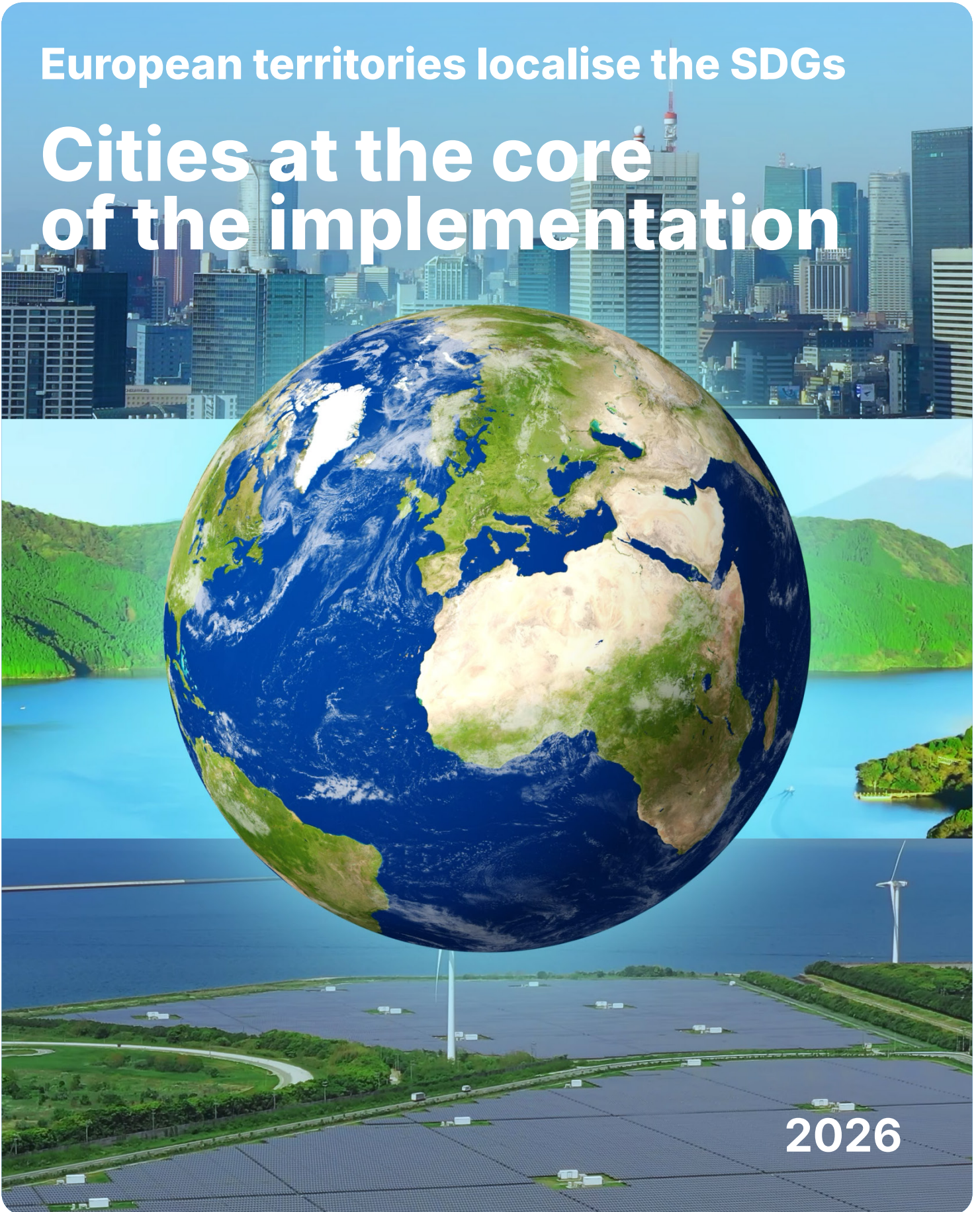


European territories localise the SDGs

Cities at the core of the implementation



2026

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Design: Inextremis.

Photos: © stock.adobe.com

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European territories localise the SDGs

Cities at the core of the implementation

2026

Foreword

By **Carola Gunnarsson**
CEMR Spokesperson for International Cooperation and SDGs
Councillor of Sala Municipality (Sweden)



Cities at the core of the implementation

As the Urban Agenda for the European Union and the United Nations' New Urban Agenda both mark their first decade of action, an essential political truth stands out: global commitments can only be translated into local realities when cities and regions are empowered to be the spearhead. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals will not come about through abstract strategies or international declarations alone—it happens where people's lives are lived. Local and regional governments are the actors shaping mobility, housing, climate resilience and social cohesion day after day and in a way that is lasting. Their role is not auxiliary; it is decisive.

A look at the objectives of SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities make this especially evident. SDG 11 is fundamentally political: it is about who decides how cities develop, whose needs are prioritised and whether public resources deliver safety, affordability, accessibility and resilience to all. In Sweden, municipalities and regions are directly responsible for these decisions. Their democratic mandate, planning powers and proximity to citizens are instrumental in determining whether SDG 11 is rolled out successfully or remains an aspiration. Without strong local governments, sustainable urban development is simply unattainable.

Sweden's leadership on sustainable development is grounded upon this political foundation. Longstanding decentralisation has placed the power to execute and deliver resolutely at the local and regional echelons, with support from platforms for local and regional cooperation, such as the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) and, at European level, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). As CEMR's new Spokesperson for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development Goals, I am committed to ensuring that cities and regions do not merely implement global agendas but also shape them. With less than four years remaining until 2030, the message is clear: closing the SDG gap requires political trust, resources and authority at the territorial level. Strengthening local democracy is not optional—it is an imperative if we are to deliver sustainable, inclusive cities across Europe and beyond.

Respondents

This publication is based on a survey involving 23 respondents, comprised of associations of local and/or regional governments, 15 EU Member States and 2 non-EU countries.

Countries from which associations of local and regional governments responded in 2026

Austria: Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT)

Belgium: Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)

Croatia: Croatian County Association (HRVZZ)

Czechia: Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR)

Estonia: Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)

Finland: Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM)

France: United Cities France (CUF), International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)

Germany: German County Association (DLT)

Latvia: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG)

Luxembourg: Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL)

Malta: Local Councils' Association (LCA)

Moldova: Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM)

Netherlands: International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International)

Romania: Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR)

Slovenia: Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI)

Spain: Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA), Euskal Fonda/Basque Local Authorities Cooperation Fund and eLankidetzeta – Basque Government Development Cooperation Agency (EUSKADI – Basque Country), Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (FMSC), Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL), Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)

Türkiye: Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB)



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

23 respondents
17 countries
15 EU Member States
2 non-EU Member States

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Our 6 key recommendations

TO WHOM?



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

1

RECOMMENDATION



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

Reinforce multi-level governance as a political priority for 2026–2030 delivery. Achieving the 2030 Agenda is no longer solely a technical challenge but a test of political commitment. European and global actors must decisively shift power, funding and trust towards local and regional governments, embedding decentralised cooperation, innovation and peer alliances within the core of implementation strategies. Without a clear political mandate going forward to strengthen these partnerships, the timeline risks slipping beyond reach.

2

RECOMMENDATION



United Nations



European Union



European Union Member States

Place the subnational level at the centre of SDG implementation. This year, special attention is being paid to SDG 11 as one of the goals under review. This calls for a clear political commitment to multi-level governance, direct access for LRGs to development financing and the institutionalisation of local participation in HLPF processes. Empowering cities and regions—while ensuring an inclusive engagement of youth and vulnerable groups—is essential to achieving a sustainable, resilient and equitable urban development within the remaining timeframe until 2030.

3

RECOMMENDATION



United Nations

Reaffirm the importance of the United Nations New Urban Agenda as the global framework guiding sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban development. As we mark the tenth anniversary of the NUA, adopted at the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016 as the preferred implementation framework for sustainable urbanisation, local governments urge the UN to deepen support for municipalities through more effective multi-level governance. By aligning the future direction of the NUA with the practical needs of cities and towns, the UN can accelerate SDG implementation and help local communities deliver meaningful improvements to people's daily lives.

4

RECOMMENDATION

 European Union

Keep cities and towns at the heart of Europe's sustainable development in the Urban Agenda for the EU. LRGs call on the EU to better align its actions as part and parcel of the different agendas for sustainable urban development—the UN 2030 Agenda, the UN New Urban Agenda, the Urban Agenda for the EU and the Commission's recent communication on An EU Agenda for Cities: Driving Growth and Prosperity—by strengthening the role of subnational governments essential to urban development in EU policymaking, improving access to finance for climate adaptation, housing and digital transition, and reinforcing coordination across EU, national and local levels. Empowering LRGs with the right tools, data and partnerships is essential to achieving inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development across Europe.

5

RECOMMENDATION

 European Union



European Union Member States

Consider the central role of territories and subnational governments in delivering sustainable development in the new Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034. Europe's green, social and digital transitions—as well as resilience and competitiveness—are ultimately implemented at the local level. To accelerate SDG progress, the next MFF should provide more targeted, flexible and accessible funding for municipalities and regions, strengthen place-based investment tools and align EU financing more closely with local and regional development strategies. By reinforcing multi-level governance, simplifying access to EU funding and ensuring that cohesion policy, climate finance and investments in competitiveness remain strongly anchored at the territorial level, the EU can empower LRGs to drive inclusive, resilient and sustainable development.

6

RECOMMENDATION



European Union Member States

Accelerate the localisation of the SDGs by ensuring that cities and regions are fully involved in the design, implementation and monitoring process of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). VNRs must give an accurate account of how the goals are implemented in practice, which necessitates the meaningful and early inclusion of local and regional governments in the review process. National reporting remains incomplete without the voices of the territories responsible for translating SDG commitments into concrete action. Excluding LRGs weakens national ownership, limits accountability and obscures territorial inequalities, as well as local innovation, which is critical for achieving the goals at scale.



1. Introduction

Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) continue to make headway in localising the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, along with its 17 SDGs. The present CEMR-PLATFORMA study reporting on this progress will be presented at the 2026 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)¹, whose theme is “Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for a sustainable future for all”.

This report (and the 100 examples in the [annex](#)²) is based on a survey conducted by CEMR and PLATFORMA in February 2026. Its purpose was to collate the most recent information on how, and to what extent, local and regional government associations (LRGAs) and networks have been involved in localising the SDGs, both within Europe and with their global peers. Since 2016, these studies have been produced annually for presentation at that year’s UN HLPF. This year’s survey included questions looking at different aspects related to financing, housing and cities in particular, given that SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities is one of the key SDGs for LRGs and is also under review this year.

The Global Task Force of UCLG has also conducted the 2026 edition [Towards the Localization of the SDGs](#)³ report. This marks ten years of amplifying the voices, experiences and demands of LRGs in global sustainable development debates. At a time when SDG progress remains alarmingly off track, the report shows that cities and regions continue to lead transformative action through public services, infrastructure and democratic governance — despite still being insufficiently included in VNR processes and national coordination mechanisms. Alongside analyses of recent VLRs and VSRs, this edition features dedicated papers on housing, mobility and energy public services as accelerators for just urban transitions. (SDG 11⁴, SDG 7⁵ and SDG 9⁶), the localization of water and sanitation (SDG 6⁷), and the role of culture and heritage in sustainable development (SDG 11.4⁸).

The HLPF is the central global platform for the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will be conducting in-depth reviews of these five goals in 2026: SDG 6⁷, SDG 7⁵, SDG 9⁶, SDG 11⁴ and SDG 17⁹.

¹ CEMR-PLATFORMA SDG reports are available online at: <https://platforma-dev.eu/our-publications/>.

² <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/ANNEX-SDG-study-2026.pdf>

³ <https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uploaded/HLPF2026.pdf>

⁴ SDG 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

⁵ SDG 7. Affordable and Clean Energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy.

⁶ SDG 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive industrialization, and foster innovation.

⁷ SDG 6. Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

⁸ SDG 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.

⁹ SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development



2. UN Dialogue with Member States on Voluntary National Reviews

Municipalities across Europe are increasingly using the SDGs as a basis for building concrete local strategies, action plans and reporting frameworks, demonstrating that sustainable development is materialising on the ground. Yet they continue to face persistent structural barriers—insufficient resources, complex planning systems and the added challenge of embedding sustainability across all policy areas. At the global level, the UN is aware of the decisive role of local action and has been participating in initiatives such as the LRG Days at the HLPF and calling on its Member States to ensure that national and subnational reviews reflect the full breadth of SDG implementation. VNRs and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have therefore become essential tools in highlighting achievements, identifying obstacles and strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Against this backdrop, the preparation of the 2026 VNRs represents a very opportune political moment to reinforce cooperation between national governments and LRGs. Of the 36 countries presenting a VNR on their implementation progress of the 2030 Agenda, CEMR has member associations in four of them: Estonia, Italy, Moldova and Norway.

Each of the reporting countries possesses unique governance models and SDG localisation pathways, and they will all have the chance to share their examples on the global stage at a time when the world is entering the final decisive phase of implementing the 2030 Agenda. This exercise is designed to ensure that the 2026 VNRs fully integrate local data, territorial realities and multi-level governance approaches, thus making national reporting more dependable, inclusive and action-oriented. It is an opportunity to demonstrate that sustainable development cannot be delivered from the top down but must be rooted in local leadership and territorial knowledge.

This reporting exercise also takes place amidst a challenging political environment characterised by geopolitical instability, recentralisation pressures and uneven progress in attaining the SDGs. This climate necessitates a renewed political commitment and coherence from all levels of governance. CEMR-PLATFORMA seek to reaffirm the indispensable role of LRGs in driving sustainable development, climate action and social cohesion and to encourage their member associations to engage with their national governments in view of preparing the VNRs. The examples highlighted in this chapter demonstrate that the VNRs can have add-on effects that go beyond assessing progress; they can set a more ambitious, locally anchored trajectory for the final years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and for the global framework that will follow.

Estonia

Voluntary National Reviews



Estonia's strong commitment to advancing the SDGs through digital innovation, evidence-based policymaking and a whole-of-government approach are all expected to be reflected in the country's 2026 VNR. Building on long-standing strengths in e-governance and transparent public administration, Estonia is likely to emphasise progress in areas such as digital inclusion, quality education, climate action and public sector efficiency, while acknowledging challenges arising from regional disparities, demographic change and the need to accelerate the green transition. The VNR will undoubtedly also highlight the country's efforts to strengthen multi-level cooperation, improve data availability at the local level and support municipalities in integrating SDGs into their development strategies. In the 2026 report in particular, the focus will be on demonstrating how national reforms, local initiatives and digital tools can together contribute to a more resilient, sustainable and inclusive society by 2030.

For the preparation of the 2026 VNR, the national government collaborated with the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities to ensure the local and regional perspective was represented. Specifically, the Association participated in the national SDG foresight and consultation seminar organised by the Government Office (Riigikantselei) on 1st April 2026. During the proceedings, the Association provided local governmental input on this year's chosen goals (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11, 17) as well as Estonia's country-specific SDG 18 regarding viability of cultural space.

Italy

Voluntary National Reviews



Italy's 2026 VNR is expected to underline the country's renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda, with a stronger focus on territorial cohesion, social inclusion and accelerating the green and digital transitions. Building on the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the accumulated experience of regions, metropolitan areas and municipalities, the report is likely to highlight the central role of local and regional governments in implementing the SDGs, particularly in climate adaptation, circular economy, sustainable mobility, housing and social services.

At the same time, the VNR is expected to openly address persistent challenges, including regional disparities between the North and South, youth unemployment and the need to further strengthen multi-level governance and territorial data systems. Italy's 2026 review is therefore likely to present a more integrated and place-based approach, showcasing local and regional innovation while calling for deeper coordination, clearer roles and sustained dialogue among all levels of government to ensure meaningful and balanced progress towards 2030.

¹⁰ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/estonia/voluntary-national-review-2016>

¹¹ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/estonia/voluntary-national-review-2020>

¹² <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/estonia/voluntary-national-reviews-2026>

¹³ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/italy/voluntary-national-review-2017>

¹⁴ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/italy/voluntary-national-review-2022>

¹⁵ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/italy/voluntary-national-reviews-2026>

Moldova



Voluntary National Reviews



Moldova has positioned the SDGs at the heart of its national development agenda, adapting global objectives to its own socio-economic context through a comprehensive “nationalisation” process that adapts targets, indicators and policy mechanisms to local realities. This work is centred within a strategic framework that guides the formulation, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development policies. At its core lies the National Development Strategy “European Moldova 2030”, adopted in 2022, which sets out the country’s long term vision and priority objectives. Fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Moldova’s commitments as an EU candidate country, the strategy establishes sustainable development as a key driver of domestic reform and European integration.

Moldova’s 2020 VNR represented its first transparent SDG reporting framework and highlighted the importance of involving local governments in monitoring progress. It documented early achievements and enduring challenges, many of which have strong territorial dimensions such as demographic decline and unequal access to services. The process strengthened data collection and policy coordination across levels of government, ensuring that local realities inform national SDG implementation. Since 2020, Moldova has advanced gender-responsive governance, expanded participatory budgeting practices and improved statistical systems to better capture regional disparities and the needs of vulnerable groups. Local governments, through the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM), have been central to these efforts, thus ensuring that decentralisation and inclusive governance remain at the heart of SDG implementation.

Moldova’s 2026 VNR looks to build on this strategic direction, reaffirming the country’s commitment to the 2030 Agenda while assessing progress across all SDGs and their targets. The VNR is expected to highlight priority areas such as poverty reduction, social inclusion, governance reforms and the acceleration of EU integration, while addressing ongoing challenges related to economic resilience, regional disparities and institutional capacity. It will also showcase Moldova’s efforts to strengthen data systems, enhance policy coherence and deepen cooperation with local and regional governments—whose role in implementing and monitoring the SDGs has been increasingly recognised as essential to achieving meaningful progress by 2030. The 2026 VNR will serve not only as a national accountability tool but also as a roadmap for entrenching sustainable development priorities into Moldova’s EU accession process, while also contributing to regional peer learning across the Eastern Partnership and South-East Europe.

¹⁶ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/republic-of-moldova/voluntary-national-review-2020>

¹⁷ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/republic-of-moldova/voluntary-national-reviews-2026>

Norway



Voluntary National Reviews



The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)**, continues to play an active and well-established role in Norway's preparation of the 2026 VNR. As was the case in previous reporting cycles, KS was formally invited by the national government to contribute to the review with an independent chapter highlighting local and regional governments' work on the SDGs, supported by relevant statistics and concrete territorial examples. This involvement is considered by KS to be adequate and constructive, reflecting a longstanding culture of dialogue between the national and local levels. Although Norway plans to produce a more concise VNR this year, the emphasis remains on high-quality evidence-based contributions, including perspectives from the country's Higher Executive Forum for the SDGs, of which KS is a member.

KS' participation in national coordination mechanisms has remained stable, with regular—though consultative—engagement in structures overseeing SDG implementation. Under this mechanism, KS ensures that local and regional perspectives are integrated into national reporting, primarily by coordinating the collection of data and case studies from municipalities and counties. This involvement has strengthened vertical cooperation, reinforcing the flow of information between levels of government and ensuring that territorial realities are reflected in national assessments. It has also supported horizontal cooperation, through KS' mobilisation of its municipal sustainability network to share knowledge, gather examples and foster joint initiatives across regions.

Looking ahead to the 2026 VNR, it is KS' understanding that the national government intends to assess all SDGs and their targets, with a particular focus on youth and children, areas where local governments play a crucial role. The VNR is expected to highlight the goals that present the greatest challenges and opportunities to Norway, and will include chapters on local and regional action, youth participation, business partnerships and independent messages from civil society and the National Sustainability Board. KS will also be joining Norway's delegation to the HLPF, thereby guaranteeing that the local and regional dimension will be properly represented internationally and that Norway's reporting will cover the full breadth of SDG implementation across all levels of governance.

¹⁸ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/norway/voluntary-national-review-2016>

¹⁹ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/norway/voluntary-national-review-2021>

²⁰ <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/norway/voluntary-national-reviews-2026>



3. Financing implementation of the SDGs

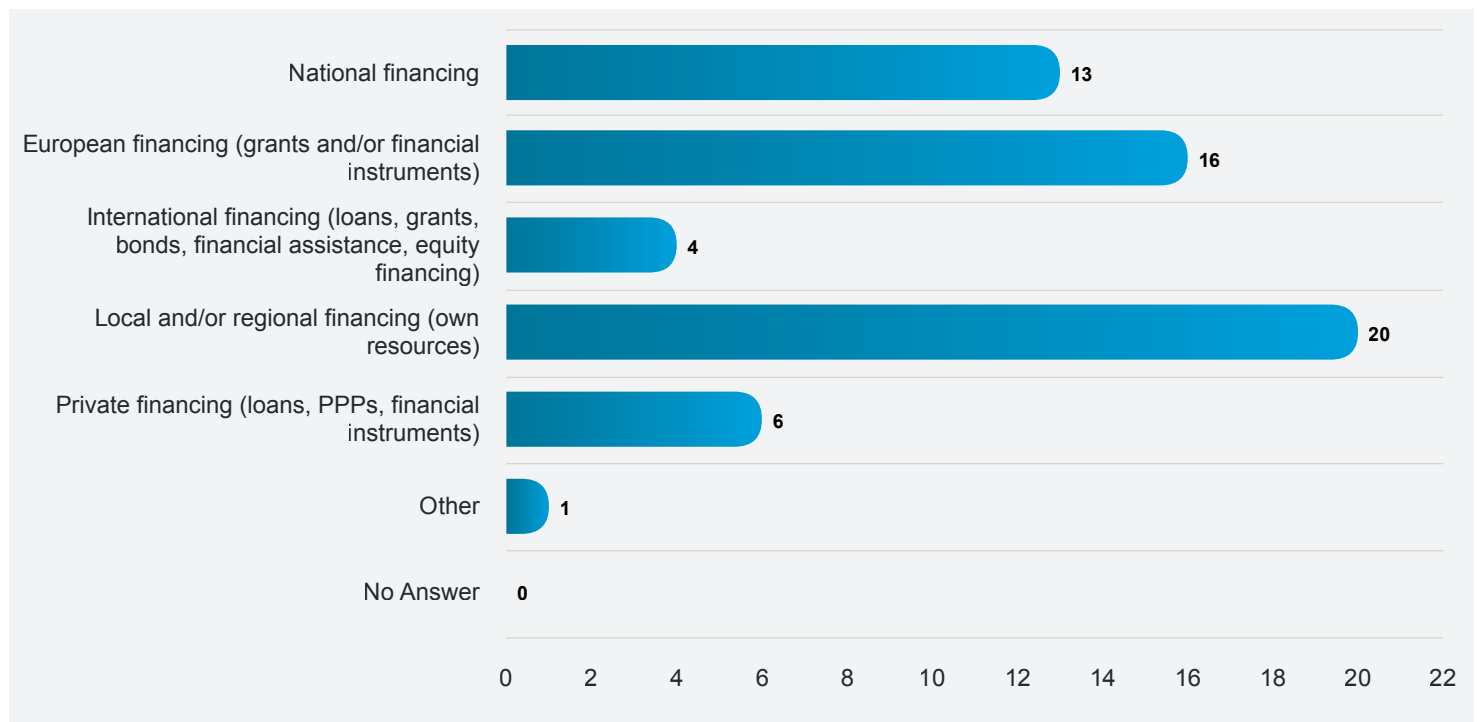
Sources of financing

LRGs rely on a diverse mix of financing sources to advance SDG implementation, but the survey responses show a clear hierarchy in what is most used. Local and regional own-source financing stands out as the primary driver, with 90.91% of respondents indicating that municipalities and regions funded SDG-related actions through their regular budgets and resources. This is closely followed by European Union financing, cited by 72.73%, reflecting the strong role of EU grants and financial instruments in supporting sustainability projects, climate action and territorial development. National financing also remains significant, used by 59.09% of respondents, demonstrating that central governments continue to play an important role in enabling SDG progress at the territorial level.

Other financing sources appear to be far less common. Private financing, including loans and public-private partnerships, was mentioned by 27.27% of respondents, suggesting that while partnerships exist, they are not yet a major pillar of SDG financing for most territories. International financing—from global institutions or development partners—was used by only 18.18% of respondents, indicating either limited access or relevance for many local governments. Finally, only 4.55% of respondents reported using “other” sources and none selected “no answer,” showing that all respondents could identify at least one active financing stream.

These results highlight the fact that, with effective policies implemented at subnational levels, fiscal decentralisation and increase of own resources can accelerate the implementation of SDGs. National and European Union funding remain crucial for LRGs, given the structural role they play in supporting long term investments as well as ongoing operational activities. At the same time, reliance on these sources highlights the need to diversify financing, which can often be impacted by shifting political priorities, undermining any long term predictability.

Figure 1. Sources of financing for SDG implementation most currently used by LRGs in your country (number of respondents).



Unlocking key financing sources for SDG implementation

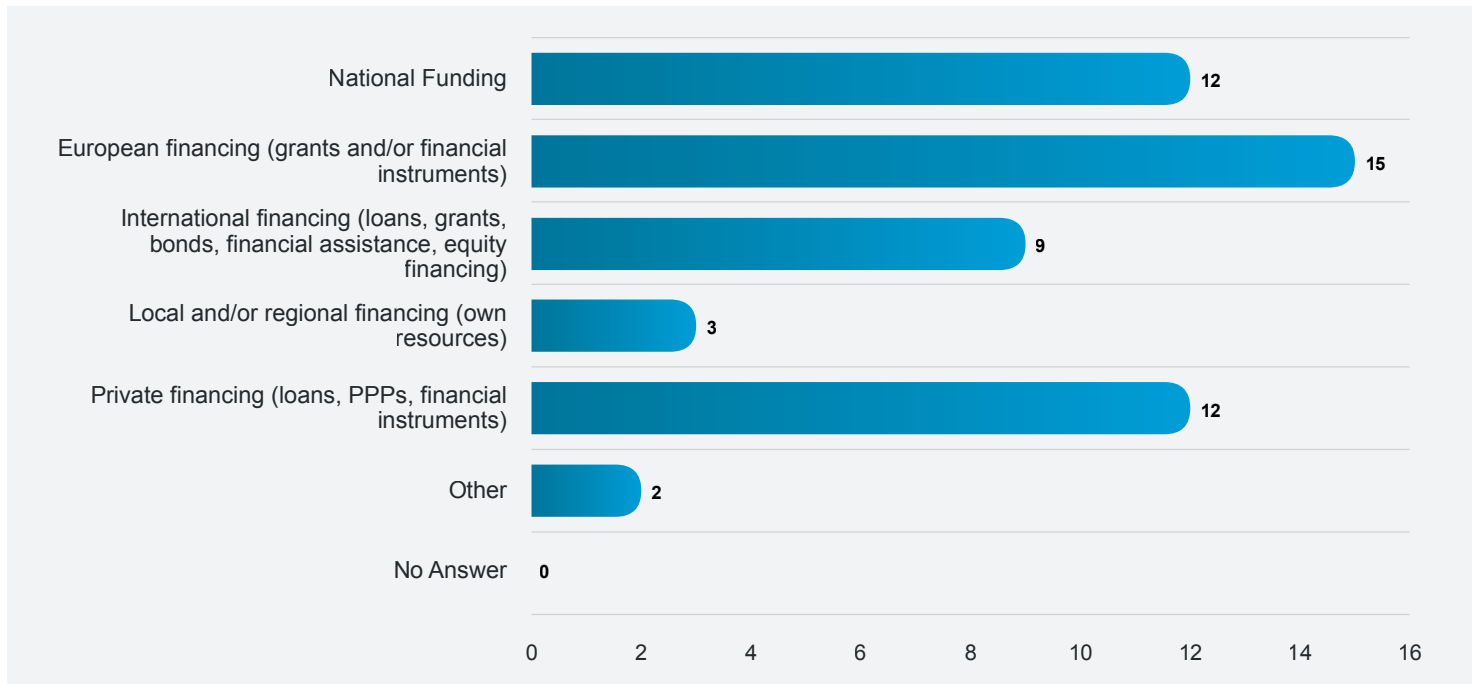
This section looks at which financing sources should be prioritised and further unlocked to help LRGs in member countries accelerate their progress towards the SDGs. The survey responses indicated that LRGs see European Union financing as the top priority to be unlocked further, with 68.18% of respondents identifying EU grants and financial instruments (like loans, guarantees, equities,..) as essential for accelerating SDG implementation. This reflects both the scale of investment required for climate action, digitalisation, mobility and social infrastructure, as well as the fact that EU programmes often provide the most accessible and structured funding streams for territorial development. National and private financing came in a close second, each selected by 54.55% of respondents, signalling a strong demand for greater national co-investment and more effective frameworks to mobilise private capital—whether through loans, blended finance or public-private partnerships. Together, these options highlight the need for stronger multi-level coordination and clearer pathways to give LRGs greater access to diverse funding sources.

International financing—identified by 40.91% of respondents—represents potential and an underused opportunity for LRGs, but also reflects the reality that most European countries are not eligible for international financing support, primarily targeted at low- and middle-income countries. However, only 13.64% of respondents selected an expansion of local or regional own resources financing, underscoring the fact that many municipalities already operate under tight fiscal policies and spending constraints and cannot increase expenditure without external support. A small share (9.09%) ticked other sources, reflecting specific national contexts.



Message: Unlocking EU, national and private financing is critical to enabling LRGs to deliver the SDGs at the scale and speed required.

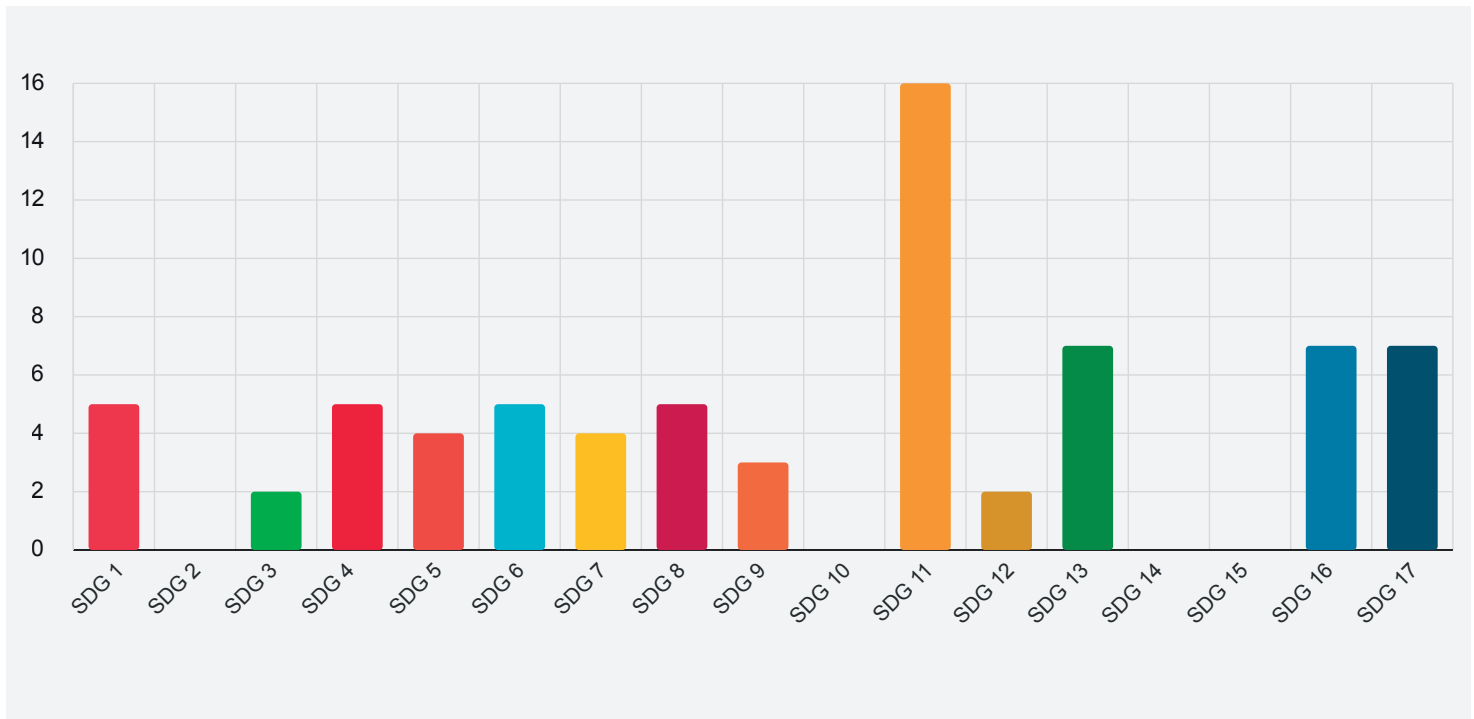
Figure 2. Source of financing which should be further unlocked and prioritised for LRGs in the respondents' countries to accelerate SDG implementation (number of respondents).



Priority SDGs for associations with increased financing

If the associations were to find themselves with access to more financing, they would, unsurprisingly, prioritise their work on SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), the choice of 72.73% of associations. This confirms that LRGs overwhelmingly give precedence to areas where they have mandates and operational leverage to act. This focus reflects the central role of cities in delivering housing, mobility, resilience and basic services, as well as in translating global goals into tangible local outcomes. Besides SDG 11, a second tier of priorities stood out relating to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) with 31.82% of respondents, as well as SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Together, these choices illustrate that additional financing would be used to maximum advantage not only to invest in infrastructure and climate action, but also to strengthen governance, cooperation and multi-level partnerships as enabling conditions for effective SDG delivery.

Figure 3. The SDGs that the associations would prioritise in their work if they had access to more financing (number of respondent associations).



A third cluster of SDGs highlighted the social and economic foundations of sustainable development. SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which are also areas of LRG competence, were each prioritised by 22.73% of respondents, underlining the continued importance of human capital, essential services and local economic development. SDG 1 (No Poverty) also featured prominently, with 22.73%, while SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) were selected by 18.18%, pointing to persistent social inequalities and the urgency of a just energy transition at local level. In contrast, SDGs such as SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) received less prioritisation in this survey.



Message: With greater funding, associations would prioritise place-based action, climate and governance enablers, as well as essential social services from which the local impact would be most immediate and scalable.

Aligning decentralised cooperation with national SDG financing for territorial coherence

There is a need for stronger coordination across governance levels to better align decentralised cooperation with national SDG financing frameworks. Improved multi-level coordination would help ensure territorial coherence and avoid fragmented or inefficient use of resources.

Respondents emphasised that territorial coherence depends on having shared priorities, structured dialogue and formal mechanisms that tie local initiatives to national strategies. Proposed solutions include joint planning frameworks, harmonised indicators and integrated monitoring systems that facilitate the tracking of how decentralised cooperation actions contribute to implementing national SDG targets. They also stressed the importance of having national legal and policy frameworks that would clearly recognise local governments as frontline catalysts in SDG implementation, as well as support through dedicated funding and permanent multi-stakeholder platforms that bring together national and local governments, civil society and development partners.

Responses also indicate persistent structural and capacity constraints that limit effective coordination on the ground. Limited fiscal autonomy, complex administrative requirements and insufficient technical support—particularly for smaller municipalities—hinder local governments in their efforts to design robust projects or successfully navigate fragmented funding mechanisms. Respondents called for simplified procedures, stronger integration of local priorities in national financing plans and more coherent use of EU, national and international funds.



Message: Decentralised cooperation can only deliver coherent and transformative SDG outcomes when local governments are adequately resourced, supported with the necessary capacities and fully embedded in national SDG financing frameworks.

Promoting investment and financing solutions for decentralised cooperation and urban development

There is a clear need to promote investment and financing solutions to enhance decentralised cooperation actions and urban development in partner countries. Survey results indicated respondents' preference for a combination of diverse funding sources: EU and national funds, local budgets and financial tools such as blended finance, green bonds, public-private partnerships and impact investing. The subnational level needs easier access to these instruments through national cofinancing, technical assistance and clearer programmes that involve local governments from the start. Simplified procedures, practical guidance and support from networks can help smaller municipalities prepare stronger projects and tap into international opportunities.

Stronger partnerships between national authorities, local governments, financial institutions and international actors are essential for mobilising larger, more strategic investments. Dedicated territorial funds, tax incentives, risk-sharing mechanisms and state-backed guarantees can attract private capital for major transitions linked to energy-efficient housing, mobility and climate resilience. Aligning decentralised cooperation with national SDG priorities, improving data sharing and focusing on high-impact, scalable projects will help ensure that financing supports coherent and sustainable territorial development.

Territories continue to face significant challenges in financing SDG implementation, largely owing to limited local revenue, dependence on central transfers and the complexity of accessing national or EU funds. Many municipalities—especially smaller or rural ones—struggle with exceedingly complex application procedures, high cofinancing requirements and the proficient technical expertise necessary to design strong, SDG-aligned projects. Rising costs arising from the ecological and energy transitions, inflation and geopolitical pressures cut into already tight budget margins even further. These constraints are compounded by fragmented funding programmes and uneven territorial development, which leave many local governments without the predictable long-term financing necessary and conducive to planning and delivering transformative SDG initiatives.

These financial pressures are exacerbated by weak multi-level coordination, administrative burdens and insufficient institutional capacity, making it more difficult to align local priorities with national strategies or to combine different funding sources effectively. Staff shortages, limited specialised knowledge and the absence of stable support structures have also slowed down project preparation and implementation. In addition, many territories highlighted the need for clearer national SDG financing frameworks, more autonomy in project design and better integration of local needs with national planning cycles. Overall, territories face not only funding gaps but also structural and governance barriers that prevent them from fully leveraging available resources and advancing the implementation of SDGs in a coherent and impactful way.

Lastly, a clear majority of respondents (72.73%) reported being aware of the EU Global Gateway strategy as a tool to mobilise investment and strengthen cooperation and urban development, signifying a growing recognition of its potential to support territorial action. However, 27.27% of respondents were not familiar with the initiative, suggesting that greater outreach, guidance and capacity building are still needed to help local and regional governments better understand how to access and benefit from Global Gateway opportunities.



4. Good practices advancing the SDGs under review in 2026

This section presents examples that highlight good practices that have been undertaken by LRGAs with respect to SDGs under review at the 2026 HLPF, with a particular emphasis on their territorial and urban dimensions:

SDG 6. Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;

SDG 7. Affordable and Clean Energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;

SDG 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;

SDG 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

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



SDG 6. Clean water and sanitation

SDG 6 seeks to ensure universal access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation, recognising water as an essential foundation for public health, environmental protection and socio economic development.

Its implementation depends heavily on LRGs, as they are the authorities responsible for planning, delivering and managing drinking water supplies, sanitation services, wastewater treatment and stormwater management. Through investments in resilient infrastructure, protection of water resources and community engagement, subnational authorities have been active in translating national and European commitments into tangible improvements in access, quality and affordability at territorial level.

Over the past year, CEMR has stepped up its focus on water as a core dimension of local resilience, sustainability and essential public service delivery. As Europe's territories face growing pressures from water scarcity, pollution, ageing infrastructure and more frequent extreme weather events, CEMR has worked to ensure that the responsibilities and needs of local and regional governments are fully reflected in EU policy debates and funding frameworks related to water management.

A key pillar of this work is CEMR's contributions to the Urban Agenda for the EU's Partnership on Water-Sensitive Cities²¹, including actions that promote the integration of water considerations into urban planning, regulatory frameworks, innovative financing mechanisms, digital tools and participatory approaches. CEMR's leadership on innovative financing and its participation in regulatory, planning and capacity-building actions have made it ideally placed to shape practical tools in a way that best supports cities in mainstreaming water sensitivity across policies and investment decisions. This includes advocating for clearer and harmonised indicators, better alignment of EU legislation and improved access to funding for local governments implementing water-sensitive solutions.

In parallel, CEMR continues to support the implementation of the European Water Resilience Strategy adopted in 2025, reiterating the message that water is a public good and that water governance is a shared competence in which local governments play a decisive role—from urban planning and flood risk management to wastewater treatment and groundwater protection—while also calling for stronger preparedness, integrated water management approaches, greater use of nature-based solutions and more systemic resource-to-locality obtained data. Water resilience is a central pillar of the CEMR position paper on climate adaptation, Adapting together: a territorial approach to resilience and risk management²², which calls for stronger local capacities, simplified access to funding and territorial approaches to risk management as key conditions for long-term water security.

The CEMR initiative Every Drop Counts: Water Resilience Begins Locally²³ shone a light on concrete and innovative measures implemented by municipalities and regions to address droughts, floods and water scarcity. Even though local governments can be found on the front line of water resilience, their efforts often remain overlooked at European level, underscoring the need for stronger recognition, knowledge sharing and targeted support.

CEMR continues to be actively engaged in EU legislative processes shaping the water sector. As discussions on the revision of the Water Framework Directive move forward, CEMR has been closely monitoring developments to ensure that any future requirements are coherent and feasible, and coupled with adequate resources to support local governments in fulfilling them. With respect to the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, CEMR has advocated for the reinforcement of the “polluter pays” principle through the preservation of Extended Producer Responsibility for micropollutants—a stance recently confirmed by the Court of Justice of the EU, providing municipalities and water utilities with greater legal certainty and protection against cost shifting.

Actions taken by LRG associations advancing SDG 6



Czechia

Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR)

Webinars strengthening local water management and climate adaptation.

The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) has been organising the Hodinka Regionálního Rozvoje²⁴ webinar series for local representatives, which focuses on key territorial development issues. The sessions include practical guidance and peer exchange, covering topics such as local water management, sustainable use of water resources, climate adaptation and municipal governance, and aim to help strengthen local capacities and coordinated action.



Finland

Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM)

Updating national guidance on sustainable stormwater management.

The Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM) is behind the Stormwater Guide Update Project²⁵, which seeks to update the national guidance on sustainable stormwater management practices. It is newly underway (2026–ongoing). In parallel, the Finnish Water Utilities Association has published model templates²⁶ designed to help with asset management and preparedness plans for water utilities.

21 <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/water-sensitive-city>

22 <https://ccre-cemr.org/impact-community-climate/climate-adaptation-policy-paper>

23 <https://ccre-cemr.org/local-insights/water-management-best-practices>

24 <https://www.smocr.cz/cs/cinnost/udrzitelny-rozvoj/hodinka-regionalniho-rozvoje-smo-cr>

25 <https://www.kuntaliitto.fi/julkaisut/2012/1481-hulevesiopas>

26 <https://www.vesilaitosyhdistys.fi/>



Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL)

Representing municipalities in national water policy processes.

The Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities' (SYVICOL) efforts to localise SDG 6 have included representing all municipalities in national water policy processes, providing opinions on draft laws, joining consultations and sustaining a structured dialogue with the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity. It works to ensure that municipal needs and practical constraints shape national legal, financial and institutional frameworks on drinking water, wastewater treatment and sustainable water management.



Local Councils' Association (LCA)

Promoting responsible water use through community engagement and conservation outreach.

The Local Councils' Association (LCA) has been advancing SDG 6 through ongoing community-level water conservation outreach that it has led in cooperation with the national Energy and Water Agency²⁷. Local councils have run campaigns, engaged residents and taken steps to ensure national water sustainability messages reach communities in order to promote responsible water use across the country.



International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International)

Supporting integrated water resources management internationally.

The International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International) has been supporting and implementing multiple integrated water resources management projects at international level that promote the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources. They have also collaborated with the Union of Water Boards to incorporate the water dimension into annual national SDG reporting.



Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI)

Following a major inter-municipal water supply project.

The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI) has been following a major inter municipal water supply project in Slovenia that will connect four regional systems to improve resilience in the drought prone Istria region. The €117 million project aims to secure summer water availability, with EU funding planned but not yet approved. However, ZMOS is not currently involved in this project beyond the sharing of information.



Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)

Promoting technical cooperation on water and sanitation.

The Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) is running a regional working group of water and sanitation specialists and public utilities that promotes technical cooperation, alignment with national frameworks and the use of a Local4Action approach in public services. More than €10 million has gone to support for more than 30 projects, 50 internships and capacity-building initiatives across Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Andes, resulting in stronger integrated water management, intermunicipal coordination and circular economy practices.

Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL)

Supporting water-saving campaigns and sanitation programmes.

The Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL), with the support of Basque local councils, has been promoting practical projects that strengthen sustainable water management at local level. Examples include campaigns to improve water saving and efficiency, both within municipal operations and among citizens, thereby helping to reduce consumption and raise awareness. EUDEL has also been supporting sanitation programmes aimed at improving infrastructure, wastewater management and access to safe sanitation, often through cooperation between municipalities and other public partners aimed at ensuring long-term service quality and resilience.

²⁷ <https://energywateragency.gov.mt/>



Türkiye

Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB)

Advancing climate adaptation and wastewater reuse.

The Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB) has been advancing local climate action through a proposed 2028–

2031 Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III project that seeks to strengthen municipal capacity for water efficiency, wastewater reuse, nature-based solutions and climate adaptation. In parallel, TBB's Local Government Policy Paper on Coastal Cities promotes SDG 6 by addressing wastewater, coastal protection and ecosystem resilience through a multi-stakeholder approach.



SDG 7. Affordable and clean energy

SDG 7 seeks to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, thus enshrining energy as a cornerstone of social inclusion, economic opportunity and climate action.

Achieving this goal is greatly dependent on action at the local level, where energy is produced, consumed and governed in everyday life. Cities and regions shape energy outcomes through land-use planning, building standards, public transport, local grids and community energy projects, while also tackling energy poverty and ensuring fair access to vulnerable groups. By empowering local and regional governments with the regulatory authority, resources and data to drive clean energy solutions, SDG 7 can translate global ambition into tangible, people-centred impacts on the ground.

CEMR is an active member of the Thematic Partnership on Building Decarbonisation²⁸ under the Urban Agenda for the EU, which provides a platform for exchange between stakeholders and policymakers at all levels of governance to support decarbonisation of the EU's building stock. Within the partnership, CEMR co-chairs a working group on strategic planning at municipal level, mapping legislation across governance levels and proposing recommendations to strengthen regulatory coherence and empower local governments.

As part of the Local Alliance—in partnership with ICLEI, EUROCITIES, FEDARENE, ACR+, Climate Alliance, POLIS and Energy Cities—CEMR has been working to secure the more substantial involvement of local governments in national consultations in accordance with the Social Climate Fund Regulation. This cooperation yielded a policy brief, which ultimately resulted in the Commission issuing new Guidance²⁹ on the implementation of the Social Climate Fund to EU Member States, a document that stresses the importance of structured consultations with local and regional governments.

CEMR also provided input to the Fast & Fair Renewables & Grids Initiative³⁰, which promotes five principles centring fairness in sustainable energy projects to strengthen local economies, protect biodiversity and ensure early stakeholder engagement to help spur public acceptance and accelerate the rollout of clean energy infrastructure.

Actions taken by LRG associations advancing SDG 7



Belgium

Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)

Supporting local energy and climate policies through Network Klimaat.

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has been coordinating Network Klimaat³¹, a

Flemish government funded initiative that supports local energy and climate policies through training, tools, pilot projects and knowledge sharing. In 2025, it organised an inspiration day on social climate policy, promoting approaches that tackle energy poverty and strengthen links between local climate and social welfare services.

²⁸ <https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/building-decarbonisation>

²⁹ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-provides-new-guidance-member-states-implementing-social-climate-fund-2025-10-09_en

³⁰ <https://renewables-grid.eu/>

³¹ <https://www.vvsg.be/themas/klimaat-en-duurzaamheid/energie-en-klimaat/werking-netwerk-klimaat>



Estonia

Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)

Supporting municipal energy transition and apartment renovation.

The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) has been working on behalf of SDG 7 locally through advocacy, cooperation across municipalities and energy transition support, including by sharing information on funding available under the Apartment Building Reconstruction Grant Programme³² (2022–2027). The programme finances up to 50% of renovation costs, targets at least 60% energy savings and supports neighbourhood-scale renewal. This action seeks to tackle high energy poverty in aging Soviet era apartment blocks, which require extensive renovation for renewable energy. In this area in particular, larger municipalities are leading on delivery, but smaller ones are constrained by finance and capacity.



Finland

Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM)

Promoting voluntary Energy Efficiency Agreements.

The Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM) has been involved in the Energy Efficiency Agreements³³ initiative, which consists of national voluntary agreements that support municipalities, companies and public organisations' efforts to improve energy efficiency. AFCM took part in the preparation of the agreements and promotes their adoption among municipalities. The aim is to encourage municipalities to join the agreements, thus ensuring that energy efficiency policies are implemented in a flexible and cost effective way. These agreements serve as an alternative to mandatory measures—such as energy saving laws or comparable regulations—and currently cover the period 2025–2035.



France

International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)

Expanding women-led sustainable energy services in Cameroon.

The International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF) has been heading up the Women and sustainable energy in Cameroon programme (FEDACAM³⁴), in partnership with Cameroon's Network of local elected women. The programme has expanded to 15

municipalities, with over €4 million invested in solar services, public lighting, electrification of public buildings and stronger local governance. By 2025, the initiative had rolled out solar infrastructure in 14 municipalities with the following outcomes: 600 000 residents' lives affected, 586 photovoltaic streetlights installed, 200 local jobs created and women's leadership in local energy policy strengthened.



Malta

Local Councils' Association (LCA)

Raising community energy awareness and supporting renewable energy.

The Local Councils' Association (LCA) has been engaged in activities focused on raising community energy awareness and promoting local renewable energy, as well as supporting councils through outreach, information campaigns and local initiatives such as promoting rooftop solar adoption. National programmes are run by the energy and water agency³⁵, with local governments playing a key role in ensuring effective delivery at community level. This approach strengthens coordination between national and local actors and helps translate clean energy policy into concrete local action.



Netherlands

International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International)

Supporting Ukrainian municipalities with resilient energy systems.

VNG International has been supporting Ukrainian municipalities through energy projects focused on sustaining, repairing and reinforcing local energy systems. The work prioritises strengthening the resilience of energy networks by addressing critical weaknesses, carrying out targeted technical upgrades—such as modernising equipment and improving system efficiency—and building up municipal capacity to manage disruptions, ensure reliable energy supply for essential services and lay the foundations for long term recovery and resilience.



Romania

Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR)

Improving energy efficiency in local public buildings.

The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) has been supporting local and regional governments through the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Programme for Local Public Buildings (2021–2026), financed under the

³² <https://eis.ee/en/services/kodudkorda/>

³³ <https://energiategohokkuussopimukset.fi/en/>

³⁴ <https://www.aimf.asso.fr/actions/fedacam-femmes-et-energie-durable-appui-au-reseau-des-femmes-elues-locales-du-cameroun/>

³⁵ <https://energywateragency.gov.mt/>

Recovery and Resilience Plan. The programme focuses on improving energy efficiency and expanding renewable energy in public buildings — such as schools and hospitals — with measures encompassing improvements such as thermal renovation, installation of solar panels and modernisation of heating systems. It has also fostered strong cooperation between national authorities, municipalities, energy agencies and the private sector.



Spain

Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA)

Funding ecological transition and renewable energy projects.

The Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) supports municipalities through its €47 million 2030 Sectoral Programme for Ecological Transition, which includes Adaptaclima 2030 for climate adaptation and Renovables 2030 for renewable energy and energy efficient public lighting. Energy related projects were approved in 257 municipalities, benefiting 146 municipalities—around

47% of the province—and delivered annual savings of over €23 million, generating more than 118 million kWh of renewable energy and reducing over 50 million kg of CO₂ emissions.

Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)

Supporting renewable energy cooperation in Tetouan.

The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has been supporting an SDG 7-aligned action by the City Council of Barcelona in Morocco to strengthen renewable energy capacities in Tetouan, which has been implemented through indirect cooperation with a national NGO. The project's aims include the training of municipal staff in solar system monitoring and maintenance, supporting women as photovoltaic installers and community energy agents, promoting energy education and employment opportunities, particularly for unemployed and vulnerable women, and fostering a more inclusive and renewable energy culture overall.



SDG 9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure

LRGs play a central role in delivering on SDG 9 as they are at the forefront of planning, investing in and managing infrastructure, while also acting as key drivers of innovation in public service delivery.

As public employers and providers of essential services, LRGs are uniquely positioned to ensure that digital and technological transformations are inclusive, sustainable and responsive to citizens' needs.

To this end, CEMR has supported LRGs in advancing the digital transformation of public administrations and services by promoting e government solutions, data driven governance and innovative approaches to service delivery. It has also propelled the exchange of good practices on smart and integrated digital solutions across sectors. At the same time, CEMR has called attention to the importance of bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas by promoting digital inclusion, access to infrastructure and the development of digital skills. In all these efforts, innovation is utilised not only to improve efficiency, but also to increase accessibility, service quality and equity in public service provision.

Providing support to its members as they navigate the digital and green transitions is a core priority for CEMR. Moreover, it strives to promote a human centred approach to innovation that strengthens public services, builds resilience and supports territorial cohesion even further. Through advocacy and capacity building, CEMR works to mould policies so as to best enable local and regional governments to invest in resilient infrastructure, reduce digital divides and equip the local public workforce with the skills needed for the future.

Actions taken by LRG associations advancing SDG 9



Czechia

Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR)

Strengthening local capacity for tailings pond risk management and emergency preparedness.

The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) contributes to SDG 9 through its

participation in the international SAFETY4TMF project, which addresses risks linked to tailings pond management—large reservoirs storing mining waste. The project strengthens prevention, preparedness and emergency response through cross-border training, knowledge exchange and joint strategies, while actively involving the local governments most exposed to these environmental and safety risks.



Estonia

Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)

Supporting regional cooperation, innovation and resilient infrastructure planning.

The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) has been leading the Pilot Regional Councils in Central and South Estonia initiative, launched in 2025 by the Ministry of Finance with OECD support. These voluntary councils enable municipalities to plan jointly, identify regional strengths and co-design development agreements with the national government across innovation, infrastructure and skills. The pilots aim to reduce urban-rural divides, strengthen bottom-up policymaking and build resilient, place-based infrastructure, with implementation ongoing into the 2030s.



Luxembourg

Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL)

Strengthening multi-level governance for infrastructure, digitalisation and innovation.

The Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL) has been supporting SDG 9 through its structured consultation and advocacy role in national policymaking on infrastructure, digitalisation and innovation. SYVICOL regularly issues formal opinions on draft laws covering areas such as public infrastructure, digital transformation, mobility, broadband and local public services. By aggregating municipal feedback and engaging with national authorities, SYVICOL helps ensure that national policies are realistic, territorially balanced and responsive to local needs. Its main added value lies in strengthening multi-level governance by bridging local and national perspectives.



Malta

Local Councils' Association (LCA)

Strengthening the digital innovation ecosystem through cooperation and knowledge exchange.

The Local Councils' Association (LCA) heads up the Strengthening the Digital Innovation Ecosystem initiative which supports the localisation of SDG 9 by strengthening Malta's digital innovation ecosystem through international cooperation and structured knowledge exchange. In close partnership with national bodies such as the Malta Digital Innovation Authority and the Foundation for Information Technology Accessibility, and through engagement with international digital networks, it helps align local action with national strategies, improve digital infrastructure, promote inclusive digital transformation and foster innovation-driven growth at both local and national levels.



Romania

Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR)

Supporting smart city development and digital transformation in local governments.

The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) supports the Smart City and Digital Transformation Initiative for Local Governments (2021–2027). Under this initiative, local and regional governments in Romania promote smart city and digital transformation projects to support the localisation of SDG 9. Project aims include developing digital public services, intelligent transport systems, open data platforms and modern ICT infrastructure.



Spain

Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA)

Investing in industrial modernisation and universal digital infrastructure.

The Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) advanced the modernisation of economic activity areas through high-impact investments to boost quality, competitiveness and jobs, benefiting over 116,000 employees in 2022. This work has since continued with the €38 million Industrial Estates Improvement Programme 2025–2028. To support universal digital access (Target 9.c), the Barcelona Provincial Council also invested over €40 million in 2024 in municipal digital infrastructure and technical support. Since 2022, the DIGITAL programme has invested more than €7 million to modernise digital infrastructure in 264 municipalities, reaching over one million residents, mainly in smaller towns.

Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)

Supporting productive and educational capacity-building through international cooperation.

The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has supported the Provincial Council of Seville in its SDG 9-aligned activities, carried out through indirect cooperation with a national NGO. The project strengthened productive and educational capacities at the bilingual intercultural community education centre Inka Wasi in the Ñamarín neighbourhood of Saraguro (Loja Province) by equipping a textile workshop and introducing recreational games to support training and community activities.



Türkiye

Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB)

Building local capacity for disaster risk reduction and waste management.

The Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency have been collaborating on a project (2022–2026) that strengthens

local capacity for disaster risk reduction and waste management in support of SDG 9. It has delivered practical outputs, including a reconstruction plan for the city of Kahramanmaraş, national disaster waste management guidelines and a pilot seismic retrofit in Izmir. Through multi-stakeholder cooperation, training and technical support, the project has improved municipal planning, coordination and use of data, while also adapting international practices to local needs.



SDG 11. Sustainable cities and communities

SDG 11 is the goal most closely linked to the everyday responsibilities of LRGs. It calls for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

These areas fall squarely within local mandates such as urban planning, housing, mobility, public services and climate adaptation. As urbanisation and inequalities increase, the post-2030 agenda will need to place stronger emphasis on place-based approaches, long-term planning and the capacity of local governments to respond to challenges such as housing affordability, climate risks, demographic change and digitalisation. Sustainable cities should therefore not be viewed as an add-on, but as a foundation for achieving all global goals.

Looking ahead, LRGs will be indispensable in delivering the post-2030 vision. They will be the ones spearheading the efforts to translate national commitments into action, mobilise communities and test innovative solutions that can be scaled up. Strengthening their role through better multi-level governance, adequate financing, disaggregated local data and formal inclusion in national reporting processes—such as VNRs—will be indispensable. Properly empowered, LRGs can drive sustainable, resilient and inclusive development well beyond 2030.

CEMR has advanced this goal by amplifying the voice of LRGs in European and global policymaking, promoting multi-level governance and supporting municipalities in translating sustainability commitments into local practice. Through policy advocacy, peer learning and concrete initiatives on climate action, mobility, social inclusion, housing and democratic governance, it has helped cities and regions strengthen their resilience, reduce inequalities and improve quality of life. By connecting local experience with European strategies and global agendas such as the 2030 Agenda, CEMR contributes to the implementation of SDG 11 where it is most tangible: in the daily lives of people and communities across Europe.

Actions taken by LRG associations advancing SDG 11



Belgium

Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)

Supporting space-efficient urban development and preservation of open space.

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) has been supporting municipalities in the Region of Flanders through policy dialogue, guidance and initiatives such as the 2025 Local Building Shift Day (Bouwshift), promoting more space-efficient urban development and the preservation of open space. In the Ghent region, where rapid population growth makes this policy shift particularly urgent, the intermunicipal body Veneco has translated the gross zero land take objective into concrete data, coordinated action and joint decision making, leading to the redesignation of hundreds of hectares as well as sustained cooperation between municipalities.



Finland

Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM)

Integrating sustainable development into urban planning and decision-making.

The Association of Finnish Cities and Municipalities (AFCM) is part of the Sustainable Future Leadership in Cities³⁶ network project, which brings together five major Finnish cities—Helsinki, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku—to better integrate all dimensions of sustainable development into urban planning and decision-making. The project also aims to strengthen the cities' visibility and influence in national and international sustainability cooperation, as it involves working with partners such as UN-Habitat, Nordregio, UCLG, CEMR and key Finnish government bodies.

³⁶ <https://www.localfinland.fi/sustainable-future-leadership-in-cities>



Germany

German County Association (DLT)

Promoting balanced territorial development through housing, mobility and spatial planning.

The German County Association (DLT) advances SDG 11 by promoting an integrated territorial approach that links housing, mobility and spatial planning across both urban and rural areas. It has been supporting counties in activating vacant housing, improving connectivity and ensuring EU regulations remain actionable for local governments. Through cross-regional cooperation and practical examples such as the Leipzig–Zeitz rail strategy, DLT helps foster balanced development and ensures no region is left behind.



Malta

Local Councils' Association (LCA)

Promoting walkable, accessible and people-centred public spaces.

The Local Councils' Association (LCA) published the *Guidelines on Walkability and Accessibility*³⁷ under the Resident First project. The guidelines promote accessible, people-centred public spaces, prioritise pedestrians, improve connectivity and strengthen open spaces as core elements of liveable communities. The document provides guidance to local councils for designing inclusive, safe and environmentally sustainable urban spaces centred around residents' well-being.



Netherlands

International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International)

Supporting municipalities in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), under the Municipalities for Global Goals initiative, has created a network that supports Dutch municipalities in implementing the SDGs. VNG International maintains this network, develops and shares tools, best practices and success stories, and organises workshops and meetings. More than 140 of the Netherlands' 342 municipalities have joined the network.



Romania

Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR)

Supporting sustainable urban mobility and low-emission transport planning.

The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) supports Romanian cities in developing Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), implemented using EU Cohesion Policy funds or national programmes advancing SDG 11. SUMPs promote integrated, low-emission urban transport by prioritising public transport, cycling and walking, while supporting investments in modern public transport fleets, cycling infrastructure and intelligent traffic management. They provide a coordinated framework for urban mobility by strengthening cooperation between local governments, national institutions, transport operators, civil society and the private sector.



Slovenia

Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI)

Financing sustainable urban development through integrated territorial investments.

The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI) has been supporting sustainable urban development through the use of Integrated Territorial Investments under the EU Cohesion Policy 2021–2027. This mechanism combines EU and national funds to finance green infrastructure, sustainable mobility and urban regeneration while implementing urban development strategies across 12 key municipalities. ZMOS acts as the intermediate body responsible for project selection, enabling multi-level cooperation that helps improve urban sustainability and quality of life.



Spain

Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL)

Advancing sustainable housing, mobility and urban regeneration.

The Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL) supports SDG 11 by working with Basque local councils on projects that foster inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities. Core actions include affordable rental housing, housing refurbishment and urban regeneration to improve housing access, energy efficiency and neighbourhood quality. EUDEL also promotes sustainable mobility through the addition of electric buses and the expansion of tram and metro networks, while advancing urban waste management to strengthen circular economy practices and urban liveability.

³⁷ <https://www.lca.org.mt/sustainability/guidelines-on-walkability-and-accessibility/>

Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)

Supporting cultural heritage preservation through language revitalisation.

The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) has supported the SDG 11-aligned action of the City Council of Burlada, Navarra in El Salvador, implemented through indirect cooperation with a national

NGO. The project forms part of the Náhuat Nests of Linguistic Immersion programme, which aims to protect endangered cultural heritage by revitalising the Náhuat-Pipil language through full immersion for children aged 3 to 5. It operates three language nests, provides language and cultural training for children and women, and strengthens the physical, technological and institutional capacities needed to ensure their long-term autonomous operation.



SDG 17. Partnerships for the Goals

SDG 17 is the political backbone of the 2030 Agenda, yet it remains one of the least delivered goals. At its core, it is about power-sharing, trust and effective cooperation across levels of government and actors.

For local and regional governments, revitalising partnerships means moving beyond symbolic inclusion towards real decision-making power, predictable financing and clear recognition of their role in any implementation. Experience shows that partnerships are most effective when rooted in long-term strategies, supported by strong institutions and backed by dedicated resources. Whether through decentralised cooperation, city-to-city links or multi-level platforms, SDG 17 is transformative only when local leadership is treated as an asset, not merely a delivery channel.

Politically, advancing SDG 17 requires rebalancing governance to reflect where action actually transpires. LRGs build partnerships with civil society, academia and the private sector, translating global goals into local results, but these efforts often remain fragmented and under-resourced. Strengthening SDG 17 therefore implies institutionalising the role of subnational governments in cooperation, financing and monitoring, and better aligning local action with national SDG strategies—placing territories at the heart of a renewed global partnership.

SDG 17 remains central to CEMR’s mission. CEMR strengthens the means of implementation by fostering multi-level governance, promoting cooperation between LRGs, EU institutions and international partners, and amplifying local voices in global processes. A core element of this work is CEMR’s long-standing support for city-to-city and region-to-region twinning, which builds lasting partnerships based on mutual learning, solidarity and shared solutions to common challenges. Through its engagement in European and global networks, CEMR connects municipalities and regions worldwide, facilitates peer exchange, supports capacity building and mobilises collective action on sustainable development. By linking local action across borders and scales, CEMR actively revitalises the global partnerships needed to deliver the SDGs in an inclusive, coordinated and effective way.

Actions taken by LRG associations advancing SDG 17



Austria

Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT)

Supporting Ukrainian municipal recovery and European integration through international cooperation.

The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT) has been a partner in international cooperation programs, such as the Municipal Exchange Fund 4U³⁸ (Austria for Ukraine). It is a two-year international cooperation project (2025–2027) connecting Ukrainian and Austrian local governments and municipal partners. It aims to strengthen Ukrainian local governments by supporting recovery efforts and accompanying municipalities on their path towards European integration.



Belgium

Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)

Promoting international solidarity and long-term municipal partnerships.

The Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) supports long-term international cooperation through its GLoBe city partnership programme, connecting Flemish municipalities with partners worldwide for mutual learning and joint action on climate, inclusion and governance. VVSG also promotes international solidarity by reaffirming the United Nations target of allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income to Official Development Assistance and highlighting the role of local governments and the need for adequate resources for decentralised cooperation.

38 <https://www.kdz.eu/en/municipalexchange4u>



Estonia

Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)

Strengthening SDG localisation through multi-level governance and municipal engagement.

The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) is a participant in the Estonian Commission for Sustainable Development³⁹, an advisory body supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews. As a permanent member since 2020, AECM contributes municipal perspectives on SDG localisation, multi-level governance and financing. For the 2026 VNR, AECM has coordinated the municipal inputs on SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, advocating for stronger local data, stronger institutional mechanisms and improved territorial coherence and partnerships.



France

International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)

Building global partnerships through cooperation with the European Union.

The International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF) has maintained a strategic partnership with the European Union since 2015, consistently promoting the role of local governments as key actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The partnership combines funding, policy dialogue, capacity building and concrete city projects. Between 2022 and 2025, it mobilised €5 million, supported eight city projects and six regional dialogues, and backed initiatives on environment, essential services, digitalisation, gender equality and local governance.

United Cities France (CUF)

Strengthening international cooperation and local government capacity.

United Cities France (CUF) have worked to advance SDG 17 by helping local governments build strong international partnerships through thematic groups, shared indicators and decentralised cooperation tools. It developed a support mechanism for local and regional governments, co-financed with the French Development Agency and the Public Deposit and Investment Fund of France, that strengthens municipalities' capacity to propose international strategies and integrate climate priorities. CUF's solidarity funds help to further mobilise French territories in times of crisis, creating durable, reciprocal partnerships that reinforce local leadership and ensure no community is left behind.

³⁹ <https://www.riigikantselei.ee/en>



Germany

German County Association (DLT)

Supporting international partnerships and decentralised governance.

The German County Association (DLT) advances SDG 11 by strengthening decentralised governance and supporting international partnerships that help counties shape sustainable housing, mobility and regional development. Through twinning, peer-to-peer projects and cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the Foreign Office, counties have been exchanging practical solutions regarding climate adaptation, land management and citizen participation. This approach ensures that even smaller and rural counties can build capacity, engage globally and contribute to sustainable communities across all territories.



Spain

Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA)

Advancing partnerships and responsible artificial intelligence in local government.

The Barcelona Provincial Council (DIBA) has engaged in key initiatives aligned with target 17.17 (which encourages and promotes effective public, public private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resource strategies of existing partnerships), such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, the Network of Towns and Cities for Sustainability, the Network of Local Urban Agendas (XAUL) and Xarxa2030. To contribute to target 17.18 (enhancing data, monitoring and accountability by building statistical capacity in developing countries), the Provincial Council has been advancing a strategic line of action, an integral part of the Local IA, project, which provides rules, tools and training to support the ethical, safe and responsible deployment of artificial intelligence in public administrations.

Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)

Promoting local economic development through global partnerships.

The Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI) is a key organiser of the World Forum of Local Economic Development (WFLED), a global platform that promotes inclusive, sustainable and territory-based economic development through multi-stakeholder cooperation. The initiative supports context-specific strategies that create decent jobs, boost innovation and ensure environmental sustainability. Through dialogue and partnerships, WFLED helps translate global agendas into local action. The next forum is scheduled to take place in Johannesburg in 2027.



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5. Special focus on housing and the World Urban Forum

Housing is a central entry point for achieving SDG 11 and is closely linked to the first target on access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services. The World Urban Forum ([WUF](https://wuf.unhabitat.org/)⁴⁰) offers a key global platform where housing challenges—such as affordability, informality, energy efficiency and social inclusion—are discussed alongside practical solutions. For subnational governments, the WUF is especially relevant as cities and regions are directly responsible for housing delivery, spatial planning and neighbourhood regeneration. By sharing local experience, influencing global policy debates and building partnerships at the Forum, local and regional governments can scale up innovative approaches, align global commitments with local realities and ensure housing policies respond to territorial needs and inequalities on the ground.

SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable recognises that more than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas. It takes up key challenges such as access to affordable and adequate housing, sustainable transport systems, reduced environmental impact and improved urban planning. SDG 11 also emphasises the importance of protecting cultural and natural heritage, strengthening resilience to climate-related disasters and ensuring participatory decision making at the local level. By empowering local and regional governments and engaging communities, SDG 11 seeks to transform cities into engines of sustainable development that improve quality of life while respecting environmental limits.

The EU supports this goal through initiatives such as the European Green Deal and cohesion policy funds, which promote sustainable urban development, the renovation of existing housing stock and improved access to adequate housing for vulnerable groups. Housing is the first target (11.1) of SDG 11, which aims to 'ensure access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums' by 2030. The varied efforts to decarbonise buildings, reduce energy poverty and foster compact, well-connected urban development all ensure that housing policy remains aligned with climate and social objectives.

Over the past decade, the Urban Agenda for the EU, launched with the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016, has evolved into a structured framework that strengthens cooperation among cities, Member States and EU institutions. It has firmly established thematic partnerships as a key mechanism for improving regulation, access to funding and urban knowledge, marking a 10-year milestone in shaping EU urban policy.

In parallel, the United Nations' New Urban Agenda—also observing its 10th anniversary in 2026—represents a global vision for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable urban development. In this respect, it emphasises the essential role of local and regional governments in delivering SDG-aligned urban policies, promoting multi-level governance and advancing

⁴⁰ <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/>

the localisation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the NUA recognises that more than 65% of SDG targets are directly linked to the mandates of subnational authorities, positioning them as central actors in its implementation.

Looking ahead, both agendas face mounting challenges at this critical juncture: housing shortages, climate impact, growing inequalities and the need for stronger institutional coordination. Subnational governments are uniquely placed to cope with these pressures through local planning, community engagement and innovative service delivery, making them indispensable partners in advancing global agendas and accelerating the implementation of SDGs. However, all this also requires a sustained political will: clearer mandates, stable financing and formal mechanisms that embed local leadership into EU and UN decision-making processes.

Persistent challenges and potential responses in the housing sector

1. Gaps in monitoring, data and evidence at regional and urban levels: the lack of harmonised regional and urban SDG indicators across the EU remains a major challenge. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre notes that no unified framework exists for monitoring SDGs at the regional level, complicating reporting and limiting evidence-based policymaking. There remain vast regional disparities, with mixed results at NUTS 2 level⁴¹, reinforcing the need for better data and place-based approaches.

2. Insufficient multi-level governance and limited involvement of subnational actors: not all EU Member States systematically involve LRGs in SDG planning, implementation or in the national reporting processes. This governance gap mirrors global trends. Roughly 33% of the countries reporting to the UN failed to include LRGs in SDG-related processes. However, within Europe and especially with respect to EU-level decision making, the need to secure a stronger political voice for subnational governments remains urgent and critical.

3. Financing and capacity constraints at local and regional levels: subnational governments often lack fiscal autonomy and the stable financing needed to accelerate SDG implementation. Global assessments have emphasised the urgent need for inclusive, predictable, long-term local financing mechanisms to avoid delays in enacting key transitions—climate adaptation, mobility, housing and social protection. Gaps in capacity also persist in planning, budgeting and integrated policy development, which calls for more EU-supported training and peer-to-peer learning initiatives.

4. Need for stronger political will and structured dialogue: successful delivery of the 2030 Agenda in Europe hinges on the strengthening of the continent's political commitment to decentralisation and multi-level governance. This should entail structured dialogue with subnational governments, the systematic inclusion of local representatives in EU and national delegations and more robust policy coherence between EU urban policies and local SDG strategies. Without formalised and regular multi-level engagement, the potential of cities and regions—responsible for delivering more than half of the SDG targets—will remain underutilised. Europe faces persistent and sometimes growing territorial inequalities in terms of poverty, employment, health outcomes and in research and development capacity. These regional disparities significantly hinder the EU's ability to realise the SDGs uniformly and highlight the need for place-sensitive policies. Many national strategies still fail to address the specific socio-economic realities of subnational territories, creating a disconnect between national SDG priorities and local needs.

How European cities and regions deliver SDG 11

Faced with climate change, demographic shifts and social inequalities, European cities and regions have increasingly had recourse to integrated and place-based strategies. Many territories are investing in more green and blue infrastructure, sustainable mobility, energy efficient buildings and affordable housing as they seek to reduce environmental impact while improving quality of life. At the same time, they are contending with divergent demographic pressures—depopulation in rural areas and overpopulation in major cities—through the introduction of measures that strengthen connectivity, expand public transport and promote compact, well-planned urban regeneration. These efforts are supported by EU cohesion funds, national programmes and local development policies that encourage balanced territorial development.

Local governments also play a central role by developing comprehensive housing plans, expanding the stock of affordable and quality homes and improving the management of public services. Municipalities—regardless of whether they are in

⁴¹ Representing regions, the second level of the EU's territorial classification system, the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, is 2 (NUTS2) level (second level of the EU's territorial classification system, representing regions used for statistical analysis, regional policy, and funding allocation)

Slovenia, the Basque Country, Latvia, Estonia or Germany—combine climate resilience, social inclusion and economic development through coordinated governance across levels. Intermunicipal and cross-border cooperation are also instrumental as they help small municipalities pool resources, share expertise and counteract depopulation. Despite tight budgets, European territories continue to innovate through digitalisation, the adaptive reuse of buildings and targeted investments that support both urban and rural communities.

Overall, the survey responses revealed a clear trend towards integrated territorial governance, where climate action, housing policy, mobility and social services are planned together rather than in isolation. By aligning local strategies with national and EU priorities, cities and regions aim to reduce inequalities, manage demographic change and build resilient, inclusive communities. This holistic approach—combining sustainable infrastructure, affordable housing and strong public services—is essential for achieving SDG 11 and ensuring that all territories, regardless of size or location, can thrive.

Shaping future-ready European cities: SDG 11 and LRGs as drivers of urban resilience and global leadership

Strengthening urban safety, cohesion and resilience through inclusive housing and local action

LRGs are fostering safer, more socially cohesive and resilient communities by combining affordable, adequate housing policies with climate-resilient and socially inclusive urban planning. Many cities have acted to expand social and cooperative housing, mobilise vacant units, regulate short-term rentals and simplify administrative procedures to ensure equitable access to homes—especially for young people and vulnerable groups. These housing measures are coupled with others designed to bring further improvements, e.g. the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods, investment in energy-efficient buildings and the creation of community spaces such as libraries, youth centres and social services that foster interactions and reduce inequalities.

To address rising climate risks and geopolitical uncertainty, territories have been investing in resilient infrastructure, sustainable mobility and disaster preparedness systems. This includes improved public lighting, protection of critical facilities and coordinated emergency protocols between police, civil protection and social services. Many municipalities have also adopted climate-neutral strategies, renovated public buildings and promoted clean energy systems to reduce vulnerability and energy poverty. Moreover, digital tools are increasingly used to streamline planning, manage land use and speed up housing developments without lowering standards.

Finally, LRGs reinforce social cohesion and community resilience through participatory governance and targeted support for diverse populations. Measures such as community mediation, migrant support programmes, participatory budgeting and help from local councils build up trust and shared responsibility. Together, these strategies create safer, more inclusive, and more resilient cities capable of withstanding social, climatic and geopolitical pressures.

Shaping inclusive and future ready European urban policies

European urban policies need to evolve towards flexible, forward-looking and data-driven frameworks that can anticipate and adapt to rapid changes in digitalisation, mobility and housing demand. Cities require better tools to analyse real-time data, update planning standards and adapt land-use rules to new lifestyles such as teleworking, shared mobility and mixed-use neighbourhoods. Reducing the digital divide, promoting universal accessibility and embedding participatory approaches are essential to ensuring that technological progress benefits all residents rather than deepening inequalities.

At the same time, policies must become more integrated, such as linking digital transformation with sustainable mobility, affordable housing, climate adaptation and social inclusion. This means enhancing social and public housing, preventing speculation and gentrification, supporting renovation and densification and ensuring that mobility systems—from public transport to cycling and mobility as a service solutions—remain accessible and climate-friendly. Stronger support from the EU is essential. A strong urban focus in cohesion policy, simpler funding rules and less administrative burden would give cities the certainty they need to plan long term and deliver the green and digital transitions.

Finally, EU policies should strengthen multi-level governance and territorial balance, recognising that not all regions face the same challenges. Cities need autonomy, predictable resources and stable cooperation frameworks—such as long-term land use, housing and transport agreements—to prepare for demographic shifts and changing mobility patterns. By combining smart technologies, inclusive design and place-based planning, Europe can ensure that its cities remain resilient, accessible and welcoming for all residents in the decades ahead.

SDG 11 as a driver of European leadership in sustainable urban development and global city cooperation

SDG 11 plays a central role in guiding European leadership on sustainable urban development because it associates housing, climate action, social inclusion and territorial cohesion together under one shared framework. It has influenced major EU strategies—from the Urban Agenda for the EU and the Green Deal to Cohesion Policy and recovery funds—by positioning affordable, energy-efficient housing and resilient urban planning as essential components of a just transition. SDG 11 also encourages integrated, cross sectoral governance, prompting the EU institutions and cities to move beyond fragmented approaches and adopt long-term, people-centred urban policies.

European cities can contribute more effectively to global agendas by internationalising their local solutions through decentralised cooperation. Twinning programmes, city networks, peer-learning platforms and city-to-city partnerships allow municipalities to exchange practical tools on housing affordability, regeneration, mobility and climate adaptation. By sharing replicable models—such as Housing First, cooperative housing, adaptive reuse or climate-neutral neighbourhoods—cities can play an outsized role by scaling up innovations that respond to global challenges like urbanisation, depopulation and access to services.

To strengthen Europe's influence globally, cities need a more robust voice to be heard in international fora and in multi-level governance. Through coordinated advocacy, participation in global networks (such as UCLG) and contributions to UN processes such as the HLPF, European cities can leverage local evidence to drive global policy. Decentralised cooperation thus becomes a strategic tool not only to share European expertise, but also to build mutual trust, support partners in the Global South and reaffirm sustainable housing and inclusive urban development as global public goods.

Accelerating SDG 11 in small and medium sized cities: inclusive, resilient and sustainable housing by 2030

Small and medium-sized cities can accelerate progress towards SDG 11 by focusing on affordable, energy-efficient housing and revitalising the existing urban fabric. Renovating vacant buildings, improving the quality of ageing housing stock and promoting compact, people-centred planning helps local governments respond to resource constraints while keeping development costs manageable. Additionally, targeted social housing, incentives for rehabilitating empty homes and resilient construction standards ensure that vulnerable groups are not left behind.

Cities facing depopulation and regional inequalities have found beneficial results from strengthening connectivity, improving access to services and linking housing strategies to local economic development. Measures such as affordable rental programmes tied to job creation, support for SMEs and better transport and digital infrastructure have helped in retaining and attracting residents. Inter-municipal cooperation and regional development plans are also important, allowing smaller cities to pool expertise, share services and coordinate housing and land-use strategies across territories.

Achieving progress is dependent on stronger multi-level governance and predictable financing as well. Small and medium-sized cities need stable access to EU and national funds, reduced co-financing requirements and support to build their project development capacities. By engaging in decentralised cooperation, exchanging best practices and adopting integrated planning that links housing, mobility, climate action and social policies, these cities can overcome resource limitations and deliver inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development by 2030.

European policy initiatives linked to housing

ESPON. ([ESPON HOUSE4ALL](#)⁴²) seeks to ensure access to affordable and quality housing for all people. The main objective of this project is to deliver high-quality research and accompanying recommendations to policymakers at different levels on how to provide access to affordable and quality housing in line with European policy goals tied to territorial cohesion and the EU Green Deal. The project also analyses and maps housing affordability and quality all across Europe.

CEMR. The [policy paper](#)⁴³ *A local plan for housing: Delivering affordable, sustainable and inclusive homes in Europe's cities, towns and regions* warns that Europe's housing crisis has now become a social emergency, and calls for integrated, people-centred solutions that associate housing with mobility, services and quality of life. Moreover, it advocates for stronger funding, modernised rules, digital permitting and true multi-level governance to enable local and regional governments to deliver affordable, sustainable homes.

The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)⁴⁴ is a tool that helps cities plan, monitor and assess sustainable urban development in line with the Leipzig Charter and the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 11. It offers a structured approach to set priorities, define actions and use indicators across areas such as housing, mobility, environment, governance and social inclusion. By promoting integrated and cross sectoral planning, the RFSC enables cities of all sizes to turn sustainability goals into practical, locally tailored actions, while supporting peer learning, multi-level coherence, as well as more inclusive and resilient urban development.

The Parliament Magazine Policy Report⁴⁵ *Addressing Europe's housing crisis* showed that between 2020 and 2025, over 13 million European residents neither had a home they owned nor one they rented—including those forced to stay with friends or relatives, relying on emergency accommodation or sleeping in public spaces. People in major European cities spend most of their salaries on rent, the reason why the topic of housing has been placed so high on the EU agenda.

Housing-related actions taken by LRG associations



Austria

Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT)

Supporting affordable housing framework.

The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT) is a proponent of the framework that exists in Austria, i.e. as a prosperous country, it can provide affordable housing. This is possible because of the development of a strong system of non-profit housing cooperatives which coordinates with limited profit housing associations. These cooperatives deliver high-quality, affordable and energy-efficient homes and then reinvest any profits into new housing. Vienna complements this with its long-standing social housing model, in place since 1919, which treats housing as a public good, thus ensuring affordability, social mix and high living standards across the city.



Czechia

Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR)

Shaping the affordable housing grant programme.

The Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMO ČR) has been supporting SDG 11 through its work shaping the affordable housing grant programme under the National Recovery Plan and by collaborating with national institutions on related legislation. It has focused on ensuring that local needs are reflected in national housing policies by actively translating municipal priorities into laws, funding schemes and strategic documents.

⁴² <https://www.espon.eu/projects/access-affordable-and-quality-housing-all-people-house4all>

⁴³ https://ccre-cemr.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026_-Housing-policy-paper.pdf

⁴⁴ <https://ccre-cemr.org/reference-framework-for-sustainable-cities>

⁴⁵ <https://library.myebook.com/the-parliament/policy-report-addressing-europe-s-housing-crisis/6536/>



Estonia

Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM)

Supporting a key transformative initiative in Estonia's 2025 national housing study

The Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) has been supporting a key transformative initiative involving Estonia's 2025 national housing study, which pointed to significant affordability pressures in Tallinn and Tartu alongside high vacancy in rural areas, with housing costs often exceeding 40% of income. It recommended an active land policy, diversified funding, public-private partnerships and clearer distinctions between affordable and social housing, all which align with the national housing strategy (2025–2030+) and trials with rental pilots (small scale, time bound test projects that try out new ways of developing, financing and managing rental housing before scaling up the approaches nationally) supported by the European Investment Bank.



France

International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)

Strengthening local capacities in urban planning and land management

The International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF) supported the EU cofinanced Urban planning and financial management (AIMF) supported the EU cofinanced Urban planning and financial management (programme⁴⁶) in Cambodia to strengthen local capacities in urban planning and land management, thereby improving living conditions in informal settlements. The project adopted an integrated, people centred approach linking housing, planning, community participation and infrastructure, while also promoting energy-efficient, climate-adapted construction to enhance the sustainability and resilience of local public buildings.



Luxembourg

Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL)

Supporting housing strategies and financing mechanisms related to affordable housing

The Association of Luxembourg Cities and Municipalities (SYVICOL) addresses housing challenges by representing the interests of municipalities in national housing policy and legislation processes. As municipalities play a key role in land-use planning, local development and the provision of public infrastructure, SYVICOL actively participates in consultations on draft laws, housing strategies and financing mechanisms related to affordable housing and urban development.



Slovenia

Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI)

Supporting housing legislation that brings investment

The Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS-SI) has been following how housing legislation is updated in Slovenia in order to make municipal investment more attractive. For example, the State now subsidises rents in public housing, while municipalities cover subsidies only for private rentals, encouraging local public-housing projects instead. A new law provides €100 million annually in low-interest loans for municipal housing and, starting in 2026, around €50 million in grants will also be available through the amended Cohesion Programme.

⁴⁶ <https://www.aimf.asso.fr/actions/renforcement-des-capacites-des-associations-dautorites-locales-du-cambodge-en-matiere-de-planification-urbaine-et-de-gestion-fonciere/>



Spain

Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL)

Bringing together public authorities and social and business actors to improve access to decent housing

The Basque Municipalities Association (EUDEL) supports the Basque Country Social Pact for Housing, a long-term agreement bringing together public authorities and social and business actors to improve access to decent housing, especially for vulnerable groups. It focuses on expanding social and affordable rental housing, mobilising vacant homes, boosting refurbishment and ensuring policy stability through broad consensus, with clear targets set through 2036.



Türkiye

Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB)

Strengthening coordination among municipalities

The Union of Municipalities of Türkiye (TBB) has been supporting the localisation of SDG 11 in the housing sector by strengthening coordination among municipalities, building capacity and sharing good practices. A key focus is sharing knowledge on affordable housing models, especially housing cooperatives, that are promoted through initiatives such as the Local Governments and Cooperatives workshop, which frames housing as a right and highlights cooperative and alternative financing models to improve affordability and local participation.

Acronyms

CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
HLPF	UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
LRGs	Local and Regional Governments
LRGAs	Local and Regional Government Associations
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NUA	New Urban Agenda
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews



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The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** is the oldest and broadest European association of local and regional governments, working persistently to build a more inclusive, fairer, and more resilient Europe by unleashing the full promise of local democracy. It is the only organisation that brings together 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 has promoted 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 continually endeavours to become the leading network of territorial leadership with a vision and the belief that local and regional governments are best equipped to lead their communities as they transition towards Europe 2050 and tackle multiple global challenges. CEMR is also the European section of the world organisation, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).



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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 local and regional governments' contributions 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).

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Localise the SDGs –
Getting local SDG
actions onto the
fast track, 2025



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The time for impact
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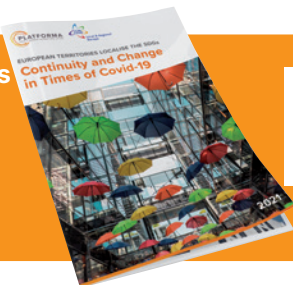
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Only six summers left
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