

# Sustainable Development Goals

*How Europe's towns and regions are taking the lead*



This study is based on a survey sent out in early 2018 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners. Its purpose was to collect information on how Local and Regional Government associations have been involved in the Sustainable Development Goals localisation. It is developed in the framework of the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between CEMR-PLATFORMA and the European Commission.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	P.4
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	P.5
INTRODUCTION - CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGs	P.6
1. ENSURING EFFECTIVE MULTILEVEL COOPERATION FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION	P.9
2. AWARENESS-RAISING AT THE CORE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS' STRATEGIC PLANNING	P.15
3. SUPPORTING THE CAPACITY-BUILDING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS	P.19
CONCLUSION	P.23



Would you like to know more about how municipalities, regions and their associations are at the vanguard when it comes to tackling the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Do you want to learn more about how the SDGs can be tied in to municipal policies, planning and monitoring?

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA – the pan-European coalition of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) working for decentralised cooperation – have decided to actively commit to the process of localising SDGs in Europe and in the partner countries. **Given that the Paris Climate Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals will all take place and shape our municipalities and regions in the coming years, we have decided to act now!**

Together, Europe's towns and regions and their associations can demonstrate an abundance of experience in managing the many responsibilities of subnational governments, all of which are linked to the Sustainable Development Goals: governance, gender equality, service delivery, planning, sustainable urban development, natural resources management, local economic development, etc. They also have a long-standing commitment to support their peers outside the EU in delivering sustainable development. These partnerships contribute to capacity building to engage, deliver, commit, self-renew and interact with stakeholders. As such, they play a part in leaving no one behind and in achieving international development goals.

We are convinced that global agendas have an impact on local and regional governments in Europe and that the latter are key players in achieving the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, as has been recognised by the European Commission<sup>1</sup>. The 2030 Agenda has also further highlighted the link between local policies and international development cooperation and the need for policy coherence.

The process of implementing the SDGs has only just started in Europe but there is already a plethora of relevant experiences in municipalities and regions which can be drawn on, regardless of whether this know-how is developed within the SDG framework or other sustainability frameworks.

**The achievements of all SDGs require local action and implementation.** We, European local and regional leaders, are convinced that by localising the SDGs with our partners all over the world, we can contribute in a very important and sustainable way to reaching the goals by 2030.

## Stefano Bonaccini

President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)  
President of the Emilia-Romagna Region, Italy  
Member of PLATFORMA via the Italian Section of CEMR (AICCRE)



<sup>1</sup> European Commission Communication on "Next steps for a sustainable European future" and the 2017 New European Consensus on Development.

# FOUR POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA are convinced that national, European and global associations of local and regional governments are instrumental in getting municipalities started on the Sustainable Development Goals' Agenda.

**Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) and their associations are policy-makers**, creating enabling environments for implementing and monitoring SDGs; **awareness raisers** across regional and municipal departments and among citizens; **implementers of innovative solutions** for a wide range of municipal and regional tasks and for modernising the public and private sectors; and **partnership facilitators** bringing together the relevant actors.

European local and regional governments are ready to work hand-in-hand with other levels of governments and in partnership with other stakeholders in order to achieve the SDGs. Therefore, we recommend:

## 1. Increasing participation

**Member States should support SDG awareness-raising initiatives taken by associations of local and regional governments in European municipalities and regions, and with their partners worldwide.** This will ensure the increased participation of local and regional governments as well as their citizens in the implementation of the SDGs.

## 2. Ensuring a coherent approach

**Member States and the European Commission should design mechanisms to effectively involve European local and regional governments, particularly through their representative associations, in localising the SDGs.** Their contribution to SDG national strategies, notably through national frameworks, for the design, implementation and monitoring of results should be facilitated. This will ensure a coherent approach that involves all the relevant actors in the implementation of the SDGs.

## 3. Getting the capacity

**Member States should support European associations of local and regional governments in developing technical knowledge and tools to implement the SDGs at the local level** to ensure that they will have the capacity to support LRGs in implementing the SDGs.

## 4. Implementing the SDGs locally and developing international partnerships

**European governments and international organisations should financially support European Local and Regional Governments Associations (LRGAs) that are willing to implement the SDGs locally or develop international partnerships** contributing to the localisation of the SDGs.

## CONTRIBUTING TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGs

Three years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the assertion that the SDGs represent an unprecedented opportunity to improve everyday lives overall and a sustainable future for all, CEMR and PLATFORMA have produced a joint publication on local and regional governments' work on localising the SDGs.

The SDGs' relevancy for local and regional governments is manifold:

- Adopting the SDGs implies making use of a common global framework for inclusive local and regional public policies and services through partnerships with relevant stakeholders.
- The SDGs provide a common ground and an opportunity for committing to new partnerships and developing new solutions for a range of municipal and regional tasks.
- They also provide common terms for describing and bringing about sustainable development and framing regional and municipal agendas with regard to the modernisation of the public and private sectors.

In the EU, municipalities and regions represent slightly more than half of total public investment. They have a relatively strong political mandate, handling a wide range of tasks with some degree of autonomy.

As the ones responsible for delivering the vast majority of public services, municipalities, regions and their associations are essential partners in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 and delivering on the awareness-raising, design, implementation and monitoring of SDGs.

Indeed, **many of the SDGs touch on many of the daily activities of local and regional governments**: education, health, water and sanitation, waste management, public transport, housing, gender equality, participatory urban planning, disaster risk prevention, environmental impacts, air pollution and climate change mitigation and adaptation, decentralised cooperation, etc., regardless of whether they explicitly use the SDG framework or vocabulary or not.

Consequently, CEMR and PLATFORMA have decided to get their members and partners involved, working with them to localise the SDGs in Europe and, with their global partners, worldwide. This publication is one of the supporting elements to ensure that the voice of European local and regional governments is heard at national, European and global levels.

These are the four components instrumental to our work:

1. **Awareness-raising and capacity-building among our constituencies** by organising regular training sessions and workshops on the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs;
2. **Awareness-raising among EU institutions** with respect to the role that municipalities, cities and regions play in achieving the goals;
3. **Monitoring and reporting** to ensure that the perspective of local governments is included in the national voluntary reporting process;
4. **Lobbying at international level** to convey the message of European local and regional governments to the UN system through UCLG and the Global Task Force of local and regional governments.



## What are CEMR and PLATFORMA, representative organisations for local and regional government?

- CEMR is the oldest and broadest European association of local and regional governments. This is the only organisation that brings together 62 national associations of local and regional governments from 42 European countries and represents, through them, all levels of territories – local, intermediate and regional. CEMR is also the European section of the world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through which it represents European local and regional governments on the international stage. It is also a member of the multistakeholder platform on the implementation of the SDGs in the EU chaired by European Commission's first vice-president Frans Timmermans.
- PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of 30 local and regional governments – and their associations representing them at the national, European and global levels – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation. PLATFORMA reflects the diversity of local and regional governments' realities in Europe and across the world. They are all key players in international cooperation for sustainable development.
- CEMR and PLATFORMA are both members of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF). As European and international networks, they play a key role in coordinating this multi-level governance and ensure that local governments' voices are heard in the EU institutions.

## Current situation

As a main component of the 2030 Agenda, the SDG framework appears to be more suited than the Millennium Development Goals' one (MDG) to a local perspective and the need for collaboration with local and regional governments has been stressed by the international institutions. It does indeed have a local focus so it can be adapted to fit local and regional governments' strategic plans.

Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the SDG framework has the potential to bring about local development by involving local and regional governments and their associations in the process as it asserts a shared responsibility among all levels of government. Local and regional governments are aware of their central role and are eager to contribute in all respects to reach the global sustainable development objectives.

This report aims to highlight good practices in local and regional governments' domestic and international actions for the SDGs.



It also focuses on some of the challenges local and regional governments have been facing in their day-to-day work with the SDGs and how CEMR and PLATFORMA, national governments, the EU and international institutions can help overcome obstacles to achieve their implementation at local and regional levels.

## Methodology

A survey was developed, made up of forty-three questions and divided into three parts, each one focusing on a distinct topic. The three main parts address different phases of the localisation process: awareness-raising, strategic planning, and monitoring. It was sent out in early 2018 to CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners. Its purpose was to collect information on how LRGAs have been involved in SDG localisation.

The study covers countries from the north, south, east and west of Europe and is based on 18 responses from national associations of local and regional governments: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldavia, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

It is important to note that the responses reflect the views of local government associations that are already quite familiar with the SDG framework and the importance of its localisation. Even so, some respondents are still in the early stages of their experience with the SDGs and their answers therefore reflect the needs and priorities of associations not very active yet in this area, but willing to make a change and support their members in this direction.

The analysis concentrates on the link between SDG implementation and effective multilevel collaboration (Part 1), the role of awareness-raising actions (Part 2) and how the capacities of local governments and their associations can be built upon and further supported by other levels of governance (Part 3).



#LocalizingSDGs



# PART 1

ENSURING EFFECTIVE MULTILEVEL  
COOPERATION FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The results of the survey highlight the fact that local and regional government associations are, for the most part, willing to engage further in the process of supporting the implementation of SDGs at local level and are aware that without the commitment of local governments, this global agenda will fail. However, they face structural challenges in implementing the SDGs, both in terms of technical needs and a general lack of coordination between different levels of governance: local/regional, national, European and international.

### Supporting a clear and action-oriented approach to the SDG framework

A general overview of the survey's responses allows us to assert that the local and regional government associations are knowledgeable about the Sustainable Development Goals framework. In this regard, broad consultations led by CEMR and PLATFORMA when the goals were being drawn up seem to have raised the awareness of local and regional governments of the SDGs. It appears nevertheless that despite this general familiarity, their incorporation into the work of the associations presents various challenges. In general, their direct application in the day-to-day work is not always evident (53% of the respondents) and entails the difficult alignment of national indicators that can correlate to each SDG target. Indeed, the respondents perceived this global framework as being too conceptual with regard to the concrete applications needed locally. This abstract view constitutes one of the main challenges in transposing the SDGs into concrete local actions and plans.

The inherent challenge in this situation is how to adapt the framework to fit in with the work of local and regional governments and their associations. The drafting of strategic plans to implement SDGs still encounters some obstacles such as greater but still insufficient knowledge of the SDGs among the political leadership. This difficulty can be alleviated by supporting local and regional governments and their associations through the allocation of human and financial resources to concretely implement SDGs on the ground. This would enable them to efficiently direct the whole process of localising SDGs.

This observation raises the following question: how can the work carried out by local and regional governments be promoted further and awareness raised internally? Going beyond a perceived theoretical framework requires both new tools and new mindsets in order to make the SDGs a priority in local policy making.

#### RECOMMENDATION

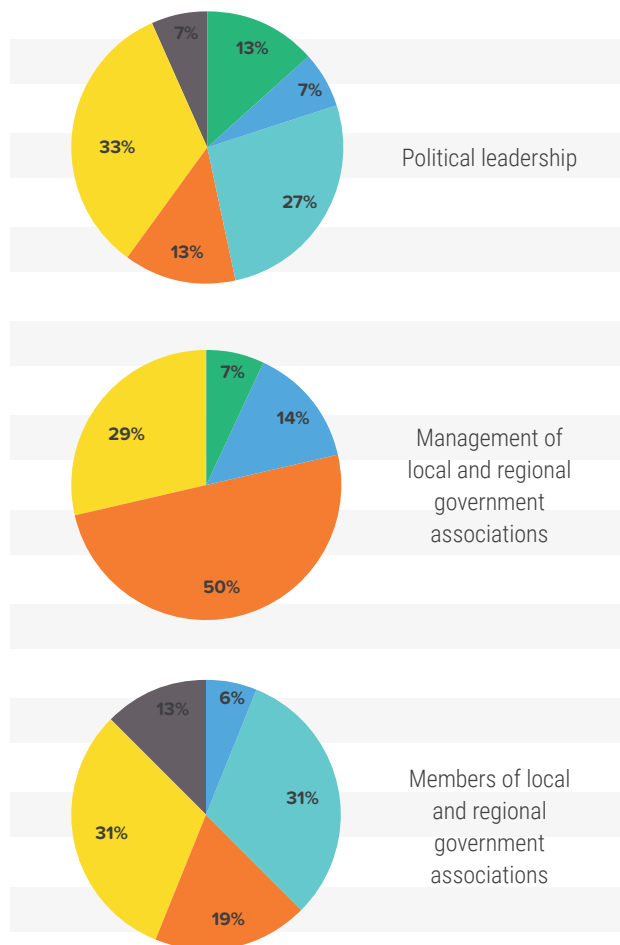


Data show that developing awareness-raising activities is a first crucial step towards achieving the 2030 Agenda objectives. National associations of local and regional governments should work hand in hand with central governments in identifying awareness-raising national indicators.

**"The SDGs provide possibilities to work in an integrated manner, across sectors and with various stakeholders"**

VNG, the Netherlands

#### Level of awareness about the SDGs\*



\* according to local and regional government associations.

- Offer training / classes / speaking points for elected leadership on the SDGs  
extremely aware
- Alignment of the work programme with the SDGs  
highly aware
- Use the SDGs in the work  
moderately aware
- Well informed about the SDGs but are not in the work programme  
somewhat aware
- Barely know that the SDGs exist  
slightly aware
- Not at all aware of the existence of the SDGs

According to the first part of the survey pertaining to the respondents' structural organisation, a majority have an international affairs department that is in charge of these questions. While this shows how the SDGs are still perceived as global interests very much linked to international cooperation, it can also prove difficult for departments working on international issues to mainstream the SDGs across their organisation, including in sectoral departments.

There is also a need to work with data collection specialists or urban planners assigned to the international affairs unit; this would be necessary to fill this gap with the technical specialists and experts needed to ensure an action-oriented approach to the SDG framework.

**“ Because of the need to raise awareness, the SDGs are sometimes perceived only as an issue for the International relations department. But the SDGs are about cross-sectoral issues!”**

ZMOS, Slovakia

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs call for different departments to work together using an interdisciplinary approach. Exploring ways to work jointly across various departments could be a solution to the current problems regarding coordination and work on the SDGs within LRGs.

The nomination of local political leaders as ambassadors for the SDGs at the local level has proven to be successful in bringing together different departments and in ensuring the overall coherence of local policies in keeping with the Agenda. Similar results from cross-sectoral work have been observed in LRGAs when the priorities regarding the integration of the SDG framework were established by the Secretary General or Director.

#### RECOMMENDATION



Local implementation of such objectives requires political leadership and specifically designated managers in order to facilitate collaboration and to act as the link between a global – and somehow conceptual – framework, cross-sectoral stakeholders and local specificities.

#### Strengthening the multilevel coordination

Our survey indicated another major challenge, namely the lack of coordination with central governments. For instance, although there is a national framework for the implementation of the SDGs in most countries, LRGAs stated that they would like their central government to be more open, transparent and inclusive towards external contributions when it comes to defining national priorities

and the agenda of the SDGs, identifying needs or establishing the monitoring and reporting methodologies.

Central governments appear to be taking steps to consult local and regional government associations on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, but, in some cases, they haven't created inclusive and formal dialogue structures or at times fail to consult them. However, collaboration structures exist for 50% of the LRGAs who responded, which help them to concretely contribute to national strategies. Nevertheless, such structures are usually far from being completely open, inclusive and formalised, and consultation of the local level does not take place systematically.

Dialogue and consultation structures are necessary to enable associations to participate in cross-sectoral round table discussions and to become key stakeholders in the planning, implementing and reporting of actions and results. They also foster long-term working relationships and promote the solicitation of contributions not only during the initial stages but throughout the implementation and monitoring phases.

As a result, these forms of cooperation and dialogue strengthen the links, not only with different departments at governmental level but also with key stakeholders such as civil society organisations (CSOs), the academic community or the private sector as well. Moreover, they effectively raise the profile of local and regional governments and their associations as essential players with respect to most SDG-related topics.



#### GOOD PRACTICE

Queen Mathilde of Belgium acts as SDG ambassador for the United Nations. But locally too, there are plenty of SDG ambassadors, like the city of Ghent, talking about the SDGs, making speeches, having debates and stimulating action in their municipalities.

Discover the Belgian SDG-voices  
[www.sdgs.be/nl/sdg-voices](http://www.sdgs.be/nl/sdg-voices)

**“ In Scotland, most strategic decisions for a given local area need to be, by law, coproduced between the municipality and the other significant public and private players in that geographical area”**

COSLA, Scotland

Interestingly, an active and close collaboration with central governments appears to be linked to a higher level of awareness of the SDGs among the LRGAs. This implies that internal training and awareness-raising campaigns can arguably contribute to a stronger position within the main decision-making spheres with respect to implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

**RECOMMENDATION**



Dialogue between different governance levels and consultation structures are needed to ensure long-term collaboration and contributions not only in the initial stages but throughout the entire implementation and monitoring phases.

Furthermore, in light of the results, we can state that the respondents see the SDG framework as a positive added-value to their international partnerships (64%) as it promotes a common language and a mutual set of goals. LRGAs are aware of the opportunities afforded by decentralised cooperation actions such as the exchange of knowledge and best practices, as well as the chance to benefit from an integrated territorial development approach. This would enable them to efficiently direct the whole process of localising SDGs.

Indeed, a higher level of awareness and a strategic perspective of the SDGs among LRGAs seem to be linked to more discernment on the partners' side. This is possibly the effect of more in-depth knowledge among local and regional government associations of the SDGs overall.

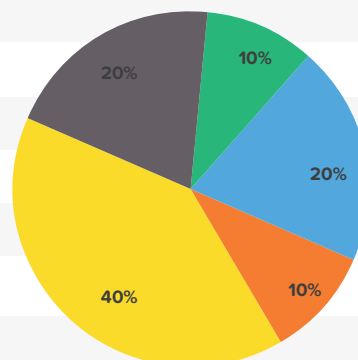
Besides the inconsistency of consultations between national levels of governance, a lack of coordination among LRGs/ LRGAs and international municipal partners is also noticeable.

**“ The SDG framework improves knowledge on global problems and makes partners more aware of the role they can play in solving them”**

Tuscany Region, Italy

The potential to mainstream SDGs through city-to-city or region-to-region cooperation projects, as a means of implementing these objectives, has not been tapped into by local and regional governments. The responses disclose a discrepancy between how the SDG framework is viewed in terms of importance and the minimal results obtained by LRGs and LRGAs.

**Awareness of the non-European partners about the SDGs\***



\* according to local and regional government associations.

- **Offer training / classes / speaking points for elected leadership on the SDGs**  
extremely aware
- **Alignment of the work programme with the SDGs**  
highly aware
- **Use the SDGs in the work**  
moderately aware
- **Well informed about the SDGs but are not in the work programme**  
somewhat aware
- **Barely know that the SDGs exist**  
slightly aware
- **Not at all aware of the existence of the SDGs**

This point is all the more noteworthy given that 60% of the respondents declared that SDG 17 “Partnerships for the goals” was a priority but have not really been implementing joint international projects or even supporting their own members in the case of LRGAs.

Some respondents raised the point that while the SDGs are eminently local, they require coordination with international organisations such as UCLG and CEMR in order to be integrated into local policy strategies (four associations explicitly referred to international and European local government networks). The primary strength of the role played by European and global networks in this regard lies in their facilitating and fostering peer-exchanges for LRGAs.



### GOOD PRACTICE

With the support of PLATFORMA, the Spanish association initiated multi-stakeholder and multi-level dialogues at the national level. In those dialogues, it has also linked international cooperation with the Agenda 2030, by associating its counterparts in Latin America.

PLATFORMA has organised five exchange meetings between four national associations of LRGs in the last two years as part of a pilot project entitled "National Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues on Development". Those are: the Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE), the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG), the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) and the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International). Such meetings enabled the four associations to learn and draw inspiration from each other's ongoing experiences with designing, implementing and reporting the SDGs.

### RECOMMENDATION



International networks play an essential role in filling a void in international cooperation projects and in better coordinating the implementation of the SDGs as they provide a framework for interaction among the different partners.

For example, they exchanged concrete practices, challenges and solutions on how to launch awareness-raising campaigns targeting their own members; on the need to closely monitor national governments' agenda setting and reporting; on how to better profile themselves in national-scaled processes, etc. Associations also found valuable support among their peers involving lobbying strategies aimed at national governments.

With these results, we were able to come up with a clear picture of the current challenges LRG associations have been facing with regard to the implementation phase of the SDGs. Identifying the main issues constitutes an essential step for understanding the entire process of localising the SDGs, with local and regional governments and their associations leading the way.

**“ Our final target is to improve decentralised cooperation between local governments, which remains quite low in Italy, except in a few regions”**

AICCRE, Italy

**“ The SDGs make the work in our international partnerships concrete and tangible; this shows how we are working together as local authorities on a broad range of topics”**

City of Ghent, Belgium



### GOOD PRACTICE

In the Netherlands, VNG International developed a practical and concise booklet" (only available in Dutch) which features the specific municipal competencies, policies and concrete actions relevant for each of the SDGs. It also highlights the role of LRGAs to ensure partnership between local, national and international levels of governance.

**Discover this publication online**  
<https://vng.nl/files/vng/5971.002-04-globalgoalsbrochure-wtk-lr.pdf>



17 PARTNERSCHAP OM DOELSTELLINGEN TE BEREIKEN

12 VERANTWOORDE CONSUMPTIE EN PRODUCTIE

10 GESLOTEN ECONOMIE EN INDUSTRIËLE INNOVATIE

10 GESLOTEN ECONOMIE EN INDUSTRIËLE INNOVATIE

3 GOEDE GEZONDHEID EN WELZIJN

16 VREDE, VEILIGHEID EN STERKE PUBLIEKE DIENSTEN

1 OEFEN ARMOEDE

14 LEVENSONDERHOUDENDE OCEANEN, ZEEËN EN KUSTGEBIEDEN

11 DUURZAME STEDEN EN GEMEENSCHAPPEN



# PART 2

AWARENESS-RAISING AT THE CORE OF  
LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS  
ASSOCIATIONS' STRATEGIC PLANNING

The survey results highlighted a positive outcome based on the perception that the SDG framework constitutes a strategic instrument for local and regional governments and their associations to make their voices heard at the national level and to become more actively involved in international activities. For instance, they showed that in comparison with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework, many associations that did not take any actions regarding the MDGs are now involved or willing to work on the implementation of the SDGs. This can be seen as greater understanding of the potential impact and the fact that while local and regional governments were not involved in the top-down approach of the MDGs, the SDGs offer new opportunities to local and regional governments to develop bottom-up strategies.

Due to an abstract perception of the framework by citizens and other stakeholders who do not work on these issues directly, as described in the first part of the analysis, the priority for awareness-raising activities is to present the SDGs as a concrete and relevant policy framework for local players in order to reduce any reticence and to stress the concrete implications for local and regional governments and their national associations.

the respondents declared that the SDGs were almost unknown in their country.

So far, LRGAs are concentrating most of their awareness-raising activities and efforts on the exchange of knowledge and best practices between municipalities. Several good practices were described by the respondents that are aimed at citizens and other stakeholders (colleagues, political leadership, CSOs, educational institutions).



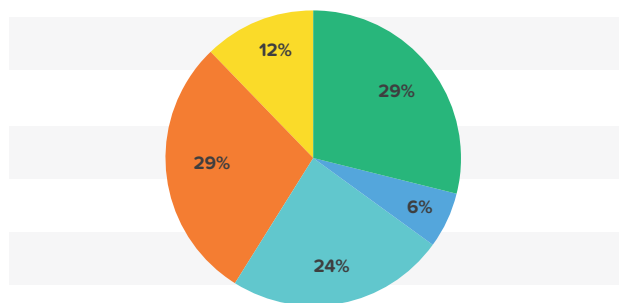
#### GOOD PRACTICE

Sustainable what? That's still a common reaction when the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are mentioned. The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has assembled 50 practical examples to introduce the SDGs to a wider audience.



**Find this publication online**  
<http://bit.ly/2Kis021>

#### How associations of local and regional governments use the SDGs in their daily work



- **Offer training / classes / speaking points on the SDGs**  
extremely aware
- **Alignment of the work programme with the SDGs**  
highly aware
- **Use the SDGs in conceptual and political work, including briefings and speaking points**  
moderately aware
- **Well informed about the SDGs, but try to acquire more knowledge**  
somewhat aware
- **Know that the SDGs exist but do not use them as such**  
slightly aware
- **Not at all aware of the existence of the SDGs**

Local and regional government associations working on this issue grasp the importance of better communications in this respect to tackle the low visibility surrounding the SDGs among citizens and other colleagues. As a matter of fact, when associations were asked to rate the degree of knowledge and understanding of the SDGs that they perceived, the results showed that citizens were the ones who seemed to have the least amount of awareness of such goals. They are consequently the priority targets of such activities. This observation also stems from the fact that 40% of

PLATFORMA has been supporting some of these practices by organising series of regional multi-stakeholder meetings to spread information about the SDGs and addressing specific relevant topics linked to them, tailored to each territory, like in Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands and Spain. Such events represent an opportunity for learning, exchanging, collecting field data (level of knowledge, best practices, etc.) and consolidating synergies with cross-sectoral stakeholders (CSOs, regional government, private sector, etc.).

Organising events to raise awareness, targeting both key stakeholders and members of associations, constitutes a necessary step in creating a common understanding of the SDGs policy framework, as well as in implementing them effectively. Moreover, associations pointed out that information and awareness-raising campaigns strengthen the coordination and collaboration between sectoral departments of the associations and with key external actors such as civil society organisations or schools.

Two additional comments can be made in this regard:

- Some associations have been taking further steps to enhance their role as SDG implementers by developing action plans, aligning their strategies with the SDG framework, collecting data and participating in reporting initiatives. Several successful initiatives have been developed showcasing the key role of national associations in forming the link between the various levels of governance.
- However, how the SDG framework is used by local and regional governments still differs from association to association, and most associations have not yet integrated it in a concrete way into their everyday work. Associations still in the early stages have been focusing on educating their staff and political structure about the relevance and concrete implications for the local level of the new policy framework and the fact that, for this, they count on the support of European and global networks.





### GOOD PRACTICE

The Union of Towns and Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO) run a project called Sustainable cities and municipalities for development, focused on raising awareness and promoting the involvement of cities and municipalities in development cooperation.

**Discover the project on SDG 11 in video**  
[https://youtu.be/1\\_26SC3scss](https://youtu.be/1_26SC3scss)

inclusive way from their first steps (awareness-raising activities) to the delivery of SDGs on the ground and in the assessment of the work that has been carried out. It therefore calls for continuous support and dialogue with the national governments, cross-sectoral stakeholders and other LRG networks.

**“ We have gathered 40 examples from municipalities and regions on how they work with the SDGs. We now have a common language and communication platform to discuss challenges and solutions when it comes to sustainable development ”**

SALAR, Sweden

Despite this observed disparity, it may be noted that most of the associations showed interest and expressed their willingness to learn more about the framework in order to increase their capacity to conduct training sessions and to provide support to local and regional governments in their countries. Overall, associations have seemed eager to become involved and/or to increase their commitment to localising the SDGs.

SDG localisation is a long-term and integrated process, which cannot be limited to one-off projects. To deal with the challenges disclosed in this report, LRGs and LRGAs must be supported in an



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# PART 3

SUPPORTING THE CAPACITY-BUILDING OF  
LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND  
THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

The results of the survey made it possible to identify gaps and insufficient results in terms of monitoring and reporting. Once again, LRGAs expressed their interest in acquiring knowledge pertaining to assessment methodology as well as their willingness to implement a reporting process as part of their work plan, but it would seem that the technical tools and guidance necessary have been lacking.

While the perception that the need to use data is important (91% of the responses), even amongst the most committed associations, there is no capacity to deliver. This seems to widely correlate with a lack of coordination and an insufficient exchange of information with the central government regarding the reporting and monitoring framework of the SDGs at the national level, and even the procedures and calendar of the national progress reports in some cases.

The LRGAs were in fact questioned about their awareness regarding the Voluntary National Report on the implementation of the SDGs to be presented to the United Nations by the central governments. It appears that most LRGAs knew about this report (63% of the responses) and were asked to contribute to reporting exercises through open consultations or, in some specific cases, by participating in national platforms and multi-stakeholder round table discussions. Their contributions however were generally passive and only consisted of providing some comments on the draft.

The contributions varied according to the willingness and capacity of the central government to set up an inclusive process.

**RECOMMENDATION**

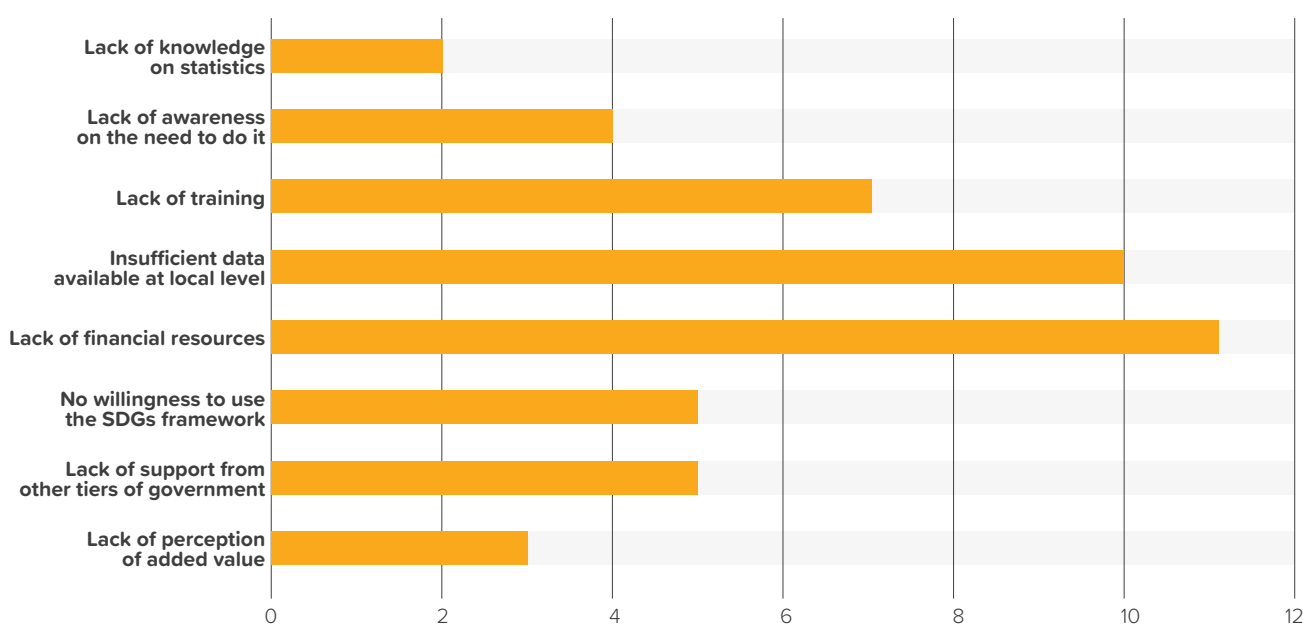


It is necessary to strengthen the links between central governments and LRGAs in order to foster greater contributions to national SDG strategies and to make them key stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of the results.

With regard to their own members, the level of specific support provided by LRGAs for monitoring and reporting at the local level remains weak (four associations never provided any support, while another provided occasional support and only one gave constant support), but it is important to note that this is changing for most of the local and regional government associations (seven in total).

We can conceivably link this observation to the above-mentioned lack of information on the global and national monitoring frameworks. LRGAs are facing technical difficulties in providing concrete tools or monitoring systems to support their own members due to a lack of training among association staff (one third of the responses) as well as an insufficient amount of data available locally (60% of the responses). In addition to this, LRGAs are also facing structural challenges: they detect a lack of awareness of the importance of monitoring and reporting on the SDGs' progress at the local level (40% of the responses), a lack of willingness to use the SDG framework (40% of the responses) and they also suffer from an absence of support from other

**Main challenges to monitor the implementation of the SDGs at the local level identified by the local and regional government associations**





governmental levels during this phase of localising the SDGs (one third of the responses).

Considering these results, actions to promote awareness-raising and the exchange of information (such as the organisation of events) are crucial for the implementation and delivery of the SDGs at local level. As organisers of consultation and information campaigns and facilitators of opportunities to promote ownership of the SDGs, international networks can disseminate tools adapted to the needs of LRGs and their associations.

Moreover, these results show that increasing the level of the LRGs' and LRGAs' work on the SDGs would require increased capacities but also additional funding. This implies that despite the commitments taken by central governments when they adopted

the 2030 Agenda, under which the responsibilities of LRGs and LRGAs have notably increased, they have not yet provided the necessary tools to enable associations and local and regional governments to play a strategic and necessary role in localising and therefore implementing the 2030 Agenda to reach the SDGs' targets.

It is necessary to support local and regional governments and associations so that they might fulfil their potential, not to mention gratify their willingness to take ownership as part of the process of implementing the SDGs.

**“ No one is against the SDGs, but that doesn't mean everyone is working towards them either. We need ambassadors to implement the SDGs. Not only to raise more awareness but to achieve the goals themselves”**

City of Edegem, Belgium

**GOOD PRACTICE**

German LRGAs have developed "SDG Indicators for Municipalities", i.e. indicators for the municipal level in Germany, to ensure local governments align and track progress towards global targets. Development indicators consist of defining and describing indicators for the relevant goals and sub-goals, as well as surveying and analysing indicator parameters. Access to the indicator parameters will be provided for all cities and municipalities with a population of more than 5,000 inhabitants as well as all rural districts (*Landkreise*).





## CONCLUSION

The responses to the survey confirm that the SDGs are a relevant and effective way to engage municipalities and other local and regional government associations in different forms of cooperation at the local, regional, national and international levels.

Having stated that, it may also be stressed that **the human and financial resources to carry out the localisation of the SDGs will be one of the biggest challenges**, partly due to the difficulty of gathering data. Respondents also emphasised the **need for greater harmonisation with national action plan frameworks** as well as the importance of pursuing their joint activities further through European and international networks. Receiving support from international structures to amplify the voices and strategy of LRGAs and LRGs and **to provide tools for advocacy and training for SDG implementation on the ground is crucial**. Last but not least, the way forward is undoubtedly by **forging links and developing activities with other stakeholders** to bring about an inclusive implementation of the SDGs.

As stated in the introduction, all local governments do in fact already implement public policies and services that are part of the sustainable development goals. These goals are of public interest, and this is indeed the objective and main task of local governments: ensuring the best quality of life possible for their community. The global agendas, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals exist to make sure that all these efforts carried out at local level progress in the same direction, globally.

It is true that we live in one place, one country, but also on one Earth. Wherever we live, we share this planet, we exploit it and are accountable – together – whether we want to be or not, whether we are more on the side of the exploiters or the ones which are already feeling the consequences of this exploitation and want to act. Sooner or later, we will all have to deal with these consequences.

**The SDGs are therefore not a matter of telling local governments what to do simply because it was decided in the United Nations arena, but rather of taking advantage of what local governments do**, and providing a common global framework to ensure that there is mutual understanding, common analysis and joint solutions to both global and intrinsically local challenges. The inclusiveness and the partnership dimension of the SDGs contribute to our becoming fully aware of and truly experiencing globalisation. Local governments participating in this exercise, like the ones highlighted in this publication, are contributing to our sustainability and living together on Earth.

*Municipalities, regions and their associations are at the vanguard when it comes to tackling the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Learn more about some of the challenges local and regional governments have been facing in their day-to-day work with the SDGs. And discover how CEMR and PLATFORMA, national governments, the European Union and international institutions, can together overcome obstacles to achieve their localisation.*



PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of local and regional governments – and their associations – active in decentralised cooperation.

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