



**European Territories Localise the SDGs
Making this the Decade of Action**

Authors and List of Respondents

Publisher: PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). Author: Eva Baños de Guisasola, PLATFORMA Advisor on Sustainable Development Goals, Global Agendas and Climate. **Research:** Nathalie Noupadja, CEMR Head of Research and Studies (until 31/03/2022), with the invaluable help of Pablo Ladha, PLATFORMA Intern, and Aleksandra Garo, CEMR Research Intern. **Managing Editors:** Fabrizio Rossi, CEMR Secretary General, Marlène Siméon, CEMR Director of Operations, and Durmish Guri, CEMR Director of External Resources and Knowledge Strategy. **Editing and Liaison** with the Graphic Design Team: Hervé Devavry, PLATFORMA Communication Officer. **Copy Editing:** Penny Yim-Barbieri. **Design:** Inextremis. Information current as of March 2022.

Respondents:

Associations: **Austria:** Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (Österreichischer Städtebund); **Belgium:** Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG); **Bulgaria:** National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB); **Cyprus:** Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM); **Denmark:** Danish Regions (Regioner); **Estonia:** The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM); **Finland:** Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA); **France:** Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (AIMF); Cités Unies France (CUF); French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE); **Georgia:** National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG); **Iceland:** Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (SAMBAD); **Italy:** Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE); **Kosovo:** Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKK); **Latvia:** Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG); **Luxembourg:** Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL); **Malta:** Local Council Association Malta; **Moldova:** Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM); **The Netherlands:** Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG); International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities I (VNG International); National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands-Nicaragua (LBSNN); **North Macedonia:** Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS); **Norway:** Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS); **Romania:** Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR); **Serbia:** Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO); **Slovakia:** Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia; **Slovenia:** Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI); **Spain:** Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP); Association of Basque Municipalities (EUEL); Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI); Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació; **Sweden:** Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR); **Turkey:** Union of Municipalities of Turkey (TBB); Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU); **United Kingdom:** Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA); Local Government Association (LGA); **South-East Europe:** Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS).

Individual Local or Regional Governments, Agencies: **France:** City of Grigny, Regional Council of Brittany, Grand Est Region. **Spain:** Government of Catalonia (GENCAT); Euskal Fundoa/Basque Local Authorities Cooperation Fund and eLankidetzeta - Basque Government Development Cooperation Agency (EUSKADI - Basque Country); City of Manlleu; City of Burela; Extremadura Agency for International Development Cooperation (AEXCID); Observatorio Provincial de Sostenibilidad de Albacete; Fundación Musol; City of Bilbao; City of Sant Boi de Llobregat; **Belgium:** City of Bruges; **Germany:** Lower Saxon State Chancellery; **Portugal:** Câmara Municipal de Palmela; **Republic of Serbia:** City of Kragujevac. **Sweden:** Gävle Municipality.

Disclaimer: The analyses, results and recommendations set out in this study are those of CEMR and PLATFORMA and do not necessarily reflect the official position of any local or regional government, their associations or the multilateral institutions whose initiatives are presented herein. This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of CEMR and PLATFORMA and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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

www.cemr.eu | info@ccre-cemr.org

www.platforma-dev.eu | platforma@ccre-cemr.org

Foreword

Even though the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery phase seems to be underway, the health crisis is very much an extant reality presenting many novel challenges that subnational governments are still striving to address. Further exacerbating the situation, the war that began in February with the Russian invasion of Ukraine critically threatens the keeping of the peace on European soil and represents a serious litmus test of the true strength of our values, democracy and local self-governance. From its inception, this war seems to have sparked a potential systemic crisis of severe far-reaching consequences that have already reverberated across multiple sectors, affecting finances and global agricultural value chains, triggering migration and forced displacement, as well as harming our capacity to work together to address climate change.

As the authorities closest to citizens, local and regional governments can once again be found at the forefront managing this crisis, working closely with local communities in Ukraine and the neighbouring countries to organise shelter and evacuations, provide food and water and welcome and host the many people, mainly women and children, who are fleeing the war.

We continue to witness firsthand the essential role that local and regional governments play in our daily lives, not only by forging swift and responsive policies to global crises but also by being able to tap into solutions, benefitting for example from the assistance provided under recovery plans (e.g. the EU's Recovery and Resilience Plan), that correspond to local communities' ambitions to give fresh impetus to their economies. It now seems increasingly apparent that the post-Covid era may also present singular opportunities to devise inspired approaches that can foster more resilient, inclusive and sustainable societies in Europe.

Local and regional governments must seize these opportunities and recognise that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda provide a path forward, a solid universally accepted framework that has proven instrumental in current rebuilding efforts structured on solidarity, justice and equitability. As for localising the SDGs effectively, they must be viewed as a set of bottom-up objectives. The values of the 2030 Agenda need to be an integral visible aspect in all our actions: inclusiveness and diversity; fostering new multi-sectoral and multi-level partnerships; policy coherence; gender equality; territorial cohesion.

Only a few years feasibly remain if we are to make this a decade of action; to do so, we must work in partnership within Europe and beyond our borders. As associations representing local and regional governments, CEMR/PLATFORMA have always ensured that they not only listen to the subnational level, but give it a voice as well, and we stand ready to assist, exchange, and improve local capacity to anticipate and respond to any future crises and situations.

This report will represent that voice, and present our points at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2022, detailing how the local and regional levels have achieved positive constructive progress in their response to the current crises. Their contributions to the Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR), SDG progress reports produced by associations of local and regional governments, show their dedication even more clearly. To implement the changes we need, a strong commitment and sufficient resources are necessary at national and European levels, as well as regular dialogue in the spirit of good collaboration.

Fabrizio Rossi,
CEMR Secretary General





Acronyms

CEMR Council of European Municipalities and Regions

EU European Union

GTF / GLOBAL TASK FORCE Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (facilitated by UCLG)

HLPF / UN HLPF High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (organised by the UN)

LBSNN National Town-Twinning Council Netherlands-Nicaragua.

LNOB principle “Leave no one behind”

LRGs Local and Regional Governments LRGAs Local and Regional Government Associations

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

UN United Nations

SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

VLRs Voluntary Local Reviews (local reporting on the progress made in achieving the SDGs)

VNRs Voluntary National Reviews (national reporting on the progress made in achieving the SDGs)

VSRs Voluntary Subnational Reviews (SDG progress reports produced by associations of local and regional governments)



The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the oldest and broadest European association of local and regional governments. It is the only organisation that brings together the national associations of local and regional governments from 40 European countries and represents, through them, all levels of territories – local, intermediate and regional. Since its creation in 1951, CEMR promotes the construction of a united, peaceful and democratic Europe founded on local self-government, respect for the principle of subsidiarity and the participation of citizens. CEMR is also the European Section of the world organisation, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), through which we represent European local and regional government on the international stage.



PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of towns and regions and their associations active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation at the national, European and global levels. All of them are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development. PLATFORMA acts as a hub of expertise for European local and regional governments' international actions and works to boost European local and regional governments' contributions to EU development cooperation policies and international frameworks. PLATFORMA is an externally funded action led by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

Key recommendations

To Whom?  EU Institutions  National governments  Local and regional governments and their national associations

1



The **European Commission** should report regularly on any progress made in achieving the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** at EU level and indicate how the different levels of governance and Civil Society Organisations have contributed to this process.

2



We encourage the national **Local and Regional Government Associations (LRGAs)** to actively take part in the **Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR)** process. It is absolutely essential to have greater LRGA involvement in the national reporting and coordination mechanisms through regular dialogue and transparency. As a tool that LRGAs can use to report to their members on the overall progress regarding SDGs in a given country, the VSRs represent one way of doing this. They also complement the Voluntary Local Review (VLR) produced individually by local or regional governments that are circumscribed to a specific municipality or region.

3



LRGs are calling for the firm recognition and inclusion by national governments of the role of LRGs and their associations in the **monitoring and reporting** of progress in the implementation of SDGs at the national level, notably through VSRs and VLRs that would provide the relevant disaggregated data and information.

4



European States and the EU need to strengthen their dialogue with the subnational levels and include them in any relevant **high-level delegation meetings** (including High-Level Political Forums and others hosted by the United Nations).

5



Strengthen international cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels. By promoting multi-level governance, multi-stakeholder partnerships, policy coherence for sustainable development,¹ sharing and learning from amongst peers in Europe and further afield, changes can be seen at the local level. We continue to support the global 2030 Agenda in Europe and around the world, particularly through more innovative partnerships with peers, as well as through a model of governance based on partnerships and decentralised cooperation² and actions that make a real difference in attaining the goal of decarbonised societies, in a coherent, just and inclusive way.

6



There is still a need to localise and territorialise the SDGs, through the deployment of appropriate funds and resources, to bring about a positive impact on the ground. LRGs are better placed to directly grasp the full scope of the large-scale challenges that exist nowadays (climate, biodiversity, the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the Ukrainian conflict). Policies require a decentralised, bottom-up, territorial approach, with clear actions where all levels of government are required to contribute and every territory is given the capacity to do so. Estimates show that 65% of the 169 targets underpinning the 17 SDGs cannot be achieved without LRG involvement. They play an essential role in transforming these international ambitions into practical realities on the ground. To help LRGs successfully take on the necessary actions, supportive regulation, financing instruments, human resources, awareness-raising and development education and capacity-building that respect the diversity of regional/local conditions and territorial specificities are needed.

¹ This concept is best explained by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on its website where a wide range of publications and research discussing the topic, including the local and regional dimensions, are available

² Development cooperation between subnational governments. To learn more, see "Decentralised cooperation to achieve the 2030 Agenda - Towards a new generation of multi-stakeholder partnerships", by Agustí Fernández de Losada Passols and Anna Calvete Moren, CPMR-PLATFORMA <http://bit.ly/2S0zgPy>

Introduction

This study is based on a joint survey conducted by CEMR, PLATFORMA and UCLG, which coordinated with all its regional sections to produce a parallel global report. It was sent out in February 2022 to CEMR's members and PLATFORMA's partners. The purpose was to collect the most recent information on how and to what extent LRGAs and networks have been involved in the localisation of the SDGs, both in Europe and with their global peers, and in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. This year's survey therefore included questions on the SDGs' implementation since 2015 and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. In the last two sections, there were also additional questions regarding Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR) and decentralised cooperation.



We received **63 responses to the survey from 28 countries (37 local and regional government associations from 25 EU and 12 non-EU Member States and 18 individual local/regional governments, 9 of which were from the EU)**. Statistics pertaining to CEMR/PLATFORMA member associations have been included in this report. The ones from individual local and regional governments will be covered under the UCLG global analysis. The report will be presented at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)¹ in July 2022, where the latest Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) from Member States will also be submitted.

Local and regional governments continue to make headway at the subnational level in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, adopted in 2015. This progress will facilitate the work of their associations/networks, both regional and global (UCLG and the Global Taskforce - GTF), as they prepare the joint report "Towards the localisation of the SDGs" to be presented to the UN at the forthcoming HLPF. To date, there has always been a European report that supplements the Global Taskforce report presented annually since 2017 to the HLPF, the central forum for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This year's HLPF will be assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs and the measures taken to "build back better" to ensure that any recovery and developments are indeed sustainable. It will also be conducting an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the goals.

This year's Global Task Force survey set out to ascertain to what extent the 2030 Agenda has supported LRGs and their associations in their recovery and resilience plans. National associations have been instrumental in bolstering their members' sustainability efforts, from planning to implementation and even monitoring and reporting. Their role in localising the SDGs is more important than ever as they will be the actors making the international framework a reality in Europe and worldwide.

¹ The HLPF theme this year will be: "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". It will review SDGs 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships. The following European countries will be reporting at the HLPF this year: Andorra*, Greece*, Italy*, Latvia, Luxembourg*, Montenegro*, The Netherlands* and Switzerland** (* corresponds to previous participation and the number of country VNR reports: the 2nd (*), 3rd (**) or 4th (***) time reporting).

1. How can we make citizens and municipal officials truly aware of the stakes of SDG implementation?

The campaign work that LRGAs carry out to raise SDG awareness among citizens and municipal officials is of crucial importance. To achieve genuine progress, it is essential that the role of SDGs and their added value be properly understood. In Belgium for example, VVSG has disseminated a [guide](#) consisting of a series of videos and webinars to mobilise municipalities and introduce SDGs to them and their citizens. Carried out in cooperation with provinces and the Flemish government, these webinars also included workshops on SDG methods. Regarding European LRGAs' familiarity with SDGs, 43% of the respondents knew them well, and used them as an important reference in their strategies within the organisation; 32% were aware of them and made references to them but they were not ranked high amongst their priorities; 14% had heard of them but were not aware of their relevance, and 11% did not know much about SDGs or of any relevance to their organization.



Some 66% of the 37 associations responding had introduced some changes to their SDG-related work: in **Norway**, a Strategy for SDG implementation was adopted by KS' Executive Board, a VSR was produced and disseminated, and a taxonomic system was developed jointly with Statistic Norway in March 2022. In **Serbia**, SKGO formulated a new Strategic Plan for 2022-2025 that defines five objectives, each of which is associated with relevant SDGs. In **South-East Europe**, the SDGs have been increasingly the focus of activities relating to social policies under a 'Localising SDGs Principle' framework. In the **United Kingdom** (Scotland), the Scottish Government announced that it will make SDGs legally binding upon municipalities, and this has already had a significant impact at the local level and on the association.

In terms of adopting or developing a formal commitment, policy resolution, or strategy on the 2030 Agenda and/or on the implementation of the SDGs, approximately 80% of respondents had formulated some approach: over 40% had a strategy, policy paper, action plan and/or political statement; less than 20% had prepared reports on the localisation of SDGs in territories, including Voluntary Subnational Reviews or other sustainability reports, for their populations, national government or Parliament; over 20% of the respondents had not taken any steps, and less than 20% had recourse to other types/methods.



Examples of SDG implementation plans

Belgium: Policy Bureau on European and International Affairs' agreement to develop a VSR in support of the 2023 VNR; **Bulgaria:** NAMRB's preparation of a long-term strategic plan for its future development, using the CEMR pluriannual strategy for reference. **Denmark:** Contribution to the 2021 Voluntary National Review (VNR); **Finland:** 2020 Strategy of the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities; **South-East Europe:** NALAS Joint Declaration from the High-Level Forum «Integrating the 2030 Agenda in the Framework of Strategic Planning in Kosovo»; **Spain:** FEMP's 2030 Agenda; EUDEL's commitment to the Basque Country's multilevel 2030 Agenda; **Turkey:** TBB's Strategic Plan for 2020-2024 includes support for municipalities to build their capacity to adopt and implement SDGs; Marmara Municipalities Union's (MMU) Statute and Strategic Plan (2020-2024); **United Kingdom:** Scotland – COSLA Convention on SDG Localisation in Scotland (2019); UK VNR (2020) and Scottish VSR; England (LGA) – SDG motion. Of the 18 associations who responded to this question last year and this year, more than half experienced some changes

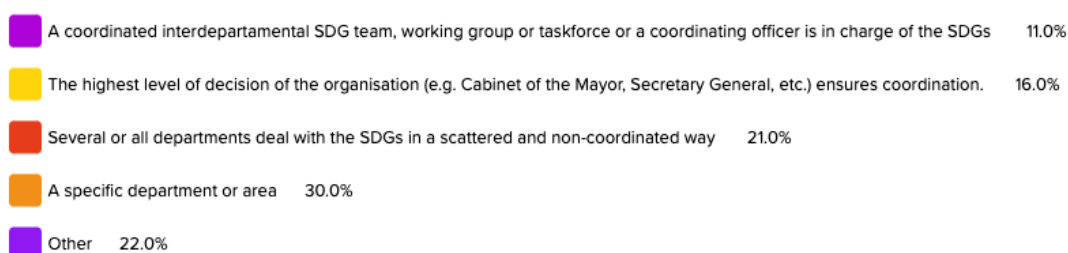
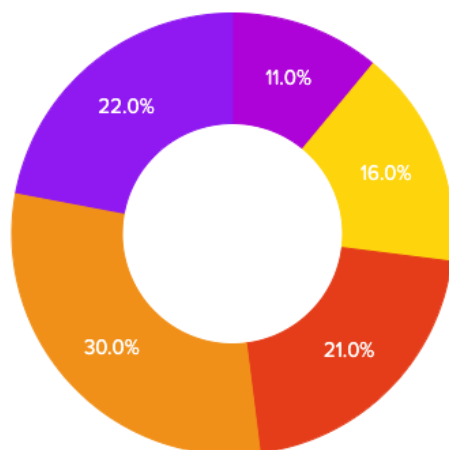
Regarding the promotion or active participation in concrete activities to raise awareness and disseminate information pertaining to the SDGs amongst the population and local stakeholders over the past year, 35% of the respondents reported that they had undertaken substantial and intensive actions to mobilize inhabitants and local stakeholders, 14% had increased mobilisation with additional partners, 11% had not carried out any promotional actions, 3% had organised meetings with municipalities focusing on SDGs and decentralised cooperation actions at the international level and 38% had conducted limited actions.



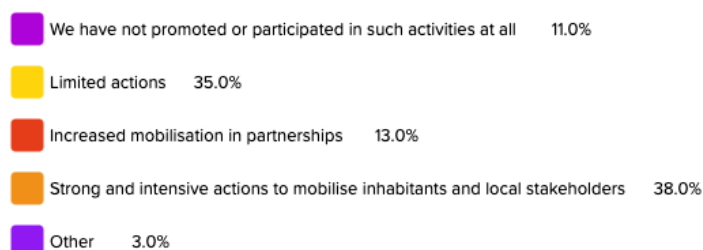
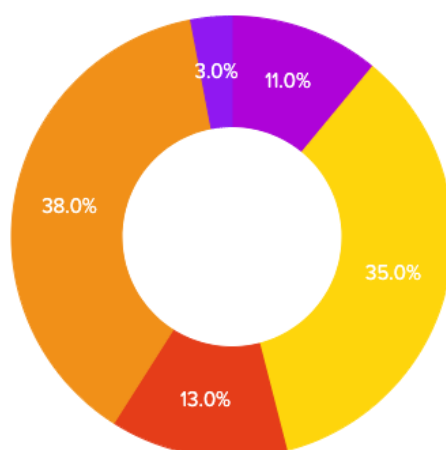
Examples of initiatives to raise awareness on the SDGs

Belgium: Week of the Sustainable Municipality, a format that LGs can use to raise SDG awareness and to spotlight good practices, e.g 'Local Heroes for Global Goals'. **Denmark:** The regions get citizens, municipalities and other stakeholders involved in the preparation of regional development strategies, and projects are almost always carried out in collaboration with external stakeholders. **Georgia:** Organisation of workshops for Georgian mayors. **Iceland:** Toolbox for the planning, implementing and measuring of SDGs and organisation of training seminars for municipalities (both for elected representatives and officials). **Italy:** Venice City Solutions 2030; HLPF side event (for Venice City Solutions) and training seminars on the 2030 Agenda and localising of SDGs by LRGs. **The Netherlands (LBSNN):** LRGs require the incorporation of Global Goals 2030 into public events as well as their inclusion in the Local Education Agenda by their local Education sector. **Malta:** Organisation of capacity-building webinars for all local elected representatives. **Norway:** To ensure concrete progress in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, KS has been working with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and other labour organisations to develop a national sustainability pledge. **Spain (EUDEL):** Coordination of 15 tractor projects propelling and promoting the SDGs by the networks of municipalities. Spain (FEMP): Agreements with universities on SDG implementation. **Turkey (TBB):** Awareness-raising activities using social media, launch of an SDG database and promotion of VLR processes and their incorporation into projects. **Turkey (MMU):** The "Golden Ant" Award 2020, which awards initiatives that contribute to sustainable urbanisation and high quality of life. **UK (COSLA):** Campaigns to localise decision-making and to align domestic policies with international standards post-Brexit. **UK (LGA):** Promotion of an SDG guide for councils (joint publication in 2020 with the UK Strategy on Sustainable Development). This year, the LGA worked with the Office for National Statistics and began producing local reports using the LG Inform data platform.

Who is in charge of coordinating the SDG-related work?



Has your organisation promoted or actively participated in concrete activities to raise awareness and disseminate SDG information among the population and local stakeholders (including your LRG members if you are a LRGA) in recent years?



2. The Voluntary Subnational Reviews at the core of the SDG process

A critical step in successfully achieving the 2030 Agenda is the reporting on any progress as well as the identification of any setbacks encountered. We learn by doing, and the subnational level is ideally placed to assess these aspects.

Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are a tool that LRGAs can use to report on their overall accomplishments as well as any obstacles, opportunities and challenges they encounter in their efforts to implement the SDGs at the subnational level in their countries. VSRs were an initiative launched by UCLG in 2020. Already, by the end of 2021, local LRGAs from 14 countries had prepared VSRs,¹ representing a total of 28,000 local governments. In 2022, the LRGAs from 10 countries (11 in 2023) are preparing VSRs.



VSRs differ from Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which are individually produced by local or regional governments and circumscribed to a specific city or region. In contrast, a VSR can encompass a country/province/region-wide analysis of the process of localising the SDGs performed at the behest of all types of local governments (big, small, urban, rural). VLRs are carried out by cities or individual local governments (125 VLRs covering 36 countries were produced by the end of 2021). A noteworthy aspect of VLRs is that it calls for a multi-stakeholder approach, whereby municipalities work with different stakeholders on their territories – thus instilling ownership. VSRs and VLRs complement each other; however, for added value, VSRs should also draw on the experiences acquired by the local governments in developing their VLR. Moreover, for some LRGAs, VLRs may prove to be a first step towards their promotion of VSRs in their country. To support this VSR process, UCLG and the Capacity and Institutional Building group have published guidelines for VSRs that compiles specific contributions and findings from the different LRGAs that have already produced VSRs, including several European LRGAs.²

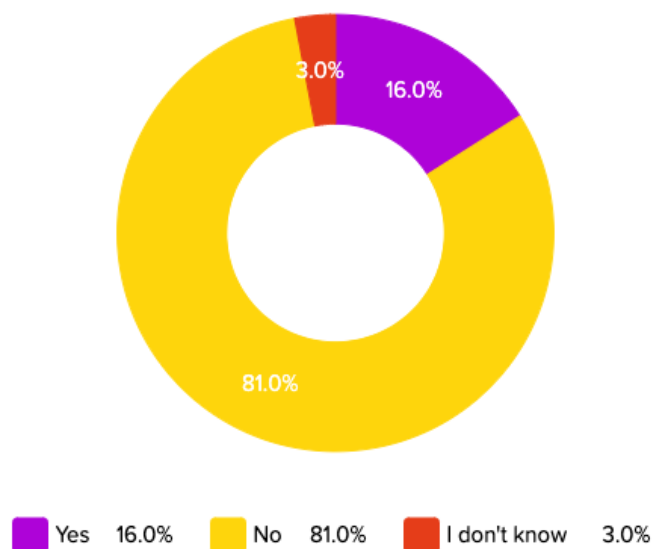
The impact of VSRs has been critical; in every country that has produced a VSR, the national governments have mentioned/integrated direct references to VSRs in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which further highlights the importance of LRGs in the reporting process.

In Europe, as of 2021, Germany, Norway and Sweden have produced VSRs. Subsequently, in 2022, Norway also developed, in partnership with Statistics Norway, a “*Taxonomy for indicators related to the SDGs*”, to encourage the subnational disaggregation of indicators.

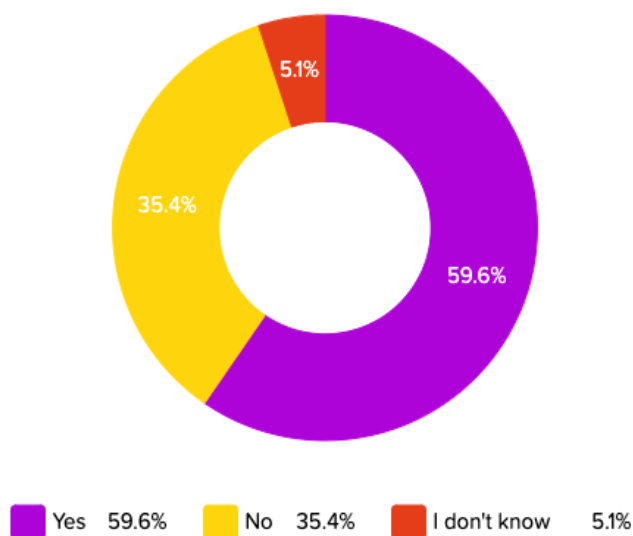
¹ Fourteen associations of local and regional governments developed their own VSRs in 2020 and/or 2021. However, there have been in fact a total of 15 VSRs, since CONGOPE (Ecuador) has already produced two VSRs so far. In 2022, an additional ten LRGAs are expected to use VSRs to report on their situation.

² UCLG and CIB (2021), Voluntary Subnational Reviews, SDG Reporting by Local and Regional Government Associations, <https://gold.uclg.org/report/localizing-sdgs-boost-monitoring-reporting#field-sub-report-tab-2>

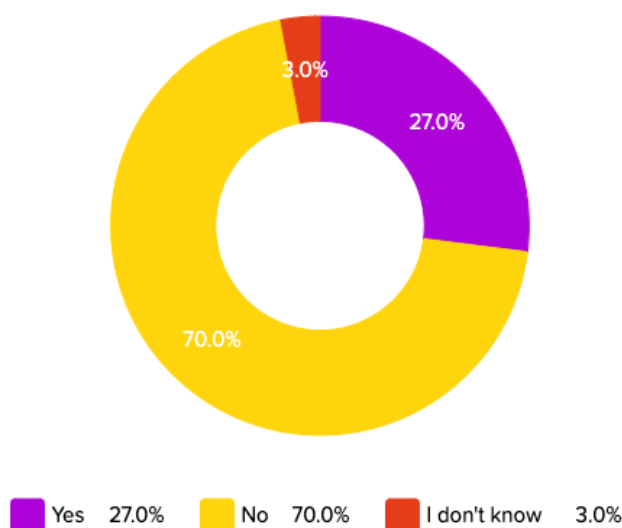
Are you involved in drafting a Voluntary Subnational Review?



Voluntary Subnational Reviews: are you aware of this tool?



Voluntary Subnational Reviews: has your association been involved in the development of a VSR?



Six CEMR countries will be using a VNR to report to the 2022 HLPF: Greece*, Italy*, Latvia, Luxembourg*, Montenegro* and, the Netherlands*³. Two of the associations from these countries are preparing their first VSR: in Italy, AICCRE has been working on its VSR with assistance from academia and its partners and, in the Netherlands, VNGi is proceeding similarly while also using their knowledge and experience to take part in VSR-coaching activities involving Cameroon, the Philippines and Sri Lanka⁴. Sixteen percent of the respondent associations have been involved in the VSR drafting process. For example, AICCRE is working on a VSR, has joined the UCLG VSR working group and is now awaiting governmental feedback about the VSR. In Scotland, COSLA attends the working group of its Scottish SDG stakeholder network. Interesting aspects that have come to light regarding the drafting of a VSR include how the process can influence reporting at the national level, cooperation with European and international LRGs and even visibility at the international level.



The way forward for VSRs

LRGAs also need capacity building that capitalises on the experiences of VSR development between 2020 to 2022 (see [Guidelines for VSRs](#), November 2021, available in three languages). Possible options for CEMR and PLATFORMA to foster VSR development include: workshops/hands-on training, online courses to reach a larger group of LRGAs and peer-to-peer coaching sessions. All these tools could make use of the 2022 UN [Handbook](#) to help prepare VNRs and the 2021 VSR [guidelines](#).

³ An asterisk indicates that the country is presenting a VNR for the second time

⁴ Work done by the CIB (UCLG Capacity Institutional Building Working Group) Working Group with the support of the UCLG World Secretariat (in particular, the GOLD team). UCLG GOLD and CIB have been facilitating the development of VSRs in some of the countries that are reporting each year to the HLPF. This year, the CIB was in charge of supporting and coaching the associations and experts from these three countries mentioned. The role was to ensure that the initial planning was followed throughout the months, with the activities planned taking place as foreseen and leading to the production of the VSR (eg. assessing the different methodologies foreseen, suggesting new actions, clarifying some ideas regarding the VSR movement, supporting with new information, etc).

3. Effectiveness of SDG national reporting and coordination mechanisms

As mentioned in Section 5, six CEMR associations will be reporting to the 2022 HLPF using Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). Four of the participating associations responded to our survey: Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, VNG presented its own report but was also active in the reporting unit appointed by the national government as well as in the drafting process. In 2019, AICCRE organised the Italian government's principal HLPF event, which is telling of the importance they attribute to AICCRE's work on the SDGs since the launch of Venice City Solutions in 2018. At the annual events organised by AICCRE presenting Venice City Solutions 2030's work, representatives of the national government are always in attendance. Under its own methodology, the VNR in fact allows AICCRE, as a member of the "Strategic Alliance for Sustainable Development", which brings together all the stakeholders (CSOs, academia, NGOs), to be an auditor of the process. It should be noted that regions in Italy are allocated their own specific space. The Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments contributed to the reporting process by responding to a survey for inclusion in their country's VNR. SYVICOL responded that they were not at all involved in the reporting process in Luxembourg.



Compared to previous years, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands reported that their level of involvement contributing to the reporting process remained the same.

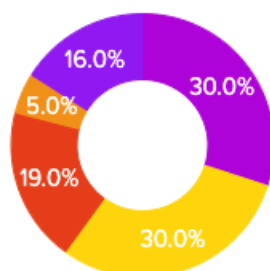


Changes in VNR involvement from 2017 to 2021

Belgium produced their first VNR in 2017. Back then, local governments were only minimally consulted or involved in the actual process and report. Belgium intends to produce a new VNR in 2023. In view of this, the **Flemish** Association of cities will be working on a VSR to be integrated into the VNR. **Latvia**: The local association received a letter from the governmental institution in charge of the SDGs informing them that they had started work on their VNR and requesting the LRGA's input and contribution. **The Netherlands** (VNG International): Although there is an annual SDG progress report at the national level in the Netherlands, there is still no official national SDG strategy. **Norway**: Norway submitted its VNR this year. Summaries of local reviews from municipalities and regional authorities that produced VLRs were also incorporated into this VNR. **Slovenia**: a VNR was prepared in 2020. Contributions from the local association were partly taken into consideration and, overall, the participatory process proved to be more inclusive than in other areas or instances involving the preparation of strategies and reports. **South-East Europe**: For the first time, through national members in Kosovo and North Macedonia, NALAS took part in the process by supporting activities of national entities providing input. This was carried out jointly under the project «Regional Learning for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in South-East Europe». **Sweden**: In 2021, Sweden submitted a VNR, a VSR and four VLRs. SALAR participated in a working group involving the national level and LRGs that was established to coordinate reporting and joint actions. The VNR included an entire chapter dedicated to the local and regional perspective that was based on the VSR and VLRs. **UK**: COSLA contributed to the UK's 2019 VNR (the only UK association to do so, as indicated in the VNR itself).

The charts below indicate the extent to which LRGAs have been involved in the coordination of SDG implementation:

Has your organisation or any LRG representative been involved in any way in the institutional mechanisms set up by the national government to coordinate SDG implementation? How?



- Though ad-hoc consultations, in few or punctual meetings, but not as a permanent member 30.0%
- Regular participation, but at consultative level (no decision-making power) 30.0%
- No involvement at all 19.0%
- Regular participation in the decision-making process as an equal partner (right to vote, for instance) 5.0%
- Other 16.0%

Below are case examples indicating how the involvement of LRGAs/LRGs in the national SDG coordination mechanisms has evolved over time. In this regard, the case of Scotland in particular is worth highlighting: a draft law is being prepared that would make SDGs legally binding upon local authorities under the Well-being and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill (the wide-ranging impact of this law would set a unique global precedent).



Examples:

AIMF: The participation of its member cities (French speakers mayors) has increased, owing in particular to the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergency programmes put in place in response. **Estonia:** In recent years, LRGA staff have increasingly played a greater role in drawing up national strategies. **Iceland:** Involvement has taken place through the Platform on the SDGs established to coordinate actions between the national and regional levels. **Italy:** Since 2018, Venice City Solutions has been acknowledged to be the platform for exchange on SDGs. **Luxembourg:** An online tool developed by the national government has been made available that allows LRGs to track their efforts to implement the SDGs. **The Netherlands:** LBSNN focuses most of its support for LGs on the education sector, and primary education in particular, in line with the Local Education Agenda. This explains why LBSNN is more active in the national education networks. VNG however remains involved in the national annual SDG report, namely by drafting and submitting a dedicated chapter on decentralised government. **Serbia:** Its main coordinating mechanism for SDG implementation is the Inter-Ministerial Working Group for Implementation of 2030 Agenda. **UK (COSLA):** There are two mechanisms in the UK, both in Scotland: 1) the UK 2019 VNR and 2) the 2020 Scottish VSR and the National Performance Framework mainstreaming SDGs in Scotland, will now be made into all by way of the Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill. As previously mentioned, this proposed bill would make SDGs legally binding upon local authorities, a global first.

4. Challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the SDGs at local level

Regarding the development of indicators or mechanisms to monitor progress in achieving the different SDGs and their targets on local territories, 14 respondents reported that they were not developing indicators, 11 were collaborating with other institutions, 9 had revised or were revising their indicators, 7 used or were continuing to use the usual mechanisms and/or previously available indicators for their follow-up and assessment, 6 worked (or are working) with their national or regional statistics office to adapt local indicators to the national monitoring system, 1 used existing indicators and 4 had recourse to other indicators.



Information on monitoring systems and contextual information describing the indicators and/or monitoring system. Examples

Belgium: The VVSG SDG indicator set developed for local governments in 2018 is currently being updated with new information based on the SDG monitor (www.sdgmonitor.be) and municipal monitor. **Denmark:** The country's five regions are currently collaborating with the Association of Danish Regions to identify a number of common regional challenges and indicators relating to the work on SDGs. **Estonia:** The Ministry of Finance has developed a monitoring system for local governments. **Georgia:** A project is underway that focuses on decentralisation and the strengthening of social policy at the municipal level. **Iceland:** The statistics office is in charge of generating, collecting and/or analysing the indicators. A task force, made up of experts from the statistics office, the LRGA and municipalities, is also already working on SDG indicators at the local level. **Italy:** The SDSN Italia SDGs City Index project was established to make it easier to draw correlations between the national context and local realities. **The Netherlands (VNGI):** A standard set of SDG indicators for the Dutch local level is available. The data has already been integrated into the VNG database. (VNGI) The SDGs in Municipal Policy | A Manual for Local Governments. **North Macedonia:** In cooperation with UN WOMEN, ZELS implemented projects aimed at building the capacities of the municipalities for gender-responsive budgeting. **Luxembourg:** Promotion of best practices for SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. **Norway:** KS partnered with Statistics Norway to develop a taxonomy for SDG indicators (available since March 2022), a classification system that can categorise and assess either a given indicator or a set of indicators. **Serbia:** A database exists to promote work on the 2030 Agenda and the use of Indicators. There is also an Analytical and Reporting System for LRGs. **South East Europe (SEE):** As a result of the pandemic, budget implementation at SEE level shifted to education, health and social protection policies, as emphasised in a separate chapter of the 8th edition of the NALAS SEE Fiscal Decentralisation Report (data was provided by the NALAS Fiscal Decentralisation Task Force). **Spain (FAMSI):** A guide was produced to assist with the identification of indicators at the local level, in line with the SDGs and the urban agenda ([website](#)). **Spain (EUDEL):** Work has begun on establishing a system of structural indicators linked to the 2030 Agenda at the regional level of the Basque Country. **Sweden:** Statistics Sweden has been commissioned by the national government to coordinate the indicator-based monitoring of Sweden's implementation of the 2030 Agenda goals. The Council for Municipal Analysis has also developed a set of 50 key figures for municipalities and 50 key figures for regions to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local/regional level. **UK (COSLA):** The performance overview of the National Performance Framework tracks progress toward National Outcomes. It shows how well Scotland is performing overall in terms of the 81 National Indicators. **UK (LGA):** The data platform LG Inform has been set up to create reports for each goal that can show a breakdown for each local authority area.

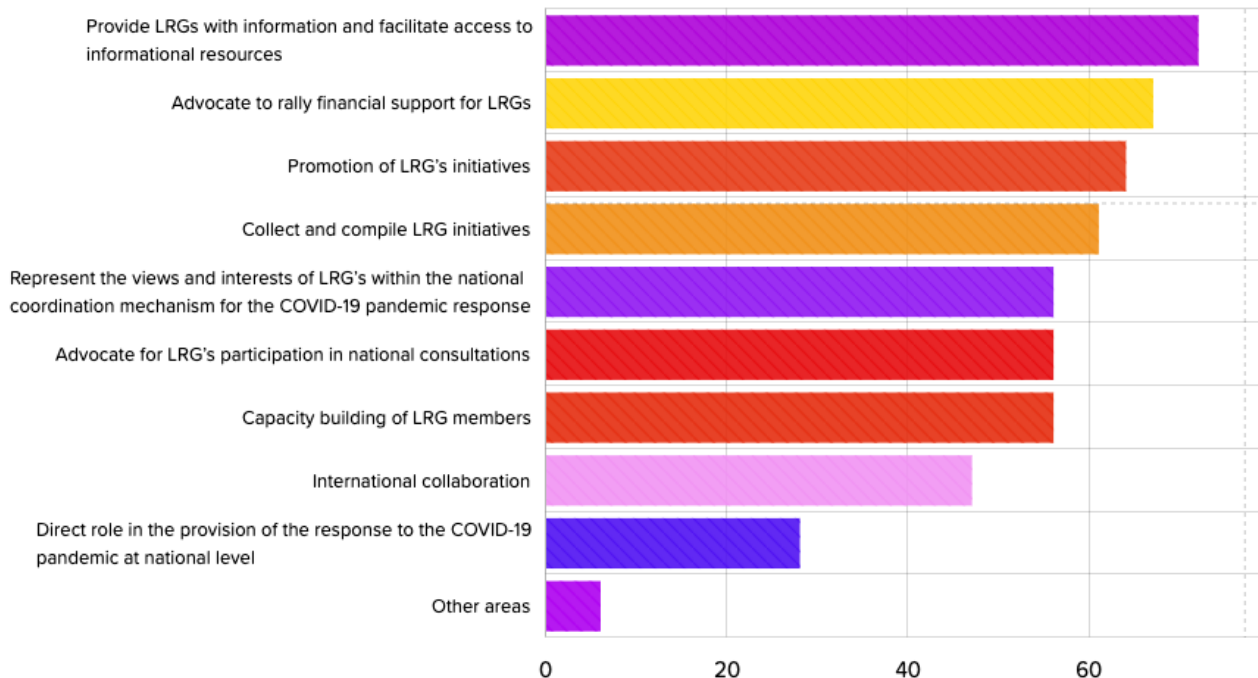
5. How can SDGs help to “build back better” after COVID-19?

In terms of progress made in integrating the SDGs into local plans, strategies and policies, around 25% of the respondents reported that, generally speaking, they were indeed able to accomplish this, achieving concrete results. With regard to budget alignment, some SDGs and targets were integrated into local budgets, with specific allocation of concrete resources for implementation. Prioritisation has generally gone to SDGs 3 (health), 6 (water), 7 (energy) and 11 (sustainable communities).



Overall, the main priorities that LRGs have decided to focus on during the post-crisis recovery include health care and prevention (including mental health), local economic development and employment, digitalisation (of education, public services, reducing the digital divide, etc.), education, social inclusion, climate action, resilience, ecological transition, water and sanitation, food and agriculture and housing.

What are the main actions that your organisation has implemented or planned in order to promote “building back better” in the recovery from the crisis?



LRGAs and national policies to build back better and promote a just, green and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples

Finland: The LRGAs' Social Sustainability Action Plan 2022 emphasises socially sustainable inclusion, equality and the social sustainability of municipalities in the future. France (CUF): Advocacy actions at the state level to recall the importance of international solidarity during the health crisis. Activities to promote the defence of global public goods were also organised. **Georgia:** The Government of Georgia took the following initiatives to mitigate COVID-19-related impacts: 1. tax breaks for Georgian businesses, 2. state subsidies for municipal expenses and 3. stimulus packages for the tourist and hospitality sectors. **Latvia:** LALRG was consulted for the formulation and implementation of national recovery and resilience packages. **Luxembourg:** Regularly scheduled exchanges were held with the Ministries of the Interior, Health and Education throughout the pandemic along with specific consultations regarding vaccination strategies. **Turkey (MMU):** Information on best practices developed by its member municipalities during the COVID-19 crisis were shared with international organisations (NALAS or OECD). **UK:** The LGA consulted with the national government on national recovery packages to influence the priorities/resources to benefit the local government sector..

Despite the above-mentioned examples of collaboration, we have also noted that some LRGAs were not consulted at all (or only nominally)¹ during the preparation or development of national recovery plans to build back better and promote a just, green and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In these cases, either there was no official reaction to local proposals, no inclusion in the implementation phase or involvement was limited to the regional level. The main outcome of this approach is that most of the funds do not go directly to the local level.

Even though it can be said that 2020 was a year without precedent due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the losses of over a million lives in Europe, in some ways 2021 has stood out even more: while some areas and sectors are still facing a recession, through the help of the EU Recovery and Resilience facility, there have also been developing trends pointing towards a green and just recovery process. This is the key instrument at the heart of [NextGenerationEU](#), with €806.9 billion set aside to help the EU emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis. In 2021, €672.5 billion in loans and grants were allocated to kickstart the reforms and investments undertaken by Member States to make European economies and societies more sustainable and resilient, ready to take on the new challenges associated with the transition towards green, digital and decarbonised societies. This is a unique opportunity to match needs and opportunities, while helping to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic, and to push for a green recovery to make our societies more sustainable. Whilst some local and regional governments had to put their SDG efforts on hold temporarily to deal with the emergency, others used the 2030 Agenda and SDG framework to adopt and promote recovery strategies that are sustainable, inclusive and “build back better”.

1. e.g. Moldova, France (AFCCRE), Denmark, Slovenia, South-East Europe, Spain (FAMSI)

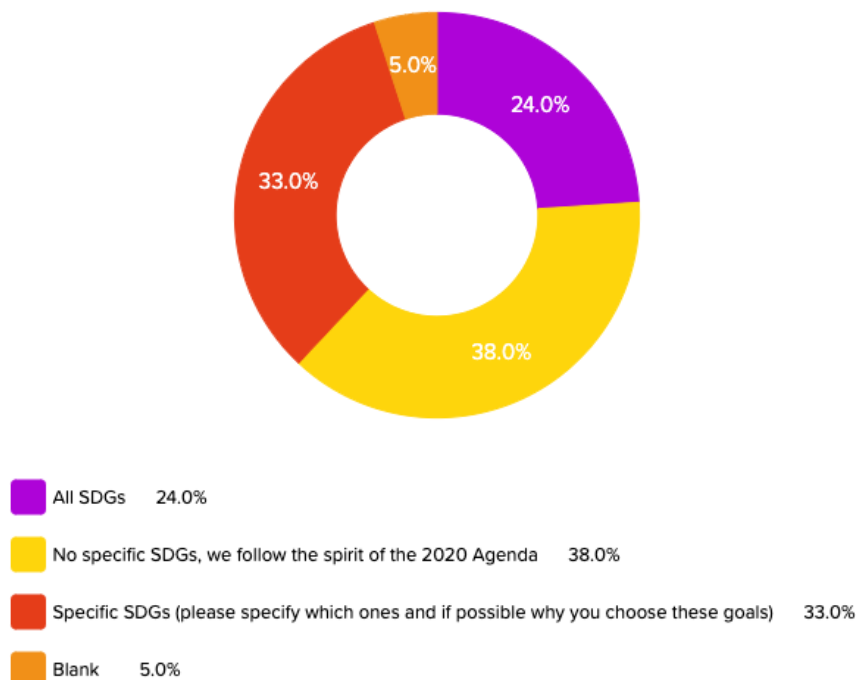
Conclusions

- **The five principal challenges LRGs face in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas are:** inadequate human resources or weak capacities; limited support from national governments (in terms of administrative and financial support, capacity building, human resources...); limited local interest and/or awareness (e.g. local governments do not understand the SDGs or do not find them relevant, or they perceive the SDGs to be an additional burden, not well adapted to local priorities); insufficient financial resources (other than national subsidies) and, in general, limited coordination with other levels of governments (e.g. overlapping responsibilities, difficulties in coordinating between national and local plans).
- **The five principal benefits for LRGs in working to achieve the SDGs and other global agendas are:** enhanced multi-level coordination including improved planning mechanisms at local level to integrate the SDGs and promote recovery; increased local interest and/or awareness as local governments gain a firmer grasp of the SDGs or better understanding of their relevance and no longer perceive the SDGs as a burden; adaptation of SDGs to better meet local priorities; introduction of legal and institutional reforms to empower local and regional governments (e.g. for the localisation of the SDGs and to recover from the pandemic); enhanced participation of local non-governmental stakeholders.
- **The principal ways for partnerships and cooperation to manage the interlinkages, synergies and integrated approach promoted by the SDGs:** the development of joint activities with external stakeholders (Civil Society Organisations, universities, think tanks, etc.); the setting up of inter-departmental working methods (e.g. collaboration with colleagues from other departments on thematic issues, the use of tools for collaborative work, such as the [RFSC](#); or choosing to focus the work on one/a few SDG(s).
- **The principal ways to address the international dimension of the SDGs:** participation in European/international networks and fora (international events, campaigns, etc.); development of international/city-to-city or region-to-region partnerships (decentralised cooperation activities) and build-up of activities lobbying European/international organisations; development of [training modules](#) on how to integrate SDGs in decentralised cooperation.
- **Results obtained from developing international partnerships through the SDG framework:** it strengthens the work with European and international networks; it helps to revitalise existing international partnerships and develops new international partnerships; it enables collaboration with external stakeholders (Civil Society Organisations, universities, think tanks, etc.) and, owing to a common language and objective, it strengthens the collaboration with the national government.
- **Ways to support non-EU partners in their efforts to localise the SDGs:** study-visits and storytelling meetings to supercharge ideas; organisation of training and capacity building activities that foster mutual learning from creating local SDG strategies together based on common objectives and shared SDGs.

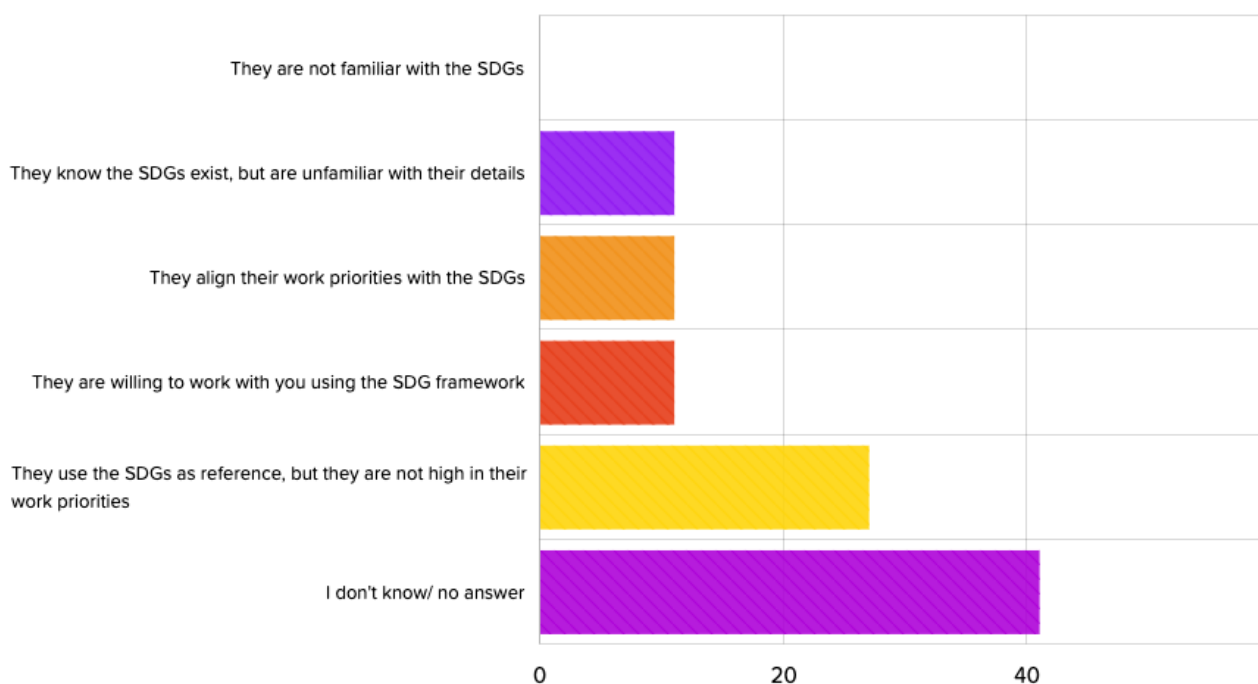


The following charts show the main focus of SDG work with international partners as well as their knowledge of SDGs:

Scope of the SDGs you are focusing on in your work with your international peers



If relevant, how would you assess the knowledge of your non-EU / non-European partner about the SDGs?



The way forward towards more just, equitable and decarbonised societies

By Carola Gunnarsson, Lord Mayor of Sala, Sweden, CEMR Spokesperson on International Affairs and UCLG Vice President, and Carlos Martínez Mínguez, Mayor of Soria, Spain, and CEMR Vice President and CEMR Spokesperson on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, UCLG Executive President.

“Public awareness of SDGs differs largely from country to country; and while knowledge is not an indicator of the level or degree of SDG attainment, it is a factor in its materialisation and a crucial step in the localisation process. Campaigns, diagnostics on concrete SDGs, agreements with universities, etc. are all examples of the many actions where the involvement of LRGs is possible and needed to deliver on potential.



For both EU Member States and non-EU countries alike, working towards the 2050 climate neutrality objective will pave the way towards new opportunities for green jobs and more sustainable and just societies. As we set off down this path together, we must keep in mind not only the differences among countries but also among territories within a country (e.g. urban, rural areas, small, medium and large municipalities).

Getting youth involved is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. With nearly two billion people aged 10 to 24 – the largest young generation in human history – 90% of whom live in developing countries, the world's young people represent a community essential to addressing the challenges of building more resilient societies. It is therefore only right that many European and international instruments are being made available to improve the living conditions of young people around the world, to strengthen their links with local and national political institutions and their commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A prime example of this is the European Year of Youth, announced in 2022 by the President of the European Commission, as well as the peer-to-peer dialogues being undertaken between local and regional governments to provide new opportunities and raise awareness of sustainable development issues among the world's youth. Localising the global agenda has never been more important than in today's world. We stand by our peers in Ukraine and are firmly convinced that through local democracy and city diplomacy, both based on the values of peace that have united our municipalities across Europe since 1951, CEMR-PLATFORMA will continue to work to support them in their recovery efforts via decentralised city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation.

Last but not least, we would also like to see a more bottom-up approach in the future in order to be able to witness a genuine localisation of the SDGs, which we know we can successfully achieve with everyone's involvement and commitment!”