

European Territories Localise the SDGs

The time for impact is running out



2024

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PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of towns and regions and their associations, active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation at the national, European, and global levels. All the partners are key players in international cooperation for sustainable development. PLATFORMA provides a hub of expertise for European local and regional governments' international actions and works to boost European towns and regions' contribution to EU development cooperation policies and international frameworks. PLATFORMA is led by CEMR and co-funded by the Directorate General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (DG INTPA). A second framework partnership agreement was signed in 2022 between CEMR and DG INTPA.

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2024

Foreword

By **Tengiz Mtvarelishvili**
Chair of Telavi City Council, Georgia
PLATFORMA Spokesperson



Only 15% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are on track. This was the alarming takeaway from last autumn's SDG summit in New York. Since we are already past the halfway point on the road to the 2030 Agenda and the implementation of the SDGs, there is only one way left to us: embrace the substantial challenges and seize the opportunities ahead! We have no excuses for inaction.

The residual aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic and health crisis, the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine and other conflicts on the European continent have only worsened the geopolitical context. We, the subnational level of governance, have the responsibility to step up and work harder, as these issues go well beyond the usual economic and social spheres for local and regional governments (LRGs) but risk putting the Europe of tomorrow – one that is peaceful, sustainable and just – in jeopardy.

These challenges continue to highlight how local and regional governments, as the level of governance closest to citizens, are critical actors and the ones intrinsically found at the forefront of these crises. LRGs are also the ones most apt to come up with solutions that best respond to the needs of their citizens, regardless of widely varying local contexts. The message is clear: according to the OECD,¹ 65% of the SDG targets can only be achieved through strong local and regional actions. Here, it is important to reiterate that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs represent an essential framework vital to engendering a successful post-crisis recovery.

It is in this spirit that Georgia, together with 40 other countries from all over the world, has stepped forward for the third time, a clear indication of its high level of commitment to the SDGs, to present its Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York in July 2024. Following the nationalisation of the SDGs after the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in September 2015, Georgia's government took the initiative in 2016 to contribute to sustainable development through voluntary efforts in continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In 2020, Georgia presented its second VNR, revealing policies and priorities well-aligned with the SDGs, rendering them a very solid foundation for the country's reform agenda as well.

Nevertheless, local and regional governments still need to be empowered to act and, in order to best implement the SDGs, to be entrusted with a greater share of responsibilities, not only financially but also in terms of competences, capacities, tools and greater leeway in decision-making. Without these means, subnational governments will not be able to choose the appropriate course of action for their citizens, especially the most vulnerable groups and young people.

¹ Achieving the SDGs in cities and regions, OECD website, <https://www.oecd.org/about/impact/achieving-sdgs-in-cities-and-regions.htm>

Yet, getting youth involved is crucial to achieving the SDGs. With nearly two billion people in the world aged 15 to 24² – the largest young generation in human history – 90% of whom live in low- and middle-income countries, young people worldwide represent a core group for achieving resilient societies. In Europe in 2021, there were 73 million young citizens (young people aged 15–29³) the rationale for many European and international instruments being introduced, namely to improve the living conditions of young people, strengthen their institutional political participation at the local, regional and national levels and promote their engagement in achieving the SDGs.

We are now facing new dynamics worldwide, and the entire UN community is getting preparations underway. The upcoming Summit of the Future in September 2024 will define how best to accelerate efforts to meet the existing international commitments and what concrete steps are to be taken to respond to emerging global challenges and opportunities. The talks are to conclude with a new action-oriented document titled Pact for the Future.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe also affirmed the willingness of subnational governments to contribute to this process in a Recommendation⁴ to the organisation's member States, adopted in March 2024, calling for them to support the role of local and regional authorities in delivering the global agenda for sustainable development, including the Pact for the Future. This document also set forth proposals concerning sustainable development and financing for development, international peace and security, science, technology, innovation and digital cooperation, youth and future generations and transforming global governance.

Local and regional governments have been presented with a unique opportunity to shape the Summit of the Future through the Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments, launched in October 2023 by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres. He tasked the members of this group with briefing the UN on dimensions of local and regional governance to be taken into consideration during the preparatory processes for the Summit of the Future.

At a time when we know our local voice is being heard, we need to keep showing leadership and working in partnership globally.

We are equally delighted to celebrate reaching a momentous historic milestone on our road towards EU membership. On 8 November 2023, the European Commission recommended granting Georgia candidate status for EU membership, which was later approved by the European Council in December. Yet this tremendous achievement was merely the next logical step forward once the EU-Georgia Association Agreement was reached, allowing for a DCFTA and Visa-Free Travel Arrangement to take effect, clear evidence of the current government's commitment to EU integration.

Attaining candidate status promises significant potential to further improve not only the political, economic, and social landscape in our country, but to spark an important positive impact triggering a transformation of the whole South Caucasus region.

A strengthened rule of law and democracy, guaranteeing further reforms in Georgia's judiciary and electoral system as well as improved governance across various sectors both at national and local municipal levels, accompanied by various economic and social benefits related to increased foreign direct investments, access to EU markets, the free movement of people and educational and cultural exchange will all bring about concrete, tangible results for our people and society.

We believe that we are well on our way towards our country's final destination. EU membership is now visible on the horizon and closer integration with the European community at membership level will provide Georgia with a platform to participate in decision-making processes on issues of shared common interest, such as shaping the future of Europe.

All of us at the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA are strongly committed to establishing a space for local voices to be heard at the European and international levels and ensuring that the changes necessary are made in as effective and appropriate a way as possible as well as in the interest of the citizens.

² Youth, UN Website, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

³ Young people in Europe: A statistical summary, Eurostat 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/15191320/KS-06-22-076-EN-N.pdf/7d72f828-9312-6378-a5e7-db564a0849cf?t=1666701213551>

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/the-un-pact-for-the-future-the-essential-role-of-local-and-regional-au/1680aefeef>

Respondents

The publication originated from a survey involving 46 respondents, comprised of associations of local and/or regional governments, representing 31 European countries (20 EU countries, 11 non-EU countries):

Albania: Institute for Albanian Municipalities (IAM); **Austria:** Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT); **Belgium:** Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP), Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (Brulocalis), Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia (UVCW); **Croatia:** Croatian County Association (CCA); **Cyprus:** Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM); **Czech Republic:** Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR); **Denmark:** Local Government Denmark (KL); **Estonia:** Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM); **Finland:** Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA); **France:** French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE), Cités Unies France (CUF), International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF); **Georgia:** National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG); **Germany:** Association of German Cities (DST); **Iceland:** Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (SAMBAND); **Italy:** Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – Venice (AICCRE Venice); **Latvia:** Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG); **Lithuania:** Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (LSA); **Luxembourg:** Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL); **Malta:** Local Councils' Association (LCA); **Moldova:** Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM); **Netherlands:** Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), Interprovincial Association (IPO); **North Macedonia:** Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS); **Norway:** Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS); **Poland:** Association of Polish Cities (ZMP), Association of Polish Counties (ZPP); **Portugal:** National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP); **Romania:** Association of Communes of Romania (ACOR), Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR); **Serbia:** Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO); **Slovenia:** Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI); **Spain:** Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity (FAMSI), Association of Basque Municipalities (EUDEL), Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA), Euskal Fundoa/ Basque Local Authorities Cooperation Fund and eLankidetza – Basque Government Development Cooperation Agency (EUSKADI – Basque Country), Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (FMSC), Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP); **Sweden:** Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR); **Turkey:** Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU); **United Kingdom:** Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA).

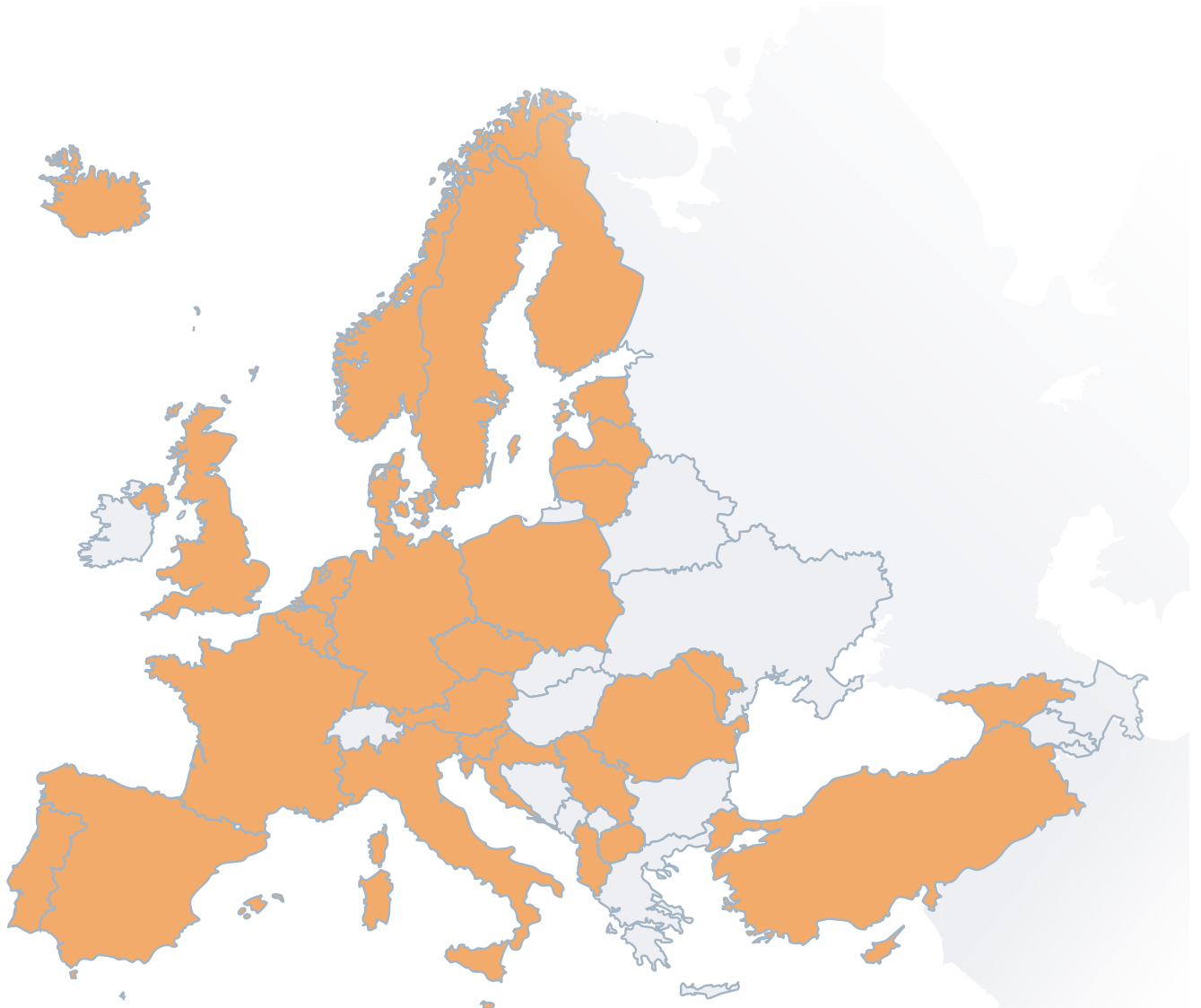


Figure 1. Countries from which associations of local and regional governments responded in 2024

- 46** responses
- 31** European countries
- 37** EU associations of LRGs
- 9** non-EU associations of LRGs

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1. Acronyms

- CEMR** Council of European Municipalities and Regions
- EC** European Commission
- EU** European Union
- GTF** Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (facilitated by UCLG)
- HLPF** UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (organised by the UN)
- LRGs** Local and Regional Governments
- LRGAs** Local and Regional Government Associations
- MS** Member States
- 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)

2. Recommendations

TO WHOM?



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

Successful effective SDG policies call for a decentralised, bottom-up, territorial approach as analyses have shown that 65% of the 169 targets underpinning the 17 SDGs simply cannot be achieved without the involvement of local and regional governments, not to mention the need to respect the diversity of local and regional conditions and territorial specificities. This year promises to be especially relevant as the Summit of the Future⁵ being held in September will give all actors the opportunity to come together to address our global challenges.

RECOMMENDATION

1



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

Achieving the 2030 Agenda in the requisite time is what is in the balance, and giving greater support to the local and regional levels to accomplish the goals may be a determining factor. CEMR members and PLATFORMA partners therefore call on their peers to usher in positive change at the subnational levels, drawing on co-inspiration to improve upon local and regional public policies. We also continue to support the global 2030 Agenda in Europe and around the world, particularly through the cultivation of partnerships valuing innovation and centred around peers able to contribute to building up capacity and mentoring as well as a model of governance based on partnership and decentralised cooperation.⁶

RECOMMENDATION

2



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

Concrete actions to accelerate progress on the SDGs are needed. The September 2023 SDG Summit revealed that only 15% of the Sustainable Development Goals were on track, making it clear that solid science and solutions are now more urgently needed than ever. The subnational level has emerged as the first line of defence in the battle against climate change as well as poverty; and as such, have an essential role to play in the design and implementation of crucial measures. We, the local and regional governments (LRGs), therefore call for the enactment of necessary appropriate measures to sufficiently address the most critical shortfalls: limited human resources, need for capacity, insufficient financial resources, lack of political engagement and limited public awareness.

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>

⁶ 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 Moreno, CPMR-PLATFORMA. <http://bit.ly/2S0zgPy>

RECOMMENDATION

3



United Nations



European Union Member States

The national governments and the EU must accelerate the localisation and territorialisation of the SDGs. For this, the **systemic involvement and participation of local and regional governments** is still needed, and not only on an ad hoc basis. LRGs still do not feel sufficiently involved in the implementation of the SDGs. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) still need to include the views of the subnational government associations, while the process itself cannot be said to be complete without LRG involvement in the monitoring and reporting on the progress of SDG implementation. Without this direct and systematic engagement of LRGs, no real progress can be made.

RECOMMENDATION

4



United Nations

The **Summit of the Future** scheduled for September 2024 represents a milestone in terms of both the challenges and opportunities it represents on a global scale and, consequently, the subnational level's place and voice therein needs to be secured. In addition, we welcome the UN Secretary General's September 2021 report "Our Common Agenda"⁷ calling for the establishment of an Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments. This Advisory Group has now been working since October 2023 and needs to continue in the long-term to fully ensure that the value of the subnational dimension is justly acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda.

RECOMMENDATION

5



European Union

LRGs need **appropriate autonomy of action, adequate means and resources** to implement the 2030 Agenda in their communities, particularly in view of the specific inclusion of youth, women and vulnerable groups in decision-making and all other related activities that contribute to achieving the SDGs. In this regard, there still remains much that is insufficient. All European Union directives, new initiatives and funds need to be developed in close consultation with LRGs and their representative associations in order to determine whether the necessary transformation can in fact materialise on the ground.

RECOMMENDATION

6



European Union

The subnational level needs to be given a stronger political **voice in the decision-making arenas** and contexts. An efficient way for the European Union institutions and the national governments to do this would be to offer political space to LRGs by establishing regular dialogue with the subnational levels and by including local and regional elected representatives in their delegations to any relevant high-level meetings (such as the HLPF, SDG summits and others hosted by the United Nations and European institutions).

⁷ The "Our Common Agenda" roadmap to 2023/2024 proposed twenty recommendations to encourage more ambitious, forward-looking thinking and deliberation on global governance innovation leading up to the 2024 UN Summit of the Future. The Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments consists of 20 representatives, 15 of them are local authorities, including 3 from Europe: London, Paris, and Utrecht. https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf



3. Introduction

Local and regional governments continue to make headway at the subnational level in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁸ and its 17 SDGs, adopted in 2015. The present CEMR/PLATFORMA report on this progress⁹ will be presented at the HLPF 2024 titled “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

This study (along with a complementary annex¹⁰ of over 100 pages of examples from the respondents) is based on a joint survey conducted in February 2024 by CEMR, PLATFORMA and UCLG.¹¹ Its purpose was to collect the most recent information on how and to what extent local and regional government associations and networks have been involved in localising the SDGs, both in Europe and among their global peers. These studies have been produced annually since 2016¹² and are later presented at the High-Level Political Forum¹³ (HLPF).¹⁴

This HLPF is the central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2024 HLPF will conduct an in-depth review of Goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17.¹⁵ This year’s survey of European LRGAs included new questions looking at “Inspiring practices on the five SDGs under review at the 2024 HLPF”, concrete actions to accelerate progress on the SDGs, the urgency to act and on future collaboration (through peer-to-peer review, capacity building, mentoring, training academies, etc.).

Four of the forty-five countries¹⁶ that expressed an interest in presenting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the 2024 HLPF are from the European continent: Austria, Estonia, Georgia and Spain.

This year’s HLPF will be followed by the UN Summit of the Future¹⁷ on 22 and 23 September. This high-level event will bring together world leaders to forge a new international consensus on how we can deliver a better present and safeguard the future. This once-in-a-generation opportunity also serves as a singular moment demonstrating that international cooperation can effectively take on longstanding current challenges as well as those that have just begun to emerge in recent years, or even those not yet on the horizon. One of the few certainties we know is that today, tomorrow and for many years to come, the local level will play a key role, starting now with the formation of the UN Secretary General’s Advisory Group on LRGs.

⁸ [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030 Agenda for Sustainable Development web.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf)

⁹ In the present text, 2023 refers to the 2023 CEMR-PLATFORMA study “European Territories Localise the SDGs - Only six summers left to make the most of the Decade of Action”, and thus covers data from 2022. <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Local-SDGs-2023-EN.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Collection-of-examples-SDG-survey-2024.pdf>

¹¹ UCLG coordinated with all its regional sections to produce a parallel global report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Along with its previous reports, it will be available at <https://gold.uclg.org/report/localizing-sdgs-boost-monitoring-reporting>

¹² The CEMR-PLATFORMA reports to the HLPF from previous years are available online at: <https://platforma-dev.eu/our-publications/>

¹³ <https://hlpf.un.org/2023>

¹⁴ The CEMR-PLATFORMA reports to the HLPF from previous years are available online at: <https://platforma-dev.eu/our-publications/>

¹⁵ **Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere; **Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; **Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels; **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

¹⁶ Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belize, Brazil, Chad, Colombia, Congo (Republic of the), Costa Rica, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Georgia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Kenya, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Namibia, Nepal, Oman, Palau, Peru, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Uganda, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zimbabwe. <https://hlpf.un.org/countries>

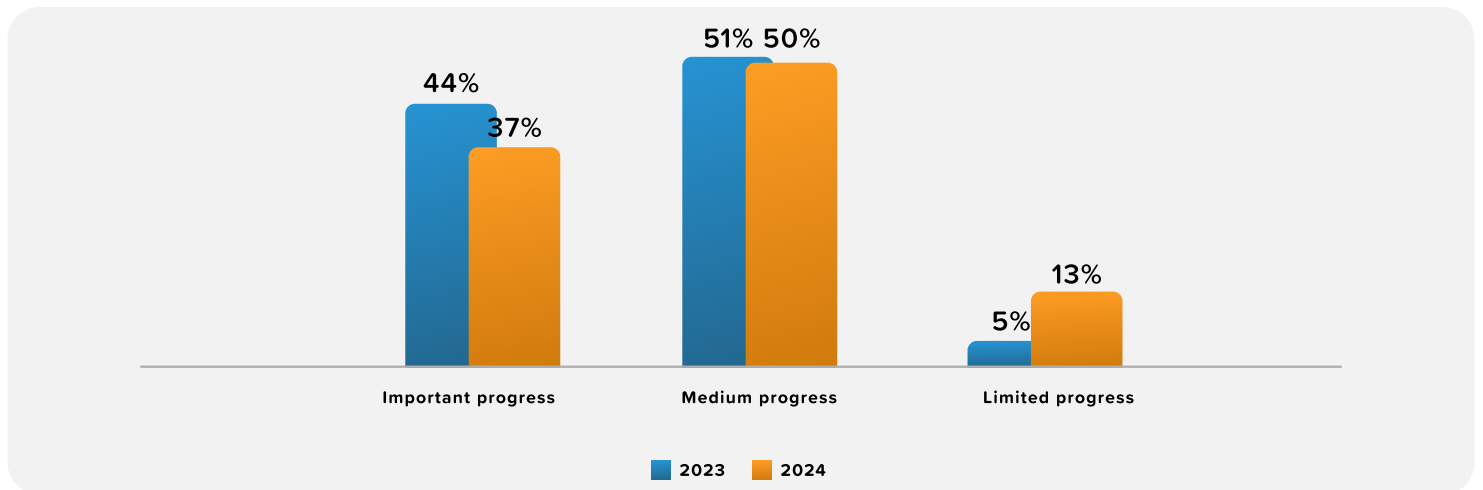
¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>



4. Need for more progress in awareness-raising

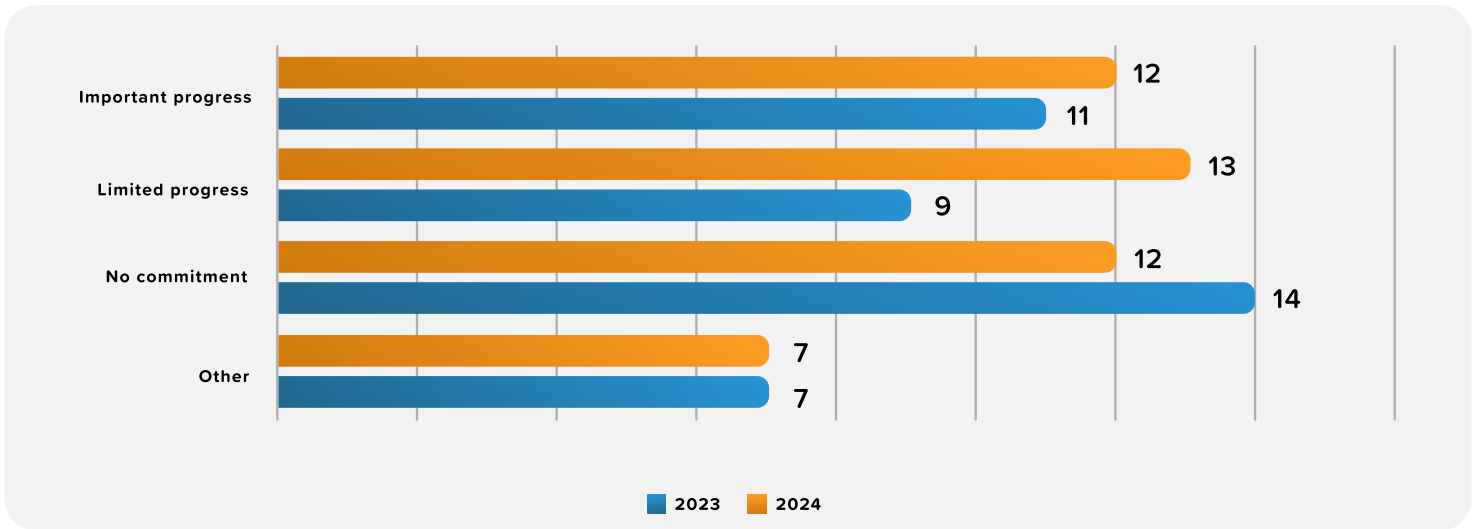
The activities undertaken by LRGAs to raise awareness of SDGs among citizens and municipal officials is of crucial importance. To continue making progress on the implementation of the SDGs, their added value must be properly understood. In comparing results to 2023, progress this year was deemed “medium” by 51% of respondents (50% last year), and another 13% stated that progress had been “limited” (compared to 5% last year). Yet 37% of respondents reported “important progress” (compared to 44% last year).

Figure 2. Progress in broadening knowledge of the SDGs within the organisation



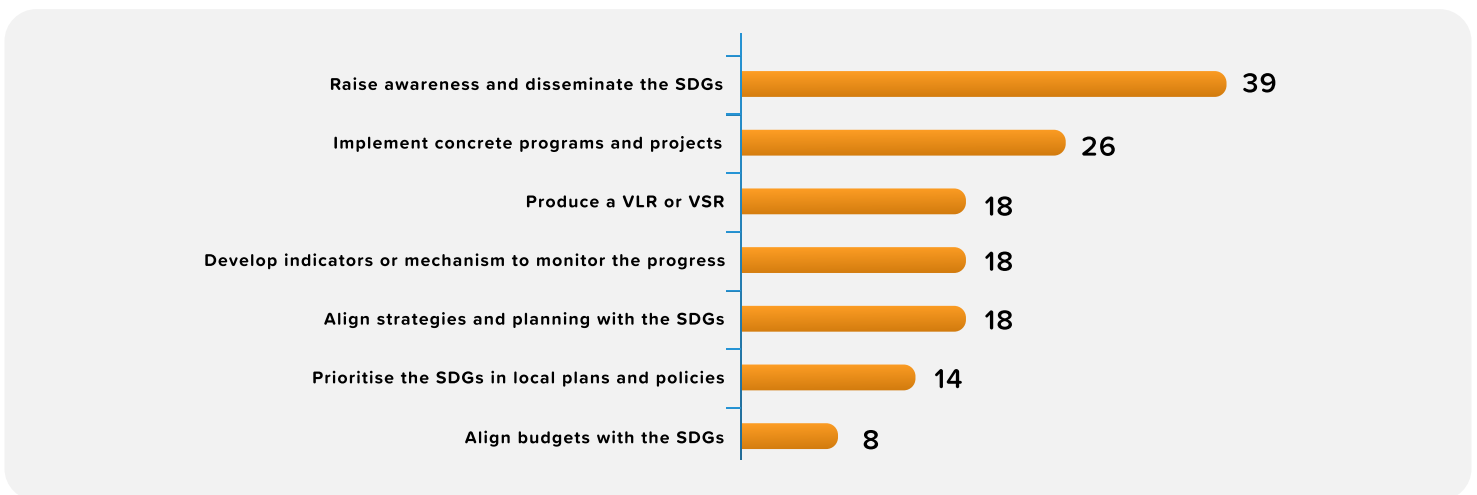
With respect to **the associations’ progress towards their strategies or plans to implement the 2030 Agenda**, 26% of the respondents indicated having no commitments in this regard this year (compared to 34% last year), a very positive development essentially since this translates into fewer non-committed associations and more with strategies and plans in place in 2024; 26% had made significant progress, with their strategy or action plan having reached an advanced stage or even having been updated to expand upon the initial objectives (27% in 2023); and 28% had adopted a strategy or action plan, but implementation was still at an early stage (22% in 2023). This shows that the will to achieve progress in the implementation of SDGs still exists.

Figure 3. Strategic commitment to implementation of the 2030 Agenda (number of respondents)



In recent years, associations have also worked to promote the 2030 Agenda's objectives and have actively participated in concrete actions for SDG localisation, such as (figures are the number of respondent associations):

Figure 4. Concrete steps towards localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals



Box 1. Ways in which the associations' strategies or plans to implement 2030 Agenda have progressed

Belgium: The Association of Flemish Provinces (VVP), working together with the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), published a VSR in July 2023. This exercise prompted the Flemish provinces to give more thought to developing indicators as a way to monitor progress. Moreover, VVSG has been conducting many activities on localising the SDGs, such as the Week of the Sustainable Municipality campaign, which they have been organising every year since 2018. During this week (18-25 September), participating local governments celebrate local heroes for sustainable development. Those spotlighted can be citizens, businesses, organisations, schools... The last few editions have featured a different SDG each year as the campaign theme. SDG 4 (education) was showcased in 2023.¹⁸

France: The French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE) have made systematic references to the SDGs, particularly in publications and for events relating to development education or climate cooperation. However, this is not the case in the rest of the association's thematic sectors, particularly those with interests which lie further afield.

Germany: The Association of German Cities (DST) indicated that most of the German federal states have adopted or revised their own sustainability strategies to include references to the SDGs and have implemented a variety of programs and efforts. A resolution "2030 – Agenda for Sustainable Development: Shaping Sustainability at the Municipal Level" was published in order to facilitate local authorities' commitment to implementing the SDGs. The resolution consists of an overview on the significance of the SDGs, and a section that can be adapted to allow for individual stipulations regarding which SDGs are to be localised and in what way. It can be signed by cities, towns and counties alike. Signatory local governments then become members of the "Club of the 2030 Agenda municipalities", a network offering different options for online collaboration, yearly networking meetings as well as a way to obtain and exchange relevant information. As of March 2024, the club had around 200 municipalities as members, a number constantly increasing.

Latvia: The Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) raised awareness of the SDGs among the students at Rekava secondary school in Balvi municipality (Latvia) by having them play an interactive game developed to teach them about the UN goals. This was organised at a European Days of Local Solidarity (EDLS) event held on 24 November 2023.

Luxembourg: The Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL) presented the SDGs to elected representatives as part of a basic training session they organised, in collaboration with the government, following the local elections held on 11 June 2023.

The Netherlands: The Interprovincial Association (IPO) invited SDG Nederland,¹⁹ "the movement of everyone in the Netherlands contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals", to its annual meeting to promote and share information on the SDGs.

Poland: The Association of Polish Cities (ZMP) organised and co-funded two databases developed primarily to monitor local development as well as the quality of local public services but which also contain many indicators related to SDGs. The databases' main users are local governments.

¹⁸ For more information on the VVSG Week of the Sustainable Municipality, see: <https://www.sdgs.be/en/week-sustainable-municipality>

¹⁹ <https://www.sdgnederland.nl/>

Romania: The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) developed a study in collaboration with the Association of Communes of Romania (ACOR), with support from United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities from South-Eastern Europe (NALAS), which resulted in the "Voluntary Subnational Review 2023 – Localising the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in Romanian municipalities and communes".²⁰ At the national level, the Romanian Government, through the Department for Sustainable Development (DSD), produced the country's 2023 Voluntary National Review (VNR). The associative structures of local authorities from Romania were invited by members of the DSD to be part of the team who worked on this report.

Spain: The Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity (FAMSI) undertook different actions, including developing programs to raise awareness of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda among its partners, providing support to local governments for the localisation of the SDGs, taking part in and organising specific events relating to the SDGs, developing a guide adapted to the Andalusian context for localising the SDGs in small municipalities and another guide for developing indicators to measure the SDGs at the local level as well as two strategic thematic documents on the 2030 Agenda and Culture and the 2030 Agenda and climate change. Lastly, it prepared a "Location pack" comprised of all these materials.

United Kingdom: The Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA) developed an online guide for localising the SDGs aimed at local authorities (2020).²¹

20 <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Romania%20Report%20Subnational%20Report.pdf>

21 <https://www.local.gov.uk/un-sustainable-development-goals-guide-councils>



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5. A need to reinforce the involvement of the subnational level

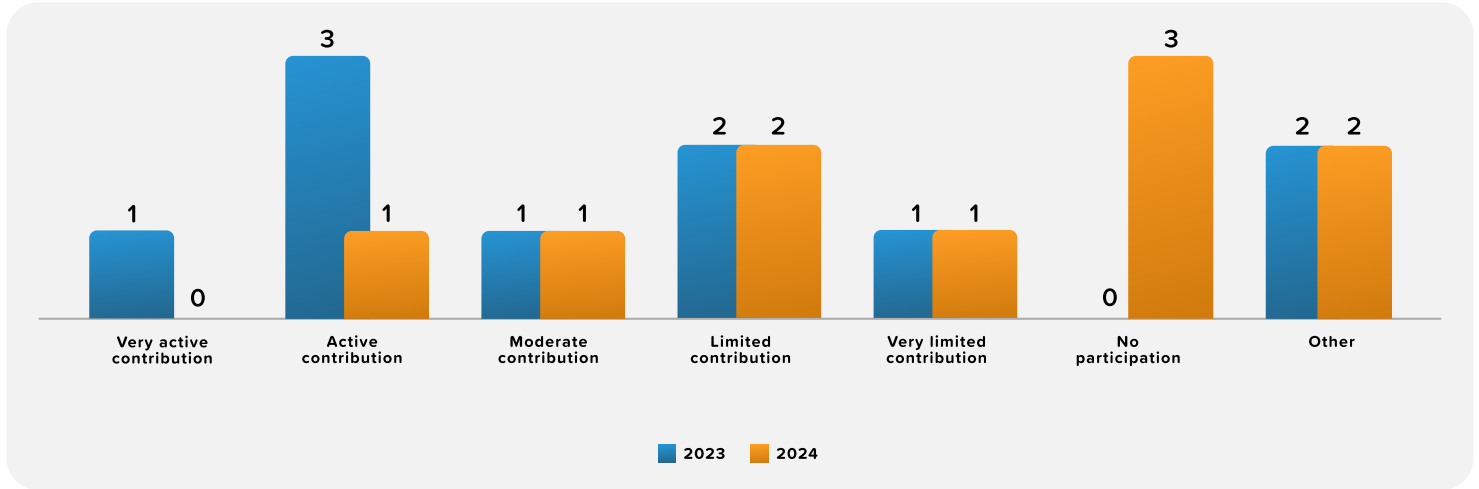
Austria, Estonia, Georgia, and Spain will be presenting VNRs this year and are all veterans of this process, as they have already reported to the HLPF in previous years. Associations from these countries numbered among the respondents to our survey.

As regards the extent of their participation in producing the VNRs, we noted that only 15% of the respondents experienced the same level of involvement as in 2023; none were heavily involved, and only a few organisations experienced any change in quality of participation (progress, setback...).

In the countries reporting to the HLPF, the national associations of LRGs were invited by their central governments to contribute to the development of their country's VNR to varying degrees and in different ways: 27% were not invited to participate at all; 18% were limited to responding only to surveys or questionnaires; 9% of contributions were very restrictive in nature, consisting of participation in occasional meetings with not much latitude to contribute to the actual report; 9% of contributions were moderate as they involved attendance in bilateral meetings with the unit in charge of the reporting; 9% played an active role as they were able to present their own contribution to the report (giving an account of LRGs' actions in terms of achieving the SDGs, etc.).

The data in 2024 on involvement in the reporting process is somewhat similar to last year's; we noted nevertheless that the level of participation was slightly lower, or essentially amounting to no participation at all in some cases (an overall decrease in participation in comparison to previous years).

Figure 5. Involvement of LRGs in the Voluntary National Reviews (number of respondents)



Box 2. Involvement of LRGs in Voluntary National Reviews

Spain: The Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has remained very active in the Network of Local Entities, which has more than 622 local governments representing 31,186,949 inhabitants.

Spain: EUSKADI – Basque Country reported that both eLankidetzeta and Euskal Fondoa and their associates (Basque local entities) have been proactively participating in the different actions and initiatives that were announced by the Basque Government in its Basque SDG Strategy²² – 2030 Agenda and in its work and action plans, as well as in the 7th VLR presented by the Basque Country, including the post-2030 reflection being promoted titled “Now 2030 Euskadi”. They also took part in the multi-agent forum held in February 2024²³ as well as in the actions carried out under the framework of the UN SDG Local2030 Coalition Secretariat based in Bilbao.²⁴

Turkey: The Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) organised two types of SDG-related actions: 1) Mentor is a programme created by MMU that aims to foster the sharing of and exchange of experiences to improve intermunicipal cooperation and the capacities of municipalities as well as the competencies of municipal employees. Under the programme, municipalities offering and seeking out expertise are matched together and can meet up either online or in face-to-face meetings. The programme encompasses expertise in all areas relevant to municipalities, including but not limited to SDG localisation and VLRs. Since 2020, MMU has organized 11 mentor meetings on localising SDGs and most of them have focused on VLRs.²⁵ 2) Awareness-raising activities were organised as part of a VLR session held during Turkey’s first national urban forum, the Marmara Urban Forum (MARUF).

United Kingdom: The Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA) reported that the first UK Voluntary National Review of the SDGs (2019) had referred extensively to the work of local government and had recognised that ‘the UK’s cities, councils and local partners play a key role in supporting delivery of the Goals in the UK, while helping to ensure no-one, and no community, is left behind.’ It also cited an estimate that a prerequisite for achieving two-thirds of the 169 targets accompanying the SDGs was securing the engagement of local stakeholders, such as local authorities. At the same time as the publication of the UK VNR, the Local Government Association (LGA) agreed to a motion supporting the SDGs at its 2019 annual conference. This motion recognised the key role councils play in delivering progress towards the goals. It also made the case for Government funding to support councils’ engagement with their localisation, even amidst a background of continuing austerity.²⁶

22 For more information, see 2023 activities report and 2024 priorities: https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/docs_interes_transicionsocial/es_def/adjuntos/Euskarri-Memoria-2023-y-prioridades-2024-CAS.pdf

23 Agenda Now 2030: https://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/transicionsocial_agenda2030/es_def/adjuntos/Now-Basque-Country-CAS.pdf

24 Alianza Multiagente: <https://www.euskadi.eus/alianza-vasca-por-los-ods/web01-a2lehetri/es/>

25 <https://marmara.gov.tr/en/mentor-1-1>

26 <https://lga.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22163/Motion%20UN%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals.pdf>

United Kingdom: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) reported that the Scottish government had been one of the first to commit to the SDGs when they were adopted in September 2015. Scotland's approach to implementing the SDGs has been to align with the National Performance Framework, the domestic performance management tool based on national outcomes. This means in practice that the whole public sector is in fact guided by the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are therefore reflected in the local outcome plans produced by local authorities. The Scottish government has additionally been working towards further transposing the SDGs into public practice (with possible duties) through a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.

Box 3. Discover the RFSC

CEMR and PLATFORMA promote an online tool supporting cities of all sizes in their localisation of the SDGs. This is done through the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)²⁷, with the support of the French Ministry for Ecological Transition and Territorial Cohesion. This tool offers a systematic approach for assessing sustainable urban development strategies and identifying areas for improvement. By using the RFSC, local and regional governments can develop targeted action plans that help to achieve the SDGs. Using an intuitive visual interface, the tool helps cities in designing, implementing, and monitoring integrated sustainable urban development strategies and develop their own Voluntary Local Reviews.

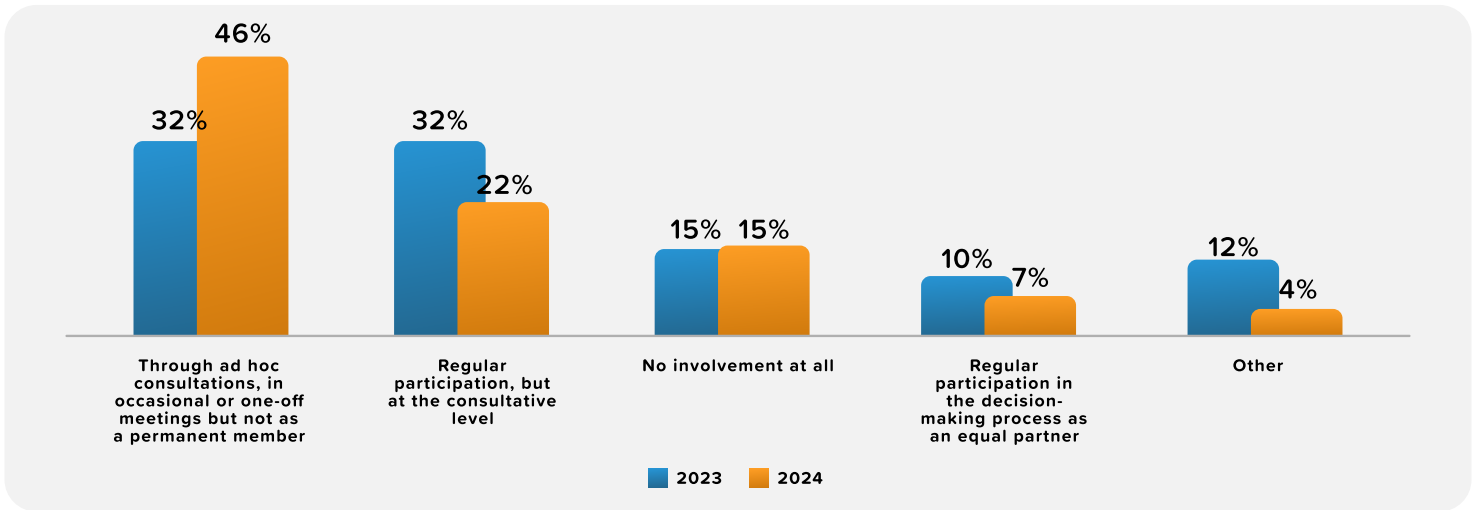


Regarding the institutional mechanisms put in place by national governments to coordinate the implementation of the SDGs, LRGAs involvement has taken on many different forms. In most countries, national governments have either created specific institutional mechanisms (high-level commissions, inter-ministerial or inter-agency committees, etc.) or strengthened existing mechanisms to further improve the coordination and follow-up for SDG implementation (examples include national councils for sustainable development or national planning institutions). Many of these mechanisms opt to use a multi-stakeholder structure.

In comparison with the 2023 findings, reports on the mechanisms put in place by national governments since then seem to indicate that ad hoc consultations have increased, as opposed to participation on a regular basis, an aspect that needs to be improved in the future.

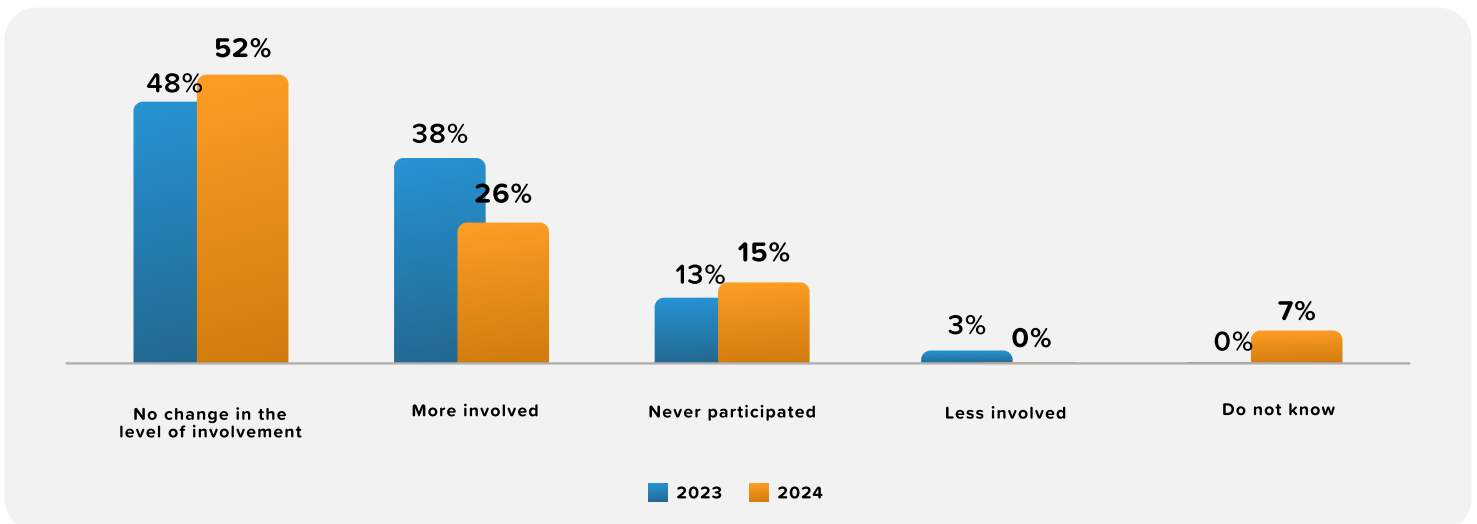
²⁷ <http://rfsc.eu/>

Figure 6. Involvement of LRGs/LRGAs in national coordination mechanisms for SDGs



In terms of any changes in LRGA involvement (progress or setback) in national coordination mechanisms for the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs, the responses received indicate different trends. While in some cases, with data going back several years, previous responses seemed to point towards a positive development, with more than one-third of respondents reporting that they had been more involved in the coordination (38% of respondents in 2023), we noted in 2024 that this involvement has since decreased to 26%. And for 52% of the respondents, no developments were noted, or they reported that their involvement had not changed in recent years, and this static state has moreover increased from 48% in 2023. Moreover, 15% reported that they had never participated in any national coordination mechanisms, a rate which has increased since the last study. This shows that LRGAs feel less involved in the implementation of the SDGs; and without direct and regular involvement of LRGAs and LRGs, progress will remain at a standstill given that 65% of the SDGs targets need to be implemented with the full involvement of the LRGs.

Figure 7. Evolution of the involvement of LRGAs in national coordination mechanisms



Box 4. Different forms of coordination mechanisms working towards implementation of the SDGs

Belgium: The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) reported that local governments are not formally associated in the Interministerial Conference for Sustainable Development in Belgium and there are no known plans to change this in the future. However, VVSG's (and other associations) involvement has increased to some degree of late, particularly after the Interministerial Conference was tasked with developing the VNR in 2023. For that VNR, localising the SDGs was a key topic. The associations of local governments and of provincial governments in Belgium therefore wrote an independent chapter on localising the SDGs. It was well received, and the association has since been more regularly consulted by other government levels.

Estonia: The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) is represented on the National Sustainable Development Commission.

Finland: The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development is an influential forum that gathers the country's significant societal actors together. The Commission promotes cooperation in achieving the SDGs and strives to mainstream the strategic objectives of sustainable development into national policy, the administration and social practices. The Strategic Management of SDGs in Cities network is made up of six of Finland's largest cities (Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku) and supports them in implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the local level and also in bringing about a change in the thinking and operating culture, a prerequisite to achieving a sustainability transformation.

France: The French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AFCCRE) made use of the 2023 VNR framework to draft a report, in collaboration with Cités Unies France (CUF) and Committee 21, and at UCLG's initiative, on the contribution of French local authorities to the SDGs. This report was then transmitted to the French government to complete the VNR, which was otherwise lacking in any appropriate consultation specifically focused on the local level.

Iceland: The Association of Local Authorities in Iceland (SAMBAND) has been allocated one seat on the Ministerial Steering Group for Sustainable Iceland, the body responsible for the overall implementation of the SDGs in Iceland.

Malta: The Local Councils' Association (LCA) has been involved in the national coordination mechanisms, and the overall follow-up on the SDGs has grown through increased public consultation and more stakeholder engagement.

North Macedonia: For the second time, the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) was directly associated, through its member LGAs, in the SDG implementation coordination mechanism for the VSR Romania 2023. In 2021, NALAS had contributed via its national members, AKM (Kosovo) and ZELS (North Macedonia).

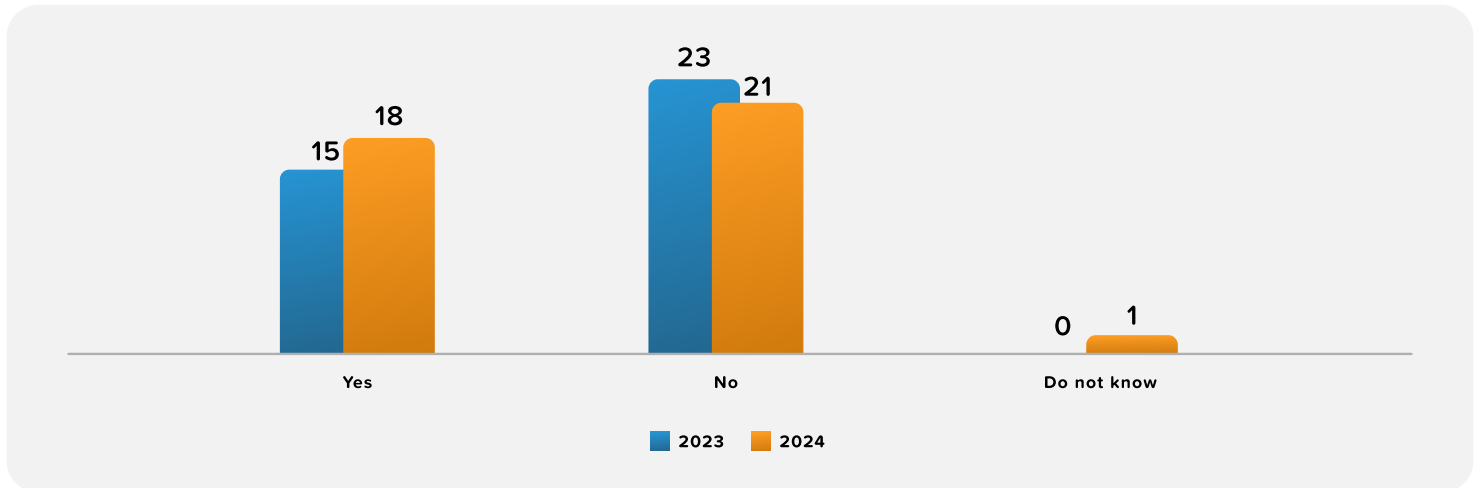
Norway: The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) has been designated as permanent representative of the National Governments Forum for Top Leaders, which is chaired at the ministerial level. Both a regular formalised consultation scheme and a political agreement on SDG implementation at local and regional level exist in Norway.

Portugal: The National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP) is represented on the National Council for Environment and Sustainable Development and also on the Committee for Monitoring and Assessing SDGs, both national coordination structures for issues relating to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The active and regular participation of ANMP in these structures has led to a deeper dialogue and cooperation with various entities, the government in particular, thereby leading to more influence on national policies in this area. ANMP's participation in these national structures also allows for greater local monitoring of national priorities since, in Municipalities Section for the SDGs meetings, local authorities are kept informed of the decisions and projects planned by the central administration and are invited to submit any comments. The dialogue thus proves mutually beneficial: horizontally between municipalities and vertically between the Government and local governments.

Sweden: The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has been taking part in the process of producing a Nordic VSR, with the support of the Nordic Council of Ministers. There had also been previous contacts with the Government ministries regarding the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely with administrators who worked within the ministry organisation under the government. These assignments were completed successively in 2023.

To be able to continue devising effective future strategies or plans, all actions implemented by LRGs first need to be monitored so their progress can be assessed. For this, indicators or mechanisms need to be developed to measure the progress made towards achieving the different SDGs as well as their objectives and targets on any given territory. Such assessment tools have already been developed by many local and regional government associations and their members (the numbers show an increase over last year's findings, a positive outcome), but just under half of the 46 respondents have not developed any such tools).

Figure 8. Indicators or mechanisms to monitor progress on achieving the SDGs (number of respondents)



In Box 5 below, we present examples relating to systems that have established indicators aligned with the SDGs, as well as any relevant prioritisation of indicators or innovations that were subsequently introduced.

Box 5. Monitoring mechanisms to track progress in achieving the SDGs

Belgium: The Flemish associations shared that the University of Ghent had run a statistical analysis for the VSR in Flanders, the methodology and results of which can be found in the final report “SDG report of the Flemish provinces, cities and municipalities”.²⁸

Belgium: The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has been working on SDG monitoring since 2018. With the help of Idea Consult, they developed a first indicator set,²⁹ which has been regularly updated over the years. It lists possible indicators for each relevant SDG sub-target.³⁰ These indicators have mostly been taken from centrally available datasets (such as the municipal monitor of the Flemish government and the data platform Provinces in Numbers). There is also an SDG monitor for municipalities.³¹

Georgia: The National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) has been consulted on indicators by the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), which provides support to 17 municipalities in localising SDGs.

28 [https://www.vvsg.be/Leden/Internationaal/SDG-pagina/Voluntary Subnational Review VVSG VVP English.pdf](https://www.vvsg.be/Leden/Internationaal/SDG-pagina/Voluntary%20Subnational%20Review%20VVSG%20VVP%20English.pdf)

29 [https://www.vvsg.be/Leden/Internationaal/SDG-pagina/documents in foreign languages/Local_SDGindicators.xlsx](https://www.vvsg.be/Leden/Internationaal/SDG-pagina/documents%20in%20foreign%20languages/Local_SDGindicators.xlsx)

30 <https://www.sdg-wijzer.zwevegem.be/>

31 <http://www.sdgmonitor.be/>

Germany: The Association of German Cities (DST) reported that the multi-stakeholder working group “SDG indicators for municipalities” has been developing instruments for a systematic municipal SDG monitoring process since 2017. The German Association of Cities and Towns first initiated the project in early 2017 and has since been moderating the working group made up of representatives from the participating organisations. The German Institute of Urban Affairs is in charge of developing and refining the SDG indicators with funding from Bertelsmann Stiftung while the latter is responsible for the overall organization of the project, the publication of the project results and providing data.³²

Luxembourg: The Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL) indicated that the Ministry of the Environment has provided the country’s municipalities with an IT tool to measure, evaluate and highlight their sustainable development initiatives.

Netherlands: The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) shared that municipalities can use the website “Where does your municipality stand” to look up each SDG and measure their progress against the national average.³³

Poland: The Association of Polish Cities (ZMP) developed a monitoring system that, despite not being specifically intended for SDGs, does contain many indicators that provide a window into the state of implementation.

Spain: EUSKADI – Basque Country reported that the territory links and classifies international cooperation activities (projects) according to SDGs. Actors report and share data using the Basque public cooperation portal.³⁴

United Kingdom: The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) noted that all the relevant information concerning SDGs, which fully align with the aims of Scotland’s National Performance Framework, is presented online.³⁵

Inspiring practices related to the SDGs under review at the 2024 HLPF

The examples below shine a spotlight on inspiring practices carried out by member LRGAs that relate to the SDGs under review at the 2024 HLPF:



SDG 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere



SDG 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



SDG 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



SDG 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels



SDG 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

³² www.wegweiser-kommune.de and www.sdg-portal.de

³³ <https://www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl/mosaic/sustainable-development-goals-rapport/inleiding>

³⁴ <https://euskalankidetza.hegoa.ehu.eus/>

³⁵ [https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/about/united-nations-sustainable-development-goals#:~:text=Scotland's%20approach%20to%20the%20SDGs&text=The%20National%20Performance%20Framework%20\(NPF,together%20to%20achieve%20the%20Goals](https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/about/united-nations-sustainable-development-goals#:~:text=Scotland's%20approach%20to%20the%20SDGs&text=The%20National%20Performance%20Framework%20(NPF,together%20to%20achieve%20the%20Goals)

Box 6. SDG 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Estonia: The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) has taken part in activities organised by “PowerPoor”, a project aimed at raising awareness of power poorness in terms of energy.

Italy: The Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – Venice (AICCRE Venice)’s initiative Venice City Solutions 2030 has published local best practices specifically focusing on SDG 1.³⁶

Box 7. SDG 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Finland: The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) has played a central role in clarifying the division of labour between municipalities and regions concerning sustainable well-being and health and the implementation of food aid.³⁷

Netherlands: The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) has written guidelines for municipalities on “Working on a healthy living environment”,³⁸ which includes a chapter dedicated to food and agriculture as well as a section specifically emphasising the importance of healthy food in schools, urban agriculture/community vegetable gardens and a healthy food supply in the environment.

Portugal: The National Association of Portuguese Municipalities’ (ANMP) Section for the SDGs plans to focus on SDGs 1 and 2 as topics for debate. The outcomes of these debates will be the basis for action ideas and proposals to be issued in 2024, for implementation either by ANMP or by Portuguese municipalities.

Spain: The Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (FMSC) financed seven projects in Morocco and Nicaragua between 2023 and 2024, using SDG 1 and specifically Target 1.4³⁹ as a framework. For one project operating in Madriz, Nicaragua, the objective has been to improve food security for the vulnerable rural population there, where the consequences of COVID-19 have resulted in a dire increase in food insecurity in the territory’s dry areas, further exacerbated by the passage of the hurricanes Eta and Lota and the effects of climate change. Activities have focused on ensuring food supplies for the 800 families settled in the dry corridor of the municipalities of Las Sabanas, Telpaneca and Totogalpa through the provision of basic foodstuffs that will allow them to cover their needs during the critical period between harvests from April to June.

³⁶ <https://venicecitysolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Le-buone-pratiche-degli-enti-locali-sugli-SDG-PDFsu-una-pagina.pdf> – see Goal 1

³⁷ <https://ruokakasvatus.fi/en>

³⁸ <https://vng.nl/artikelen/46-voedsel-en-landbouw>

³⁹ By 2030, ensure that all men and women, particularly the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership, and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services including microfinance

Box 8. SDG 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Belgium: The Association of the City and the Municipalities of the Brussels-Capital Region (Brulocalis) takes steps to ensure that part of its action is framed specifically within the fight against climate change. Together with the Brussels-Capital Region, Brulocalis supports Brussels municipalities in implementing the Climate Action Plan (CAP), oftentimes through a call for projects aimed at Brussels local authorities.

Belgium: The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) supports Flemish local authorities in implementing an ambitious climate (mitigation) policy through its VVSG Climate Network. This work has focused on areas related to public buildings, renovation, renewable energy, heat and financing. Other recent support includes the tool ‘Inspiration Card Renovation Policy’, developed in 2023 to assist municipalities in finding relevant data so that they can establish priorities and tailor their approach to local renovation and policy.⁴⁰

France: Cités Unies France (CUF) offers a tool, to all the local governments in France taking part in its cross-sectional Climate Mission, that makes it possible for all types of communities to calculate the greenhouse gas balance of their international cooperation, even beforehand, enabling them to anticipate ways in which they can compensate for these emissions. It is “the tool for more responsible decentralised cooperation”⁴¹ and was developed by Grand Poitiers with financial support from the French Development Agency (AFD). Several French communities have already adopted this tool in the interest of pursuing cooperation that is efficient but also sustainable and responsible.

Georgia: The National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) has long been a supporter of the Covenant of Mayors and, as such, has a strategy for promoting energy efficiency in its member municipalities.

Romania: The Romanian Municipalities Association’s (AMR) member municipality of Cluj-Napoca submitted a winning application to NetZeroCities and was thereby designated one of 53 model cities (from 21 European countries) selected to take part in its Pilot Cities Programme. This forward-looking initiative aims to be the starting point in the journey of European urban communities towards sustainability through a reduction of their own carbon footprint.

Serbia: The Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO) began organising training sessions in 2024 for five cities (Novi Sad, Subotica, Sombor, Sremska Mitrovica and Kikinda) to raise awareness of the impact of climate change on water supplies, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and, consequently, the health of children and young people. This was done in connection with the UNICEF project “Children, Water and Climate Change”.

Spain: The Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) has been actively working on “Renovables 2030”, a transformative project that aims to bring about renewable energies and energy communities in the municipalities of the province of Barcelona on the way towards a decarbonised and less delocalised economy. Under DIBA’s guidance, using the criteria of balance, territorial revitalisation and the mobility of all the public actors involved (local administration, autonomy), an important inversion in renewable energies has become apparent in the municipalities engaged in the province’s project.⁴²

Spain: In EUSKADI – Basque Country, the project “Ekiola” promotes civic participation in the generation and management of renewable energy by using citizen cooperatives to build solar parks in municipalities and counties. A second project, “Clima-Ondarea”, has established areas of action (the Bay of Txingudi and the Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve) for the sustainable use of natural resources and the improvement of ecosystem services.

Spain: The Andalusian Municipal Fund for International Solidarity (FAMSI) - The project “GloClima - *Gobiernos Locales y Ciudadanía por el Clima en Andalucía*” aims to contribute to taking action against climate change by pushing, promoting and accelerating local Andalusian governments’ public policy and concrete actions related to the climate agreements stemming from the 2030 Agenda, European Sustainable Development Strategy, and other European and global commitments.⁴³

United Kingdom: The Local Government Association of England and Wales (LGA) has been closely engaged with government and local authorities on climate questions and achieving net-zero goals (SDG 13). A range of resources are available via the LGA’s sustainability hub.⁴⁴

40 www.inspiratiekaartrenovatiebeleid.be

41 <https://cites-unies-france.org/Journee-d-039-echange-L-039-AICT-Climatique-enjeux-outils-financements>

42 <https://www.diba.cat/es/web/pam-2020-2023/renovables-2030>

43 <https://www.andaluciasolidaria.org/noticias/itemlist/tag/Move%20Green>.

44 <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/sustainability-hub/climate-change-resources>

Box 9. SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

Czech Republic: The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) – #GrowOurHumanity is a long-term international project implemented by the Czech Centres.

Malta: The Local Councils' Association (LCA) has partnered with the Party of European Socialists Group on the #SafePlace4Women campaign to make cities and regions a safer place for women. The goal has been to work to raise awareness through communication campaigns, educational and training programmes or presentations in schools and universities. Other actions envisaged include banning sexist advertising, opening shelters for victims of violence and rethinking the overall design of Maltese cities.

North Macedonia: The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) – There have been two regional projects (Western Balkan countries) that aim to foster the social inclusion of vulnerable groups by applying the Leave No One Behind principle of the 2030 Agenda and both contribute to SDG 16. They have been carried out by NALAS as a strategic regional partner of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ): 1) Regional cooperation (SoRi 3) for better social inclusion at local level (36 months, December 2022 to November 2025) and 2) Scaling up of good practices in promoting sociocultural participation of people on the move in host communities in the Western Balkans (17 months, September 2023 to April 2025).

Spain: In EUSKADI – Basque Country, the Institute Hegoa (UPV/EHU) has been conducting, since 2010, a series of investigations into violations of the Saharawi population's human rights. The findings have made it possible to produce instruments to uphold the truth of the Saharawi victims.

Spain: The Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (FMSC) has a new strategy and manual of indicators that encompasses target 16.7, as its indicator is adapted to handle all cooperation projects. These indicators are: Number of public policies and/or actions aimed at strengthening human rights, and gender-related information in particular; Number of associations and other local actors participating in municipal consultation spaces.

Box 10. SDG 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

France: The International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF) has been a supporter of the Women's Sustainable Energy programme in Cameroon (FEDACAM), a grassroots initiative that was begun by the women mayors in that country, when they joined forces and leveraged their network of locally elected women of Cameroon (REFELA-Cam) to ensure that they would have a say in the management of electricity generation, as a local priority issue, through its inclusion in municipal development plans. REFELA-Cam was thus a pioneer on this issue, as can be seen in the "FEDACAM" programme's implementation. Between 2016 and 2019, seven municipalities were able to benefit from this programme, which received support from AIMF, ADEME and the Véolia Foundation. FEDACAM made it possible to introduce the novel approach of pooling technical and financial resources through a network. An evaluation was conducted in 2020 and its findings used as the basis for designing the programme's next phase, which is also supported by the AIMF.

Germany: The Association of German Cities (DST) - SDG 17 was the focus of the German Association of CEMR's (RGRE) Committee for Municipal Development Cooperation at its meeting on 18-19 April 2024. A roundtable event of international local and regional elected officials is scheduled for November 2024.

Lithuania: The Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (LSA) – Since 2014, Ukraine has been strengthening local democracy and self-government through decentralisation reforms, which are now widely regarded as a successful contribution to war response efforts as they allow local governments to act as important interlocutors for citizens and their concerns. Following the devastating destruction of many Ukrainian municipalities, it has become clear that there is a need to increase local and regional cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in order to help Ukraine rebuild and to keep citizens' civic reference point and space alive. There are currently around 50 active cooperation agreements between Lithuanian municipalities and Ukrainian cities. A good example of this cooperation is the organisation of summer camps for Ukrainian children in Lithuanian cities.

Romania: The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) – The process of developing the "Voluntary Subnational Review 2023" itself is indicative of the efforts undertaken to foster partnerships aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The involvement of various stakeholders, including local governments, associations of local authorities, international organisations and the Romanian government's Department for Sustainable Development, underscores the collaborative approach essential to localizing the SDGs.

Sweden: The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has been responsible, since 2022, for a network of municipalities that works to combat segregation and its negative consequences. The network was originally started by the Delegation Against Segregation (Delmos) but was taken over by SALAR after this agency's closure.



6. Concrete actions to accelerate progress towards the SDGs

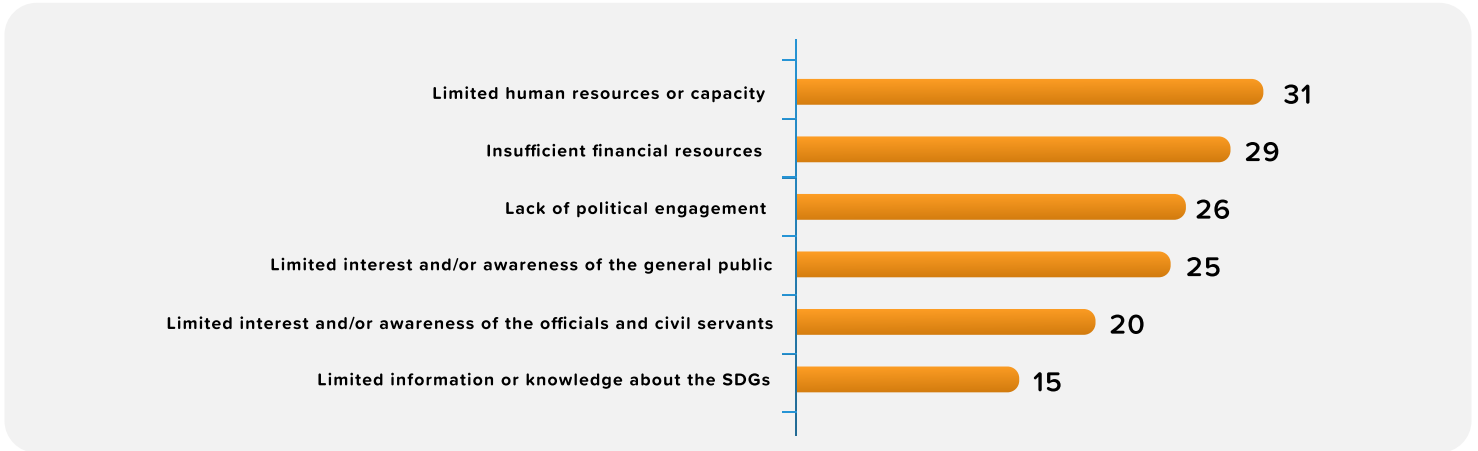
In light of the findings of the SDG Summit in September 2023 that only 15% of the SDGs are currently on schedule, it is clearer than ever that concrete solutions grounded in science are critical to achievement. Key to these efforts are LRGs as they remain the frontline champions in the battle to fight climate change, protect against poverty, and lead the way towards other SDGs, given their primordial role in the design and implementation of the measures critical to any progress in this regard. Fuelled by a growing sense of urgency, they have also developed and implemented their own initiatives in response to individual challenges.

Recognising the need for a collective response to the many global challenges, the subnational level has demonstrated a proactive commitment to collaboration. There has been an ever-growing awareness of the important benefits to be gained from sharing successful practices and lessons learned in the field.

By fostering a culture of knowledge exchange among the community of local and regional governments, we can leverage collective wisdom, accelerate the adoption of effective strategies, and amplify the impact of climate measures on a broader scale. This collaborative approach ensures that innovative solutions and best practices are disseminated efficiently, creating a network of resilient communities dedicated to mitigating and adapting to the challenges posed by climate change and other emerging issues.

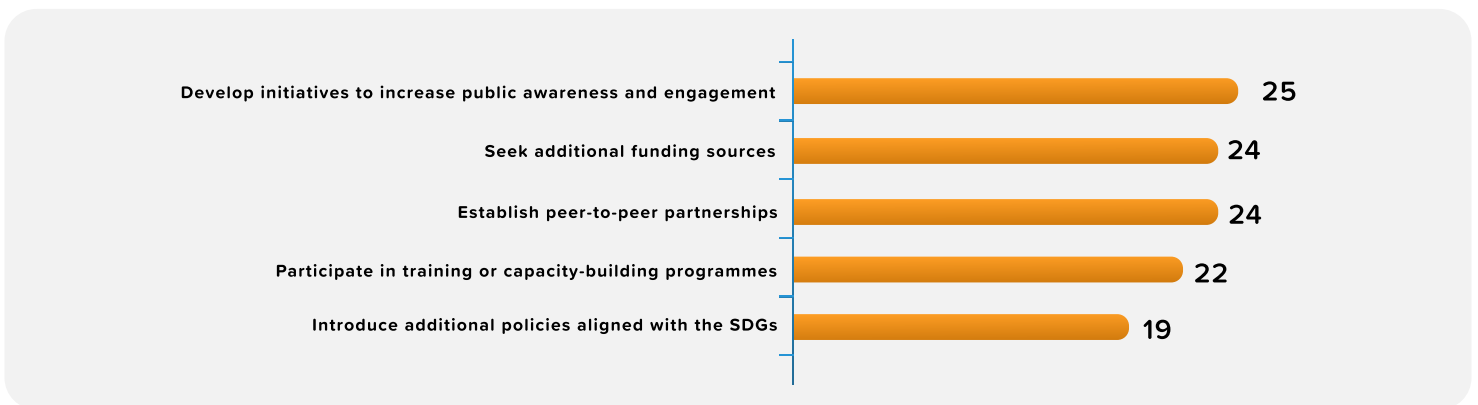
With only 15% of the SDGs currently on track and the year 2030 fast approaching, we have identified certain factors that are preventing European LRGAs from advancing more quickly towards SDG implementation. Limited human resources or capacity appears to be the main factor, followed by insufficient financial resources, lack of political engagement, and limited public awareness.

Figure 9. Factors preventing acceleration towards SDGs (number of respondents)



In response to a query about what measures LRGAs should take in the short-term (2024–2027) to accelerate the implementation of SDGs, LRGAs responded that the development of initiatives to increase public awareness was the most relevant measure, followed by seeking additional funding sources and peer-to-peer partnerships.

Figure 10. Short-term measures (2024–2027) to accelerate actions towards SDGs (number of respondents)



In the long term, however, the main measure for localising the SDGs by 2030 and achieving the target goals was seen as the introduction of innovative policies aligned with SDGs.

Figure 11. Measures needed until 2030 to achieve SDGs



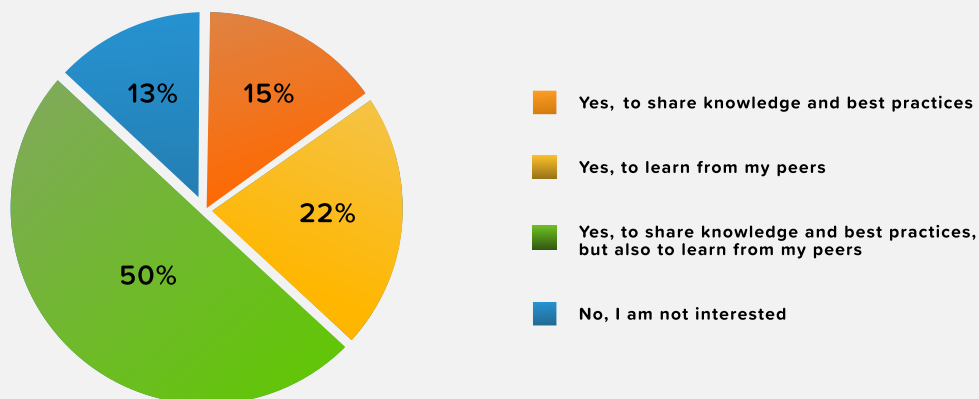


7. Future collaboration

This section explores initiatives developed by LRGs and LRGAs to meet specific SDGs and address local challenges. Considering the urgency to act, it aims to shed lights on concrete initiatives that can be developed and shared to accelerate achievement of the SDGs, such as training, capacity building, learning, peer-to-peer collaboration, and possibly additional funding.

With regard to the establishing of peer-to-peer partnerships to take on SDG-related challenges, 50% of the respondents affirmed wanting to share knowledge and best practices as well as learn from their peers; 22% wished to learn from their peers; 15% preferred sharing knowledge and best practices and 13% were not interested in partnerships.

Figure 12. Interest in establishing peer-to-peer partnerships for the SDGs



Up to 54% of the respondents had already developed successful actions targeting specific SDGs (mainly related to SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being), whereas 33% did not develop any actions. The breakdown for actions related to the above-mentioned SDGs is as follows: 20% of respondents' actions targeted SDG 17 and SDG 11 and SDG 3 were each the focus of 13% of respondents.

Box 11. Successful actions targeting specific SDGs

Finland: SDG 11. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities' (AFLRA) Municipal Climate Networks' initiative supports municipalities in their climate work. A majority of Finns (80%) reside in municipalities actively engaged in efforts targeting climate change. The legislative obligation to create or update climate action plans now falls within the scope of municipal competences due to an amendment of the Climate Act (took effect on 1st March 2023). In addition, AFLRA facilitates the SDG work of the front-runner six-city network SDG46. This network collaborates on strategies and tools to promote the strategic steering of SDGs in their local governments.

France: SDG 5. The International Association of Francophone Mayors' (AIMF) member cities wish to establish a cross-cutting initiative to strengthen local governance in terms of gender and gender equality. This will notably involve developing a specific monitoring system – to ensure that these issues are given increased consideration within the network – and analysing and sharing best practices. In addition to this system, the AIMF already supports a number of actions that tie in concretely with SDG 5 such as the Togo project, “Atakpamé Women's Promotion Centre and gender equality in Togo”. One of the goals of the project and the municipality of Atakpamé is to set up a centre able to meet women's needs by consolidating municipal activities and those of several local associations working in literacy, empowerment and female leadership.

France: SDG 17. United Cities France's (CUF) structure has, over the last two years (2023-2024), developed, promoted and supported more than 150 French local authorities in their ambitions to carry out international actions (decentralised cooperation, solidarity initiatives, aid actions in crisis situations) in partnership with a community in another country (on the African continent, in the Near and Middle East, Asia).

Italy: SDG 17. Since 2018, through events, studies and workshops, the Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – Venice (AICCRE Venice) has been placing an emphasis on multi-stakeholder and multi-level dialogue to increase people's understanding of the fundamental stakes involved in achieving all the SDGs.⁴⁵

Latvia: SDG 4. The Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) has been working with youth in municipalities (non-formal education) to raise awareness of the SDGs through creative activities (games, painting contests, musical performances).

Malta: SDG 3. The Local Councils' Association (LCA) has plans to introduce a policy on Mental Health and Well-being Policy in acknowledgement of the growing and profound effects of poor mental health in the workplace and to determine what can be done to respond to these challenges. Another related policy already in place deals with substance abuse issues and has introduced measures that help workers undergoing abuse- or addiction-related problems to come forward and receive help.

North Macedonia: SDG 5. The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) has been a pioneer on this issue in the region, working together with UN Women to promote increased awareness of gender issues within the network. Best practices surveys were conducted at regional level as part of a compendium of gender-responsive budgeting and an analysis of NALAS gender equality data was carried out as part of a project titled “Strengthening the knowledge base and capacities of NALAS to promote gender-responsive policy making and to engender local service delivery in SEE”. The first cycle of the e-learning course “Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level” was launched on 6 November 2017 as part of the NALAS E-Academy. Since then, there have been more than eight editions of this e-course not only in English, but in NALAS' members' local languages too: Serbian, Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish. The NALAS Women Mayors network and its annual summit meetings is another example of working towards SDG 5. NALAS also conducts a gender survey on a biannual basis within the Secretariat and throughout the whole network, which involves the collection and updating of data on the number of women and men in associations and municipalities (mayors and city councils), both in managerial and administrative positions.⁴⁶

Spain: SDG 3. In view of achieving SDG 3, the Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) has launched a Local Telecare Service,⁴⁷ which offers people at risk, owing to advanced age, loneliness, fragility, health, disability and/or dependency, the possibility of communicating – from home, 24 hours a day and 365 days a year – with professionals prepared to offer help and implement support measures as needed.

Spain: The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has created a Network of Local Entities for the 2030 Agenda, which emphasises alliances and mutual learning, as well as localisation.

⁴⁵ <https://venicecitysolutions.com/vcs-over-the-year/>

⁴⁶ <http://nalas.eu/recommendations-on-promotion-of-gender-responsive-budgeting/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.diba.cat/es/web/teleassistencia/que-es-la-teleassistencia>

Box 12. Challenges related to specific SDGs

Albania: SDG 13. For the Institute for Albanian Municipalities (IAM), climate action is the most pressing and all-encompassing challenge in general.

Belgium, the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG): **SDG 15** since the VSR has shown that open space is one of the biggest challenges municipalities are facing; **SDG 12** given that local governments can leverage sustainable procurement to a great degree, but it is still being developed in many municipalities and is not always a priority; and lastly, **SDG 17** because international solidarity and cooperation have become more difficult. There is no obligation for local governments to work on international solidarity/cooperation and, consequently, there have been lower budgets and capacity in recent years in many municipalities.

Belgium, the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia (UVCW): Structural funding is required for actions to be implemented. The concept of territorial resilience needs to be incorporated into the SDGs.

France, United Cities France (CUF): Implementing actions needs more structural financing. There needs to be integration of the concept of territorial resilience into the SDGs.

Luxembourg, the Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL) is a very small association in terms of personnel and its main objective is the defence of local governments by ensuring that the central government does not encroach on municipal interests. The association rarely intervenes on the ground and therefore has few means for implementing concrete measures. Everything happens through the municipalities.

Netherlands, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG): **SDG 7.** Over the past few years, the Netherlands (and Europe) has become more aware of its need to become more self-sustainable in energy production. However, clean energy like windmills and solar panels is sometimes difficult to put into place in such a densely populated country. At the same time, its power grid is full. **SDG 11:** The Netherlands is urbanising at a fast rate and Dutch cities need to learn how they can continue to grow in a sustainable way; for example, they are currently contending with a housing crisis. **SDG 13:** Climate change is increasingly seen as a more important topic that must be jointly tackled by all municipalities. However, rural and urban municipalities have very different perspectives on the solutions needed to tackle climate change problems.

Romania, the Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR): **SDG 13.** The lack of specific climate change initiatives is an issue. The gaps in administrative capacity and strategic planning, as well as the dependence on external funding sources, are key challenges in implementing specific climate action initiatives.

Serbia, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SKGO): The most important challenges in this area for LRGs are insufficient human resources, financial capacities and the insufficient predictability of funding and the lack of quality project pipelines, particularly for the more demanding infrastructural investments. Vertical strategic planning (top to bottom, national to local level) likewise falls short in consistency for most areas falling under local governments' competence, thus preventing quality prioritisation that would also have the added benefit of being consistent across different levels of government. In this respect, while local governments have already made progress, e.g., in their drawing up of local development plans (and their linking with SDGs), the national development plan is still in the early stages of preparation and lacks a national framework/profiling towards SDGs that would induce stronger coordination. These deficiencies are fertile ground for further difficulties in terms of reporting on the strategic impacts of policies and their effective contributions to SDGs. Despite the efforts invested by the national Statistical Office to increase the matching of domestically available indicators with the ones related to SDGs, the exercise proved much more of a success with the nationally available indicators than with the local ones.

Spain: One of the main challenges faced by the Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) has been staying on top of the severe drought that has hit the territory for more than three years. On account of the province's 311 municipalities' differing situations (type of management, form of supply, etc.), the Provincial Council must gear up for the multiple circumstances that each of the municipalities' experiences, with the overriding objective being that all municipalities retain access to drinking water.⁴⁸

Spain: For the Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (FMSC), it has proven difficult to establish alliances because prospective partners are generally more interested in larger territories, population-wise, rather than in delimited territories with a smaller population. Nevertheless, as vulnerable and fragile as Majorca is, it may be ideal for pilot projects as it would entail a simpler implementation. Securing a political commitment can also be tricky since many municipalities view the SDGs solely from a political perspective.

⁴⁸ <https://www.diba.cat/es/web/mediambient/gestio-abastament-aigua>

Since it is quite obvious that more needs to be done and quickly if the implementation of SDGs is to be accelerated, we asked our members what kind of assistance they were seeking to speed up this process: 29% of respondents expressed interest in participating in peer exchanges and cross-training sessions, 26% preferred online workshops or webinars to address the lack of progress in achieving the SDGs, with the remainder opting for, in decreasing order, capacity-building programmes, in-person workshops, training academies or mentoring capabilities. It was very clear that the need for pedagogical activities remains a key priority for our members.

Figure 13. Interest in activities by number of respondent associations



We also observed that, in terms of improving collaboration and achieving the SDGs, the needs and challenges encountered by LRGs and LRGAs varied across different regions. Nonetheless, it was apparent that many of the examples cited by the respondent associations as helpful and contributing to positive outcomes were based on the following: focusing on connection, sharing experiences and networking; learning from both positive and negative experiences; building a supportive community; targeting activities; informing beforehand for effective planning; working with associations to facilitate exchanges; using digital participation to ensure greater accessibility; understanding working methodologies and best practices from other municipal associations; employing methods to raise awareness of SDGs and encourage action; introducing cross-collaboration to yield positive results; holding dedicated workshops on localising SDGs; sharing knowledge, modalities, and skills for voluntary reporting on SDGs.

By **Boris Tonhauser**
Director of PLATFORMA



8. Conclusions and the way forward towards 2030

With 2030 approaching ever nearer, we can only act quicker and better. Carrying on with business as usual as an actor and decision-maker is no longer sufficient when it comes to achieving sustainability. It is now widely acknowledged that local and regional governments are best placed to take on the full scope of the current large-scale challenges – climate, biodiversity, health pandemic, wars on the European continent and beyond. Municipalities and regions are our best prospects for successfully leading the sustainable and multidimensional transitions that now need to take place. To actually implement these changes however, we still need a broad effective coordination, stronger commitments and sufficient resources at national and European levels, as well as regular dialogue in the spirit of good collaboration. This holds true now more than ever, at a time when the implementation of SDGs is lagging behind, when only around 15% of the 17 SDGs are on track.

We will be meeting in July 2024 to present our progress on SDGs, a date that puts us past the midway point of our allotted time for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In September 2024, we will be delving into exactly where our world is headed at the Summit of the Future, a watershed moment when localising the global agendas is more critical than ever for achieving global goals. As the world takes a closer in-depth look at SDG 17, we hope it will recognise all that the local and regional levels have to offer and that, being directly impacted by global policies, local and regional governments are already actively engaged.

With only five summers left to make this a decade of action, to attain the goal of decarbonised societies in a coherent, just, and inclusive way, we need to further strengthen our work in partnership, both within Europe and beyond our borders, as well as reinforce decentralised cooperation, peer reviews, and the sharing of experience as crucial instruments in achieving the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional levels. Achieving the 2030 Agenda successfully, more efficiently and more quickly, entails raising the awareness of citizens and people of our global challenges and their reality at the local level. Global citizenship education – in which LRGs have a key role to play – needs to be further integrated into our policies. As networks representing LRGs and their interests, CEMR and PLATFORMA have always strived to give a voice to the subnational level and to improve local capacity to better anticipate and respond to any future crises and situations.

We stand firmly by our peers in Ukraine as well as those from all other territories in conflict and crisis. SDG16 on peace and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies and institutions is under review this year, when it seems clear we are in need of stronger and more solid local democracies and dialogue, the pillars which have united our municipalities across Europe since 1951. Achieving this promises the best path forward to 2030 in a way aligned with our goals.

It bears repeating that European Member States, the European Union and the international community need to strengthen the support given to the subnational level and to involve them more methodically in any relevant high-level delegation meetings and negotiations (including High-Level Political Forums and other fora hosted by the UN). In this respect, we welcome the United Nations' creation of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments, where we are represented through three European mayors. This group's appointment clearly shows the United Nations' willingness to forge a path towards the 2024 Summit of the Future that involves all levels working side by side. We need to ensure however that the group is made permanent. In this way, we can truly contribute to the dialogue on global challenges and the implementation of global agendas.

Various transitions lie ahead of us: food, energy access, digitalisation, education, job creation, biodiversity and climate, not to mention other global trends that cannot be tackled from a global perspective alone (in light of the very pertinent gaps that have a crucial impact locally, such as incomplete data, capacity building, financial measures, harmonisation of different policies). But we will not be able to progress towards a post-2030 era unless there are some real and swift changes: 65% of the 169 targets cannot be met without local level involvement, which confirms that the governance model and policy coherence are more vital than ever. Furthermore, we are well aware that 70% of global emissions are concentrated in cities, which is why more attention and resources are needed for LRGs' geographical territories. It is my sincere belief that localising the SDGs, in a way that involves all spheres of government and society (paying specific attention to youth and vulnerable groups), is the key to attaining the goals of the 2030 Agenda and, beyond that, a stronger, more inclusive, just and sustainable future for all.

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