Commission's exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA have joined forces to propose a pilot network currently made up of 19 municipalities from across Europe, providing support by granting access to the RFSC tools and helping them to design an individual Integrated Action Plan for localising the Sustainable Development Goals. It also aims at connecting the local to the global, fostering exchanges, learning from European and International peers, capacity-building for localising the SDGs in their territories and with their peers and the development of tools and policy recommendations to do this. This project was launched in April 2021 and will run for 18 months. Stay tuned!

**More information:** [bit.ly/3rWeHGk](https://bit.ly/3rWeHGk)





## A new emerging trend: Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR)

In many contexts, the intermediary space between national and local governments is being filled by national local government associations. Their ability to provide information and tools to a large audience of municipalities, provinces or regions constitutes an efficient mechanism of collaboration and peer-to-peer learning and builds useful points of connection with the national government. Spearheaded by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and their Capacity and Institution-Building working group, together with their partners like PLATFORMA, and members such as CEMR, a new trend has been emerging since 2020: Voluntary Subnational Reviews. The first pilot phase facilitated the VSRs of Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mozambique, Nepal, Kenya. These consist of SDG progress reports that are coordinated and produced by national associations and which showcase a broader territorial picture of the situation regarding SDG localisation at national level. Together with VLRs, these represent powerful tools that can truly complement and directly augment national reporting. A VSR is a transformational tool which can become a vital coordination mechanism owing to its association of LRGs, together with national governments. They improve coordination and provide a global policy perspective at local level and within a specific country. They also highlight how local and regional governments have stepped up and are handling the work themselves. Whilst it is still too early to determine to what extent Covid-19 has influenced the pace of implementation, the silver lining of the pandemic is that, once this can be measured, it can become a real tool for transformation. VSRs will make such an analysis possible.

Among the first European associations to prepare a VSR in 2021 are Sweden, Norway and Germany.



### Added value of producing a VSR

- ✓ Systematically assess the process of localising the SDGs on a national scale
- ✓ Establish proof of progress towards the SDGs, which can be used to validate European, national and local policy making
- ✓ Enhance the spirit of the 2030 Agenda by reinforcing shared responsibility as a means to achieve the SDGs, notably through governance in partnership with the national government
- ✓ Encourage the exchange of good practices between local and regional governments and with their national associations
- ✓ Increase the national and international visibility of subnational territories of a country and their SDG efforts, along with those of their national associations and partners
- ✓ Increase local and regional government advocacy in the international arena, like the United Nations, with documentation based on hard data
- ✓ Enable the future use of SDGs as a reference framework for sustainability management in municipalities and regions



# THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL EUROPE AT THE UN HLPF 2021

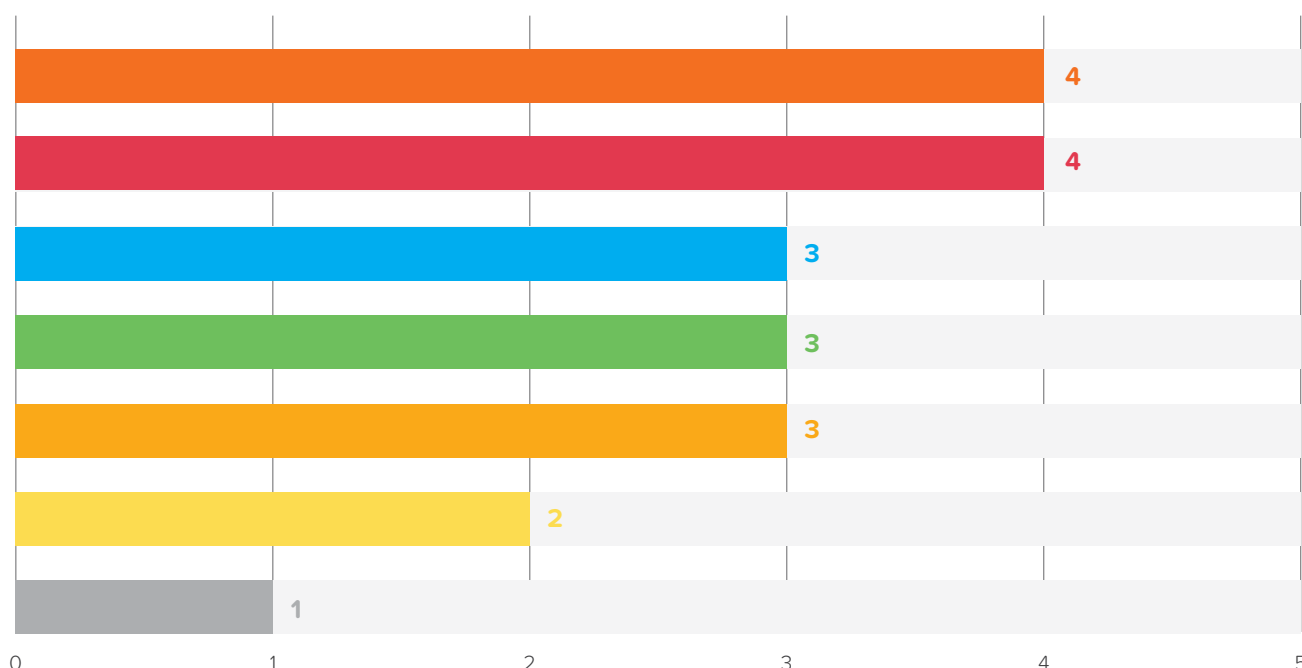
Out of 44 countries worldwide, 7 countries from Europe will be presenting their reports to the UN in 2021 at the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in July. The countries are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Spain and Sweden. All of these countries have already reported to the UN on their SDG progress. How are the local and regional realities being included in their national reports this year? What types of mechanisms have been set up so that national associations can aliment the national process with their members' contributions? Has there been any discernible progress

since the last reports? Out of the seven, only one association<sup>60</sup> informed us that they are not participating at all in the development of their country's Voluntary National Review in 2021.

The other countries all take part under different mechanisms, including some of the actual processes mentioned in the survey questions. More detailed information can be found below in the presentation of each country's LRG involvement in the national reporting for 2021.

### ASSOCIATIONS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS IN 2021

FIGURE 6.



- By attending bilateral meetings with the reporting unit (in charge of the reporting) to discuss the report (e.g. between your organisation, local elected officials and the reporting unit)
- By presenting your own contribution to the report (e.g. about what local and regional governments are doing to implement the SDGs, etc.)
- By participating in occasional meetings, with limited opportunity to contribute to the actual report
- By responding to a survey or questionnaire
- By directly participating in the reporting unit appointed by the national government as well as in the drafting process
- By being invited to the presentation of the VNR once it has been finalised
- Not participating at all

## CYPRUS

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? NO**  
**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): N/A**



**More info:** Even though they may not be reporting to the 2021 VNR process, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities have participated in the national reporting mechanisms for the past couple of years through ad-hoc consultations, in a few meetings or on a one-off basis, but not as a permanent member.

## CZECH REPUBLIC

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES**  
**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): Contributing the same tasks as in previous years.**



**More info:** The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) took part in the preparations for the 2021 national reporting process by contributing comments to the draft report. SMO ČR's comments were accepted for the most part and the report was revised accordingly. Even though the association indicated that they had contributed to the reporting process with the same task as the previous year, they did note that the Ministry of the Environment, which coordinated the process in 2021, had expressed interest in cooperating further with associations representing local governments.

## DENMARK

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES**  
**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): Contributing with the same tasks**



**More info:** The Danish Association's contribution to the 2021 national report involved being invited to the presentation of the VNR once this was finalised. The Association had contributed in the same way in previous years to Denmark's national reporting process. The Associations of Danish Regions and Local Government are members of the Danish government's "2030 Panel", which is a group of 23 of the leading figures and organisations in Denmark with the capacity and knowledge to work on behalf of SDGs both in Denmark and globally.

## GERMANY

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES**  
**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): Stronger involvement**



**More info:** The German Association of CEMR (RGRE) plans to produce a Voluntary Local Governments Review (VLGR) along the lines of the Voluntary Subnational Review concept mentioned earlier. RGRE hope to contribute their own chapter on the state of progress of SDG localisation across Germany, which would then be included as an official annex of the German VNR. This process is a clear step forward from previous years, where very little or none of the local perspective in Germany was included in the national SDG progress reviews.

## NORWAY

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES**  
**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): Stronger involvement**



**More info:** Norway had submitted a report to the SDG review in 2016 but, in the end, there was no mention of LRGs in the document. Five years later, the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) are working on a coordinated approach to national reporting, including several Voluntary Local Reviews and an association-driven Voluntary Subnational Review that will constitute an official section of the Norwegian national report to the UN. Following KS' attendance in bilateral meetings with the reporting unit to discuss SDG reports and the submission of their own local and regional contributions to the national reports, there has been increased cooperation in the area of SDG reporting between the local and national levels. This has in turn led to the direct participation in the reporting unit appointed by the national government and in the drafting process of the VNR.

## SPAIN

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES (for FEMP, EUSKADI and FAMSI)**

**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s):**

- For FEMP: Contributing with the same tasks as in previous years
- For EUSKADI and EUDEL: Stronger involvement
- For FAMSI: Stronger involvement



**More info:** In Spain, local and regional governments and their networks and associations have been involved in national SDG reporting, mostly at consultative levels without any decision-making powers. Regular meetings have been held with Spanish local and regional governments and the national association together with the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda. For the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), a sectoral commission for the SDGs has been set up, consisting of a multi-level coordination mechanism in which all the Autonomous Communities, the Government, FEMP and the Basque Government (EUSKADI), together with the Association of Basque Municipalities (EUDEL), can participate and have a say but no vote. Nevertheless, EUSKADI and EUDEL, along with the Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI), have all indicated that their experience within national coordination mechanisms for reporting to the UN has undergone positive changes in recent years, for EUSKADI and EUDEL in particular.

## SWEDEN

**LRG involvement in the 2021 Voluntary National Review? YES**

**Changes to the reporting process since the previous year(s): Weaker involvement**

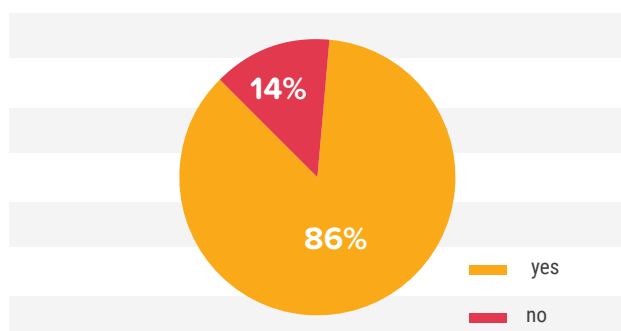


**More info:** The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) indicated that they had been involved to a much lesser extent in the reporting for 2021 compared to previous years, particularly 2017 when Sweden reported the first time. At that time, SALAR was part of a national reference group providing direct input for the report. In 2018 and 2019, the Swedish government did not produce a VNR but prepared so-called implementation briefs on the five SDGs that were the focus of that year's HLPF. SALAR submitted general comments on the importance of highlighting the role of the local and regional level in the work with the 2030 Agenda in these implementation briefs and also provided some concrete examples of the work related to the SDGs at local and regional level. Some of their input was included in the implementation briefs. The process in 2021 has thus far<sup>61</sup> been characterised by sporadic dialogue between SALAR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment, jointly in charge of coordinating the VNR. SALAR contributed to the VNR by providing a short text on the VSR process, underlining the importance of horizontal and vertical collaboration. In addition, SALAR also facilitated the exchange with LRGs by organising a workshop focusing on SDG synergies for the MFA, the Stockholm Environmental Institute and several of its members. Discussions on further joint activities, including representation in the national delegation to the HLPF, are ongoing.

It should be noted that four Swedish municipalities (Malmö, Helsingborg, Stockholm and Uppsala) are producing VLRs. They have had meetings, at their own initiative, with the MFA on the VNR process. SALAR enjoys a structured dialogue with the VLR working groups, and there are discussions underway pertaining to coordination, joint messages and activities.

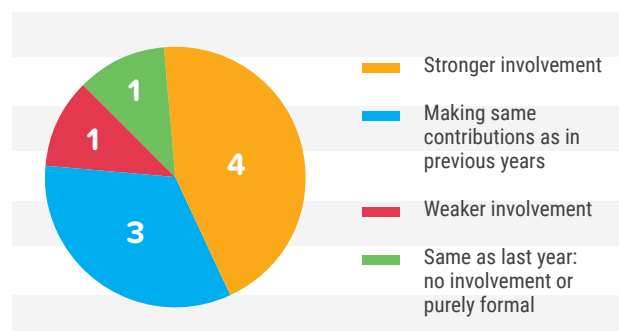
**LRG CONTRIBUTION TO THE 2021 HLPF**

FIGURE 7.



**CHANGES IN INVOLVEMENT IN NATIONAL REPORTING**

FIGURE 8.



# 3 DECENTRALISED COOPERATION TO ACHIEVE THE 2030 AGENDA



One thing the Covid-19 pandemic has taught the world is that partnerships and dialogues are the key to more efficiently overcoming common challenges, in an inclusive and coherent manner, with quicker and longer-lasting results. Even though borders have been physically closed, today's technologies and innovations make it possible to have more connections than ever, not to mention exchanges between municipalities, regions, national associations and their counterparts around the world, engendering solidarity while brainstorming together on ways to overcome the crisis.<sup>62</sup>

International action and cooperation, particularly between local and regional governments, foster better coordination of relations between the international, national, regional and local levels, as well as between regions and municipalities themselves. Several local and regional governments around the world showed no hesitation in reaching out to their peers during this time of need, as demonstrated by the Chinese City of Taizhou sending masks to their German Partner City of Hanau, or the welcoming of the other's patients by hospitals in France and Luxembourg. The National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands Nicaragua (LBSNN) provided financial support for micro loans reserved for women, youth and small- and medium-sized farmers/entrepreneurs in several partner towns from their network in Nicaragua: Matagalpa, Jinotega, El Rama, San Pedro de Lóvago, Juigalpa, Estelí and Condega.

Such spontaneous acts of solidarity and exchange of experience are key to helping bring global agendas to life, including the 2030 Agenda, starting from the bottom-up.

International action can take on different forms for local and regional governments and their associations, from representation at international fora to cooperation with EU delegations directly on the ground, city diplomacy and of course, city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation, also known as decentralised cooperation.



## WHY GO FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL? VVSG'S FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance their participation, associations are producing a growing number of reports, studies, handbooks and tools to help showcase how LRGs are implementing the 2030 Agenda, both in Europe and with their peers in partner countries. VVSG for instance, recently launched a publication on SDGs in international cooperation, encouraging municipalities to look beyond municipal borders and connect the local to the global. Their recommendations and key reasons for linking the SDGs to international cooperation include:

- 1 The 17 Goals are the perfect international framework for placing decentralised cooperation activities into the greater "big picture" story
- 2 The SDGs speak a universal language, creating connections between peers no matter where they are located around the world
- 3 The 2030 Agenda promotes a comprehensive, transversal and multi-stakeholder approach, since all 17 goals are interconnected
- 4 Working on the SDGs automatically helps city-to-city cooperation to become more sustainable
- 5 The SDGs enhance the visibility of local and regional governments' international activities

Read the full publication here : [bit.ly/3vs273K](https://bit.ly/3vs273K)

<sup>62</sup> In March 2020, UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat launched a series of live learning experiences bringing local and regional governments and their national associations together from all over the world. The purpose of these sessions was to create a virtual and living global community for sharing experiences involving crisis management and protection of the commons, making online resources available to LRGs and developing briefs and guides in anticipation of the support LRGs will need during the recovery phase. A full year later, the entire collection of outcomes and resources is available here: <https://www.beyondtheoutbreak.uclg.org/>



## Europe's local and regional participation at the UN

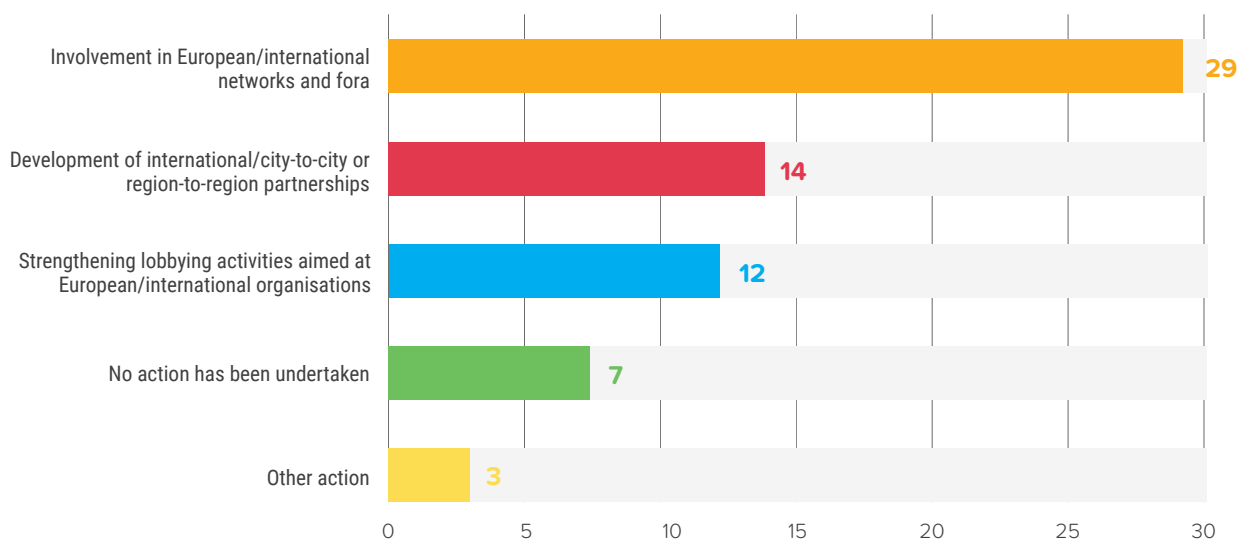
A bigger place at the table is being made for municipalities and regions, and their national associations, to share their experiences and take part in European and international fora, a change which has been positively confirmed by 29 associations<sup>63</sup> responding to our survey.

They indicated in particular that their organisation manages the international dimension of the SDGs by contributing to European and international networks and discussions, including actively participating in international events and campaigns, such as the

United Nations High Level Political Forum,<sup>64</sup> an annual event. City diplomacy<sup>65</sup> has been gaining traction as local governments increasingly learn how to utilise institutions and processes at the international level to both make contributions and impart international policies and frameworks. By representing their interests and those of their citizens, they can enhance their position as pioneers and global frontrunners on specific topics, such as climate, and make a case for their central role in facilitating the delivery of key global objectives, such as the 2030 Agenda or the Paris Agreement.

### INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE SDGs

FIGURE 9.



#### UNITED NATIONS 75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

In the Autumn of 2020, at the United Nations 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary (UN75) events, during a time of great challenge and in the midst of the "Decade of Action", Secretary General António Guterres called for unity and accelerated action for all the peoples of the world, convening a global dialogue to discuss human priorities and how to build a better future for all. The international municipal and regional movement, convened by the Global Taskforce facilitated by UCLG, joined the UN75 global conversation to ensure that the voices of municipalities and regions around the world are represented.

The European Constituency, brought together by CEMR-PLATFORMA, contributed to both the discussions and the report produced by the Global Taskforce on what the state of multilateralism would be like in 2045, envisioning a future of the world attainable through the continued use of the multilateral model that acts in response to the dreams and expectations of our communities. As a result, the United Nations recognised the leading role that municipalities and regions play in helping to respond to the needs and visions of citizens across the globe.

- Visit the website on the Vision Report: [bit.ly/3cqNxR2](https://bit.ly/3cqNxR2)
- Read the full Visioning Report on How Local and Regional Governments Envision the Global Future: [bit.ly/3rT4TfW](https://bit.ly/3rT4TfW)

<sup>63</sup> Austria (Städtebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Georgia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, NALAS, Netherlands (VNG and LBSNN), North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI, FEMP, Fons Mallorquí), Sweden, Turkey (TBB and MMU), Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA and COSLA).

<sup>64</sup> The United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main United Nations platform on sustainable development and it plays a leading role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level. More info: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

<sup>65</sup> [https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/topic/0TO1Q0000001IRDWAY/city-diplomacy?language=en\\_US](https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/topic/0TO1Q0000001IRDWAY/city-diplomacy?language=en_US)



With the support of European and international networks like PLATFORMA, CEMR, UCLG and the Global Taskforce, European and global delegations of local and regional government representatives have been able to attend and actively participate in international programmes, ensuring that their local perspective and needs inform these discussions and that their voices are heard at the different decision-making levels.<sup>66</sup> In total, 22 respondents<sup>67</sup> indicated that working with the SDGs had helped bolster their working with European and international networks.

## The SDGs in partner countries – how national associations can help the EU connect the dots

The European Commission's new financial instrument for Europe's development cooperation policy, previously referred to as the Neighbourhood, Development, International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) but now called the "Global Europe",<sup>68</sup> explicitly recognises the importance of *"supporting local and regional governments, including through decentralised cooperation, capacity development and resource mobilisation, to improve in urban and rural areas the localisation of the sustainable development goals"*.<sup>69</sup>

The Global Europe instrument emphasises a geographical approach to EU development and neighbourhood policies. This means that most EU funding opportunities for Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) will now be channelled through EU delegations (EUD) around the world at country level. National associations of local and regional governments are key drivers for change in the development sector and as partners in the programming of EU priorities. Through different modalities of action,<sup>70</sup> LRGs and their national associations can effectively contribute to the European Commission's five priorities for its external action as well as directly to the EU's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda with partner countries.



### "GLOBAL EUROPE" INSTRUMENT FOR 2021-2027 - AN ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO ENHANCE SDG LOCALISATION

EU aid is delivered through financial instruments, which run for a seven-year period. From 2021 to 2027, there will be a new unique instrument called "Global Europe" for cooperation aimed at developing and neighbourhood countries, now more generally referred to as partner countries, with an overall budget of € 79 billion. The Global Europe instrument draws new attention to the importance of working in line with the framework provided by the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. It calls in particular for the close consultation and association of LRGs to ensure their implementation at local level.

The instrument will focus on five priority areas for its external action:

- Green Deal, including the fight against climate change, energy efficiency, sustainable consumption and waste management, etc.
- Digital transformation and innovation
- Jobs and investment, representing an economy that works for people
- Human development, governance, security and peace
- Migration partnerships

To deliver this support, a geographic approach is now preferred, which gives more power to EU delegations and allows for greater alignment with country-led strategies. With this instrument, LRGs are mainstreamed throughout the finalised regulation, especially in the geographic programmes, which is good news. It includes:

- a mandatory consultation of LRGs by EUDs under the framework of the policy dialogue;
- an indicative amount of € 500 million to support "Local and regional governments" all over the world.

<sup>66</sup> In preparation of the UN HLPF 2020, a special consultation was led by UN DESA on "Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation" – PLATFORMA was invited by the United Nations as an expert to contribute to the consultation; more information here: [bit.ly/2QasbQD](https://bit.ly/2QasbQD)

<sup>67</sup> Austria (Städtebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Georgia, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, MALAS, Netherlands (VNG and LBSNN), Norway, Serbia, Spain (EUDEL, FAMSÍ, FEMP, Fons Mallorquí), Sweden, Turkey (MMU), Ukraine, United Kingdom (COSLA).

<sup>68</sup> This new instrument will be operational for the next financial period of the European Union (2021-2027) : [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI%282018%29628251](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282018%29628251)

<sup>69</sup> <https://t.co/ld2YTK16Py?amp=1>

<sup>70</sup> As described in detail in PLATFORMA's 2020 position paper on "How towns, regions and their associations can contribute to the 2021-2027 EU Programming": [bit.ly/3bQ9dql](https://bit.ly/3bQ9dql)

Having worked on this topic since 2018, PLATFORMA has been very active in fighting for the recognition of the crucial role that LRGs play as policy makers and key implementers of the Sustainable Development Goals, thus fulfilling the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. Aside from SDG 11, which focuses on cities and communities, an estimated 65% of the 17 SDGs' 169 targets will not be reached without the engagement of local and regional governments. Achieving the 2030 Agenda therefore depends on full ownership by regions, cities and communities of all sizes, provided they are equipped with the right capacities and leeway to experiment. All SDGs have a territorial dimension and depend on the place and the territorial context where they are implemented. Decentralised cooperation is a critical process that strengthens these efforts – even more so with the help of peers in partner countries – and helps in connecting the local to the global through effective partnerships structured around a common framework and universal language.

Finally, working on the 2030 Agenda from the bottom up is an essential means to actively implement the five priorities of the European Union to an even greater degree. Linking the EU priorities unambiguously to the SDG framework and providing clear instructions on the working modalities with the different stakeholders at all levels and at all stages of the implementation and monitoring process can help to accelerate progress on all fronts.



#### EXAMPLE FROM THE COMMONWEALTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM (CLGF)

Currently in its second phase, the CLGF EU-funded global project *"Empowering local authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and effective development outcomes"* focuses on localising the SDGs with national association partners like ALGAJ (Jamaica), TTALGA (Trinidad and Tobago) and DALCA (Dominica), and more directly with ten local pilot councils in these same countries. By looking globally and deliberately at what councils can do with their local development plans and how to include the SDGs in these plans, the project aims to increase their awareness on the 2030 Agenda while addressing certain local priorities, such as the local economy, healthier lifestyles, urban planning, inclusive mobility, etc. The associations process any feedback and share the knowledge and experiences on a wider level. Through the work with the national associations, the project has been able to strengthen decentralisation processes, local economic development, enhance the LRGs' profiles and dialogue with EU delegations, identify points of confluence and improve cooperation through shared work on these common priorities, including the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

**More information:** <https://www.clgf.org.uk/>





## Decentralised cooperation as the building blocks of international partnerships

Another significant way of working with the SDGs at international level consists of taking part in international partnerships with peers. Collaboration among municipalities and regions worldwide has produced positive results in terms of the development of efficient and responsive territorial policies. In addition, city-to-city and region-to-region initiatives, also referred to as decentralised cooperation, present new opportunities for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Decentralised cooperation forms an essential part of the modern internationalisation process of municipalities. It is one of the main reasons why municipalities and regions seek out good practices and solutions in the international arena, to solve perhaps their own domestic challenges.



### PARTNERSHIP OF AKMENĖ DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY IN LITHUANIA WITH THE CITIES OF MARIUPOL, AVDIJVKIA AND SHOSTKA IN UKRAINE

The Akmenė District Municipality in Lithuania formed a partnership with the Cities of Mariupol, Avdiyvkia and Shostka in Ukraine. It has been fruitful in multiple areas.

After the 2015 crisis in Ukraine, many refugees sought to reach Lithuanian municipalities for a safe haven in the EU. Akmenė established good contacts with many of them and set up the NGO "Way to Dream" to come up with development cooperation program projects intended to help people who still live in war zones in Ukraine.

This NGO successfully implemented three development cooperation projects:

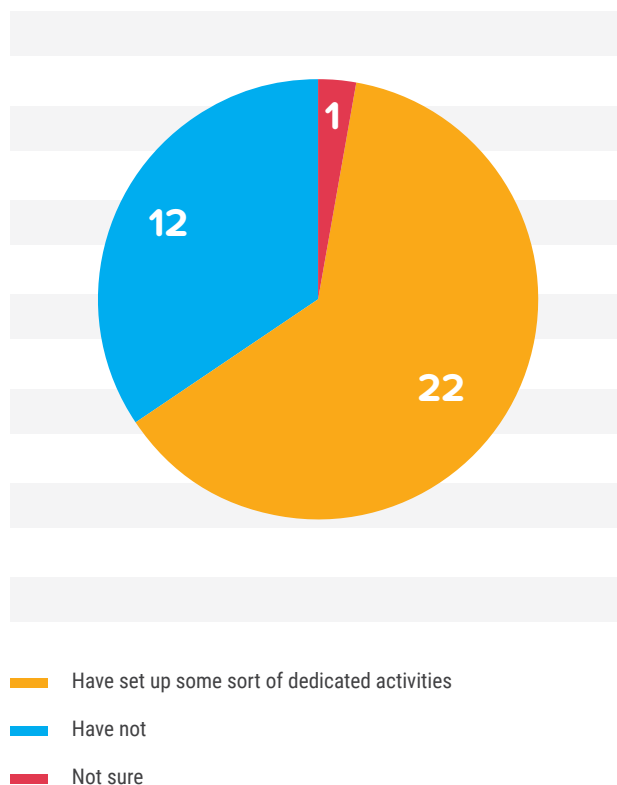
- In 2017, the project "Bridge" in the city of Mariupol established a clinic to help young people with mental issues
- In 2018, the project "Way to the future" was set up to increase entrepreneurship among young women dealing with social issues.
- In June 2019, the "Summer kaleidoscope" project was launched with the goal of helping teachers from the city of Shostka to broaden their competencies working in non-formal education.

All these projects helped a great number of people in the cities of Mariupol, Schostk and many other places in Ukraine.

**More information:** <https://platforma-dev.eu/project-one-akmene-district-municipality-lithuania-cities-mariupol-avdiyvkia-shostka-ukraine/>

## DEDICATED ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF NON-EU PARTNERS' EFFORTS TO LOCALISE THE SDGs

FIGURE 10. (35 ASSOCIATIONS)



Working together using a common framework and the same SDG language can help identify potential approaches for reinvigorating partnerships with peers across the globe and even encouraging the creation of new ones. Although 12 associations indicated that they had not set up any specific activities to support their non-EU partners in their efforts to localise the SDGs or were not aware of any such attempts, 22 responded in the affirmative.





### PROMOTING LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM INITIATIVES BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES IN PORTUGAL AND CAPE VERDE

By means of coherent and planned development, with the support of international cooperation projects, it is possible to conceive a sustainable model of tourism development that corresponds to the populations' social and economic expectations while also preserving their local environment and traditions. Indeed, the natural and cultural assets of Maio island are precisely the tourism resources that sustainable local tourism initiatives, such as the project for the Tourism Promotion and Requalification of Maio Island, are created to protect. This project (Projeto de dinamização e requalificação turística na Ilha do Maio) supports the development of the island of Maio in the archipelago of Cape Verde as a sustainable tourism destination, with the help of local entrepreneurship and urban renewal. This project is an example of international cooperation for development whereby the

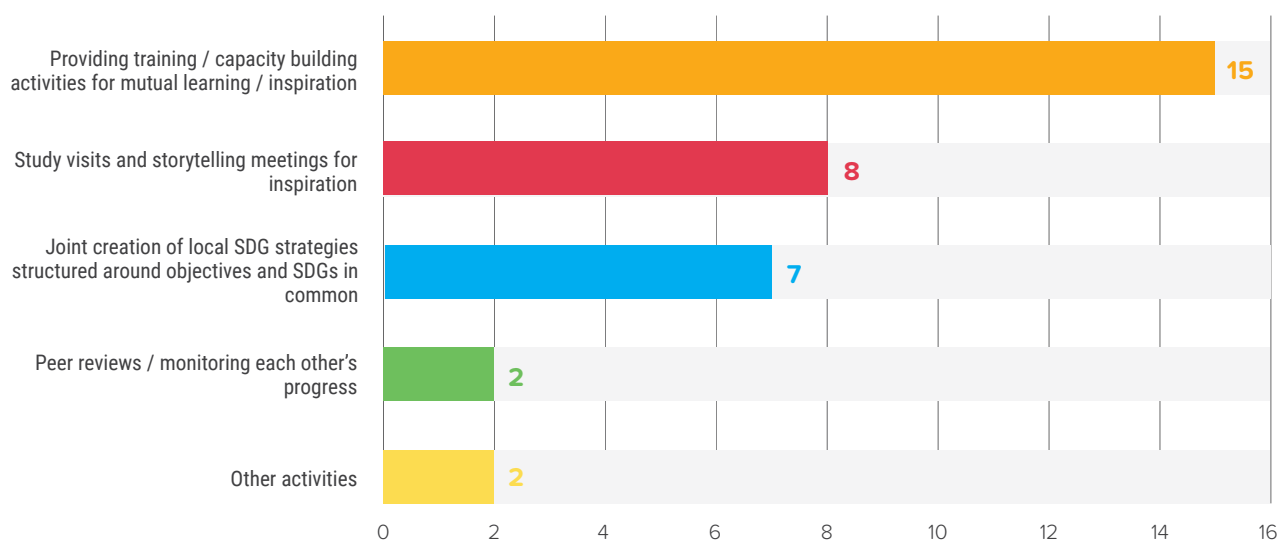
combination of the knowledge and experience of the different partners involved plays an essential role. The municipality of Maio (Câmara Municipal do Maio) and the municipality of Loures (Câmara Municipal de Loures – Portugal) have in fact been cooperating since 1993.

This project cooperation, in partnership with Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr, a development NGO, has worked hard to channel Câmara Municipal de Loures' knowledge and experience in specific areas, particularly urban planning and rehabilitation but also in municipal planning and development to make use of the expertise of Câmara Municipal do Maio's technicians. Furthermore, the project was successful in building up productive dialogue, cooperation and exchange of experiences in other areas, in accordance with the expertise of each partner.

**More information:** <https://plataforma-dev.eu/project-912-loures-portugal-maio-cape-verde/>

### DEDICATED ACTIVITIES OF ASSOCIATIONS IN SUPPORT OF NON-EU PARTNERS' EFFORTS TO LOCALISE THE SDGs

FIGURE 11. (35 ASSOCIATIONS)



Of the latter, a majority of 15 associations,<sup>71</sup> supported their peers in partner countries by organising training and capacity-building activities for mutual learning. Eight associations,<sup>72</sup> relied on study visits and storytelling meetings with their peers for inspiration on how to localise the SDGs. Seven respondents,<sup>73</sup> worked with their peers to jointly come up with local SDG strategies based on shared objectives and SDGs in common, compared to only three associations in 2020. Last but not least, two associations,<sup>74</sup> conducted peer reviews with their counterparts and also monitored each other's SDG progress. Four had done so prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020.

Increasingly, associations have also been holding exchanges with other associations around the world to find solutions on how best to support their LRG members, engage with national governments and find innovative ways to engage with different stakeholders and raise awareness. VVSG had exchanges with the National Association of Municipal Areas of Benin (ANCB) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) on how to enhance their SDG localisation efforts.

In response to our query of how they would assess their non-EU or non-European partners' knowledge pertaining to the SDGs, nine associations<sup>75</sup> informed us that they were not completely sure of their peers' awareness level on the 2030 Agenda. Eight association<sup>76</sup> indicated that their peers used the SDGs as a reference, but that they did not necessarily rank high in their work priorities. An interest in linking the SDGs to decentralised cooperation has been growing and the PLATFORMA coalition, together with its partners, have identified a clear need for tools and capacity-building to help raise awareness of what they can represent in terms of opportunities for partners and for the 2030 Agenda.



#### LEARNING MODULE 4 ON DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AND THE SDGs - BECOME A TRAINER

Where does your association stand on international cooperation and how is it linked to the 2030 Agenda? How can you make the most of the SDG framework by entering into a new cooperation? If any of these questions sound familiar, we invite you to look at the newly available "Learning Module 4: Localizing the SDGs through Decentralized Cooperation", by UCLG Learning, together with PLATFORMA and an array of partners. This instructive learning tool for trainers proposes an integrated approach to decentralised cooperation in line with SDG targets to help practitioners become active and effective partners. The module also provides a foundation for conducting learning events, such as workshops where city officials, local and regional leaders and other stakeholders receive specific training, designed to increase awareness of the pivotal role that decentralised cooperation can bring to LRGs and their respective associations.

- Read the module: [www.cglu.org/sites/default/files/module4.pdf](http://www.cglu.org/sites/default/files/module4.pdf)
- Sign on to become a trainer or receive more information: [bit.ly/3s3YkYI](https://bit.ly/3s3YkYI)

<sup>71</sup> Albania, Belgium, Germany, Kosovo, Latvia, NALAS, North Macedonia, Netherlands (LBSNN), Norway, Serbia, Spain (FAMSI, FEMP, Fons Mallorquí), Turkey (TBB and MMU).

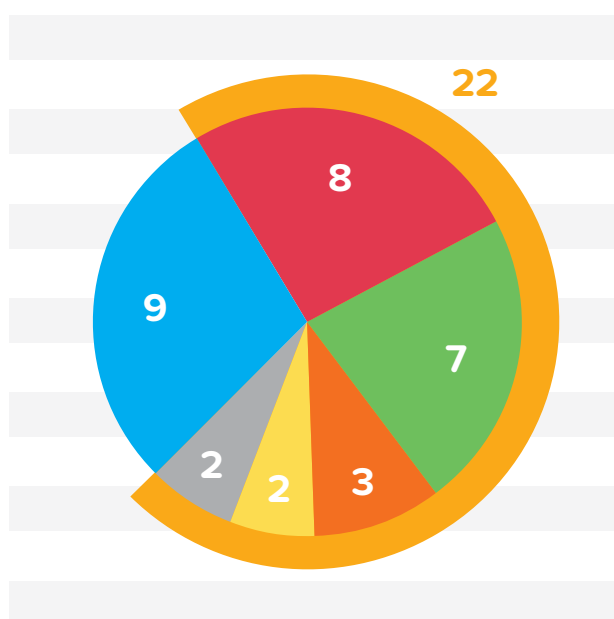
<sup>72</sup> Bulgaria, France (AFCCRE), Latvia, NALAS, Netherlands (LBSNN), Spain (FAMSI and FEMP), Sweden.

<sup>73</sup> Austria (Österreichischer Städtebund), Georgia, Italy, Kosovo, Netherlands (LBSNN), Norway, Spain (FAMSI).



#### KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT OF NON-EU / NON- EUROPEAN PARTNERS ABOUT THE SDGs

FIGURE 12. (31 ASSOCIATIONS)



- They use the SDGs as a reference, but they are not high in their work priorities
- They are willing to work with you using the SDG framework
- They know the SDGs exist, but are unfamiliar with their details
- They align their work priorities with the SDGs
- Other
- I don't know

<sup>74</sup> Italy and NALAS.

<sup>75</sup> Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Serbia, Slovenia, United Kingdom (LGA).

<sup>76</sup> Albania, France (AFCCRE), Germany, Kosovo, Lithuania, NALAS, Norway, Spain (FAMSI).



Seven associations<sup>77</sup> reported that their partners aligned their work with the SDGs and three others<sup>78</sup> declared that their partners were aware of the global framework but unfamiliar with the details.

Other nuances were provided by our Spanish respondent from FEMP, who stressed that it was difficult to give an overall answer to such a question as it depended on both the country and the type of partner. They did note however that national associations in partner countries overall were aware and did have good knowledge regarding SDG localisation.

So, how do local and regional governments and their associations work with the different SDGs in their partnerships? Do they focus on specific goals and, if so, which ones? Of the 39 associations responding, 17 indicated<sup>79</sup> that they did not work with specific goals but in the overall spirit of the 2030 Agenda, putting policy coherence, multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance as well as the transversal dimension of the SDGs at the core of their efforts. However, 6 associations<sup>80</sup> stated that they did work directly on the SDGs and on all 17 of them.<sup>81</sup>

Specifically, 8 associations<sup>82</sup> indicated that they worked on certain SDGs with their international peers. In contrast to 2020, when only 5 goals were identified in 2020, 14 out of the 17 were mentioned in this year's responses. The specific goals mentioned by respondents in 2021 include:

- **SDG 1** (Fons Mallorquí, Euskadi, LBSNN)
- **SDG 2** (Fons Mallorquí)
- **SDG 3** (NALAS and Euskadi)
- **SDG 4** (Fons Mallorquí, Euskadi NALAS)
- **SDG 5** (Fons Mallorquí, Euskadi, FEMP, NALAS, Georgia)
- **SDG 6** (Fons Mallorquí, Euskadi, NALAS, Georgia)
- **SDG 7** (NALAS, Georgia)
- **SDG 8** (Georgia, Euskadi, LBSNN)
- **SDG 10** (NALAS)
- **SDG 11** (NALAS, Georgia, FEMP)
- **SDG 12** (Fons Mallorquí)
- **SDG 13** (Fons Mallorquí, NALAS, Georgia, LBSNN)
- **SDG 16** (Georgia, Cyprus, Euskadi, FEMP, LBSNN)
- **SDG 17** (NALAS, Euskadi, FEMP, LBSNN)

## DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AND SPECIFIC SDGs

FIGURE 13. (8 ASSOCIATIONS)



<sup>77</sup> Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands (LBSNN), Spain (Fons Mallorquí), Turkey (MMU), Ukraine.

<sup>78</sup> France (CUF), North Macedonia, Sweden.

<sup>79</sup> Albania, Austria (Städtebund), Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France (AFCCRE), Kosovo, Lithuania, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Spain (FAMSI), Turkey (TBB), Ukraine, United Kingdom (LGA and COLSA).

<sup>80</sup> Germany, Italy, Latvia, Serbia, Sweden, Turkey (MMU).

<sup>81</sup> Even though AFCCRE (France) has been working on all the principles of the 2030 Agenda, they decided in 2021 to begin working on an extensive analysis of their efforts in connection with SDG 17, to be carried out with Comité 21 (a French organisation promoting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda). This analysis is still underway.

<sup>82</sup> Cyprus, France (CUF), Georgia, Luxembourg, NALAS, Netherlands (LBSNN), Spain (FEMP and Fons Mallorquí).



#### **“SHAPING FAIR CITIES” PROJECT BETWEEN MUNICIPALITIES IN ITALY AND MOZAMBIQUE**

The “Shaping Fair Cities” project is the embodiment of the spirit shown by local and regional government representatives at the events marking the adoption of the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in New York in 2015. It recognises, highlights and enhances the role that all cities and sub-national governments need to play in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The project mobilises local and regional governments in implementing SDGs, in particular: SDG 11 (making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), SDG 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies), SDG 13 (combat climate change and its impacts), incorporating a strong gender approach (SDG 5) during times of migration and refugee movements, a theme that is being taken into account in mainstream development policies for the first time.

The project raises awareness and actively involves local decision makers, civil servants, grassroots organisations and citizens in localizing the SDGs in eight European countries and two EU partner countries through a pan-European multi-stakeholder partnership. In doing so, the action promotes the crucial role of local governments in the implementation of a new set of goals, paving the road to specific local 2030 Agenda plans.

**For more information:** [shapingfaircities.eu](https://shapingfaircities.eu) and <https://platforma-dev.eu/project-712-emilia-romagna-region-italy-pemba-municipality-mozambique/>



#### **DON'T MISS THE 3<sup>RD</sup> EDITION OF THE PLATFORMAWARDS**

Winning a prize at the PLATFORMAwards offers the perfect opportunity to shine a spotlight on decentralised cooperation projects.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> ceremony, held in 2020 awarded several amazing international projects covering a wide range of topics relating to the 17 SDGs, such as water, gender, good governance, education, mobility, waste, and many more. The 26 applications received by PLATFORMA represented a total of 74 local and regional governments from 11 EU Member States and 19 partner countries in Africa, Latin America and the European Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood. For those who missed it, an animated video of the 2021 winners is available: [bit.ly/3vsQAKz](https://bit.ly/3vsQAKz)

The jury, made up of independent elected officials and experts from various institutions, including the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the UN, all agreed that trust, innovation and mutual learning were three key components that make local and regional cooperation a success.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the PLATFORMAwards is set to take place in the spring of 2022, so stay tuned for upcoming information on how to apply and follow the proceedings on our website: [platformawards.eu](https://platformawards.eu)

# **PLATFORMA WARDS**

# 4 OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF



## Obstacles

(Challenges ranked by order of selection from highest to lowest):

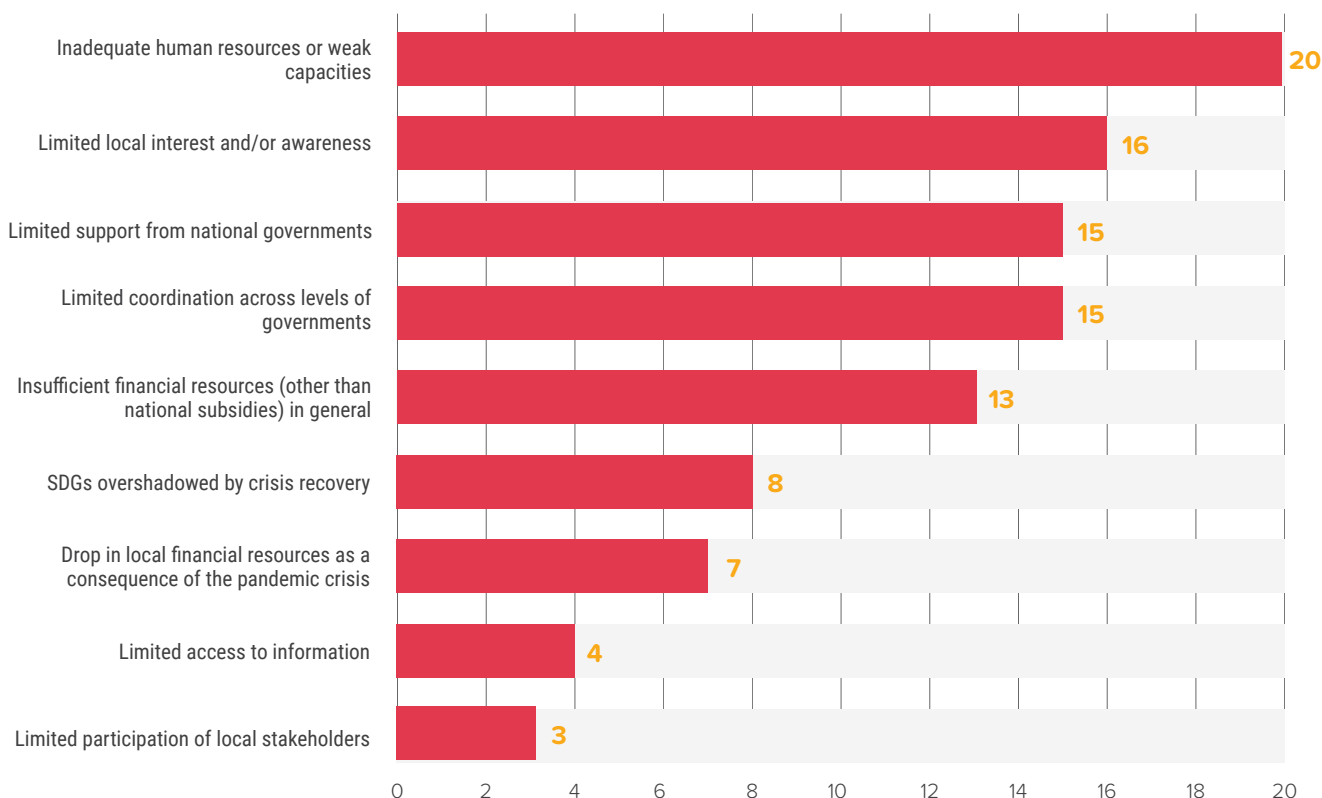
- 1 Inadequate human resources or weak capacity of municipalities (e.g. for planning, data collection and management, project design, etc.)
- 2 Limited local interest and/or awareness (e.g. local governments do not understand the SDGs or do not find them relevant, or they view them as a fresh additional burden, not well adapted to the local priorities)
- 3 Limited coordination across levels of governments (e.g. overlapping of responsibilities, difficulty in coordinating between national and local plans, etc.)
- 4 Limited support from national governments (in terms of administrative and financial support, capacity building, human resources...)
- 5 Insufficient financial resources (other than national subsidies) in general
- 6 SDGs overshadowed by the health crisis and recovery
- 7 Drop in local financial resources as a consequence of the pandemic (reduction in local revenue generated by taxes, fees, etc.)
- 8 Limited access to information
- 9 Other (such as lack of disaggregated and available data, etc.)
- 10 Limited participation of local stakeholders

### Additional obstacles include:

- Political sensitivities and priorities (importance of elections, sometimes insufficient capacities, profiling, reluctance in connection with data and targets, ...)
- Complete lack of knowledge and information about the SDGs among the population at-large. However, in some countries notably from Eastern Europe, this lack of awareness is probably rooted in an underlying mistrust of the whole concept of the SDGs at the decision-making levels and in society overall
- Lack of tools to help transform the intention to use the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs into an operational framework that leads to its actualisation

## MAIN OBSTACLES

FIGURE 15.





# WORKING WITH THE SDGs



## Opportunities

(Challenges ranked by order of selection from highest to lowest):

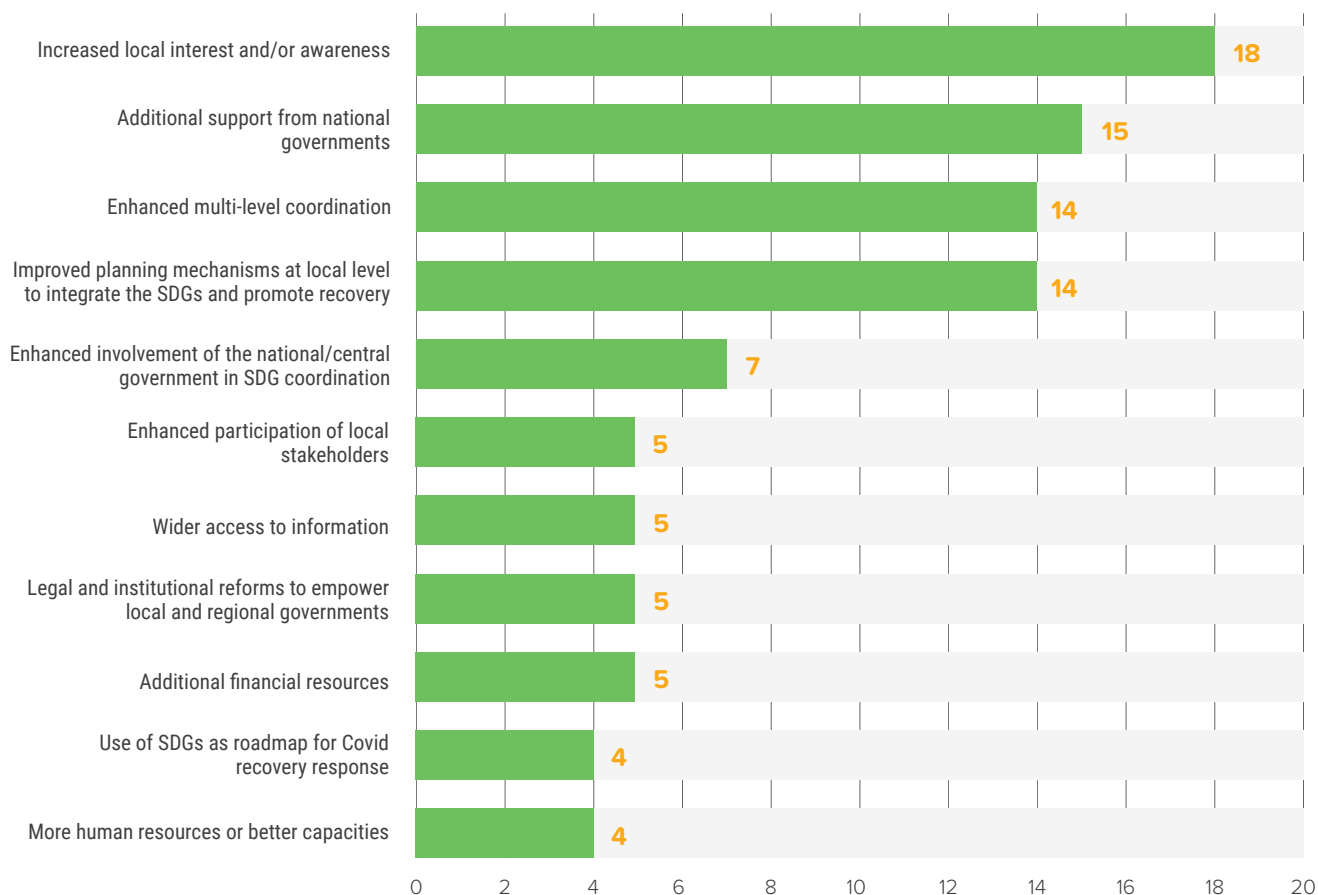
- 1 Increased local interest and/or awareness (e.g. local governments gain a better grasp of the SDGs or find them (more) relevant; they no longer view the SDGs as a burden, SDGs are adapted to the local priorities)
- 2 Greater support from national governments (in terms of administrative and financial support, capacity building, human resources...)
- 3 Improved planning mechanisms at local level to integrate the SDGs and promote recovery
- 4 Enhanced multi-level coordination
- 5 Better involvement of the national/central government in SDG coordination
- 6 Introduction of legal and institutional reforms to empower local and regional governments (e.g. for the localisation of the SDGs and recovery from the pandemic)
- 7 Additional financial resources (e.g., to support investments in basic services and local development)
- 8 Newfound use of the SDGs as a roadmap for responding to the Covid-19 crisis
- 9 More human resources or better capacities;
- 10 Wider access to information
- 11 Enhanced participation of local stakeholders (e.g. to support SDGs and the recovery process)

### Additional opportunities include:

- Enhanced multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral work (coordination within local government); shared language to enter into discussion and collaborate with stakeholders

## MAIN OPPORTUNITIES

FIGURE 14.



## CONCLUSION

The years 2020 and 2021 have indeed been most singular years. A “new normal” is being sought, and in the midst of health emergencies, social and economic crisis management and development of digital connections, “building back better” has already been declared a priority for local, intermediate, regional, national, European governments and international institutions. All levels are focused on ensuring that this historic global crisis can ultimately also become an opportunity to make things better and inspire deep-rooted transformational change.

Is the 2030 Agenda a solution? If there is to be only one takeaway from this publication, it should be that an increasing number of LRGs in Europe, and their associations, are taking the lead in implementing what is still seen by others as just “a global agenda”. Those on the forefront however appreciate how the 2030 Agenda and its Goals can be drawn on to transform their daily work, policies and public services into **inclusive** approaches; in time, their work may resonate with other governments in the world, become **interconnected** through a shared vocabulary used in a common goal of reaching global targets and objectives; thus, they form a link between **citizens and the world**. By monitoring and reporting on their progress, they help in determining how to continue fine-tuning and realigning their actions to suit their aspirations.

National associations play an essential role in advocating for their members with national governments, European institutions and international networks. They provide information, impart experience and promote knowledge-sharing opportunities. Their role is particularly critical when it comes to raising awareness on the benefits of working with the SDGs in medium and small cities, as well as in rural areas. Three-quarters of CEMR national associations represent the local level only.<sup>83</sup> This is in fact another strength to build on.

Moreover, since the first edition of this publication in 2018, we have witnessed a change in outlook within associations in countries where awareness was, and sometimes still is, very low. They are actively seeking to increase their knowl-

edge surrounding the 2030 Agenda, adjust their actions and raise awareness among their citizens and partners. They have even adapted their rationale regarding their role of advocacy with respect to their national governments.

In addition, implementing SDGs in a territory also helps in contributing to city diplomacy. LRGs that have already submitted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have also accomplished a great service by furthering the recognition of local and regional governments’ role on the international scene. Voluntary Subnational Reviews produced by national associations represent an innovative next step towards coordinating policy perspectives on the SDGs at local level and within a specific country for sharing with their national governments and the United Nations.

Last but not least, the transformative and sustainable dimension of implementing SDGs is evident throughout the study, regardless of whether it is internal (in the way the associations or local governments work using an inclusive approach) or external (increased multi-level, multi-stakeholder and international partnerships for instance).

However, transforming territories to align them with the SDGs will require the mobilisation of additional investment; the Global Europe initiative, the EU Green Deal, the (post-2020) EU cohesion funds and other EU instruments offer a vital opportunity to promote local investment and support sustainable development in all territories. Progressive growth in public and private partnerships is also an innovative way to induce transformation and positive developments in public policies and services.

Are the SDGs a solution? They most certainly can be, and CEMR and PLATFORMA are proud to show with this study how local and regional governments and their associations can help make the SDGs a reality in territories all across Europe, transforming them in a sustainable manner, even and especially during times of Covid-19.

<sup>83</sup> See CEMR study on national associations:

[https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_study\\_association\\_local\\_government\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_study_association_local_government_EN.pdf)

## FURTHER READING

# Don't miss our other publications on the SDGs!



Municipalities and regions take action on Global Citizenship  
Education - The road towards 2030!  
[bit.ly/2T6GuY2](https://bit.ly/2T6GuY2)



UCLG-PLATFORMA Learning module 4:  
Localising the SDGs through decentralised cooperation  
[bit.ly/2RBA4zI](https://bit.ly/2RBA4zI)



SDGs: How Europe's towns  
and regions are taking the lead  
[bit.ly/3z9sSM6](https://bit.ly/3z9sSM6)



How local & regional  
government associations  
bring the SDGs to life  
[bit.ly/3push3f](https://bit.ly/3push3f)



The 2030 Agenda  
Through the eyes of local and regional  
governments' associations  
[bit.ly/3fXYHQq](https://bit.ly/3fXYHQq)

2018

2019

2020

...

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Founded in 1951, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions is Europe's longest-established organisation of towns and regions. It brings together 100,000 local and regional governments through 60 member national associations.

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

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

CEMR advocates on behalf of local and regional governments to ensure their voice is heard at European level, while shining a spotlight on local democracy and autonomy. This advocacy work is grounded on the experience and expertise of CEMR's member associations.

[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 these actors are strongly engaged in international cooperation for sustainable development.

PLATFORMA is the hub of expertise on local and regional governments' international action, uniting the endeavours of towns and regions, their European and global networks, and regional and national associations.

Together with its partners, PLATFORMA champions the role of towns and regions in EU development policies, promotes international cooperation between municipalities and regions around the world and facilitates knowledge exchange 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 pledged to undertake actions based on common values and objectives to tackle global poverty and inequalities, while promoting local democracy and sustainable development.

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

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*A global pandemic, social crises, conspiracy theories: a veritable hurricane is blowing through the organisation of our societies, defying elected representatives. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be an answer because their framework sets a clear, common goal, entailing a shared responsibility. They aim at the implementation of public services, which are concrete results of the organisation of a society, for and by the citizens.*

*The ambition of this publication is to help understand how to apply this framework, how to make it real thanks, in particular, to the role of associations of local and regional governments in Europe. This publication contributes to overcoming this impasse and improving social harmony, in Europe and beyond.*



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