

LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS' REPORT
TO THE 2021 HLPF
5th REPORT

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

Sustainable and Resilient Recovery
Driven by Cities and Territories



Facilitated by:



#HLPF2021
#Listen2Cities

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United Cities and Local Governments
Cités et Gouvernements Locaux Unis
Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales Unidos
Avinyó 15
08002 Barcelona
www.uclg.org

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Editorial board:

Edgardo Bilsky, Anna Calvete, Ainara Fernández, Jolie Guzmán, Cécile Roth

Policy advisory:

Emilia Saiz, Secretary-General, UCLG

UCLG World Secretariat:

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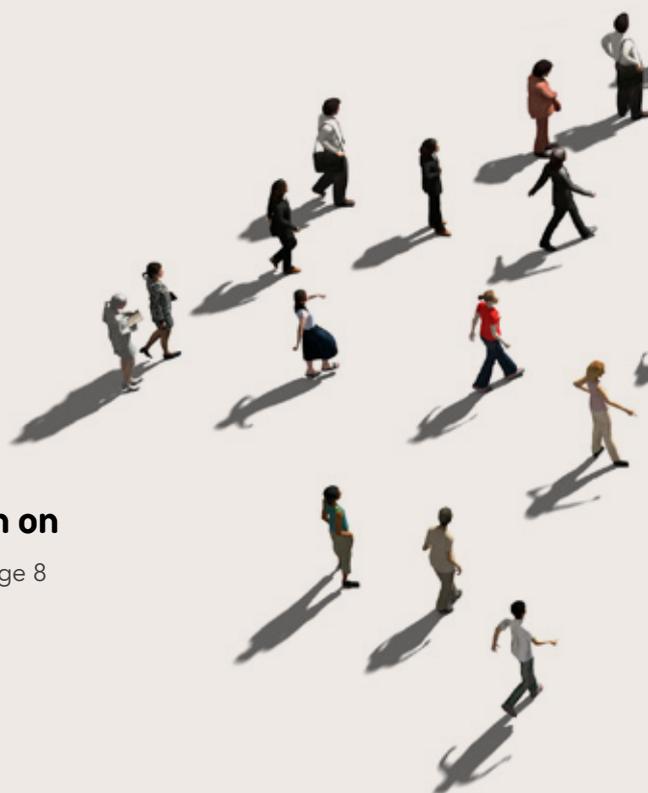
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Abbreviations

A

AChM: *Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades* (Chilean Association of Municipalities)

ACT-Accelerator: Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator

ACVN: Association of Cities of Vietnam

ADCCN: Association of District Coordination Committees Nepal

ADEKSI: City Councils Association of Indonesia

ADKASI: Regency Council Associations of Indonesia

ADLG: Association for Development of Local Governance of Pakistan

AER: Assembly of European Regions

AF: *Alianza Federalista* (Federalist Alliance of Mexico)

AFCCRE: *Association Française du Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe* (French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

AICCRE: *Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa* (Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

AIMF: *Association Internationale des Maires Francophones* (International Association of Francophone Mayors)

ALAL: Association of Local Authorities of Lithuania

ALAN: Association for Local Authorities in Namibia

AL-LAs: *Alianza Euro-Latinoamericana de Cooperación entre Ciudades* (Euro Latin American Alliance for Cooperation between Cities)

AMB: *Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia* (Association of Municipalities of Bolivia)

AMGVM: *Association des Maires des Grandes Villes de Madagascar* (Association of Mayors of Major Cities of Madagascar)

AMM: *Association des Municipalités du Mali* (Association of Municipalities of Mali)

AMM: Association of Mayors of Mauritania

AMN: *Association des Municipalités du Niger* (Association of Municipalities of Niger)

ANAM: *Asociación Nacional de Municipios de Guatemala* (National Association of Municipalities of Guatemala)

ANAMM: *Associação Nacional dos Municípios de Moçambique* (National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique)

ANCB: *Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin* (National Association of Municipalities of Benin)

ANCT: *Associations Nationale de Communes du Tchad* (National Association of Municipalities of Chad)

ANMCB: *Associação Nacional do Municípios de Cabo Verde* (Association of Cape Verde Municipalities)

APEKSI: Association of Municipalities of Indonesia

APKASI: Regencies Government Association of Indonesia

APLA: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

APPSI: Provincial Government Association of Indonesia

ARDCI: *Assemblée des Régions et Districts de Côte d'Ivoire* (Assembly of Regions and Districts of Ivory Coast)

ARDCZ: Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe

ARENI: *Association des Régions du Niger* (Association of Regions of Niger)

ASOCAPITALES: *Asociación Colombiana de Ciudades Capitales* (Colombian Association of Capital Cities)

ASPAC: Asia-Pacific region

ATA: UCLG Africa's Africa Territorial Agency

C

C40: C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

CAF: County Assemblies Forum of Kenya

CAM: China Association of Mayors

CCFLA: Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CI: *Congreso de Intendentes de Uruguay* (Uruguayan Congress of Mayors)

Cités Unies Liban/BTVL: *Cités Unies Liban/ Bureau Technique des Villes Libanaises* (United Cities Lebanon/Technical Office of Lebanese Cities)

CLAIR: Council of Local Authorities for International Relations of Japan

CLGF: Commonwealth Local Government Forum

CNM: *Confederação Nacional de Municípios* (National Confederation of Municipalities of Brazil)

CoG: Council of Governors of Kenya

CONAGO: *Confederación Nacional de Gobernadores de México* (National Governors' Conference of Federated States)

CONAMM: *Confederación Mexicana de Municipios* (National Conference of the Associations of Municipalities of Mexico)

CONGOPE: *Consortio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador* (Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador)

COP: United Nations Climate Change Conference

COSLA: Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

COVAX: COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access

COVID-19: coronavirus disease, originated by SARS-CoV-2 virus

CPAFFC: Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries

CSN: civil society network

CSO: civil society organisation

CUF: *Cités Unies France* (United Cities France)

D

DFI: development finance institution

DLT: *Deutscher Landkreistag* (German County Association)

DMP: disaster management plan

DPR Korea: Democratic People's Republic of Korea

DR: Danish Regions

DRR: disaster risk reduction

DS: *Deutscher Städtetag* (Association of German Cities)

DSTGB: *Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund* (German Association of Towns and Municipalities)

E

EGI: Emergency Governance Initiative

EIB: European Investment Bank

EU: European Union

EUR: euro

F

FAM: *Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia* (Federation of Municipal Associations of Bolivia)

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

FCM: *Federación Colombiana de Municipios* (Federation of Colombian Municipalities)

FDI: foreign direct investment

FECOMUDI: *Federación de Concejos Municipales de Distrito de Costa Rica* (Federation of District Municipal Councils of Costa Rica)

FEDEMUCA: *Federación de Municipalidades de Cartago* (Federation of Municipalities of Cartago in Costa Rica)

FEDOMU: *Federación Dominicana de Municipios* (Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic)

FEMP: *Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias* (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces)

FLACMA: *Federación Latinoamericana de Ciudades, Municipios y Asociaciones de Gobiernos Locales* (Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Latin America)

FMDV: *Fonds Mondial pour le Développement des Villes* (Global Fund for Cities Development)

FNCT: *Fédération Nationale de Communes Tunisiennes* (National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities)

FNP: *Frente Nacional de Prefeitos* (Brazilian National Front of Mayors)

FSDR: Financing for Sustainable Development Report

FSGLA: Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities

G

GCM: Global Compact for Migration
GCoM: Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy
GCR: Global Compact for Refugees
GDP: gross domestic product
GFMD: Global Forum for Migration and Development
GG: general government
GHG: greenhouse gas
GiZ: *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GPM: Global Parliament of Mayors
GTF: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

H

ha: hectares
HiAP: Health in All Policies
HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

I

IAEG-SDGs: United Nations Interagency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
ICLEI: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability
ICMPD: International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICT: information and communications technology
IISD: International Institute for Sustainable Development
ILO: International Labour Organization
IMIF: International Municipal Investment Fund
IOM: International Organization for Migration
IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IT: information technology

J

JRC: Joint Research Centre

K

KiLGA: Kiribati Local Government Association
KPI: key performance indicators
KS: Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

L

LALRG: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments
Lao PDR: Lao People's Democratic Republic
LATAM: Latin America and the Caribbean
LCAS: Local Councils Association of the Sindh
LCP: League of Cities of the Philippines
LGA: local government association
LGA: Local Government Association of the UK
LGAZ: Local Government Association of Zambia
LGBTIQ+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning and other gender and sexual identities

LGDK: Local Government Denmark
LGNZ: Local Government New Zealand
LLE: Live Learning Experience
LoCASL: Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone
LRG: local and regional government

M

MAB: Municipal Association of Bangladesh
MALA: Malaysia Association of Local Authorities
MCR: Making Cities Resilient initiative
MEWA: Middle East and West Asia
MIMA: Marshall Islands Mayors Association
MMC: Mayors Migration Council
MMU: Marmara Municipalities Union
MSME: micro, small and medium-sized enterprise

N

NALAS: Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe
NARMIN: National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal
NCD: non-communicable disease
NDC: Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO: non-governmental organisation
NORAM: North America and the English and French speaking Caribbean region
NUA: New Urban Agenda
NUP: national urban policy

O

ODA: official development assistance
OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPACI: *Organización Paraguaya de Cooperación Internacional* (Paraguayan Organization for Municipal Cooperation)

P

PFM: public financial management

R

RALGA: Rwandan Association of Local Government Authorities
RFSC: Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities

S

SALAR: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SALGA: South African Local Government Association
SCTM: Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia
SDB: subnational development bank
SDG: Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN: Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SIDS: small island developing states
SME: small and medium-sized enterprise
SMO CR: *Svaz měst a obcí České republiky* (Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic)
SWG: subnational government
SSE: social and solidarity economy
SUD-Net: Sustainable Urban Development Network

T

TRIPS: Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights

U

U4SSC: United 4 Smart Sustainable Cities
UCAZ: Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe
UCCI: *Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas* (Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities)
UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments
UCLG Africa: UCLG's regional section in Africa
UCLG ASPAC: UCLG's regional section in Asia-Pacific
UCLG-MEWA: UCLG's regional section in the Middle East and West Asia
UCM: Union of Cyprus Municipalities
UK: United Kingdom
ULGA: Uganda Local Governments Association
UN: United Nations
UN DESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UN SG: United Nations Secretary-General
UNCDF: United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA: United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNGL: *Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales* (Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica)
US/USA: United States of America
USD: US dollar
UVICOCI: *Union des Villes et Communes de Côte d'Ivoire* (Union of Cities and Municipalities of Ivory Coast)

V

VLR: Voluntary Local Review
VNG: *Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten* (Association of Dutch Municipalities)
VNR: Voluntary National Review
VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review
VVSG: *Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten* (Association of Flemish Cities and Towns)

W

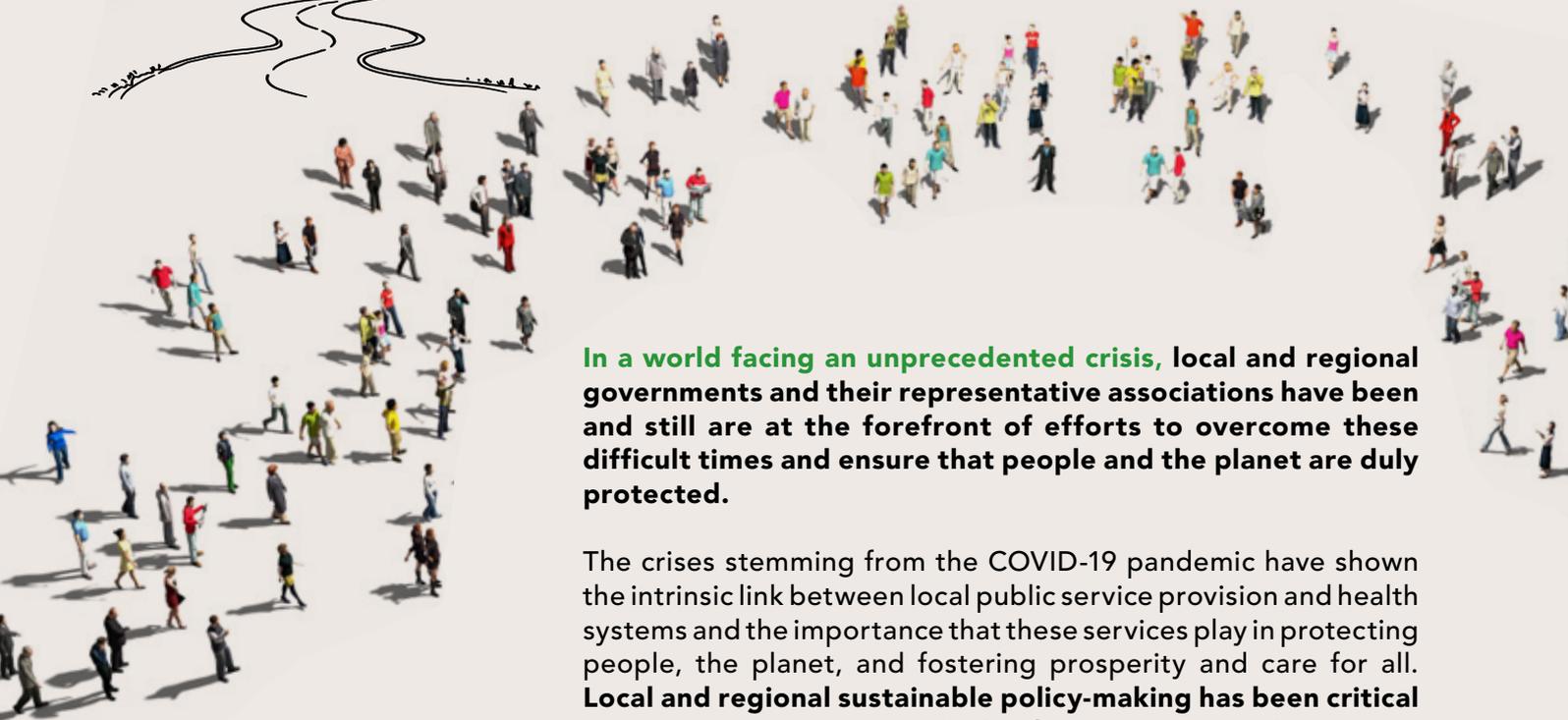
WHO: World Health Organization

Z

ZILGA: Zimbabwe Local Government Association

Joint Statement to the 2021 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

of the organised constituency of local and regional governments



In a world facing an unprecedented crisis, local and regional governments and their representative associations have been and still are at the forefront of efforts to overcome these difficult times and ensure that people and the planet are duly protected.

The crises stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the intrinsic link between local public service provision and health systems and the importance that these services play in protecting people, the planet, and fostering prosperity and care for all. **Local and regional sustainable policy-making has been critical to preserve our communities' safety, linking health systems, public services and the universal development agendas.**

As the conversation gears towards the recovery, we shall address the failures and gaps that have been observed during the pandemic in order to prepare our communities to be more resilient to face possible recurrent crises of similar nature. Recovery packages must consider how to address the economic and social dimension of recovery, without compromising the future of our societies and planet, reducing the harmful environmental impact of our cities and territories.

The recovery needs to be equitable and work for all communities

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the inequalities and shortcomings that we were already aware of. Structurally discriminated social groups and territories are among the most heavily affected by the health, economic and social consequences of this pandemic, which brings with it a host of complex and intertwined crises.

Throughout the worst of the pandemic, it has often been LRGs, supported by their associations and their peers across the world, who worked tirelessly at the frontline to safeguard the rights and health of communities via local public service delivery, underpinning health measures.

As we enter the recovery, it is essential to adequately resource and support public services and, in particular, to ensure universal health care around the world. Moreover, we need to honour the commitment of making vaccines a global public good through strong collaboration between the public and private sectors and equitably distributed to people in all countries and territories. We need to restore and improve the education systems, to avoid leaving the millions of children that dropped out from classes and are at risk of falling below minimum reading proficiency levels. Localized food systems are also critical to contribute to equity, by ensuring nutrition and food security.

The need to bridge the digital divide is more crucial than ever, as we enter an era where digital knowledge for work, education, health, and even public procedures is becoming more common. Digital literacy is therefore a new human right. It is necessary to carry out an equality framework to ensure full inclusion and participation of all, protecting digital rights and creating public infrastructures to facilitate access to internet in public spaces and to guarantee adequate support as a new public service.

Essential services will need to be redefined as we work towards a society where solidarity and active and informed citizenship guarantee safety for all. **All people need to be involved when defining the future, mindful of the crucial role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development and of the need to develop inclusive public spaces.**

Involving vulnerable groups in governance is critical, in particular older persons and persons with disability, in order to design territories that work for all people. Equal representation of women, in decision-making and in all facets of society, needs special focus. In the current context safeguarding and accelerating gender equality is essential to meet the SDGs.

People-centered governance is the key for developing a sustainable urban recovery and infrastructures that promote a more inclusive urban development, integrating informal settlements and activities in the urban fabric in the Global South, and reducing harmful urban environmental impacts.

It will be critical to cooperate towards the implementation of the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees as critical roadmaps to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Recognising the positive contributions of migrant and displaced populations to their communities of origin, transit and destination is a prerequisite to ensure the recovery is inclusive, fair and equitable, regardless of migration status.

The role of LRGs as a lever for transformation is nowhere as clear as it is in the COVID-19 recovery. At the same time, all of these measures can only occur if LRGs are included in decision-making processes at all levels.



The only recovery is a recovery which is safe, green and just

Stimulus packages for the recovery need to promote sustainable economy, infrastructures and public services that create opportunities for all, that reduce the environmental impact of cities and territories, that are low carbon and that support the transition toward renewable energies.

As major engines for economic growth, cities and territories are well placed to drive place-based policies adapted to their communities to unlock economic, social and environmental benefits. LRGs are also drivers of ecological action, by ensuring the renewal of infrastructure towards zero-carbon by 2050. It is essential that commitments to ecological transformation to preserve our planet are at the core of decision-making and political agendas at all levels. In order to enable essential local action on climate change, we must ensure global green finance is more accessible to cities and local governments.

Ahead of the UNFCCC COP26, joining the Race to Zero and Race to Resilience global campaigns becomes a necessity, promoting and supporting cities and regions pledge to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, a just transition to prevent escalating threats, address inequalities by creating decent jobs and unlocking inclusive and sustainable pathways.

It is key to create new models and framework of commitments to guarantee productive employment and decent work for all in order to address the rising inequalities that the pandemic has exacerbated. Work, and guaranteeing workers' rights, is the most powerful lever to address inequalities and the gender and racial gap. A green and just recovery could create as many as 50 million sustainable jobs by the end of 2025, over a third more than a traditional, high-carbon recovery. This calls for the redefinition of critical sectors, such as tourism, by communities and LRGs as a critical pillar of the promotion of cultural diversity, fraternity and heritage while ensuring decent jobs and fostering innovation and sustainability with cross generation responsibilities.

This should include providing equal access to quality education for all, employment opportunities for youth and people with disabilities, professional and vocational training and upskilling on soft and digital skills, and tackling the administrative, economic and technological barriers that impact our communities, including regularisation mechanisms, benefits and protection for informal workers and contract-based workers.

We pledge for an equality-driven system that fully engages LRGs and their associations, able to deliver universal basic services and healthcare, decent jobs and opportunities for all, powered by a green and sustainable vision, using the most appropriated technologies available, to contribute to reinforcing the urban-rural continuum enriched through peer-to-peer cooperation and driven by accountable inclusive institutions at all levels.



Strengthening multi-level governance and capacities for LRGs is a must

The constituency of LRGs is convinced that the 2030 Agenda is an adequate framework not only for the transformation required for the COVID-19 aftermath, but also to ensure an equitable, inclusive and sustainable recovery. We are also aware that no single sphere of government or actor can achieve the global agendas alone.

LRGs have a democratic mandate and are state actors that want to contribute to shaping a multilateral system that places a greater emphasis on the role that sustainable urbanization and more balanced territorial development play in the achievement of the global development agendas.

This means that we need to consider and support the well-being of our communities in all territories, intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions. We need to strengthen urban-rural linkages and build balanced urban systems. Territorial cohesion needs adequate financial and capacity support for LRGs to leave no territory and no community behind. Rooting the 2030 Agenda implementation in territorial priorities allows for a collaborative and cooperative multi-level governance approach. Both city-to-city and region-to-region cooperation have a big transformative and mobilising potential, which should be better acknowledged, to foster awareness about shared goals and to bolster capacities at local level, as well as fostering citizens participation through inclusive mechanisms.

The localization of the SDGs requires multi-level governance, shared leadership, and multi-stakeholder coordination, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies and actions. Improved coordination mechanisms based on the principles of subsidiarity and the respect of local autonomy, as well as civil society participation, are critical to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and promote local innovation.

The localization of the agendas remains as relevant as ever

LRGs and their networks are leading the global localization movement of the universal agendas: a testimony of our support towards territorial cohesion and leaving no one, and no place, behind. Only through effective coordination mechanisms and the establishment of synergies and interlinkages among institutions can we transform these commitments into action.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, LRG involvement in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved. Over the past two years, the total number of VLRs available worldwide has doubled (from approximately 40 VLRs in June 2020 to more than 100 in June 2021). In the same period of time, 15 VSRs have emerged in 14 countries worldwide, which together represent more than 16,000 LRGs. However, LRGs and their associations' involvement in national reporting exercises is not making enough progress. In 2021, the percentage of LRGs that were consulted by their government in the VNR process has fallen, in spite of the efforts made by LRGs and LGAs to upscale local and subnational reporting. If the SDGs are to be achieved, it is critical to ensure the involvement of LRGs in the VNR processes, supported by resolutely more enabling institutional environment and disaggregated data. These should be seen as policy revision opportunities in order to create more traction and ownership of the Global Goals.

Our hopes for the 2021 HLPF

Efforts shared among LRGs and their networks and partners in maintaining service provision and ensuring the safety of their communities have been critical to mitigate the pandemic, and the world needs these efforts to continue to ensure a better normal.

LRGs are bringing to light the new essentials for a world that cares. The time has come to develop an enabling environment for women and girls to be represented in all facets of public life; of working for the sustainability of basic services as the cornerstone of the life of our communities; of fostering a new technology that enhances democracy and improves the quality of life for people; and of re-designing our cities and territories so all people can enjoy their lives with dignity.

In this sense, the constituency of LRGs calls on the HLPF to:

We call for strengthening health services and universal vaccination to all, bolstering multi-stakeholder governance of the international system to respond to emergencies.

We call for the uninterrupted support of all spheres of government in ensuring health and human rights protection to everyone and especially to the most marginalised and already structurally disadvantaged facets of population, including migrants and displaced persons.

In line with the Paris Agreement and IPCC Findings, we call for all efforts in the recovery to be geared towards delivering a green and just recovery, and thus also contribute to reducing GHG emissions in order to keep global warming to the 1.5°C target.

We call to associate LRGs in the definition and implementation of the recovery packages to ensure a safe, green and just recovery. Unlocking the means of implementation for LRGs will allow an equal, inclusive, and sustainable recovery of strategic sectors to achieve the SDGs.

We call on the international systems and national governments to promote the necessary reforms to strengthen the role and resources of LRGs. Empowered LRGs are necessary, with adequate

regulatory frameworks that encourage the alignment of national and territorial plans with the SDGs to ensure universal access to quality public services.

We call to guarantee access and participation in cultural life as an antidote to all crises, and to acknowledge its essential role in the recovery of our communities with its power for social justice, freedoms, innovation and global fraternity.

We call for the recognition of the New Urban Agenda to act as an integral part of our response in the COVID-19 recovery due to its accelerating potential of the achievement of the global goals, and its potential to territorialize the achievement of the Global Goals, building on a system of metropolitan and intermediary cities and building on the rural-urban continuum.

We call on the HLPF to recognise the critical role that migration plays towards sustainable development, and call upon all Member States to join local governments to develop and implement policy measures that uphold the human rights of migrants and recognise the interlinkages between climate change, human mobility and urbanization, identifying common action to meet SDGs 10, 11 and 13 together.

We call for the involvement of LRGs in the VNR process and the full recognition of VLRs and VSRs as part of the monitoring and reporting processes, as well as in official HLPF deliberation.

We call for a system in which LRGs are fully engaged by holding a permanent seat at the decision-making tables representing the peoples they serve, and for a strong international community and updated UN system that reflects the current context, including LRGs in all stages of decision-making processes.

We reiterate the commitment of our organised constituency towards the localization of all the universal development agendas, including the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Climate Agenda the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the Global Compact on Refugees. Only through achieving all agendas as one will we ensure a safe, equitable and green recovery that works for all.

Highlights



BACKGROUND

The fifth report of local and regional governments (LRGs) to the HLPF, *Towards the Localization of the SDGs*, provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of LRGs' efforts to respond to the pandemic in cities and territories worldwide, as well as their connections with the SDGs under review, with a particular focus on the 43 countries presenting Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) this year. It shows how LRGs are contributing to promoting a safe, just and green recovery at all levels and what challenges must be overcome to harness their full potential.

Over the past year, LRGs, supported by their associations, have resolutely and constantly positioned themselves on the front line of the fight against the pandemic and its multifaceted consequences, in a bid to protect their inhabitants and territories. As recognised worldwide, LRG's responses and containment measures have been essential in preserving communities' health, and ensuring access to essential public services and livelihoods for all, including by implementing broader measures to support the groups most hit by the crisis; hence strengthening efforts to foster cooperation and solidarity, and promoting caring cities and territories.

In order to do so, the analysis presented in the report mainstreams the "Health in All Policies" approach across the five pillars of sustainable development, thus providing key insights into the policies implemented to respond to the crisis and their interconnections. The report advances a thorough analysis of

the state of SDG localization in the different continents, based on both subnational and national sources: VNRs presented at this year's HLPF; 100 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) from all over the world and 15 Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) published to date; and first-hand accounts from LRGs and national associations from 92 countries that responded to the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' survey on SDG localization.

Some of the key conclusions of such a comprehensive analysis are that there is a pressing need to increase the involvement of LRGs throughout the whole process of SDG implementation: in multi-level government coordination, joint implementation and monitoring. Despite the increasing efforts made by LRGs to localize the SDGs and report on the progress achieved, the inclusion of LRGs in national coordination and reporting processes is not advancing. On the contrary, it has even gone backwards in some regions.

As the world seeks to recover from the pandemic and reverse the negative trends observed for many SDGs, it is all the more important to ensure the involvement of LRGs in recovery strategies. The extent to which local public services and infrastructures will be integrated into recovery packages will be a determinant for the resilience of our societies in the face of recurrent crises—and thus, for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda and in ensuring that no one and no territory is left behind. The achievement of the SDGs is at risk: we are in urgent need of a renewed social contract, and LRGs have an essential role to play in it.



GOOD PRACTICES

LRGs' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic: putting care at the centre

In these trying times for humanity, key dimensions of the work of LRGs have revolved around ensuring access to essential services for all and protecting their communities' health, as well as strengthening social safety nets and providing support to the groups most vulnerable to the multifaceted impacts of the crisis. These efforts have been critical to curb the spread of the virus and mitigate its impacts on different populations, striving to reach those most vulnerable to the pandemic's impacts first.

In many territories, LRGs have advanced initiatives to protect people's right to housing, often based on local alliances between LRGs and other local actors, including the private sector. In some territories, LRGs have also extended access to water and sanitation networks to populations that were deprived of this service prior to the crisis. In other parts of the world, LRGs have advanced moratoriums on the payment of basic public services for those populations whose livelihoods had been severed by the crisis. Many LRGs have taken initiatives to foster local food systems to ensure food security. LRGs have also striven to promote inclusive digitalisation strategies to address the widening digital gap, which is having a dramatic impact on job opportunities, on less technologically-savvy populations, and on education, especially following school closures implemented to prevent the contagion of COVID-19. The efforts undertaken by LRGs to sustain minimum transport services that ensured the safety of passengers and transport workers is also worth highlighting, as are their endeavours to ensure equal access to basic services for persons with disabilities and older persons.

LRGs have also sought to protect livelihoods while advancing socially and environmentally sustainable economic development models. As such, many LRGs have reprioritised local expenditure to protect jobs, support MSMEs, promote local economic circuits, and foster alternative forms of production and consumption based on the social and sharing economy. Moreover, the number of LRGs that have adopted commitments to reduce their

greenhouse gas emissions through mitigation and adaptation policies continues to grow, and currently stands at 10,700 LRGs in all world regions.

All these different experiences from territories across the world have shown that policy advancements that put care for the population at the centre can indeed be implemented. While the full effects of the pandemic are still looming, it is important that LRGs find ways to ensure that many of the emergency measures undertaken in terms of housing, healthcare or improved access to public service provision are transformed into permanent policies. Doing so will allow our cities and territories to secure the advancements achieved in terms of the protection of human rights and SDG achievement.

LRGs and their associations have made great efforts to expand SDG localization through Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews

Despite the new challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, LRGs have continued to promote initiatives to accelerate the localization of the SDGs and to reinstate their commitment to global sustainability agendas by mainstreaming them in their development plans and strategies.

This report shows how the global movement for the localization of the SDGs has expanded over the past year. The expansion of subnational reporting efforts deserves special attention in this regard. Over the past 2 years, the total number of VLRs available worldwide has doubled (from approximately 40 VLRs in May 2020 to more than 100 in June 2021); while in the same period of time, 15 VSRs have emerged in 14 countries worldwide, which together represent more than 16,000 LRGs. These subnational reporting efforts have direct positive impacts by increasing transparency, accountability and ownership of the Global Goals by LRGs and their associations.

Moreover, these subnational reporting exercises have had another remarkably positive outcome: the increasing number of VNRs explicitly recognising the role of LRGs in SDG localization—or even dedicating them a specific space to present local inspiring practices and/

or national initiatives to co-produce policies for sustainable development at all levels—is a clear sign of progress in this direction.

Bottom-up reporting efforts have opened up and consolidated channels of dialogue with national governments and international

institutions on SDG implementation and coordination, enhancing multi-level governance approaches. These are determinant elements necessary to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs in the Decade of Action.



LESSONS LEARNED

Progress on LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes for SDG implementation is too slow and uneven across regions

The SDGs call for the adoption of a whole-of-government approach to sustainable development that necessitates LRG involvement in national coordination, implementation and reporting processes. Since 2016, LRG participation in the national reporting processes has seen some progress: in 2016, they were actively involved in 32% of the reporting countries, in comparison to 37% in 2021. However, concerning national coordination mechanisms, LRG participation dropped from 29% for the period 2016-2020 to 21% in 2021. Overall, progress regarding the participation of LRGs in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes for SDG implementation is still alarmingly slow, as well as highly uneven across regions. Important progress has been seen in Europe, and to a lesser extent in Asia, while LRG participation is rather stagnant in Africa, and recoiling in Latin America. In the Eurasia and Middle East and Western Asia regions, LRG involvement is still very limited.

The COVID-19 crisis and its impacts have accentuated many grey areas and gaps in the distribution of powers and responsibilities among levels of government. Yet, dialogue and coordination among different levels of government and with other stakeholders will be critical to address other overlapping complex emergencies, such as the current and other pandemics, climate change or social emergencies (for instance regarding housing or

mass migration). Inter-municipal cooperation has shown its effectiveness in the face of the crisis and needs to be further incentivised. Ensuring the continuity of citizen participation mechanisms is also essential to foster inclusive local governance.

LRGs have critical tasks to fulfil, usually as part of their daily undertakings derived from devolved responsibilities, for which they must also be accountable. SDG monitoring and reporting are key levers for change that can enhance LRG involvement in SDG fulfilment, while inclusive national coordination mechanisms and collaborative multi-level governance can ensure that overlaps are avoided and synergies are improved instead.

LRGs in the face of COVID-19: local public services and recovery measures to protect our communities and planet

The COVID-19 crisis has been particularly critical in that it has revealed deep vulnerabilities in health systems, essential services and food security, and the lack of crisis preparedness of many governments, at all levels. It revealed the direct link between local public service provision and health systems, and emphasised their importance in protecting people and the planet. As the conversation gears towards the recovery, we must address the failures and gaps that have been observed during the pandemic to prepare our communities to be more resilient to better cope with possible recurrent crises of a similar nature.

COVID-19 has not only exposed but aggravated poverty and inequalities. From a territorial perspective, slums, deprived neighbourhoods and marginalised territories were hit hardest, since their inhabitants lack the appropriate infrastructure to ensure access to basic services and prosperity, as well as opportunities to mitigate such impacts. Given these self-reinforcing dynamics, a key takeaway must be that territorial disparities—often closely associated with social, economic and other inequalities (racial, gender-based, etc.)—should not be overlooked when discussing measures to mitigate the crisis' impacts and support recovery.

At the same time, LRGs' responses have been constrained by the "scissor effect" that the crisis has had on subnational finances. While human and financial pressure to support their communities increased, local sources of revenues decreased. This effect may be aggravated in the coming year as a result of

a fall in local taxes, reflecting the economic slowdown of 2020. Meanwhile, LRGs have had to shuffle their priorities to respond to the emergency, leading to the deprioritisation of certain policy sectors, such as culture and long-term investments for sustainable development, particularly in infrastructure. These crisis reprioritisation choices will undoubtedly have negative consequences for sustainable development.

Therefore, recovery packages must consider how to address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the recovery, granting the protection of human rights, investing in quality and equitable public social services, making quick progress in the fight against poverty and inequalities, without compromising the future of our societies and planet. Recovery funds also need to address some of the newly identified inequalities that the pandemic has brought to light.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Align COVID-19 recovery plans at all levels with global sustainability agendas

The global development agendas are more necessary than ever as guiding frameworks for the recovery. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the New Urban Agenda, among others, are underpinned by principles that must be put at the heart of the recovery: the protection of human rights, the fight against poverty and inequalities, as well as promoting the ecological transition and building resilient communities, to name but a few. In particular, the New Urban Agenda must be an integral part of both national and local public responses for the COVID-19 recovery: in an increasingly urbanized world, this Agenda is crucial to accelerate and territorialize the achievement of the SDGs.

Ensure equitable access to health and public services for all, putting human rights at the centre of the recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the crucial need to plan cities and territories and provide public services that care for their communities: supporting the essential rights of citizens and residents to equitable access to health, adequate housing, essential services and livelihoods. People-centred planning and place-based policies will be key to developing a sustainable and inclusive urban and territorial recovery, integrating informal settlements and activities into the urban fabric. Participative approaches based on solidarity, which include women in all facets of decision-making and public life, should be at the core of recovery strategies, as they generate new pathways for inclusive development.

Drive a safe, equitable and green recovery that works for all by involving LRGs in its definition and implementation

The current emergency must be a turning point, and the recovery a new opportunity to drive sustainable development. It is essential to support stronger frameworks of public services and infrastructures supported by social policies that bridge the inequalities that COVID-19 has exacerbated. This includes curbing the digital divide, strengthening access to education and decent work, and reducing vulnerabilities to climate change and natural disasters while making significant progress towards a fair ecological transition. Recovery should also strengthen virtuous rural-urban linkages and better take into consideration the role of intermediary cities, regions, and small towns. Recovery means transforming local production and consumption patterns, for instance through social and solidarity economy and circular economy principles. It will be important to convert many of the emergency measures undertaken to promote care and solidarity into permanent policies. National governments should work in partnership with LRGs in the design, implementation and governance of national recovery plans committed towards more just and resilient cities and territories.

Empower LRGs through adequate finances and multi-level coordination mechanisms

Accounting for and counterbalancing the backlash on LRGs' resources in the face of the pandemic, and empowering them through adequate finances, is critical to strengthen public services and attend to the needs of their communities during the remainder of the crisis and beyond. It is therefore crucial that recovery packages include financial support to ensure that LRGs will be able to sustain public service provision as a cornerstone of health systems, develop healthy cities and territories, and achieve the global sustainability agendas. The pandemic has led to the redistribution of powers and political turmoils that can undermine the objective of accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Citizen participation in local governance has also been severely affected by restrictions on freedom and the concentration of power. Hence, improved multi-level and multi-stakeholder mechanisms based on the respect of the principles of subsidiarity, as well as civil society participation, are critical

to create local ownership of the SDGs and guarantee coherent policies and context-sensitive action and innovation.

Strengthen LRGs' contributions to SDG localization by integrating them into national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes

As well as recovery from COVID-19, the localization of the 2030 Agenda requires multi-stakeholder coordination, multi-level governance and shared leadership, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies and actions. As the involvement of LRGs in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes for SDG implementation has decreased during the last year, it is absolutely necessary to better recognise—in particular at the national level—the remarkable efforts made by LRGs and their associations to advance towards the Global Goals and to develop their own reporting exercises. Officially recognising VLRs and VSRs and including their insights, data and results in the VNRs, are decisive steps to intensify efforts at all levels towards the global localization movement.

Renew the multilateral system by acknowledging LRGs' voices at the global level and fully engaging them in decision-making processes

As LRGs' role is increasingly recognised as essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda and other Global Agendas, their voices, points of view and participation should also be fully institutionalised at the global level. Their recognition should lead to concrete and operational multilateral mechanisms that facilitate their presence and active role in international SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting efforts. In this sense, global fora, such as the HLPF, and UN Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, are key opportunities to truly become multi-level and multi-stakeholder spaces themselves, and for the international community to prove its commitment to ensure LRGs a seat at global decision-making tables. Through their actions on the front line and commitment to sustainable development, LRGs have made it clear that they deserve a seat at the global table in a renewed multilateral system that emphasises sustainable urbanization and revitalised, balanced, territorial development. LRGs are the lever to ensure multi-stakeholder engagement as a pre-requisite for a renewed system that brings everyone on board.

1 Introduction



This year has been a historical one. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a global sanitary, social and economic crisis that has put unprecedented pressure on our governance systems and spotlighted the critical role of local and regional governments in public policy. It has highlighted previous vulnerabilities and given rise to new ones, challenging the progress hitherto achieved in the pursuit of sustainable development worldwide. The fifth edition of the local and regional governments' report to the HLPF: *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* seeks to reflect on the multifaceted impacts of the crisis on the localization of the Global Agendas and the future of our cities.

Throughout the year, local and regional governments (LRGs) have frontlined the response to the pandemic. They have taken rapid and radical action to protect communities on the ground, ensuring the protection of human rights and continuity in the provision of public services. LRGs have advanced their efforts to prevent the spread of the virus and have responded to the immediate necessities of their populations. Some of the actions undertaken have constituted notable breakthroughs with respect to the previous pace of moves towards the achievement of the SDGs. The urgency of the situation has, for instance, triggered responses based on: radically advancing the protection of their communities; extending the right to adequate housing; reducing energy poverty; and ensuring access to water and sanitation for populations most in need. However, the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis has rendered the power of these

actions merely relative. To ensure a recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, it will be essential to maintain these services, buttress them through innovative action and solidarity, and support them with adequate funding.

The moment therefore calls on us to look back in order to think forward. There are critical lessons to be learned if we are to fulfil the global sustainability commitments, and LRGs have a decisive role to play in this process. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that we, as human beings, are only safe when the safety of everyone is guaranteed. The pandemic has brought to light the critical need to ensure that public health permeates all public policy. Moreover, it has shown how all territories, both rich and poor, are indeed interdependent. It has shown the power of solidarity and care as central pillars of development, demonstrating the urgent need for public action that takes care of the safety, social needs and economic opportunities of everyone. The COVID-19 crisis has also brought to the fore critical debates regarding the future of our cities and territories. These include how we can make the New Urban Agenda, the Climate Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction accelerators of transformation at the local level and ensure that no one and no place is left behind. The way in which the recovery from the pandemic is shaped will have a decisive impact on this. As of today, there are more questions than answers in this regard. There is, however, an unprecedented opportunity to construct the future that we all want. If appropriately applied, recovery strategies can provide a critical starting point.



This report picks up these questions and, building upon the four previous editions, explores how they translate into the implementation of the Global Agendas and the key role that LRGs must play in this process. In order to do this, the report advances an analysis of global reporting on SDG implementation from the perspective of LRGs. It analyses the involvement of LRGs in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted to this year's HLPF, contrasting this with the regional trends observed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The report also highlights how, in spite of the extreme complexity of the present situation, the global movement for the localization of the SDGs has accelerated over the past year (see Box 1.1). It provides an overview of the expansion of voluntary subnational reporting processes worldwide, focusing on the growing number of LRGs and their associations that are currently producing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs). The report examines how the involvement of LRGs in national reporting processes, combined with the expansion of these subnational reporting processes, has influenced national dialogues and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs. Lastly, the report asks what means of implementation are available to LRGs and looks at the main challenges that are currently preventing the upscaling of transformative actions. This includes a reflection on the transformational potential of recovery strategies that appropriately acknowledge and resource LRGs.

Forty-three countries are reporting this year and Table 1.1 outlines the great diversity that exists within them in terms of subnational governance structures. In the 43 reporting countries, the number of LRGs per country ranges from 1 to over 83,800. There is also tremendous diversity among the reporting countries with regard to their institutional frameworks and the capacities of their respective LRGs that enable their contributions to achieving the SDGs. The reporting countries present very different decentralization processes and regulatory frameworks which, in turn, results in policy environments that may, or may not, be conducive to local action. The COVID-19 crisis has also had a direct impact on systems of governance. In the different stages of the emergency, there have been power shifts and a reallocation of responsibilities between central and subnational levels of government. These have, nevertheless, predominantly depended on the national context. Whether these shifts in governance will be temporary or become permanent is a question to be monitored beyond this report.

Some of the actions undertaken by local and regional governments have constituted notable breakthroughs with respect to the previous pace of moves towards the achievement of the SDGs.

There are 10 African countries reporting this year: **Angola, Cape Verde, Chad, Egypt, Madagascar, Namibia, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tunisia** and **Zimbabwe**. There are currently local governments in 9 of the reporting countries, albeit the extent to which national environments enable local action varies significantly between countries. According to an analysis made by UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance, these 9 countries could be divided into two groups. **Angola, Chad, Egypt, Madagascar** and **Namibia** could be classified as countries whose progress towards establishing an enabling environment for cities and local governments still requires major reform. In Chad, Madagascar and Namibia, decentralization processes date from the 1990s. In **Angola**, civil war effectively froze the

BOX 1.1

Localization

This is the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level in order to achieve global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets. Localization is, therefore, the process of implementing the SDGs in different territories. More specifically, it takes into account subnational contexts in the quest to deliver the 2030 Agenda. This ranges from setting goals and targets to determining the best means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress.

Source: GTF, UCLG (2020), "Towards the Localization of the SDGs"; GTF, UNDP, UN-Habitat (2016), "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level"; UN Development Group (2014), "Localizing the Post-2015 Agenda" (outcome of the global UN dialogue process developed from June 2014 to October 2014).

TABLE 1.1

Local governments in the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2021*

	TYPE OF STATE	REGIONAL-STATE LEVEL	INTERMEDIATE LEVEL	MUNICIPAL LEVEL	TOTAL LRGs		TYPE OF STATE	REGIONAL-STATE LEVEL	INTERMEDIATE LEVEL	MUNICIPAL LEVEL	TOTAL LRGs
Afghanistan ¹	U	34	387	153	574	Japan	U	47	-	1,747	1,794
Angola* ²	U	18	-	163	181	Lao People's Democratic Republic ¹³	U	18	140+	9,000+	9,158+
Antigua and Barbuda	U	-	-	1	1	Madagascar ¹⁴	U	6	22	1,695	1,723
Azerbaijan	U	1	-	1,607	1,608	Malaysia ¹⁵	F	3	13	154	167
Bahamas ³	U	-	-	32	32	Marshall Islands	U	-	-	33	33
Bhutan ⁴	U	20	-	205	263	Mexico	F	32	-	2,469	2,501
Bolivia	U	9	112	336	457	Namibia	U	14	-	57	71
Cape Verde	U	-	-	22	22	Nicaragua ¹⁶	U	2	-	153	155
Chad ⁵	U	23	107	377	507	Niger	U	7	-	266	273
China ⁶	U	31	333	2,851	3,215	Norway ¹⁷	U	11	-	356	367
Colombia	U	33	-	1,103	1,136	Paraguay ¹⁸	U	17	-	259	276
Cuba ⁷	U	[15]	-	169	184	Qatar*	U	-	-	-	-
Cyprus ⁸	U	-	-	526	526	San Marino	U	-	-	9	9
Czech Republic	U	14	-	6,258	6,272	Saudi Arabia ¹⁹	U	-	-	285	285
Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)*	U	9	-	4	13	Sierra Leone ²⁰	u	-	-	22	22
Denmark	U	5	-	98	103	Spain	QF	17	50	8,131	8,198
Dominican Republic ⁹	U	-	-	159	159	Sweden	U	21	-	290	311
Egypt ¹⁰	U	-	462	220	682	Thailand ²¹	U	76	-	2,452	2,528
Germany	F	16	401	10,799	11,216	Tunisia ²²	U	24	-	350	374
Guatemala ¹¹	U	-	-	340	340	Uruguay	U	19	-	125	144
Indonesia	U	34	514	83,344	83,892	Zimbabwe	U	10	-	92	102
Iraq ¹²	F	1	18	132	151						

U: unitary country; F: federal country; QF: quasi-federal country

* Of the 43 countries reporting this year, there are 3 countries which do not have elected LRGs. In Angola, promises were given in 2018 to hold local elections in 2020. These were not organised, however, partly because of the health crisis. All the subnational level officials are appointed by the national government. In Qatar and in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), there is no available evidence of local or regional self-government. In the latter, there are elections every 4 years for the local people's assemblies (legislative functions), which in turn approve the local people's committees (administrative functions). The people's committees operate under the control of the cabinet (national government).

Sources: Information obtained from OECD/UCLG (2019) Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Country Profiles <https://bit.ly/2S6Ckit>; UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance (2018), Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa <https://bit.ly/3pd30dt>; UCLG ASPAC and Cities Alliance (2018), City Enabling Environment Rating: Assessment of the Countries in Asia and the Pacific <https://bit.ly/2RURYOZ>; 2021 Voluntary Subnational Reviews from Cape Verde, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia and Zimbabwe; OECD (2021) Subnational governments in OECD countries: key data - 2021 edition; CEMR (2016), Local and Regional Governments in Europe. Structures and competences <https://bit.ly/3peamO3>; CLGF Country profiles <https://bit.ly/3fHNjrR>; National Bureau of Statistics China (2020) China Statistical Yearbook 2019; Wikipedia, List of administrative divisions by country <https://bit.ly/34CkB5l>; international organisation publications, national statistical offices and national government and local government portals from different countries; local press and online media.



In the different stages of the COVID-19 emergency, there have been power shifts and a reallocation of responsibilities between central and subnational levels of government. Whether these shifts in governance will be temporary or become permanent is a question to be monitored beyond this report.

country's incipient decentralization process until the 2000s. In **Madagascar**, decentralization advanced in the 2010s, with the passing of key legislation relating to LRGs, and in 2018-19 there were municipal elections, while a new national policy on decentralization is currently in the making.²³ Local government is explicitly mentioned in the constitutions of all four of these countries, although its operationalisation still needs to be decided and put into practice. Since 2018, **Namibia** has accelerated the decentralization of its government functions.²⁴ In **Angola**, although some legislative advances have been made,²⁵ since 2020 the central government seems to have been delaying key steps towards more effective decentralization, such as holding local elections.²⁶

The other countries: **Cape Verde, Niger, Sierra Leone, Tunisia** and **Zimbabwe** could be classified as countries which present favourable environments for action by cities and local governments, but in which some improvements are still needed. In **Cape Verde**, the 1992 Constitution recognises local autonomy, and local democratic power is acknowledged as an element for structuring the republic. The 1995 municipal statute and the 2010 framework for decentralization have been the key pillars of the country's two waves of decentralization. The latter envisioned the creation of an intermediate level of government and inframunicipal administrative divisions, both of which have yet to be implemented. Regionalization reform is the main focus of the third wave of decentralization, which is currently underway. The tendency is to deepen decentralization and to reinforce the technical capacity of the country's municipalities

so that they will have competences to design and implement local policies, particularly relating to territorial planning.²⁷ Local government is enshrined in the constitutions of **Niger** (2010), **Tunisia** (2014) and **Zimbabwe** (2013). In **Niger**, legislation passed in 2018 sought to clarify a proposed transfer of competences. However, at the same time, other new legislation made it possible to revoke LRG power and to install centrally appointed delegations.²⁸ In **Sierra Leone**, decentralization was identified as a priority in post-war consultations. The main legal document on decentralization is the Local Government Act, yet there is no constitutional provision for local governance. The main reforms have concerned the conditions for inter-governmental financial transfers and the need to give local governments more power to decide over public spending and thereby reflect local needs and priorities. In **Tunisia**, it is necessary to operationalise various constitutional provisions and to create a global vision for decentralization in order to facilitate more structured and coordinated internal dialogue. In 2019, a high authority for local finance was created to contribute to the implementation of the national decentralization policy. In **Zimbabwe**, the Constitution of 2013 contains provisions for LRGs. A policy of devolution and decentralization was approved in 2020, which should help to operationalise such provisions.²⁹ Although a bill regarding provincial councils was also passed in 2020, recognition of provincial self-government remains unclear. Intergovernmental relations are still a challenging obstacle to decentralization.

This year, 9 countries are reporting from the ASPAC region. There is, however, no evidence of elected LRGs in the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea**. According to a study carried out by UCLG ASPAC, Cities Alliance and UNDP in 2018, the other reporting countries include some of the most enabling environments for LRG action in the region. **Bhutan, China** and **Japan** have been the best performing countries in this respect. All three have robust legal frameworks for facilitating decentralization: local government is enshrined in their respective constitutions and they have complementary laws that outline a clear delegation of responsibilities between different levels of government. In **Bhutan**, good governance is included as one of the most important pillars of Gross National Happiness. This country has also made efforts to improve transparency, accountability and public participation. Local assemblies are elected, but executive bodies are still appointed. In **China**, local assemblies and executive bodies are elected, but not necessarily throughout the



Third Local and Regional Governments' Forum, held fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 July 2020 (image: UCLG-CGLU)

whole country. Local tax management has been the main area of reform. **Japan** provides the most favourable environment for transparency, accountability, public participation, capacity building for cities and local authorities, and national urban strategy.

Indonesia started its decentralization process (called "the Big Bang") in 1998 and has an institutional framework that also promotes a favourable environment for subnational governments, even if some reforms are required. In **Lao PDR**, local assemblies are elected, but executive bodies are appointed. Key reforms have included the development of national regulations and a framework for public participation. The capacity for local authorities to optimise revenue generation has also been increased and improved. In **Malaysia**, responsibilities and powers are clearly defined in accordance with the Constitution, yet certain statutory laws and regulations are still pending. Malaysia had recently made a number of important improvements to its local government system, including the assignment of a quantity of national resources for use by local governments. However, following the COVID-19 outbreak, the national government recentralized a lot of political power and postponed both national and local elections. Local assemblies and executive bodies are currently appointed. In **Thailand**, local autonomy was acknowledged by the 2006 Constitution and ratified by subsequent constitutions, including the current 2017 Constitution. Complementary legislative provisions are in place but political

instability and a highly centralized system have limited their implementation and the establishing of practical guarantees for local autonomy.

This year, only **Azerbaijan** is reporting from the Eurasian region. Decentralization is acknowledged in the country's 1995 Constitution, according to which local government is exercised through both local bodies of the state administration and municipal governments. From the 2000s onwards, the normative framework for local self-government has been improved. Even so, there is a lack of legal clarity regarding the division of responsibilities between municipalities and local state administrations. Observers note that, de facto, municipal governments have been disempowered and that their role is often limited to merely implementing decisions taken centrally.³⁰

There is local self-government in all 8 of the European countries reporting this year. In **Cyprus**, however, governance is relatively centralized. Local governments were recognized by the country's 1960 Constitution, albeit only indirectly. Decentralizing reforms have been underway since 2010 in an effort to amalgamate municipalities; these measures were subsequently revamped in 2020. In the **Czech Republic**, the 1993 Constitution recognised local self-government. Since then, several regulations have been passed to complement the regulatory framework for LRGs. However, recentralizing reforms began in 2015 in an attempt to combat municipal fragmentation.³¹ In **Denmark**, the Danish Constitution recognizes local self-government and legislative provisions

are in place that determine the responsibilities of LRGs. The key decentralizing reforms took place in the 1970s and in 2007, and have significantly changed the country's territorial and institutional organisation. Wide-ranging administrative sector reforms have also taken place since 2012. **Germany**, for its part, is a decentralized country in which multi-level governance is based on co-operative federalism.

In **Norway**, decentralizing reforms were undertaken in 2014; these included the consolidation of local and regional amalgamations. In **San Marino**, decentralizing reforms have been advancing since the ratification of the European Charter for Local Self-Government in 2013. However, LRGs still have only limited competences and decision-making powers.³² In **Spain**, the right to self-government is enshrined in the 1978 Constitution. The main milestones in decentralization have included the establishment of the autonomous communities (regional governments) in 1983 and, in the 2000s, the devolution of responsibilities for the areas of health and education, and the reform of the autonomous communities' status. In **Sweden**, the constitution also acknowledges the right to self-government. Since 2019, all of the country's counties have been formally transformed into regions. Until then, Sweden's regional governance structure had been asymmetric.

There are 9 countries reporting from Latin America and the Caribbean: **Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay** and **Uruguay**. The 2009 Bolivian Constitution establishes that **Bolivia** is a decentralized country organized into autonomous regions, in which departments, provinces, municipalities and rural native indigenous territories coexist within a unitary country in a quasi-federation. Bolivia's decentralization process started in 1994. In the 2010s, several provisions were passed to establish a legislative framework for decentralization and the regulation of LRGs' structure and functioning. The last subnational elections were held in March 2021. In **Colombia**, the decentralization process started in 1986 and was strengthened by the 1991 Constitution, which granted the principle of self-governance and autonomy to the municipalities, departments and the Capital District of Bogota. Following a halt between 2002 and 2010, reforms to the fiscal system revamped the decentralization of the country. However, the decentralization process is currently on hold due to the current political crisis. In **Cuba**, the 2019 Constitution acknowledges local autonomy for municipalities, which are directly elected.³³ The country operates under a one-

party system and decentralization is therefore, de facto, conditioned by the centralized nature of the political regime.

In the **Dominican Republic**, the decentralization process started in the 1990s and has gained momentum since the passing of the 2007 National Districts and Municipalities Act, the 2010 Constitution and the 2012 National Development Strategy. This legislation has promoted the reinforcement of LRG capacities and entailed the updating of the legal, fiscal, transparency and participation framework for decentralization.³⁴ In the case of **Guatemala**, although the 1986 Constitution acknowledged the local autonomy of the country's municipalities, it was not until the 2000s (following the 1996 national cease-fire agreement) that the legal framework to regulate decentralization was introduced. In 2017, the national government presented the National Decentralization Agenda, which outlines a series of reforms aimed at achieving decentralization by 2032. The decentralization process in **Nicaragua** started in the 1980s, as part of the reforms for the country's peace and democratization. The 1987 Constitution gave municipalities local autonomy and recognizes specific rights and autonomy for the two regions on the country's Atlantic coast, which have majorities of indigenous and ethnic communities. Decentralizing reforms were undertaken in 2003 and 2013, with the revision of the main laws relating to the legal framework for municipalities.



To ensure a recovery that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient, it will be essential to maintain local public services, buttress them through innovative action and solidarity, and support them with adequate funding. If appropriately applied, recovery strategies can provide a critical starting point to construct the future that we all want.



Saint John's, Antigua and Barbuda. (Image: simone-mascellari-EKnEmv7ca8U-unsplash)

Since its return to democracy in 1989, **Paraguay** has initiated a decentralization process to improve the efficiency of the delivery of local services and promote greater transparency and accountability. The 1992 Constitution recognizes municipal governments as bodies with decision-making responsibilities for service delivery. Overall progress towards decentralization has been slow, however, despite a revamp in 2010 with the adoption of the Municipal Law. In **Uruguay**, the 1967 Constitution already acknowledged local authorities, although decentralization only really advanced in the 2000s, which was later than in the majority of countries in the region. The 1996 constitutional reform acknowledged decentralization, yet it did not make any specific provisions to promote it. The 2009 law on decentralization and citizen participation was a milestone for decentralization and led to the creation of 89 municipalities.³⁵ The first local elections were held in 2010. In 2014, a law was passed that established municipal councils as fully decentralized government bodies. However, the 2015 fiscal recentralization reforms reverted this advance.

Following UCLG's regional arrangements, 4 countries are reporting from the Middle East and Western Asian region. In **Afghanistan**, despite the 2004 constitutional provisions aiming for decentralization, the process is in a very incipient stage. Only the provincial councils are elected (not the governors) and the municipal elections legally foreseen have not taken place at the time of writing. There is no evidence of local self-government in **Qatar**. The conflicts suffered by **Iraq**, over the last four decades, have left a legacy of violence, war, poverty and weak governance. The 2005 Constitution established a federal system consisting of a decentralized

capital, with regions, governorates, and also local administrations. **Saudi Arabia** is a centralized monarchy. Its Constitution does not acknowledge any local autonomy. In recent years, the role of local authorities has, however, been revised to increase some local competencies. The Future Saudi Cities Program, led by the Ministry of Municipalities, has paved the way for a revision of the regulatory framework relating to LRGs.³⁶

Last but not least, there are 2 countries reporting from the Caribbean region: **Antigua and Barbuda** and **Bahamas**. In the former, there is no constitutional provision for local government across Antigua; however, the status of the Barbuda Council, which is the only local authority, is enshrined in the 1981 Constitution. Similarly, there is no provision for local government enshrined in the Constitution of **Bahamas**. The main legislative provisions affecting the work of LRGs were introduced in 1996 and 2014.

Following this overview of the different environments for LRG action in the countries reporting this year, the report will follow a structure based on the UN *Handbook for the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*. Section 2 will cover the methodology followed to prepare this report. Section 3 analyses the institutional framework for SDG localization, focusing on LRG engagement in national reporting processes, as well as LRGs' and LGAs' SDG localization initiatives around the world. Section 4 is devoted to analysing LRG actions in response to, and aiding recover from, the pandemic and its impact on efforts to deliver the SDGs. Section 5 focuses on the means of implementation available to LRGs, noting the critical impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 6 concludes and proposes ways to take SDG localization forward. ●

2 Methodology



This year's edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* comes at a critical juncture in the effort to achieve the SDGs. As noted in the UN Secretary-General's *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals* report, the COVID-19 crisis has halted, or reverted, much of the progress made over the past 6 years. The extent of the recoil is still unknown and will be largely determined by the strategies implemented to recover from the crisis.¹ The present report therefore seeks to echo the voices of LRGs and their call for a sustainable and resilient recovery that promotes economic, social and environmental sustainability as the means for achieving the 2030 Agenda. Spurred on by the pandemic, the second year of the decade of action for sustainable development has highlighted the critical role played by LRGs in building an inclusive path towards delivery of the SDGs. This report analyses and presents the concrete ways in which LRGs have contributed to addressing the COVID-19 crisis on the ground, while trying to ensure—and at times even advance—the delivery of the SDGs, despite the many challenges faced.

The evidence presented in this report is grounded in the experiences shared by LRGs and their associations via the 2021 “Survey on the role

of LRGs and their associations in the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda” (see Box 2.1). Further first-hand evidence has been drawn from subnational SDG monitoring and reporting efforts, which—quite remarkably—have accelerated in recent years. In this regard, two specific modalities should be distinguished.

On the one hand, this report builds upon efforts undertaken in previous years regarding the compilation of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs); this initiative continues to expand across the world.² The analysis presented in the first volume of the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews*, by UCLG and UN-Habitat, has been complemented with a further analysis of the VLRs published in 2021.³ The present report also reflects the key debates arising from the second volume of the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews*, which is to be launched during the 2021 HLPF. Its highlights include how to leverage the link between national and local reporting processes in order to accelerate SDG implementation.

On the other hand, this report also weaves in the 15 Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) that were undertaken between 2020 and 2021.⁴ Since 2020, UCLG has been promoting the elaboration of VSRs in countries that are reporting to the HLPF. These subnational reviews are drafted

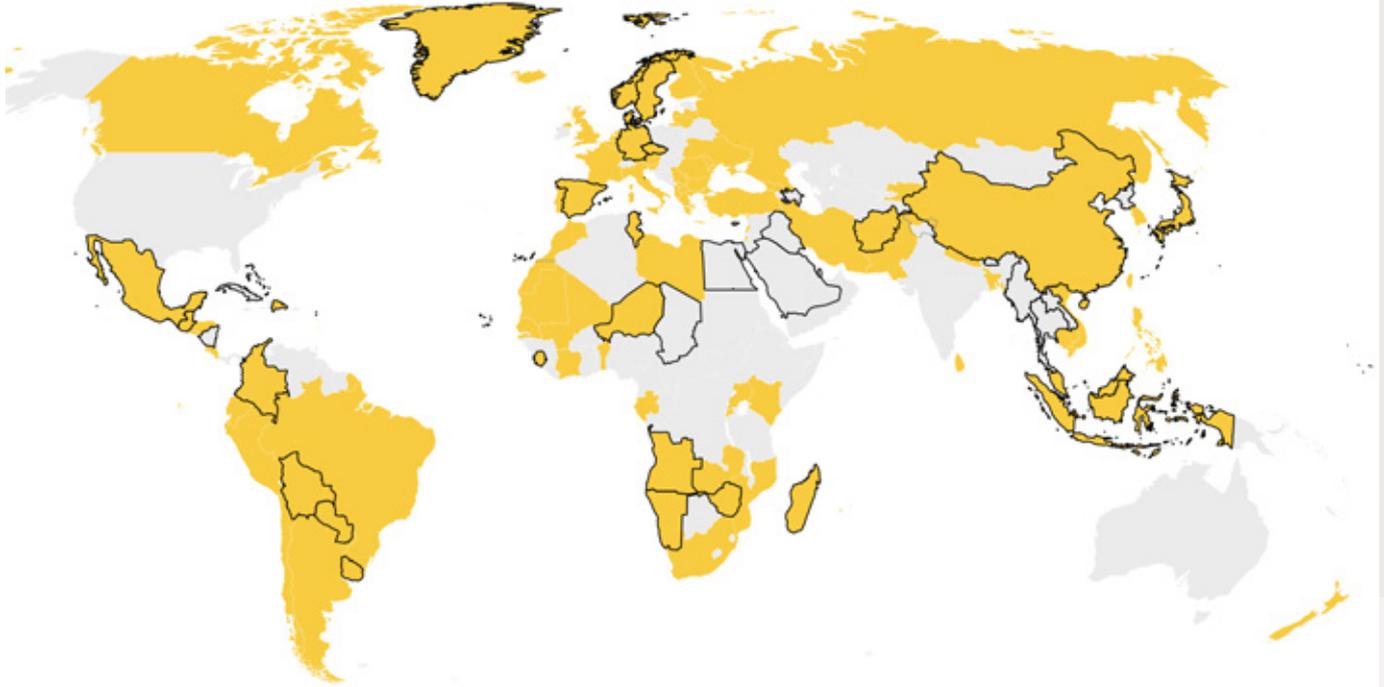
BOX 2.1

Surveys collected by the GTF/UCLG in 2021

For the preparation of this year's edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs*, the GTF has collected 263 surveys, as opposed to the 204 collected in 2020. The surveys received have come from 92 different countries, 28 of which are reporting this year. Of the 263 surveys, 94 correspond to answers from LGAs (24 from reporting countries); 159 to answers from LRGs (including 5 from reporting countries that are not covered by the answers from the LGAs) and 10 to responses from partners. Most of the replies came from Europe (94 surveys), followed by Latin America (53), Africa (37), Eurasia (29), Asia-Pacific (28), and Middle East and West Asia (19). In Africa, most replies come from LGAs. In ASPAC, answers from LGAs and LRGs are balanced. In Eurasia, most replies come from Russian LRGs (26). In Europe, 34 LGAs from 28 countries have responded (plus NALAS: a subregional network from South-East Europe). In Latin America, the majority of the replies come from LRGs (34), particularly from Argentina and Brazil, and include those of 14 LGAs from 13 countries. In MEWA, the majority of the replies come from Turkish (10 of 19) and Palestinian LRGs (4). In NORAM, all 3 replies come from Canada.

FIGURE 2.1

Countries that committed to submitting their VNR to the HLPF in 2021 and countries whose LRGs answered the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey



Source: own compilation.

- Countries whose LRGs answered the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey
- Countries committed to present a VNR in 2021

in close collaboration with the national LRG associations in each country. They provide both comprehensive and in-depth analyses of the corresponding national environments for SDG localization. They also include the experiences of LRGs from different parts of each country in implementing the SDGs on the ground.

The report also provides a systematic analysis of the actions taken by LRGs around the world in response to and, as far as possible, to help them to recover from the COVID-19 crisis. This analysis is based on the premise that health must permeate all other policies. Through this lens, the report explores the relationship between LRG initiatives and the pillars of sustainable development within the context of the current crisis. Initiatives from different LRGs from all around the world are highlighted in order to ensure geographical balance and a truly representative review.⁵ The report consolidates these different subnational sources of information on SDG implementation and punctuates them with an analysis of the VNRs presented to this year's HLPF. At the time of writing, 35 VNRs have been analysed in depth

in order to produce this report. As in previous editions, special attention has been paid to the involvement of LRGs and LGAs in national reporting processes and to the coordination mechanisms guiding SDG implementation. Finally, the report reflects on the means of implementation available to LRGs and on how these have also been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In sum, the present report puts forward a contrasted analysis of the progress of SDG localization in the territories reporting to this year's HLPF. It compares and contrasts key national and subnational sources on SDG implementation, with the objective of preparing the ground for further debate on the effectiveness of multi-level government arrangements in the different territories. In these trying times for humanity, we find ourselves at a crossroads regarding the achievement of the SDGs. This report seeks to provide evidence of the crucial importance of SDG localization and of the challenges faced by LRGs as they try to accelerate their actions during this time of crisis. ●

3 Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization



3.1 Strengthening ownership: participation of LRGs in the preparation of VNRs

Between 2016 and 2021, a total of 248 VNRs will have been submitted by 176 countries. In 2021, 43 countries have committed to presenting their VNR: 8 are doing so for the first time, 25 for the second time, and 10 for the third time!

As highlighted in Table 3.1, the participation of local and regional governments and their respective associations in national reporting processes and the production of VNRs has evolved since 2016. Overall, there has been a notable increase in LRG involvement in the VNR process since 2016: 32% of countries produced one in that year, yet 43% in 2020. However, the figures for the present year show a decline: of the 43 VNRs published in 2021, only 16 countries have engaged LRGs in the consultation process (37%).

Part of the explanation for this evolution lies in the widening of regional differences (see Table 3.2). In Europe, LRG participation in VNRs has

increased: from 57%, between 2016 and 2020, to 75%, in 2021. In the Asia-Pacific region, it rose from 31% to 44% in the same period. However, it has fallen significantly in Latin America and Africa: from 41%, between 2016 and 2020, to 33%, in 2021, in Latin America, and from 39% to 30% in Africa. In the other regions (Eurasia, MEWA and North America), LRG participation in the VNRs in 2021 has been much more limited. Over the period from 2016 to 2021, LRG consultation and involvement in the VNR processes has been most important in Europe (58%), followed by ASPAC and Africa (39%) and Latin America (29%).

TABLE 3.1

LRG participation in the preparation of the VNRs from 2016 to 2021 (by year)

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		Period 2016-2021	
	No.	%	No.	%										
Total No. of countries reporting (per year)	22	100%	43	100%	46	100%	47	100%	47	100%	43	100%	248	100%
Medium to high degree of LRG consultation	7	32%	15	35%	20	43%	19	40%	20	43%	16	37%	97	39%
Low degree of LRG consultation	4	18%	11	26%	11	24%	11	23%	11	23%	7	16%	55	22%
No LRG consultation	11	50%	16	37%	14	30%	13	28%	11	23%	17	40%	82	33%
No elected LRGs	0	-	1	2%	1	2%	4	9%	5	11%	3	7%	14	6%

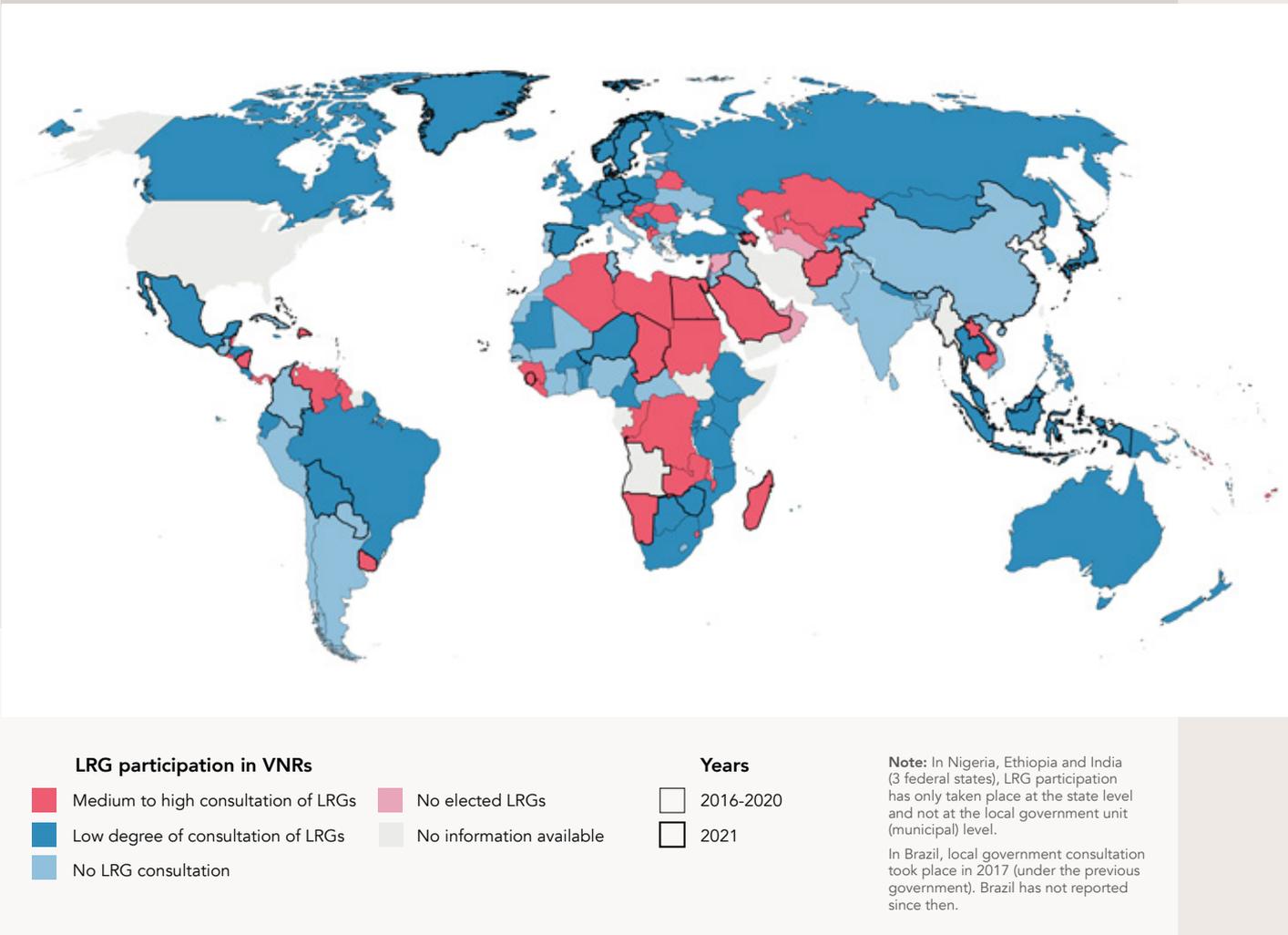
TABLE 3.2

LRG participation in the preparation of VNRs by regions, for the period 2016-2020 and in 2021

	AFRICA		ASPAC		LATAM		EURASIA		EUROPE		MEWA		NORAM		TOTAL	
	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021	2016-2020	2021
Countries																
Total No. of countries	56	10	42	9	29	9	9	1	47	8	15	4	7	2	205	43
Medium to high degree of LRG consultation	22	3	13	4	12	3	3	0	27	6	1	0	3	0	81	16
Low degree of LRG consultation	15	1	14	2	7	3	1	0	8	0	3	1	0	0	48	7
No LRG consultation	19	5	10	2	10	3	4	1	11	2	9	2	2	2	65	17
No elected LRGs	0	1	5	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	2	0	11	3
Percentage																
Total No. of countries	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Medium to high degree of LRG consultation	39%	30%	31%	44%	41%	33%	33%	-	57%	75%	7%	-	43%	-	40%	37%
Low degree of LRG consultation	27%	10%	33%	22%	24%	33%	11%	-	17%	-	20%	25%	-	-	23%	16%
No LRG consultation	34%	50%	24%	22%	34%	33%	44%	100%	23%	25%	60%	50%	29%	100%	32%	40%
No elected LRGs	-	-	12%	11%	-	-	11%	-	2%	-	13%	25%	29%	-	5%	7%

FIGURE 3.1

LRG participation in the preparation of the VNRs 2016-2021



Seeking a finer analysis, there is a group of countries in which LRGs have actively taken part in national reporting processes and directly interacted with the reporting units appointed by their national governments. In 10 countries, LRGs have even presented their own contributions to the national report. These are included in a larger group (of 16 countries) in which LRGs have been involved in extended and regular consultation processes. In a second group (of 6 countries), LRGs have had more limited possibilities to contribute to the elaboration of the VNRs, but have still been involved in consultations through a number of conferences, informative workshops, surveys and/or web platforms. Finally, in a third group (of 18 countries) there has apparently been very little, or even no, LRG involvement in the reporting process.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic has had again a huge impact on the reporting process. In several countries, workable solutions were found, as were ways to involve stakeholders and to collect the required data. In others, however, such as **Chad** and **Bolivia**, consultations were hindered by the public health crisis. In most cases, virtual meetings were organised in order to limit travel and the number of face-to-face meetings. In certain countries, such as **Bhutan** and **Thailand**, in addition to online consultations, stakeholders were also invited to provide written input. In others (e.g. **Sierra Leone**), problems with stakeholder engagement were offset with the help of civil society platforms. In **Indonesia**, the VNR even underlines the fact that online consultation has facilitated and extended outreach.

Countries with a strong degree of LRG involvement in the VNR process

As mentioned above, a group of 16 countries (including the **Czech Republic, Denmark, Japan and Spain**) has shown a more inclusive consultation process. In some countries the consultation process took place over quite a long period through a series of conferences, workshops, working groups and focus groups. These were organised at the national and, sometimes, regional levels and combined with surveys and operations to gather local data based on a multi-stakeholder approach (e.g. **Cape Verde, Germany, Indonesia**). The VNR

Sidi Bou Said, Tunisia.
(Image: natashia-shukla-
r9dzkV8NbtK-unsplash)



of the **Czech Republic** has been prepared with the support of the Government Council for Sustainable Development, in which LRGs were represented by the LGA (SMO CR), the Association of Regions, and Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic. In **Denmark**, the Ministry of Finance made contact with municipalities that were particularly active in SDG implementation through LRG organisations. In fact, Danish Regions and Local Government Denmark (KL) presented their respective contributions in a specific section of the national report, together with some Danish municipalities (Gladsaxe, Copenhagen, Sønderborg, Guldborgsund, Vejle and Aarhus). They also contributed to the SDG Panel, in which the views of the LRGs were reflected. In **Japan**, LRGs contributed to the VNR process through the SDG Promotion Roundtable. In **Spain**, regional governments and the LGA (FEMP) presented their own contributions and participated in the VNR process by answering a survey. Some of those taking part in the Spanish Commission for the 2030 Agenda also reviewed the draft report.

Consultation processes were also carried out, although to a lesser extent, in **Malaysia, Niger and Thailand**. In **Malaysia**, cities presenting a VLR were invited to contribute to the VNR and to present a paper on their activities and priorities to the Technical Working Groups coordinating the inclusion of the contributions of different stakeholders to the national report.² In **Niger**, the Association of Regions mentions its participation in meetings and collaboration with the reporting unit in charge of the VNR.³ In **Thailand**, local authorities took part in the consultations organised by the Working Group on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda; this ensured the participation of all relevant sectors and stakeholders in drafting the VNR.

It is particularly noteworthy that the LGAs of 8 countries: **Cape Verde, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia and Zimbabwe**, presented their first VSRs in 2021 (for more information on VSRs, see Subsection 3.3, below). More than 33 LRGs from 11 countries reporting this year produced VLRs. Most of the national reports from these countries have taken this subnational reporting exercise into account, dedicating a specific space to it and/or including a contribution written by their LGAs and/or LRGs. For instance, the government of **Cape Verde** decided to give greater visibility to the localization of the SDGs in its 2021 VNR. The Association of Cape Verde Municipalities (ANMCV) presented its own contribution, which was briefly included in the national report. Similarly, the VNR for **Germany** contains an annex summarising VSR contributions by 3 LGAs: the

Deutscher Städtetag, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, and the German County Association. In **Indonesia**, subnational governments were involved in the VNR process via a specific platform and participated in a number of different events. Its report also included the results of the survey used for the VSR, which had been carried out by the LGAs (APEKSI, APPSI, and ADEKSI) in collaboration with the ITB SDGs Network and with the support of United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific (UCLG ASPAC). In **Mexico**, regional and local governments provided a summary of their VSRs to the national report. KS participated in the working group established for the VNR process representing the municipalities and county councils of **Norway**; this formed part of the process led by the country's Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. As specifically stated in the report, this partnership was established with the clear objective of shedding light on the work that Norwegian municipalities perform to promote sustainable development. In **Sweden**, the VSR that was developed by the LGA (SALAR) this year proved an excellent vehicle for dialogue with the national government and led to an opportunity to contribute to the VNR. In **Zimbabwe** and **Tunisia**, the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA) and the National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities (FNCT) both presented VSRs; this was also mentioned in the VNR of the former but not in that of the latter (see below).

Countries where LRGs participated in VNRs but made more restricted contributions

In **Bhutan**, only selected districts and municipalities were consulted as part of the national reporting process. In **Cuba**, representatives of subnational governments formed part of the multidisciplinary work teams in charge of the VNR, subject to the institutions responsible for each SDG. In **Colombia**, different tiers of government and other stakeholders participated in the VNR process, but on specific occasions. They did so during a presentation of the content of the VNR and participated in a workshop organised by the SDG Commission that included representatives from all levels of government and administration. During this, they shared insights and suggestions relating to the report. In addition, an online questionnaire gave citizens the opportunity to submit their own ideas and contributions. However, when the LGAs and LRGs answered the GTF/UCLG Survey, they reported that their involvement was only limited. In **Tunisia**, some municipal councillors participated in workshops

organised by the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Investment Support. The VNR also mentions a consultation process involving the presidents of the 18 municipalities of the governorate of Sousse to discuss issues related to the SDGs (including energy, environmental pollution and urban planning). However, although this process culminated in a VSR, the FNCT was not involved in the VNR process and reported that the overall participation of LRGs in the national reporting exercise was limited. In **Sierra Leone**, some meetings were held with local councils as part of the VNR review; this process also included representatives from the government, parliament, civil society, private sector, development partners, women and young people, and the media. However, the Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone (LoCASL) was not involved. Although the VNR of **China** does not mention any LRG involvement, or that of any other local stakeholders in the reporting process, some LRGs (Hangzhou and Zengzhou) mentioned that they met with representatives of the reporting unit and made contributions. Some other countries, including **Bolivia** and **Guatemala**, also used questionnaires and surveys. In **Paraguay**, a survey was carried out and a Committee for the Localization was created in May 2021. However, the LGA reported limited consultation.

Even more limited participation has been observed in countries such as the **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, where the provincial authorities have been engaged in the VNR process, but mainly with the aim of increasing their understanding of the SDGs. In the **Marshall Islands**, the VNR Working Group met with the officers of the Marshall Islands Mayors Association (MIMA), but LRGs were not actively engaged in the overall reporting process.

Countries with little or no LRG involvement in the VNR process

Finally, there are a number of countries for which there is no evidence of any LRG involvement in the VNR process. These include **Afghanistan**, **Azerbaijan**, **Chad**, **Cyprus**, the **Dominican Republic**, **Egypt**, **Iraq**, **Madagascar**, **Namibia**, **Nicaragua**, **Paraguay**, **San Marino**, and **Uruguay**. In countries with no elected LRGs: **Qatar** and the **Democratic People's Republic of Korea**, there is also no evidence of local administrative units having been involved in the elaboration of the VNRs. At the time of finalising this report (June 2021), no information had been provided by **Angola**,⁴ **Bahamas**, or **Saudi Arabia**.



Some countries are currently making important progress in the elaboration of their VNRs by applying a co-production approach. However, this is still insufficient in the majority of countries. Stronger commitments and greater efforts will be needed to reaffirm the place and role of LRGs in the processes of reporting on, and implementing, the SDGs.

How are local and regional governments and “localization” mentioned in the VNRs?

Even when LRG involvement in the VNR process was relatively limited, the majority of VNRs still mentioned the role of LRGs in the implementation of the SDGs. As well as countries in which LRGs were included in the VNR processes (see above), it is worth noting the references to LRGs in the reports of **Chad, Egypt, Iraq, the Lao PDR, Madagascar, the Marshall Islands, Namibia and Nicaragua**. There are, however, no or only a few limited references to them in the reports of **Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan and San Marino**.

As mentioned above, several VNRs have dedicated space to reporting on initiatives led by LRGs, such as Voluntary Subnational Reviews and Voluntary Local Reviews. As well as countries that have presented a VSR, 16 VLRs have been referenced from 7 other countries (out of a total of 31 VLRs that were finalised in 2020-2021).⁵

Several VNRs have dedicated a section, or subsection(s), to the role of LRGs and their initiatives and/or work associated with the “localization” of the SDGs (or to their “territorialization”, as in the cases of **Colombia,**

Cuba and Madagascar). For instance, the VNR of the **Czech Republic** has a subsection on “Regions and their strategies”, which includes references to municipalities and their national association (SMO CR). **Denmark’s** VNR has a special subsection dedicated to regions and municipalities and their role as “partners in the implementation of the SDGs”. In the VNR of **Norway**, a chapter called “SDGs in Norwegian Municipalities and Regions” was written by KS; it is entirely dedicated to LRGs and acknowledges their key role in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Other countries have also dedicated a specific section to SDG localization processes in their respective VNRs (e.g. **Cape Verde, Egypt, Germany, Paraguay and Thailand**). In **Egypt**, the VNR states that the country is well aware of the local dimension and dedicates significant attention to the localization of the SDGs at the governorate level and to addressing geographic disparities. In a subsection entitled “SDG Localization”, the VNR of **Thailand** presents several national initiatives to identify the capacities of different bodies, across the country, to implement the SDGs. It also identifies some provinces and local governments as pilot areas which will receive national government support to raise awareness of the SDGs and implement them. A subsection in the VNR of **Germany** presents different national programmes for SDG localization. In some countries, the support for SDG implementation at the local level is associated with “decentralization” policies (e.g. **Iraq and Madagascar**). Finally, some VNRs make only very limited reference to SDG localization strategies (**Afghanistan, Chad and Namibia**) or fail to do so at all (**Azerbaijan, Bolivia, China, Nicaragua, Qatar and San Marino**).

As reporting exercises, the analysis of the VNRs gives us a clear picture of the recognition of the roles of different levels of government in the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the SDGs. As previously underlined, some countries are currently making important progress in the elaboration of their VNRs by applying a co-production approach (e.g. **Cape Verde, Denmark, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Norway, Spain and Sweden**). This shows the transformative potential of reports based on coordinated and multi-level efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda. However, the involvement of LRGs and other stakeholders in national reporting processes is still insufficient in the majority of countries. Stronger commitments and greater efforts will therefore be needed to reaffirm the place and role of local and regional governments in the processes of reporting on, and implementing, the SDGs. ●

3.2

National SDG coordination mechanisms, implementation strategies and LRG participation



Despite the impact of the pandemic, the VNRs submitted at the 2021 HLPF reaffirm the global commitment of national governments to pursue and achieve the SDGs. They are currently doing this by designing national strategies and plans aligned with the SDGs and setting up coordination mechanisms to foster their implementation. After a brief introduction recalling these national mechanisms and strategies, this Subsection analyses the involvement of LRGs in the coordination mechanisms and the localization dimensions, or strategies, associated with national plans and policies to promote and deliver sustainable development.

In the majority of countries, different mechanisms, often led by the highest levels of national government, ensure the coordination of the implementation and reporting of the 2030 Agenda. This leadership role is the responsibility of different ministries in different countries. Amongst others, it is subject to the ministries of: Planning (**Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Iraq, Qatar and Sierra Leone**—Planning and Economic Development); Economy (**Afghanistan and Mexico**—where there is a specific 2030 Agenda Office); Finance (**Cape Verde, Cyprus and Denmark**); Local Government and Modernisation (**Norway**); the Environment (the **Czech Republic and San Marino**); Foreign Affairs (**Antigua and Barbuda, and the Lao PDR**); or Labour and Social Affairs (**Zimbabwe**). Very often,

leadership is shared between several different ministries. For example, in **Tunisia**, responsibility for steering the SDGs is shared between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for diplomatic leadership, and the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Investment Support, which is responsible for national coordination and technical leadership. In other cases, specific offices, or roles, have been created at the highest levels of government. This is the case both in **Spain**, with its Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda, and in **Sweden**, with its National Coordinator for the 2030 Agenda (who was appointed in 2020).

These national coordination mechanisms are often chaired by the Prime Minister or Head of Government themselves (as in **Bhutan, Egypt, Germany, Indonesia, the Lao PDR, Madagascar, Malaysia and Thailand**). Some of the coordination mechanisms include only national-level ministries, or representatives from other central government offices (as in **Bhutan, Bolivia, China, Colombia, Egypt, Germany, the DPR Korea, the Lao PDR, Madagascar**—where it is also responsible for international organisations—and **Sweden**). In other countries, national governments are increasingly acknowledging the role of other stakeholders, such as: LRGs, civil society, businesses, and academia and involving them in national councils, sometimes as full partners, and sometimes with an advisory role (e.g. **Afghanistan, Cape Verde, Chad, Cuba, the Czech Republic,**

Madagascar, Mexico, Thailand, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe). In other cases, national governments additionally coordinate SDG action through mechanisms that are specific to stakeholder participation. This is the case of the **German** Council for Sustainable Development, the **Spanish** Sectoral Conference for the 2030 Agenda and the **Danish** 2030 Panel, which was created by the non-partisan 2030 Network (which was, in turn, created by the Parliament).

Long-term development strategies have been the instruments chosen by many national governments to align their national visions with the SDGs. This is the case, amongst others, of the “**Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development 2021-2030**” strategy; the **Cape Verde** *Ambition 2030*; the **Czech Republic** 2030 Strategic Framework (complemented by two implementation plans adopted in 2018); **Iraq’s** and **Egypt’s** *Vision 2030* programmes; the **Marshall Islands’** National Strategic Plan 2020-2030; **Spain’s** Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (which was adopted in June 2021 and which complements the Spanish Urban Agenda); and **Thailand’s** 20-Year National Strategy Framework (2017-2036). Several countries have complemented their national strategies with roadmaps or action plans. For example, **Cuba** has developed both a National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2030, which is fully aligned with the SDGs, and a National Action Plan for the Promotion of the 2030 Agenda in the short and medium term, which is updated on a yearly basis.

Other national governments which have aligned their mid-term development strategies with the 2030 Agenda include: **Bhutan**, with its 12th Five-Year Plan for 2018-2023 (whose objective is a “just, harmonious and sustainable society through enhanced decentralization”); **Indonesia**, and its 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan; and **Madagascar**, and its General State Policy for 2019-2023. The national government of **Zimbabwe** amended its Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation 2013-2028 in 2015 to mainstream the SDGs. However, examples of national strategies that do not clearly align their efforts with the 2030 Agenda can also still be found. These include: **Afghanistan’s** National Peace and Development Framework 2021-2025 (which only mentions the SDGs 3 times), and **Namibia’s** Fifth National Development Plan (which mentions them only once).

Looking ahead, several countries consider the SDGs to be key elements around which they plan to devise their future strategies. This is the case in: **Chad, Denmark, Qatar, Antigua and Barbuda, and San Marino**.

Analysis of the role of LRGs in national government-led SDG-related strategies and actions

The analysis of the 2021 VNRs shows the extent to which national governments have prioritised SDG localization through their mid- and long-term strategies.

In the first of these groups, countries with enabling environments for LRGs—including an embedded tradition of local self-government—have developed strategies or policies that have promoted greater local ownership and given more room for innovation and support for SDG localization. In other words, LRGs have taken the lead in SDG localization and initiatives now flourish throughout the national territory. In some cases, such as those of **Denmark, Germany, Japan, Norway, Spain and Sweden**, early national strategies and action plans already incorporated the LRGs within this process. Even if SDGs had been aligned with their national and sectoral policies in previous years, this year, **Denmark** and **Norway** adopted the first action plans seeking to improve the coordination of SDG implementation. Both schemes have been developed through collective and cooperative efforts. In addition, a collaboration agreement between the ministry in charge of coordinating the SDGs and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) was signed earlier this

Bumthang, Bhutan.
(Image: bradford-zak-
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year. In **Germany**, the Federal Chancellor and the heads of government of the 16 *Länder* adopted a resolution,⁶ in 2019, which refers to the pursuit of sustainable development as a task that the Federal Government and *Länder* must share. The newly adopted German Sustainable Development Strategy continues this commitment to an integrated, and multi-stakeholder, approach to sustainable development.

In **Japan**, based on a long tradition of strong collaboration between the central and local governments, the Cabinet Office of the Central Government has supported local sustainability processes since 2008. Since then, it has promoted the localization of the SDGs through the “SDGs FutureCity” initiative and other country-wide programmes that have engaged pace-setting cities. In **Spain**, the 2018 Action Plan and, more especially, the 2021 Sustainable Development Strategy include the commitments of various autonomous communities, as well as local authorities. LRGs have, however, been involved in bottom-up initiatives since as early as 2016. This year (February 2021), a collaborative Framework Agreement was signed between the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda, at the national level, and the association FEMP. In **Sweden**, the 2030 Agenda has been included in every Statement of Government Policy since its adoption in 2015. Some LRGs and other stakeholders were part of the original Delegation for the 2030 Agenda, while some others were consulted about it.⁷ The action plan and bill that were subsequently adopted present a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

In a second group of countries, the national government has been steering SDG implementation based on a more top-down approach and through national strategies and guidelines that are often supported by incentives. In **China**, despite the fact that policy processes involving central government and LRGs have recently started aiming for more horizontal coordination (in particular, the 14th Five-Year Plan), the top-down approach has tended to prevail, with LRGs largely performing as actors which assume the “main responsibility for implementation”, aligned with national directives. However, in some cases, such as that of Hangzhou, the LRG has individually taken steps towards SDG achievement (as explained in Subsection 3.3). A comparable situation can be observed in **Cuba**, where decentralizing reforms are being implemented and the National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2030 acknowledges the need to apply an integrated, multi-dimensional, inter-institutional and interdisciplinary approach to local and sustainable development.

Several countries with enabling environments for LRGs have developed strategies or policies that have promoted greater local ownership and given more room for innovation and support for SDG localization. LRGs have taken the lead in SDG localization and initiatives now flourish throughout the national territory.

A similar top-down approach determines the localization of the SDGs in **Indonesia**. Since 2017, presidential decrees and ministerial regulations to align subnational action plans with the SDGs have been mandatory for the country’s provinces and have served as a reference point for municipalities and villages, along with, firstly, the 2015-2019 National Medium-Term Development Plan and then that for 2020-2024. Also, national policy is supported by guidelines, performance indicators and financial incentives. In **Malaysia**, the SDGs were integrated into the 11th Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 and Vision 2020. They were also established as one of the main goals of the SDG Roadmap Phase 2 (2021-2025), which is currently underway and seeks to foster greater policy coherence amongst the implementation strategies applied at both the national and local levels. The Ministry of Local Government has been actively supporting LRGs and has also developed local indicators for the SDGs. In **Niger**, the national government is leading a top-down strategy based on sectoral and regional coordination units. These are being used to implement the national development plan, but are more focused on regions than on municipalities. In **Colombia**, the National Development Plan 2018-2022 is strongly focused on regional pacts and the national government has reaffirmed its strategy for the alignment of the territorial development plans with the SDGs and the localization of indicators and targets. This policy has involved important efforts to raise awareness among members of local authorities elected since 2019, to monitor the progress of alignment and to showcase local good practices. The aim is to apply a territorial approach that

recognises the specificities of the different departments and municipalities.

A more mixed situation can be found in **Mexico**, where there is no clear national localization strategy associated with the National Development Plan 2019-2024. However, in order to promote the alignment of the SDGs with the plans of federated states and municipalities, the national office in charge of the 2030 Agenda has worked with UNDP and GiZ to: create offices responsible for the SDGs at the state⁸ and, to a lesser extent, municipal levels; train 200 local public servants; and establish a set of guidelines for VLRs (see below in Subsection 3.3). In **Bolivia**, the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2015-2020 is aligned with the SDGs, although there are few references to the global framework and there is no clear strategic guidance for SDG localization. Even so, each province and municipality has received resources to support its local plans for integrating the SDGs.

Elsewhere, progress is slowly being made, even when there is no clear SDG localization strategy. In the **Czech Republic**, for example, the drafting of the Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030 and the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda action plan involved the participation of LRGs and other stakeholders through the Government Council for Sustainable Development. This emphasises the willingness of the Czech national government to complete the ongoing reform of regional public administration by 2030, with municipalities and regions being key actors for sustainable development. In **Cyprus**, the national government proposes local government reform to reduce the number of municipalities. It is also counting on European funds to foster “integrated sustainable urban development”. Some other countries have also benefited from important international support, such as **Cape Verde**. In this country, for example, the government regionalized its Strategic Sustainable Development Plan for 2017-2021. It has also implemented the Platforms for Local Development and SDG Localization and launched the Requalification, Rehabilitation and Accessibilities Programme to support municipal sustainable development plans. In **Guatemala**, the 2014 K’atun National Development Plan was aligned with the SDGs after the country adopted the 2030 Agenda. The national government, with the support of international partners, is currently helping pilot municipalities to prepare, adopt and implement municipal planning and land use instruments aligned with the national plan and the SDGs. In **Thailand**, where local elections finally took place this year after a long delay, decentralization is making slow progress and

the country is taking the first steps towards SDG localization, through its 20-Year National Strategy 2018-2037 and SDG Roadmap (2019).⁹ In all of the cases mentioned above, national governments have provided specific tools and activities with which to raise awareness, build up the capacities of local authorities, and launch pilot projects.

The main element hampering SDG localization and ownership in another group of countries is the often weak enabling institutional environment for local governments. In many countries, LRGs have not been allocated adequate human and financial resources to implement the 2030 Agenda and the support received from national government seems to be insufficient. This has been the situation in the **Lao PDR**, despite requirements to include its provinces in the drafting of development plans and the 2019 SDG Roadmap, and to offer awareness-raising campaigns at the local level. It is also the case in **Bhutan**, where the 5-Year Plans were supposed to trickle down from the central and sectoral ministries to the *dzongkhag* (district), *gewog* (block) and *thromde* (municipality) levels, and to subsequently transform into annual performance agreements and budgets. However, this has added very little to an already limited and incipient decentralization process, which is failing to ensure SDG integration at all levels. Similarly, in **Sierra Leone**, the country’s 22 local councils have been encouraged to integrate the SDGs into their development plans as part of the national SDG localization strategy, with the aim of strengthening decentralization.¹⁰ However, the predominant top-down approach makes it difficult for local councils to become involved in national SDG planning or to have much influence over the priorities for action.

In **Zimbabwe** and **Tunisia**, institutional arrangements to operationalise decentralization are still not yet in place and this is obstructing SDG localization. **Zimbabwe**’s Vision 2030, which is aligned with the SDGs,¹¹ has established decentralization and devolution as one of its key goals. However, in spite of this commitment at the national level, the absence of SDG institutionalisation, limited resources and data, and institutional fragmentation are all signs of the very incipient stage of SDG localization at present. In **Tunisia**, decentralization is acknowledged in the Constitution but the implementation of many regulations has yet to take place.¹² However, the VNR presented does highlight several initiatives for local and sustainable development. This, along with the elaboration process and preliminary goals of the next 5-Year Plan 2021-2025, suggests a more

promising future for SDG localization in the country, if the national government effectively commits to this.

Finally, and as already underlined in reference to very limited efforts in localization in the previous Subsection, in some countries (**Afghanistan**, **Azerbaijan**,¹³ **Chad**,¹⁴ **DPR Korea**, **Egypt**,¹⁵ **Madagascar**,¹⁶ **Namibia**¹⁷ and **Nicaragua**¹⁸), the SDG approach taken by national governments with regard to the role of LRGs in implementation has not been clearly defined. Only limited information can be provided for **Angola**, the **Bahamas** and **Saudi Arabia**, since their VNRs had not been published at the time of finalising this report. The fragile institutional contexts of **Afghanistan**¹⁹ and **Iraq** do not allow us to draw any sound conclusions in this regard.

Analysis of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

Table 3.2, below, shows to what extent national coordination mechanisms have involved LRGs in the period 2016-2021. The Table offers a view of the participation of LRGs in national coordination mechanisms in 2021 and compares it to the cumulative analysis for the period 2016-2020. In 2021, LRGs participate in national coordination mechanisms in 21% of the 43 reporting this year, that is, in 9 cases. This participation may involve participating regularly in the decision-making process as an equal partner (for example, with the right to vote), or participating on a regular basis at consultative level (such as partaking in advisory councils). In the Table, these modalities are qualified as "Medium to high degree of participation". On some other occasions, LRGs

TABLE 3.3

Participation of LRGs in the national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs in 2016-2020 and in 2021

2021

Region	Total number of countries Countries per region	Medium to high degree of participation		Low degree of participation		No participation		No elected LRGs / No information	
		No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%
World	43	9	21%	12	28%	19	44%	3	7%
Africa	10	1	10%	3	30%	5	50%	1	-
ASPAC	9	2	22%	1	11%	5	56%	1	11%
Eurasia	1	0	-	0	-	1	100%	0	-
Europe	8	6	75%	0	-	2	25%	0	-
LATAM	9	0	-	7	78%	2	22%	0	-
MEWA	4	0	-	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%
NORAM	2	0	-	0	-	2	100%	0	-

2016-2020

World	205	60	29%	43	21%	91	44%	11	5%
Africa	56	15	27%	12	21%	29	52%	0	-
ASPAC	42	8	19%	10	24%	19	45%	5	12%
Eurasia	9	2	22%	3	33%	3	33%	1	11%
Europe	47	23	49%	7	15%	16	34%	1	2%
LATAM	29	10	34%	8	28%	11	38%	0	-
MEWA	15	1	7%	1	7%	11	73%	2	13%
NORAM	7	1	14%	2	29%	2	29%	2	29%

may participate in a rather limited manner in such national mechanisms. This includes having been consulted ad hoc, in few or punctual meetings, but not as a permanent member. This year, in 28% of the reporting countries (12 of 43), LRGs have a low degree of participation in coordination mechanisms. Finally, in 44% of the reporting countries (that is, in 19 cases), LRGs have not been involved at all in the national coordination mechanisms.²⁰

If the figures for 2021 are contrasted with those for the period 2016-2020, it can be seen that the level of medium to high degree participation has fallen from 29% to 21%, while low degree participation has slightly risen (from 21% to 28%), and no participation has remained stable (44%). Globally speaking, these figures show a decrease in participation. This could threaten achievement of the SDGs at the local level and, as a consequence, also at the national one. While it is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic

has reshaped local agendas and priorities, placing public health and economic recovery at the centre of government actions, decisions made relating to organisational priorities and strategies at the national level are likely to affect the possibilities of achieving the SDGs at the local scale. Analysing the situation region-by-region, Europe is, by far, the region that offers LRGs the greatest possibilities of participation in national coordination mechanisms, followed by Asia-Pacific and Africa.

In Europe, the percentage of medium to high participation has increased from 49% to 75% this year. The reason for this is probably the fact that many countries with strong decentralization schemes and multi-level governance (such as **Denmark, Germany, Norway, Spain** and **Sweden**) have reported this year, in addition to the efforts made by the Czech government to integrate LRGs. In the case of the **Czech Republic**, the national government regularly seeks advice



Prague, Czech Republic.
(Image: rachel-martin-
btd6rjalFUY-unsplash)

from the Government Council for Sustainable Development, on which its LRGs are represented by SMO CR, by the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic, and by Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic. In **Denmark**, the Association of Danish Regions and Local Government Denmark both form part of the 2030 Panel, which has an advisory role and is broadly acknowledged by the national government. In **Germany**, the *Deutscher Städtetag* occasionally participates in the national coordinating mechanism (but more so now than several years ago). In addition to the German Council for Sustainable Development, which has an advisory role, the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development sometimes invites representatives from federal states and local authorities to attend its meetings. The Federal-Länder Exchange on Sustainable Development meets regularly.

In **Norway**, the fact that the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation has been appointed as the coordinating body for the national implementation of the SDGs has increased cross-sectoral cooperation and led to a more holistic approach to sustainable development. In addition, an advisory Forum on Policy Coherence involves all other stakeholders, including LRGs. In **Spain**, the autonomous communities, central government, and the FEMP participate in the Sectoral Commission for the SDGs, but without the right to vote.²¹ In **Sweden**, the county administrative boards and the local government association SALAR all form part of the Council for Sustainable Cities. This organ was founded by the national government in 2017 and also includes 11 government agencies. The Council's task is to support the municipalities in their work on SDG 11 and it will operate until May 2022. These regular consultations between SALAR and the national government have been recently bolstered by the VSR. This has proved an excellent vehicle for dialogue with the national government and has provided a golden opportunity to contribute to the VNR. In **Cyprus**, LRGs have had very limited participation in national mechanisms although their views have been considered, while the 9 *castelli* of **San Marino** have not participated in any national decision-making and coordination processes at all.

Progress has also been observed in Asia-Pacific, with participation increasing from 19% for the period 2016-2020 to 22% in 2021. However, the results have also been polarised, with a large proportion of the reporting countries not participating at all (from 45% to 56%). The frontrunners are just 2 countries (representing 22% of all ASPAC reporting countries): **Indonesia** and **Japan**. **Indonesia's**

SDGs National Coordination Team includes several participation platforms, one of which includes the national and local governments. At subnational levels, the governorates' Subnational Coordination Teams are involved in monitoring and evaluating SDG implementation in districts within their provinces and then report on SDG implementation to the national government. In **Japan**, LRGs are involved in the SDG Promotion Roundtables, through which they offer advice to the national government. Coordination is also ensured through different national-led initiatives on SDG localization. In **China**, an inter-ministerial coordination mechanism, comprising 45 different government agencies, has been set up. LRGs are mentioned as implementers within what is an efficient structure with central, local and primary levels of participation.

Two reporting countries have very weak degrees of LRG participation in their national coordination mechanisms. In the **Marshall Islands**, there is an annual conference and meeting between LRGs, the national government and other stakeholders, conducted through the Marshall Islands Mayors Association (MIMA), but no direct LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms. In **Malaysia**, LRGs also have little or no involvement in the coordination mechanism involving the national government. In three countries: **Bhutan**, the **Lao PDR** and **Thailand**, LRGs have had no participation at all. The **DPR Korea** has no elected LRGs.



If the figures for 2021 are contrasted with those for the period 2016-2020, globally speaking, there has been a decrease in participation of LRGs in the national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation. This could threaten achievement of the SDGs at the local level and, as a consequence, also at the national one.

In Africa, numerous setbacks have been observed. Medium to high degree participation has dropped from 27% in 2016-2020 to 10% in 2021 (1 country), while low degree participation has increased from 21% to 30% (3 countries) and absence of participation has remained stable: 52% to 50% (5 countries). In **Cape Verde**, municipalities participated in the elaboration of the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development 2017-2021 and play a regular, consultative role in the Territorial Consultation Council, under the leadership of the national Prime Minister. Likewise, the Platform Programme implemented by the central government, for the creation of municipal platforms to review existing municipal strategic plans for sustainable development, has made a positive contribution towards coordinating efforts. In **Chad**, provincial, departmental and local bodies have been established to implement the SDGs at the local level, although with only limited operationalisation. The national government of **Niger** has different relationships with its regions and municipalities: the LGA representing regions is consulted, albeit without having any decision-making power, while the LGA representing its municipalities seems to be absent from this dialogue. The LGAs from **Madagascar, Sierra Leone and Tunisia** mention that they have not been involved in national coordination mechanisms (although in the case of Tunisia, the 2021 VNR does mention that the LGA has participated in the national mechanism). Neither **Egypt** nor **Namibia** have developed any coordination mechanisms involving LRGs. In **Angola**, LRG elections have been postponed.

The situation in Latin America is not very encouraging either. There is no medium-to-high degree participation in any of the countries reporting this year, compared to an average of 34% in previous years. The amount of low participation has more than doubled (from 28% to 78%) while that of no participation has been slightly reduced from 38% to 22%. In **Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Guatemala** and **Mexico**, the level of participation from LRGs and associations in the national coordination mechanisms has been low. In **Bolivia**, the association FAM participates, on an ad-hoc basis, in the Interinstitutional Committee that seeks to implement the SDGs and the national development plan. However, this is not the case for the other association, AMB, or for any other LRGs. On the other hand, a new multi-stakeholder platform for the SDGs will be launched in **Colombia** in 2021. Until now, the Colombian National Planning Department was promoting the alignment between national and local plans, with unequal outcomes. There has also been LRG participation in **Cuba's** National group through

provincial and municipal institutions, which aims to coordinate SDG implementation with the country's ministries and other stakeholders. Likewise, in **Guatemala**, the involvement of LRGs in the national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation has remained low. The LGA has participated occasionally. There is a need to strengthen involvement of LRGs in regional and national coordination system. The spaces in which the involvement of LRGs has been most visible are those aiming for the application of tools for linking together different plans, and support local and regional planning. In **Mexico**, the National Governors' Conference of Federated States is invited to the national coordination mechanism, but on an irregular basis and only as an observer. Even so, there have been proposals for the creation of a subnational committee within the 2030 Agenda National Council. The **Paraguay** SDG Commission, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was recently restructured to include more stakeholders, and a specific Committee for the Localization of the SDGs was created.²²

In the **Dominican Republic**, the association FEDOMU was appointed to participate in the national High Level Inter-Institutional Commission for Sustainable Development and also in one of its subcommissions. However, it reports participating only on a very occasional and limited basis. Meanwhile, in **Uruguay**, exchanges between the local and national levels of government are limited (only Montevideo has reported having had any kind of interaction, and such cases have been sporadic). Very little information is available for **Nicaragua**.

The situation in the MEWA countries reporting this year has been quite adverse for LRGs. In **Afghanistan**, very limited participation by LRGs has been identified. In **Iraq**, LRGs have only participated at a very low level in the national mechanisms for coordinating SDG implementation.²³ In **Saudi Arabia**, where local administrations include councils in which only a limited group of members are elected, LRGs have not had much say in the relevant mechanisms. In **Qatar**, local administrations are not elected. In the Caribbean region, neither **Antigua and Barbuda** nor the **Bahamas**,²⁴ the two countries reporting this year, have involved LRGs in its coordination mechanisms. The same situation has been seen in the Eurasian region: in **Azerbaijan**, which is the only country reporting in 2021 from this region, neither the LRGs nor their associations are members of the National Coordination Council (although the municipality of Bakh has reported a certain degree of sporadic participation). ●

3.3

Leaving no-one behind



This Subsection addresses the trajectory of LRG efforts for the localization of the 2030 Agenda in reporting countries and gives some updates of the processes in other countries that are not reporting this year. The main sources of information are the answers to the 2021 Survey collected by the GTF/UCLG in more than 90 countries (see, above, Section on “Methodology”). This Subsection also analyses the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) produced in reporting countries throughout 2020-2021. Finally, it summarises the main action undertaken during the past year by all the different global and regional networks included in the GTF.

The actions of LRGs to localize the SDGs in the countries reporting in 2021

Local and regional governments have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 response. More often than not, this has been through actions aimed at containing the pandemic and promoting a safe, inclusive and sustainable recovery, in line with the 2030 Agenda. This Subsection shows how, despite the severity of the present situation, they have continued to promote initiatives to accelerate the localization of the SDGs both in their own territories and as part of the wider, global movement.

The following figures and information give account of the views of LRGs working in 28 of the countries reporting this year; they include those of 46 LRGs from 17 countries and 28 LGAs from 21 countries.²⁵ As mentioned in the Subsections above, LGAs play a critical role in advocating strengthened localization strategies at the national level, as well as in making the voices of LRGs heard within coordination mechanisms and national reporting processes. They also help to deliver the SDGs by mobilising their members; disseminating key information and best practices through training sessions, toolkits and support programmes; and generally increasing and improving the involvement of LRGs in this joint undertaking. On digging deeper into the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey responses, it can be seen that 71% of the LGAs that answered the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey have a high level of acquaintance

with the 2030 Agenda. In **Cape Verde, the Czech Republic, Germany, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Niger (ARENI), Norway, Spain and Zimbabwe**, the SDGs are used as important points of reference when developing strategies, while in **Colombia, Denmark, Guatemala, Sierra Leone and Sweden**, the majority of LGA staff are aware of, and make reference to, the SDGs, even though they may not necessarily be among their highest priorities. However, a worrying 29% of LGAs had a low level of awareness of the SDGs, showing that there is still a lot of work to be done.

LRGs are moving from making acquaintances to making concrete commitments and institutional arrangements to support the sustainability agendas. Two thirds of the responding LGAs (38%) have already shown a high level of commitment through the adoption of specific statements and strategies.²⁶ Almost half of the LGAs (48%) have already nominated a specific unit to support SDG implementation, or coordinate SDG work at the highest levels of their respective organisations.

Of the LRGs that answered the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey,²⁷ 65% had a good level of awareness.²⁸ Furthermore, 92% had already assumed political commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level and 56% had adopted either a strategy or an action plan.²⁹ A large majority of LRGs stress that they have aligned their local plans with the SDGs and prioritised a set of goals and targets. For example, 53% have established SDG 11 as one of their priorities (particularly for planning, resilience, transport and pollution). This is followed by SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 9 (infrastructure), SDG 3 (health), SDG 8 (economic development), SDG 10 (inequalities) and SDG 4 (education). SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (energy), SDG 13 (climate change) and SDG 12 (waste management) fall into a second group of priorities.

LRGs from the majority of reporting countries are progressively moving forward in their commitments towards SDG implementation. They are doing this by adapting their agendas and institutional structures to accommodate what is an evolving context, and one which has been hard hit by the epidemic and the associated socio-economic crisis. Through VLRs and VSRs, their initiatives are also being increasingly analysed through bottom-up approaches to monitoring and reporting.

VLRs and VSRs: effective bottom-up reports to track the progress of SDG localization

The first VLRs were officially presented at the HLPF in 2018. Since then, the number of these reports has steadily increased each year and has more than doubled during this last year (from 39 VLRs in May 2020 to more than 100 in June 2021), and even more are expected to be published in the coming months. VLRs have been submitted from almost every continent and by different types of LRG: federated states and regional governments (e.g. Hawaii in the USA, Yucatan in Mexico, and Scotland in the UK), global cities (such as Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Guangzhou, New York City and Moscow) and small and middle-sized cities (such as Chimbote, in Peru; Kelowna in Canada; Turku, in Finland; and Victoria Falls, in Zimbabwe; see Figure 3.2).³⁰

VLRs provide first-hand information on how LRGs are leading the way in the implementation and innovation of the SDGs. They are reinventing themselves, aligning their policy making to the vision of the 2030 Agenda, and learning from other members of the VLR community. VLRs have helped to improve the localization process as well as citizen participation, raising awareness, accountability and transparency. In this Subsection, several particularly relevant examples of VLRs will be highlighted.

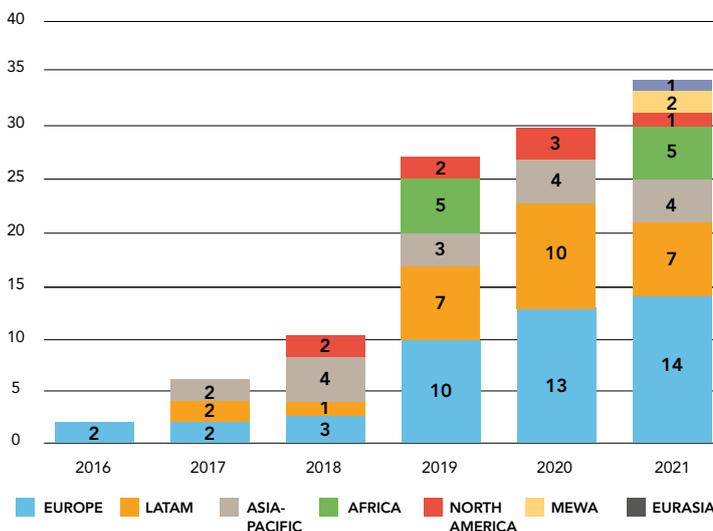
At the same time, new modalities of LRG involvement are currently being developed, related to monitoring and reporting. Based on the experience which began in 6 countries,³¹ in 2020 (mentioned in Subsection 3.1), 8 more countries have prepared Voluntary Subnational Reviews or Voluntary Local Governments Reviews in 2021: Cape Verde, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. Ecuador has also produced its second VSR.³² Their innovative approach, led by local and regional government associations, differs from VLRs in that VSRs offer a broader country-wide analysis of subnational efforts and the challenges to be overcome for the localization of the SDGs. These reports assess the efforts of local governments to align their local development plans with the SDGs. They also present an assessment of the enabling institutional environment, including the means of implementation, which supports these processes. All VSRs present policy recommendations for improving local implementation and national collaboration. In all of these countries, local governments have been asked to summarise their contributions to integrate them within their country's VNR, whether in the form of brief notes (as in the cases of Zimbabwe and Tunisia) or through a summary of their report, which has been partially quoted or fully integrated into the VNR (as in those of Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway and Sweden). In the case of Cape Verde, local governments were associated with the reporting unit.

Both VLR and VSR processes have revamped the dialogue between LRGs, national governments and international institutions, such as UNDESA, various UN agencies and regional commissions, the European Commission and the OECD. Many new initiatives have been launched to support VLRs (including VNR-VLR labs, technical support, regional workshops, studies of localized indicators). In almost all UN Regional Forums for Sustainable Development, special sessions have been dedicated to VLRs and they have been acknowledged as a topic in several VNRs.

Together with VLRs, local government mobilisation for VSRs has acted as a catalyst for the localization process and as a lever for promoting a more comprehensive, multi-level approach to governance related to the monitoring and reporting of the SDGs. The upscaling of VLR and VSR experiences is paving the way for a reinforced bottom-up dialogue about how best to achieve the SDGs. National governments are increasingly aware of the relevance of such initiatives and are now more open to accepting, and using, the information and analyses that they provide. The following pages showcase some of the most relevant highlights and sources of added value underlined in the 8 VSRs developed this year.

FIGURE 3.2

VLRs by region 2016-2021



Notes: the VLR figures for 2021 include the VLRs planned to be presented in June/ July 2021. Some of them need to be confirmed

Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Despite the pandemic crisis, the general consensus is that, thanks to the decentralization process that began in 1991 in **Cape Verde**, municipalities are key actors of SDG localization through municipal platforms. The platforms gather all local actors to assist municipalities in the development of municipal strategic plans for sustainable development. Currently, 20 of the 22 municipalities have developed and approved such plans. The priority SDGs for the municipalities are: poverty (SDG 1), water and sanitation (SDG 6), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and partnerships (SDG 17); followed by SDGs on gender equality (SDG 5), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), and economic development (SDG 8). As a result, the Government decided to give more visibility to the location of the SDGs in the 2021 VNR, and the Association of Cape Verde Municipalities (ANMCV) was included in the Drafting Group of the 2021 VNR.

Cape Verde's VNR presents several successful experiences that have contributed to the process, such as: the Municipal Programme of Sustainable Development Platforms in the implementation of SDGs, aiming to accompany the implementation of the municipal strategic plans for sustainable development in 9 municipalities; and the Programme of Requalification, Rehabilitation and Accessibility in the implementation of the SDGs (with a budget of EUR 99 million), launched by the government and implemented by the municipalities through "programme contracts". It has also been observed that there is a difference in the SDGs prioritised within the 2 programmes, which denotes a difficulty in integrating national programmes into municipal development plans, creating a dichotomy between projects executed with resources from municipal budgets and those executed with extra-municipal budget resources through programme contracts covering the same territory.

According to the responses of the municipalities, there have been substantial improvements in access to drinking water, healthcare, the upgrading of neighbourhoods and villages, waterfront infrastructure, access to energy, public lighting, basic sanitation, housing, a reduction in school dropouts, assistance to vulnerable families, support for income-generating activities—benefiting young people and female heads of households—professional training and a reduction in poverty and inequality, as well as the establishment of partnerships with local associations and other partners.

Regarding challenges, the financial weakness of municipalities and the low level of local economic development and local capacities are the main obstacles to the implementation of the SDGs. The centralization of the main public policies creates a strong financial dependence of municipalities upon the central government. It is necessary to promote effective integration and complementarities between municipal action and sectoral programmes and projects executed by the state's services, public companies, and the private sector, since all these interventions have an impact on the territory. Another weakness identified is the lack of indicators to measure the impact of the SDGs and their progress in a disaggregated way by each municipality.

The fact that in 2021 all Cape Verde municipalities will have municipal strategic plans for sustainable development represents an opportunity for the development process of the new National Strategic Development Plan (*PEDS 2021/2026*) to generate synergies and complementarities: 40% of the national plan should be destined to financing the municipal plans. However, the recovery of the country's economy in the post-COVID-19 era will be critical, since the increase in the transfer of resources to the municipalities is highly dependent on the recovery of the economy, with a main emphasis on the tourism sector.

CAPE VERDE

Boa Vista, Cape Verde.
(Image: belinda-fewings-znbWNYxfUn0-unsplash)



Voluntary Subnational Reviews

As a federal state, **Germany** has 3 levels of subnational governments: *Länder* or federal states (16), *Kreise* or counties (249) and cities and municipalities (11,054). The German report focuses on the city level, the level of municipalities and the county level, and does not take into consideration federal states.

The federal government's sustainability strategy is a multi-level approach. In a federal multi-level system, the state and local authorities must share responsibility for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Most of the German federal states have adopted or revised their sustainability strategies with reference to the SDGs and have implemented diverse initiatives. Some of them specifically focus on supporting their municipalities in developing and implementing their own sustainability strategies. However, the capabilities of German cities, municipalities and counties, in terms of budget and personal resources, vary dramatically within and among federal states. Thus, the degrees of localization and implementation of the SDGs at the local level are quite diverse.

German LGAs have promoted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Building Sustainability at the Local Level*, to which 175 municipalities have subscribed. Other institutions devoted to municipal sustainable development are: the German Council for Sustainable Development, which gathers 30 German cities to develop joint position papers or roadmaps related to municipal sustainability policy; the Globally Sustainable Municipalities programme supported by Engagement Global's Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW, financed by the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), which supports cohorts of 5-15

municipalities in the development of a sustainability strategy; and some philanthropic institutions such as the Bertelsmann Stiftung, which coach pilot municipalities in systematic SDG implementation and monitoring.

Since 2017, the 3 German associations (of cities, of counties, and of towns and municipalities), with the support of several partners, created the working group "SDG indicators for municipalities", advocating for the application of the SDG indicators in their respective member municipalities. The 2 most important products are an SDG indicator set and an SDG portal (see: www.wegweiser-kommune.de and www.sdg-portal.de). The portal contains more than 200 examples from cities, municipalities and counties. The indicator catalogue consists of 120 municipal SDG indicators; 54 indicators are provided for about 3,000 German counties, cities, and towns with over 5,000 inhabitants. The analyses of these indicators show that more positive developments are observed in SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 8 (economic development), SDG 13 (climate) and SDG 16 (institutions). The trends of the indicators related to SDG 11 are quite mixed, but the negative dynamics of car density and rent prices point to major challenges for municipal development. A new binding instrument for monitoring and evaluation is being developed by the German Council for Sustainable Development and SKEW—the *Berichtsrahmen nachhaltige Kommune* (reporting frame for the sustainable municipality)—and is currently being tested in selected pilot municipalities (as of March 2021).

So far, 3 German cities have published their own VLRs: **Bonn**, **Mannheim**, and **Stuttgart**.

Bonn, Germany.
(Image: tim-russmann-
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GERMANY



Voluntary Subnational Reviews

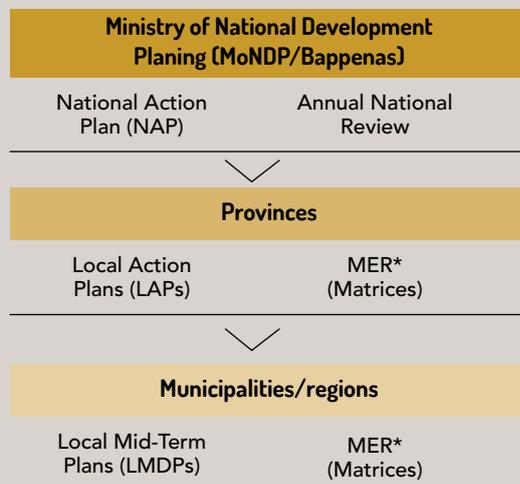
Since 2015, **Indonesia** has integrated the SDGs into national action plans, roadmaps and laws, and has supported these with the provision of training and technical guidance. There are 3 levels of subnational governments in Indonesia: provinces (34), including the capital **Jakarta**; municipalities (519, called regencies in rural areas); and villages or *kelurahan* (92,375). There is no direct involvement of subnational governments in national coordination mechanisms related to SDG implementation. A Presidential Decree (59/2017) and a Regulation (33/2018) defined the roles of the Ministry of National Development Planning and of the provincial government for inter-level coordination and participation in implementing the SDGs. From 2018 to 2021, about 29 provinces adopted local actions plans aligned with SDGs. Local action plans are mandatory for provinces but not for municipalities. The involvement of municipalities and regencies in the localization of the SDGs is followed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). MoHA's Regulation (7/2018) established strategic environmental assessments, which should define the SDGs to be included in the local mid-term development plans of municipalities and regencies.

Usually, local mid-term development plans are formulated only after local elections (371 since 2019) and translated in local annual working plans and budgets. In 2019, MoHA developed performance indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs (Regulation 90/2019). The national Local Governments Information System was created to collect all municipal data on performance indicators. In 2020, the Ministry of Villages launched the Village SDGs project, comprising 18 goals, and the Village Fund towards SDG attainment, as well as a digital portal. These are the formal dimensions of SDG implementation at the local level.

On the ground, LRGs have different capacities and political drives to engage in SDG implementation. Those who do not have access to capacity building sponsored by international institutions and non-state actors are left on their own. Uninformed local leaderships contribute to unequal access to capacity building and resource mobilisation. The SDGs prioritised at local level are: poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4); followed by water and sanitation (SDG 6), economic development (SDG 8), energy (SDG 7), sustainable cities (SDG 11) and climate (SDG 13); and finally gender equality (SDG 5) and inequalities (SDG 10). The least prioritised goals are SDGs 14, 15, 12, 9 and 17. Inter-governmental coordination on SDG implementation, either vertically (from provinces to municipalities and regencies) or horizontally (among provinces or municipalities and regencies) have not been utilised optimally. For example, divergent priorities among municipalities can be an obstacle, and provincial governments cannot oblige municipalities and regencies to implement targets set by them, unless there are incentives transferred from the provinces. However, interaction is improving and several provinces have created platforms to support coordination with municipalities and regencies. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting in SDG implementation has been the longest and hardest task to fulfil.

To face the pandemic, regulations (Act No. 2/2020) were enacted to allow for the adjustment of local budgets towards social and economic protection against human and economic losses, resulting in delays to the planned programmes and activities set out in the local mid-term development plans as well as a repositioning of the SDG priorities (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8). Many local governments in Indonesia are struggling with providing adequate public services to their communities. Support provided to the local economy during the pandemic has led to funding deficits. In addition, limited access to funding and internet connection hinders LRGs' capabilities to adjust local administrative capacities. The role of LGAs in terms of advocacy needs to be strengthened to facilitate a dialogue on the SDGs with the national level.

Integration of planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting among government levels in Indonesia



* Monitoring, evaluation and reporting
Source: Adapted from the Government of Indonesia (2017)

INDONESIA



Jakarta, Indonesia.
(Image: rohiim-ariful-
Iz2cMct6BzU-unsplash)

Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Mexico subnational governance is structured in 2 tiers: 32 state governments, including the government of Mexico City, and 2,479 municipalities. At state level, 6 have already integrated the SDGs into their development plans, 8 are making progress, 16 are at incipient stage and integration is pending for the last 2. Seven states have finalised long-term development plans. All federated states have created monitoring and implementation offices, responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies and policies for localizing the SDGs. However, their regular functioning needs to be strengthened, and in 16 cases, they should include local government representatives. The number of offices constituted at the municipal level is lower, and the majority are in large municipalities. Their work is often impacted by discontinuities generated by the 3-year electoral cycles. Figures 1 and 2, below, show the progress of state and local governments in the implementation of 16 SDGs.

These figures show that the implementation of the SDGs is more advanced in the North and centre of the country, while the South is lagging behind. Among federated states, 5 show “good progress” and 17 are in the groups of “far away from the goal” and “very far away from the goal”.

There is a general weakness of intergovernmental coordination for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, related to structural problems observed in the National Democratic Planning System since its creation. To improve the involvement of subnational governments, the creation of a Committee of Subnational Governments for the Implementation and Monitoring of the 2030 Agenda was proposed within the National Council of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In the same way, 24 monitoring and implementation offices must be reformed at the State level to integrate municipalities, the private sector, CSOs, academia and the National Institute for Statistics and Geography representatives with voice and vote. State planning laws must implement the same principles for such offices at municipal level.

Subnational governments consider that fiscal coordination and decentralization are some of the greatest challenges for the localization of the SDGs. Therefore, they propose to reform the National Fiscal Coordination System, the national mechanisms for resource transfers, and the expenditure modalities of subnational governments. It is also necessary to strengthen subnational government capacities and improve data disaggregation to develop indicators that provide information to feed local decision making.

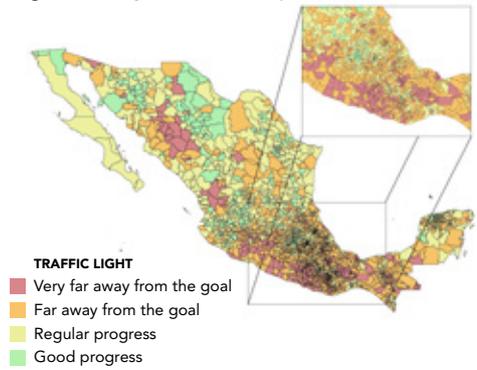
In June 2021, local elections will renew LRGs in 15 states and 80% of the municipalities. To avoid the progress made in the localization of the SDGs being lost, it is imperative to promote a subnational capacity building programme to support knowledge exchange and improve access to resources.

MEXICO

Figure 1. Progress at state level for 16 SDGs



Figure 2. Progress at municipal level for 16 SDGs



San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. (Image: jezael-melgoza-9KnlH_dKmGE-unsplash)



Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Norwegian LRGs (356 municipalities and 11 regional authorities) are at the forefront of the localization process. Municipalities and regional authorities have initiated this work, and many of them use the SDGs as a guiding framework for planning, management and local development within their communities. Half of the municipalities have incorporated the SDGs into their master plans. The most mature have operationalised and integrated the SDGs into their strategic plans and management processes (e.g. one fifth in land-use plans). 58% of municipalities agree that the leaving no-one behind principle is integrated into policymaking and implementation. Recently amalgamated, larger, more central and network-oriented municipalities have come the furthest, although being “big and strong” is not a prerequisite for succeeding. LRGs contribute substantially to SDG achievement through their regular service delivery, welfare production, planning and development work. They are on track to reach many of the goals and targets. Many of the localized targets related to the green transition are far more ambitious than the national goals. As requested by the national government, the VSR was utilised to complement the VNR.

Challenges, however, remain. National government sectoral approaches often impede LRGs’ ability to work holistically with the SDGs. Political cohesion across levels of government should foster joint and collective efforts towards the goals. Support mechanisms and guidance, particularly for the regional authorities, should be amplified. Lack of resources and capacity, access to adequate tools and methodologies, competences and political ownership are the biggest barriers to local governments’ work. LRGs deliver well on health and education, although school dropout is still too high. They take active leadership in the transition towards a climate- and environmentally-

friendly society, but a wider use of innovation and available technology could accelerate the pace. Collaboration and procurement could be utilised to a larger extent as vehicles to achieve a sustainable future.

Norwegian LRGs collaborate through the Network of Excellence on SDG City Transition. The association KS also works with the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise and the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions to develop a national sustainability pledge to strengthen the progress on achieving the 2030 Agenda. The absence of SDG indicators to measure progress on the goals and targets at the local and regional level presents a huge challenge when conducting VSRs. KS has developed a taxonomy to classify SDG-related indicators in partnership with Statistics Norway. With the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, they will collaborate on the development of indicators, knowledge and best practices for joint action on SDG implementation across all levels of government. Currently, more than 30 cities apply the U4SSC Key Performance Indicators for smart and sustainable cities.

KS has several recommendations for the municipal and national governments:

1. Uphold multi-level governance, policy coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships.
2. Fully consult LRGs at each step of the national decision-making process.
3. Maintain and foster political commitment, and continue localizing and implementing the SDGs.
4. Increase the focus on enhancing institutional knowledge and competences on sustainable development.

NORWAY



Bergen, Norway.
(Image: millie-olsen-
mNRPJW7yrlr-
unsplash)

Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Sweden is a unitary state composed by 290 municipalities (*kommuner*) and 21 regions (*regioner*). The association SALAR is undertaking a dialogue with the national government towards the coordination of the SDGs and to contribute to the VNR process. The association has been supporting its members in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through Glocal Sweden: the 2030 Agenda in municipalities and regions, a communication and training project supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. This project has been of great importance for the implementation of the SDGs in municipalities and regions, disseminating successful methods, models and research findings. More than half of the municipalities and almost all regions are involved in the project. The association is also working with the Council for the promotion of local government analyses ("*Rådet för främjande av kommunala analyser*" or RKA) on the development and use of localized SDG indicators. In 2020, the report Public performance reporting on the 2030 Agenda in municipalities and regions was released. The purpose of the report is to promote baseline comparisons and assessments in the transition to a sustainable future, and to increase knowledge and inspire municipalities and regions to work even more vigorously than they are currently with regard to the 2030 Agenda.

Studies presented in the VSR show the great disparity between LRGs in their progress towards sustainable development, as well as the structural factors that are constraining municipalities' work. To advance, the SDGs must be clearly integrated into regular governance in municipalities and regions. The latter need to develop impact assessments, creating scope for transition and innovation, and commit to new solutions that lead to wanted long-term effects (e.g. optimised production, balance between quality and cost, changes in ways of

working and methods, etc.). Municipalities and regions have a tradition of network governance based on the collaboration between municipalities and regions and a stronger involvement of citizens, as well as international partnership. The central government needs to create good and equivalent conditions for municipalities and regions, in areas like finance, staff provision and digitalisation, for example. Policy tools have to establish a balance between national policies and local autonomy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced social challenges. LRGs are playing an important role as producers of welfare services and employers in the post-pandemic recovery, and in the transition needed towards a more sustainable society. In 2021, SALAR commissioned a study on how municipalities have integrated sustainability and the 2030 Agenda into their regular governance. The study contains an analysis of objective and budget documents and annual reports in 60 municipalities selected to make up a representative sample. The VSR presents a selection of cases on the roles of LRGs as democracy actors, builders of society, and producers of welfare services and employers, and also summarises the 4 VLRs produced by Swedish cities so far.

To accelerate the localization process, SALAR proposes to define:

- National objectives and general guidelines that clarify mandates between national and subnational governments while leaving scope for variations.
- Fundamental principles for what is to characterise implementation.
- General government grants to provide scope for local priorities and adaptation to local needs and circumstances.
- Interactive knowledge-based governance with cross-fertilisation between research and the practical experience of local government services.



Stockholm, Sweden.
(Image: catalina-johnson-inbePXjTh-A-unsplash)

Voluntary Subnational Reviews

TUNISIA

The territorial governance structure of **Tunisia** is composed of 350 municipalities and 24 regions (governorates). Decentralization principles were acknowledged in the new Constitution adopted in 2014, but progress is slow and incomplete (a limited set of 34 laws and decrees out of which only 13 have been officially enacted). The first free municipal elections in the country's history were held in 2018. For the report, a representative sample of 76 municipalities was targeted by a questionnaire and further analysed.

At the national level, the Five-Year Development Plan 2016-2020 was aligned with the SDGs. However, the assessment shows weak achievements, a situation accentuated by the context created by the pandemic. Overall, the integration of LRGs into the national strategy remains weak. The Steering Committee defined in the national institutional and coordination framework for monitoring the SDGs does not include representatives of LRGs.

Few of the 350 municipalities currently have local development plans. According to the sample studied (76 municipalities), local governments are aware of the SDGs (68%) and apply them, but often without necessarily naming them in their plans. Some municipalities have set up specialised commissions on sustainable development. The main targets prioritised by Tunisian municipalities are SDGs 6, 11 and 12 (in particular: waste management, drinking water, renewable energy, reduction of environmental impact, and preservation of cultural heritage). However, municipal resources are insufficient: they represent only 4% of the national

government budget, and LRGs' revenues declined by 3% in 2020 compared to 2019. Added to these difficulties is the instability of municipal councils, marked by waves of resignations for political and professional reasons. The SDGs require close collaboration among local and national institutions, the private sector and civil society.

Among the actions needed by LRGs to strengthen the localization process, 82.3% of municipalities mention increased support from the national government (e.g. in terms of capacity building and human resources), followed by the strengthening of the coordination between national and local levels (77.4%), as well as more financial resources (75.8%). Local funding is expected to increase gradually over the next few years (it should reach 21% of the national budget in 9 years). In 2021, a new fund to support decentralization, equalisation and solidarity among municipalities was set up. In addition to strengthening local capacities, the municipalities emphasise the need for reliable and disaggregated data at the local level to ensure the monitoring of the SDGs. Most municipalities do not have specific mechanisms for collecting and monitoring local data.

The 2030 Agenda represents an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between the national government, LRGs, international partners and civil society. The establishment of a single platform for information and monitoring of the SDGs with the participation of municipalities could contribute to the localization of the SDGs.

Kasbah Square, Tunis, Tunisia.
(Image: amnat30-shutterstock)



Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Zimbabwe is a constitutional democracy, independent since April 1980, and run by a 3-tier government system (national, provincial/metropolitan and local authority). Zimbabwe's 92 local governments and 10 middle-tier (provincial and metropolitan councils) are yet to systematically engage with SDG localization.

Efforts are largely seen at the national level. The national coordination mechanisms are neither linked to, nor do they steer, subnational localization. These structures involve national government institutions, UN agencies and other development partners. National macro-economic planning, and clear ministry and parliamentary oversight structures have been aligned to the SDGs since 2015. The key instruments being used to strengthen localization include national programme-based budgeting, inter-governmental fiscal transfers, and sector-specific ministry leadership on specific SDGs. However, the association ZILGA and the Ministry responsible for local government are still to develop and implement a sector-wide SDG localization initiative.

The VSR found that there is some progress in selected LRGs on SDG localization. But these efforts are largely in the initial stages. LRGs have seized on piecemeal opportunities to learn and adapt localization practices based on external funding or facilitation. Based on these initiatives, some rural and urban local authorities have adapted their structures, assigning SDG-related functions to key departments. A few have gone as far as designing change projects, while a much smaller cohort has initiated SDG reporting, as is the case with the cities of **Harare** and **Victoria Falls**. The LRGs surveyed that have demonstrated commitment to the SDGs indicated SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 11, followed by SDG 5, as priorities.

The delays in enacting local government laws aligned to the 2013 Constitution has also delayed the kind of local government empowerment critical for SDG localization. Important gaps regarding local authorities' fiscal autonomy, political empowerment, development planning leadership and administrative autonomy constrain the participation of LRGs in SDG-related functions, decelerating

progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Recently, the Provincial Councils and Administration Bill was approved by Cabinet and gazetted on 31 March, 2021. A legal drafting workshop to finalise the alignment of the Urban and Rural District Councils Acts to the Constitution took place in March 2021. Disbursement of devolution funds has begun to plug LRG funding gaps. However, local funding is limited and cannot address the gaps arising from decades of inadequate investment. One of the main challenges relates to local fiscal gaps arising from a combination of underperforming local economies due to rising poverty and macro-economic shrinkage within a context of lack access to affordable development or long-term finance. Citizen contributions are limited due to poverty and political disengagement. Consequently, resource flows for SDG implementation are weak. Further, SDG reporting is yet to be initiated systematically.

Based on the analysis, three main gaps emerge: i) the absence of SDG institutionalisation; ii) resource limitations; and iii) data and institutional fragmentation. To address these strategic gaps, it is important for Zimbabwe to:

- Develop and implement a systematic institutional framework for SDG localization, connecting national mechanisms to subnational governments.
- Build the capacity of ZILGA and the Ministry responsible for local government to support an SDG localization programme.
- Prepare an SDG localization programme to address local level critical awareness gaps in a manner that leaves no one behind.
- Amplify SDG localization as part of framing devolution implementation in Zimbabwe.
- Review local authority funding mechanisms to facilitate SDG implementation.

These recommendations require national and local government dialogue to be initiated by the Ministry responsible for local government together with ZILGA, using the findings of the VSR as a reference.



Harare, Zimbabwe. (Image: Sproetniek-Istockphoto)

Brief summary of LRG actions in countries reporting this year

Complementing the analysis of the 8 VSRs presented this year, the following Subsection provides a quick region-by-region view of the efforts undertaken by LRGs and their respective associations in the countries reporting in 2021 to localize the SDGs. The content of this Subsection is based on answers to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey (see Section 2, “Methodology”) and on an analysis of VNRs and of complementary information submitted by LRGs and partners. The 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey shows that 82% of the LGAs and 88% of the LRGs from countries that are reporting this year have promoted, or actively participated in, activities specifically aimed at raising awareness and disseminating the SDGs among staff, local stakeholders and the population in general. The Survey also underlines an important step forward in the process of aligning local development plans and strategies with the global sustainability agenda (70% of the answers). SDG 11 is clearly the goal that has attracted the most attention (53% of respondents), while the commitment to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is also high on the agenda of the responding LRGs (SDG 5, 44%). However, this Subsection also shows the huge contrasts between regions and countries with regard to driving towards the localization of the SDGs.

Africa

Following UNECA’s report, “what has become increasingly clear is that the success of these agendas (African Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030) rests at the local level where cities, municipalities and districts in Africa are at the forefront of service delivery and interventions across sustainable development targets”.³³ However, while the involvement of LGAs and some large cities is making steady progress on the continent, LRG mobilisation is still only incipient and largely depends on the support of national localization strategies and international partners.

As seen with the VSRs, while municipalities have advanced with their development plans in **Cape Verde**, by taking the SDGs as their point of reference and thanks to the national localization strategy, in **Tunisia** and **Zimbabwe**, the process is still in its early stages, with only few exceptions. In **Cape Verde**, municipal platforms represent an innovative approach for boosting participatory local strategic planning.

At present, 20 of 22 municipalities have prepared and passed their own plan. In **Tunisia**, certain projects have been particularly instrumental for the development of the country’s urban strategic plans: providing more and better integrated basic services and waste management; promoting gender equality and local leadership; fostering local economic development in pilot municipalities; and promoting more participative approaches (examples of this are provided by the Madinatouna, Wamanet, Femedina, Idema, PLMI and TADEEM projects).³⁴ However, as in **Zimbabwe**, the localization process still remains rather limited. Harare and Victoria Falls produced their own VLRs in 2020 with the support of UNECA. The VLR of Harare highlighted the importance of linking this reporting exercise to other ongoing projects, such as the city greening initiative and a project for upgrading the informal sector.³⁵ As reported in the VSR, other districts have also made considerable efforts to align their local plans with the SDGs (e.g. Bindura Rural District, Bulawayo City, Masvingo City, and Ruwa Town, among others). Efforts are also being made to strengthen local budget planning and implementation (e.g. 60% of intergovernmental fiscal transfers are currently being prioritised for water, sanitation and hygiene services by local urban authorities).³⁶ Regarding monitoring, Zimbabwe has set up focal points established by local authorities to support the work of the national State Statistics Committee.

In other countries, making progress has been even more difficult. In **Chad**, the regional and local bodies created to support SDG implementation were set up as a result of a new

Palmeira, Cape Verde.
(Image: krisztian-tabori-
vdWjS8MIJnc-unsplash)



decentralization scheme introduced as part of the 2018 Constitution (these are regional, departmental and local action and follow-up committees), but they have so far had only limited operationalisation. In **Egypt**, despite the commitment of the national government to decentralize its planning systems, with the aim of empowering governorates, municipalities and local communities, no major changes have so far been noted. However, the country's VNR does mention national efforts to advance in localizing the SDGs at the governorate level, with the support of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and the government is also producing localization reports for all the Egyptian governorates. In **Angola**, according to response to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey by Luanda's planning authority, the metropolis has now integrated the SDGs into its urban development plan.

In **Madagascar**, the AMGVM is committed to helping newly elected mayors to establish their policy priorities using the 2030 Agenda and has called for increased national investment in basic services in a framework of decentralization strategies (affecting such areas as sanitation and waste management). Several municipalities (including Morondava) and regions (Atsimo-Andrefana, Menabe, Androy and Anosy) aligned their development plans with the SDGs in 2020. The country's VNR indicates that the national government will support the localization of the SDGs in the local plans of all regions of the country. In **Namibia**, as in the previous VNR, the LGAs were not involved in the reporting process and recent action to raise awareness has focused more on COVID-19 responses than on the SDGs. Even so, several projects are being supported by international partners in an attempt to foster sustainable urban development (e.g. projects in Windhoek, relating to the urban transport system, and in Rehoboth, Rundu, Helao Nafidi and Opuwo, relating to housing conditions).

In **Niger**, where the approach taken by the national government is top-down, both associations: that of the municipalities (AMN) and that of the regions (ARENI), have been supporting their members through action to raise awareness (conferences, publications) and increase training, and by supporting the alignment of local plans with the SDGs. In the capital, Niamey, the urban communes of Dosso and Tillabery have set up consultative councils for neighbourhood development to improve citizen participation.

In **Sierra Leone**, as mentioned in subsection 3.2, the government has encouraged the 22 local councils to integrate the SDGs into their district and municipal development plans. This initiative

has revitalised the district development coordination committees. It has been accompanied by a scaling up of the People's Planning Process model (*Wan Fambul* National Framework) and the integrating chiefdom/village level planning (subdistrict level) into district and national planning processes. In the future, the government will establish chiefdom development coordination units, which will be the counterparts to the coordination committees at the district level, in order to strengthen subnational development coordination. However, the predominantly top-down approach makes it difficult for local councils and the association LoCASL to become fully involved in national SDG planning or to influence the priorities of the action programme. LoCASL has also organised workshops to streamline the SDGs into local development programmes and has participated in outreach activities organised by partners. The EU is currently supporting 6 provincial local councils (Bombali District, Kenema, Pujehun, Kambia, Falaba and Karene) and an upcoming project sponsored by the World Bank will focus on "Accountable Governance for Basic Service Delivery".

Asia-Pacific

As highlighted in UNESCAP's *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021*, this region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs by 2030.³⁷ Localization is making significant progress in more developed and emerging countries (such as China, Japan and Indonesia, among the countries reporting this year), often as the result of specific country-wide programmes, applied in the frontrunning cities/provinces and backed by national governments and international organisations and partners. The localization of the SDGs is particularly uneven in countries with a less favourable institutional environments for LRGs (such as the Lao PDR, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Thailand).

In **China**, the central government acknowledges the important role of local governments for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. LRGs in the 31 provinces and autonomous regions have aligned their own five-year plans with the 2030 Agenda, following a top-down policy implementation. According to the VNR, extreme poverty has been eradicated and access to key infrastructure and public services has been guaranteed in poor regions. Eco-functional zones and programmes to restore the main rivers have been launched and multi-tiered systems for the efficient and circular use of resources have also been developed. At

the same time, in order to achieve the “high-quality development” promised in the 14th Five-Year Plan, China’s cities and provinces need to pursue a strategy for “new, people-centred urbanization” and to promote an urbanization model offering “more compact, connected, clean and resilient cities”. China is striving to cap carbon emissions before 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.³⁸ China’s cities and provinces are working actively in several different areas to foster more sustainable development through a series of ambitious and innovative programmes (relating to: mobility, climate change mitigation and adaptation, smart cities, waste and pollution management, and housing, amongst others), but face important challenges in their efforts to ensure quality public services, revise the present urban development

model and reduce their debt. For example, the city of Hangzhou is currently developing a series of strategies to promote a circular economy, a greener urban public transportation system with a multi-modal approach (“Walk, ride, take”), and ecological and garden-based, low-carbon city construction. Guangzhou³⁹ is one of the first Chinese cities, along with Deqing (2017, 2018), to have produced a VLR (see Box 3.1).⁴⁰ Since 2016, the national government-led SDG Pilot Innovation Demonstration Zones initiative has been supporting pilot LRGs (Guilin, Shenzhen and Taiyuan) and helping them to innovate in line with the SDGs.

As mentioned above, and in the VSR, 29 of the 34 provinces of **Indonesia** have developed action plans aligned with the SDGs, while another 5 Indonesian provinces are currently finalising them. At the municipal level progress has, however, been less equal. The DKI Jakarta Government has mainstreamed the SDGs in its Mid-Term Development Plan. Bandar Lampung city has developed a local plan, which involves a large number of stakeholders, through a Development Planning Conference and the implementation of several development programmes (relating to: free education and health, poverty reduction, water and sanitation, disaster mitigation, gender equality, and clean river). Surabaya city has developed a VLR with the support of UNESCAP and UCLG ASPAC. The national government has also offered guidance for the development of local indicators. Coordinated by the National Development Planning Agency and the National Statistics Bureau, the OneData portal is a data hub that allows districts, municipalities and provinces to gather, compile and report on correct indicators in line with the SDGs and Indonesia’s national development indicators. A Local Governments Information System, led by the national government, has also been created to collect municipal data relating to the performance indicators.

In **Japan**, since 2018, the national government has encouraged 30 LRGs to become “SDGs FutureCities”, each year, and has selected 10 model projects, which enjoy additional subsidies.⁴¹ It is expected that by 2024, 214 cities will have been selected for this programme.⁴¹ The government has also launched 2 other initiatives to encourage the involvement of its citizens in this process: the “Public-Private Partnership Platform for Local SDGs” and “Local SDG Finance”. In 2020, a study was conducted into COVID-19 measures and the SDGs and their impact on local governments. The percentage of local governments working on the SDGs

BOX 3.1

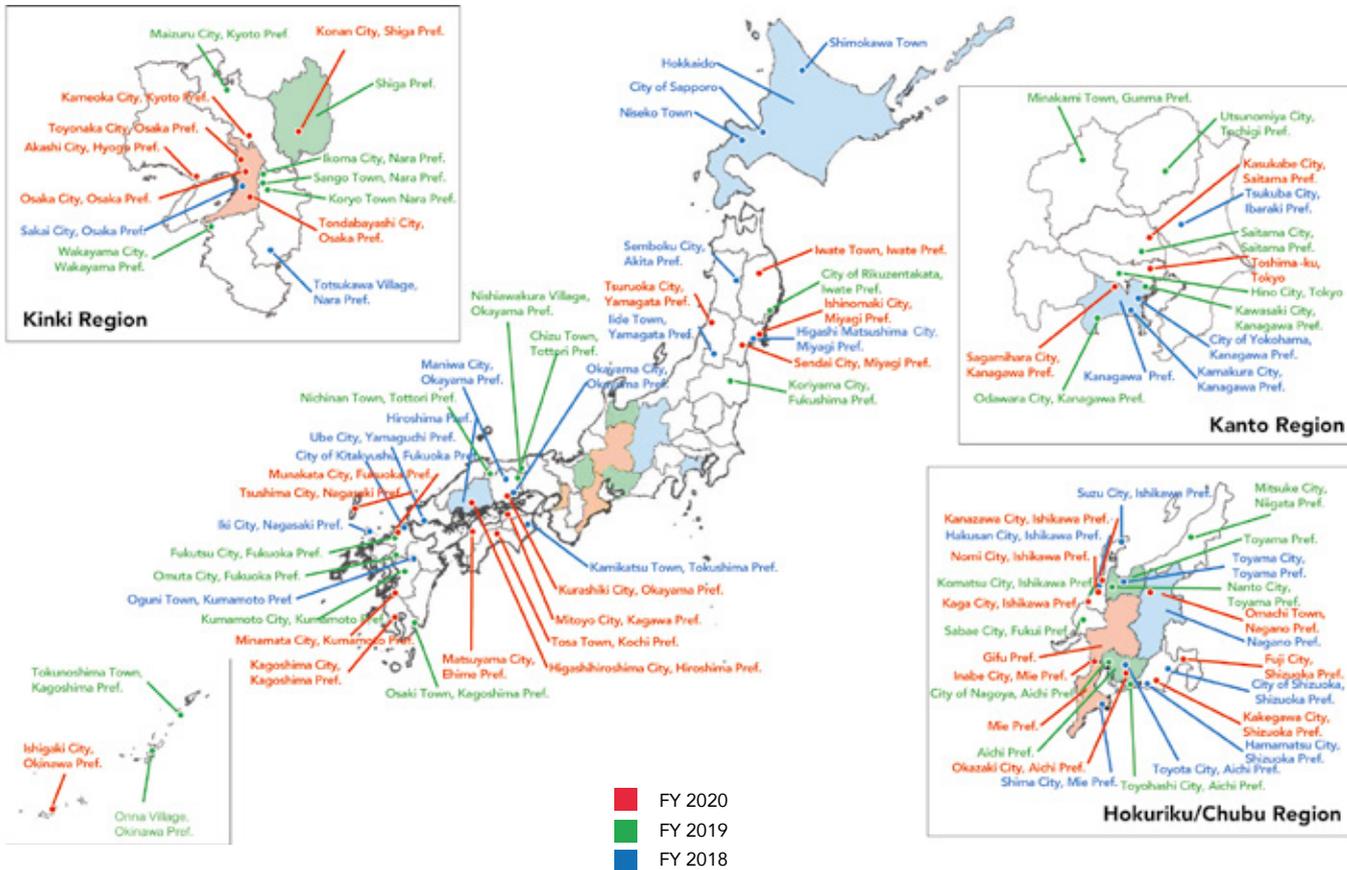
Guangzhou’s Voluntary Local Review

Guangzhou’s VLR dovetails with the public engagement of the city’s 2035 Strategic Plan. This plan also covers the developmental vision for a “beautiful, liveable City of Flowers and vibrant, global city”. The VLR was jointly developed by various city government departments, research institutes, and social organizations, with guidance from the SDSN China Hub and several universities and think tanks. Five prioritised review goals were selected for in-depth evaluation: quality education (SDG 4), clean drinking water and sanitation facilities (SDG 6), industrial innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) and life on the land (SDG 15). For each of these SDGs, the VLR analyses the current situation and defines the targets and policies to be developed. Guangzhou has also implemented the concept of sustainable development in four different aspects: land and space control; high-quality development; high-quality life; and high-level governance. A continuous follow-up and evaluation system is planned. Guangzhou will closely follow procedures established for the post-COVID-19 era and: for the development of emerging economies; to highlight the relationship between environmental health and human health; to adhere to the logic of green and low-carbon development; to strengthen public participation in sustainable urban development; and to gradually develop a long-term, routine working mechanism. With all of these unremitting efforts, it should be possible to build a sustainable city offering greater vibrancy, inclusion, and openness.

Source: City of Guangzhou’s VLR (2020)

FIGURE 3.3

“SDGs FutureCities” in Japan (2018-2020)



Source: Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (2021)

+ Fully colored for the prefectures selected as a whole

rose from 1%, in 2017, to 39.7%, in 2020 (in over 1788 municipalities).⁴³ Three well-known VLRs, produced by Kitakyushu, Shimokawa and Toyama, which were developed in collaboration with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies,⁴⁴ pioneered this global movement, which has subsequently continued to grow. Following the adoption of its VLR, in 2019, Hamamatsu has also continued to work towards achieving the SDGs. In fact, in March 2021, the Hamamatsu City SDGs Future City Plan was revised, adding a new planning period, from 2021 to 2023, which is supported by a multi-stakeholder platform: the Hamamatsu City SDGs Promotion Platform.⁴⁵ In December 2019, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government presented the Strategic Vision for Tokyo’s Future: a plan that looks towards the year 2040 and which is centred on people. This plan is structured around 20 strategies, which are targets for 2030, aligned with the SDGs.⁴⁶

In **Malaysia**, the National SDG Roadmap

has been the first step towards localizing the SDGs, following a top-down approach led by the Ministry of Housing and Local Governments. The Ministry has undertaken awareness-raising activities and proposed tailor-made grants to incentivise participation. It also supports a think tank: Urbanice Malaysia, whose task is to assist cities interested in establishing SDG city roadmaps and action plans. To do this, Urbanice has launched the “Malaysia SDG Cities” programme and published the *Malaysia SDG Cities* booklet.⁴⁷ Additionally, the national statistics office has adapted the IAEG-SDGs indicator framework to Malaysia’s national specifications with the support of local focal points. Working with Urbanice, it has developed the SDG Local Indicators for Cities to help them monitor their own progress and to develop a VLR based on a set of localized indicators.⁴⁸ Kuala Lumpur has aligned its plan with the SDGs and has been particularly active in responses to the COVID-19 crisis. Two cities: Shah Alam and

Subang Jaya, have worked on their VLRs (with the support of UNESCAP) and, as previously mentioned in Subsection 3.1, were also invited to contribute to the VNR.

For other countries, there is rather limited available information. **Bhutan**, whose scores are above the global median for the path towards achieving the SDGs,⁴⁹ held its first local government elections in 2011, 2 years after the approval of a new Constitution, and LRGs are still relatively new and underdeveloped figures there. As mentioned above, the government is pushing a “trickle down” approach to localization. However, the use of SDG language and the guidelines provided for formulating local plans, which are issued at the national level for LRGs, seem inadequate for bridging the knowledge gap concerning SDGs at the subnational level. In **Thailand**, working in partnership with the Ministry of Interior and other relevant agencies, the National Economic and Social Development Council has assessed the capacities and readiness of various areas, spread across the country, to implement the SDGs. As a result, 9 provinces and 5 local government authorities (from 6 regions and 4 development groups within Thailand) were selected as pilot areas. With the support of UNESCAP, in 2021, the Nakhon Si Thammarat Municipality has initiated a VLR process. The other reporting countries from this region (the **DPR Korea** and the **Lao PDR**) have weak enabling environments at the local government level. In the Lao PDR, despite its traditional top-down approach, which involves only limited or no consultation with local administrations, the national VNR mentions greater involvement by provincial authorities to promote SDG localization. In the **Marshall Islands**, the VNR does not mention any specific SDG-related initiatives from LRGs.

Europe

Over the first 5-year period of SDG localization, the EU report considers that the region has “made progress towards almost all goals [and that] for two goals—SDG 13 on climate action and SDG 5 on gender equality—[...] trends show stagnation or a moderate movement away of the EU from the respective [sustainable development] objectives”.⁵⁰ For European countries, and particularly for the EU, policy coherence for sustainable development includes coordination efforts across different forms of government, at all levels.⁵¹ This approach is strongly supported by LRG action and Europe is a region where local self-governance is already well established. This

is the continent where the localization process is most advanced. This is shown by the three countries whose LGAs have produced the first European VSRs (**Germany, Norway and Sweden**, see above) and where local initiatives and innovation are instrumental for progress towards delivering the SDGs. Similar stories can be found below for the **Czech Republic, Denmark and Spain**.

As mentioned above, the SDGs have become one of the top priorities for the **Czech LGA** (SMO CR). 89% of the Czech municipalities that took part in a recent questionnaire circulated by SMO CR considered sustainable development an important factor for the development of their respective municipalities. The Liberec region, which has adopted a Sustainable Development Strategy and also a Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change, has established an advisory climate commission and currently applies sustainable development principles in strategic development and during the creation of its regional plans. Other regions (such as Moravian-Silesian, South Bohemian and Vysocina) have also proceeded in a similar manner. In addition, the town of Jihlava has joined the URBACT IV – Global Goals for Cities programme network.

In **Denmark**, subnational governments are particularly active in working towards achieving the SDGs and there is a strong tradition of engagement with other local actors and other tiers of government. All five of Denmark’s regions state that they work with the SDGs. There are also many examples of municipalities doing so too. Local SDG committees that involve the participation of civil society have been established in the municipalities of Aalborg, Aarhus and Odense. Sonderborg City Council also recently approved a 2021-2024 Sustainability Policy, with associated baselines. Guldborgsund municipality is also taking the SDGs as the basis for its policy making. Aarhus City Council has explicitly referred to the SDGs in reviews of its last two budget agreements. Gladsaxe has recently produced its first VLR. In addition, the KL (representing municipalities) and Danish Regions associations form part of the national 2030 Panel.⁵² The 2030 Panel has, amongst other actions, helped the national statistics office to establish 197 new indicators to help achieve the 2030 Agenda; this has been based on input from more than 6,000 different Danish companies, organisations, researchers and citizens.⁵³

The efforts undertaken by local governments in **Germany** for monitoring SDG implementation have been described above (in the VSR). At the federated government level (*Länder*), 11 bodies have either adopted, or are currently

working on, sustainable development strategies of their own. At the local level, an increasing number of cities are producing VLRs. Inspiring examples include Bonn's 46 indicators, which were used to track progress in its first VLR. The Federal government has implemented several programmes to support the *Länder* and local governments. These include a National Urban Development Policy, incorporating action for climate change, integrated rural development, a programme for ending violence against women, the promotion of cultural and creative industries, and a Smart City Charter.

In **Norway**, half of the regional authorities and a quarter of the municipalities have measured their progress on achieving the SDGs, and both large and small authorities stand out for inspiring initiatives for creating local engagement and awareness; good examples are provided by Arndal, Asker, Kristiansund and Stavanger.⁵⁴ The city of Trondheim uses SDG budgeting to integrate the SDGs into local finance structures.⁵⁵ The municipalities of Aremark and Bodo, as well as the Viken regional authority, have established a systematic approach for involving the political level in the operationalisation of the SDGs by incorporating them in templates for the treatment and processing of documents used for supporting political decisions. As a result, the SDGs have become an integral part of political governance. In Norway, LRGs play a key role in civil society participation (Local Government Act). With regard to monitoring, as mentioned above, KS and Statistics Norway are jointly working on an indicator taxonomy for local and regional use.⁵⁶ Over 30 municipalities have so far established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are used for monitoring purposes, in line with the U4SSC for smart and sustainable cities. At the individual LRG level, the regional authority of Viken has used OECD indicators, whereas Trondheim is currently following in the footsteps of cities like Los Angeles, London and Amsterdam, having developed an open access platform for city data, enriched by references to the SDG KPIs.⁵⁷

In **Spain**, both regional and municipal bodies have been active in the localization of the SDGs. The national LGA (*Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias*, FEMP) has led municipal SDG localization (see Box 3.2).⁵⁸ Both regional and local governments have participated in the shaping of the National Sustainable Development Strategy which was adopted by the national government in June 2021. In 2020, the regional government of Catalonia adopted a National Agreement for the 2030 Agenda and launched a Catalonia 2030 Alliance, which has

brought together all sectors of society.⁵⁹ In the Basque country, the regional government, its 3 provincial governments and the association of municipalities EUDEL have jointly developed a multi-level strategy to coordinate the localization

BOX 3.2

The commitment of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) to the SDGs

The Spanish Government has recognised the value of the work carried out so far by the country's LRGs and their associations. This work has primarily been related, firstly, to the 2018-2020 National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, more recently, to the new Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in 2021. The aim of these strategies has been to encourage the acceleration of initiatives taken at the local level to promote the localization of the 2030 Agenda and to align the measures in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis with the Agenda's main principles. The FEMP also participates in SDG governance through the Sectoral Conference for the 2030 Agenda.

The FEMP is recognised as a lever institution that promotes the localization of the 2030 Agenda. The association initially adopted its SDG implementation strategy in 2018. Amongst other lines of action, it has included: the strengthening of multi-level and multi-stakeholder partnerships for the development of SDG 11; the localization of the New Urban Agenda; and the strengthening of SDG 17. This strategy served as the basis for the creation, in 2020, of the SDG 2030 Agenda Political Commission and the Network of Local Governments for the 2030 Agenda, which brings together more than 230 LRGs committed to the development of local plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also favours: coordination; the exchange of good practices; and the co-creation of new tools for training and generating knowledge. One of its first results has been the establishment of the *Guidelines for the Localization of the 2030 Agenda*,⁶⁰ which provide a support tool aimed at the political representatives and technical staff of LRG. Its goal is to facilitate the alignment of municipal planning to the SDG principles, goals and targets, paying special attention to the particularities of small municipalities, islands and what has been called "rural and empty Spain".

Through an institutional agreement with the national Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda, in 2021, the FEMP will launch a call for grants, with a total value of more than EUR 4 million, to help local governments to promote localization.

Source: FEMP

of the SDG at 3 different levels, supported by guidelines and indicators. Since 2016, this territory has also witnessed the emergence of pioneering VLRs (6 of which have already been published). In 2020, the Basque government published its 4th VLR.⁶¹ The Cordoba Provincial Council published its VLR in September 2020 and Barcelona did the same in November 2020.⁶² Madrid adopted officially its new Strategy for the localization of the SDGs in March 2021.⁶³ Several municipal development cooperation funds have taken similar initiatives: in 2019, FAMSÍ, in Andalusia, fostered the adoption of a Joint Declaration for the region's SDGs by LRGs and other institutions,⁶⁴ and Fons Mallorquí has ensured SDG localization through development cooperation projects. In Catalonia, several local governments have taken similar action (Terrassa, Sant Vicenç dels Horts, and Anoia).⁶⁵ Barcelona Provincial Council has continued to offer a diverse range of services, technical support and funds for the municipalities of its territory and has organised an international MOOC on SDG localization. This is just a selection of the many best practices that have recently been developed and documented in Spain.⁶⁶

In **Sweden**, as well as the information presented above (see Subsection 3.2 and the box dedicated to Sweden's VSR), it is relevant to underline that the Council for Sustainable Cities was founded by the Government in 2017 and that it includes the LGA (SALAR). It has also published information about LRG actions for sustainable urban development via the website *Hallbar Stad* (Sustainable City).⁶⁷ Swedish LRGs have made several agreements on different national initiatives (gender equality, youth, child health-care, etc.) and have been active participants in national health coordination mechanisms during the pandemic. Looking beyond the 4 cities that have produced VLRs (Helsingborg, Malmö, Stockholm and Uppsala), another good example of a Swedish municipality that has made significant progress is Strängnäs, which has reviewed its existing goals, in the municipality's Comprehensive Plan 2014-2040, and plans to link them to the 17 SDGs. In 2016, Atvidaberg, which is a smaller town, also adopted a sustainability programme based on the 17 SDGs. To monitor SDG implementation, the Swedish Council for Municipal Analysis, working on behalf of SALAR and the Swedish government, has developed a set of 50 key figures for municipalities and 50 key figures for regions, called "Kolada". In 2020, SALAR also launched an initiative called "Open Comparisons", related to the 2030 Agenda, to encourage local and regional authorities to analyse their results, learn from each other, and

improve their quality standards and efficiency.⁶⁸

In **Cyprus**, several municipalities, including Nicosia, have carried out awareness raising activities, while others (including Strovolos, Ypsonas, Latsia, Ayia Napal, and Athienou) have conducted environmental studies, improved integrated urban development plans, developed waste management strategies and promoted the protection of cultural heritage. At the local level, the Integrated Limassol Development strategic plan 2021-2027 was adopted in 2021 is generally in line with the SDGs. In **San Marino**, a strategic instrument has recently been adopted which aims to promote urban regeneration and sustainability throughout the country: the General Town Planning Scheme: SM 2030, "Garden of Europe—Microcosm of Biodiversity".

Strovolos, Nicosia, Chypre.
(Image: vianney-cahen-
gZJvqq13WdY-unsplash)



Latin America and the Caribbean

Localization efforts continue to grow in Latin America and the Caribbean, although the process seems to have slowed down in comparison with previous years, as a result of the pandemic and of certain recent political trends in several countries. The regional commission: ECLAC, is concerned that “the indications that the comprehensive nature of the Agenda was already in jeopardy [...] have been exacerbated by the pandemic”.⁶⁹ ECLAC also adds that: “to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, there needs to be greater awareness of the territorial dimension in order to reverse the concentration of resources and services, particularly in large cities, to the detriment of rural and hard-to-reach territories”.

Looking at the progress made by each country, in **Bolivia**, the FAM states that 80% of the country’s municipalities have produced local development plans that take into consideration

the national Social and Economic Development Plan and are based on sustainable principles (see Box 3.3). In parallel, the AMB has worked with UNDP on a joint strategy to territorialize the SDGs in the 10 capitals of the country’s departments. AMB has directly contributed to mainstreaming the SDGs into the local integrated development plans of 3 of these cities (Tarija, Sucre and El Alto). The city of La Paz has aligned its development plan and budget with the SDG goals and targets and created the Observatory for COVID-19; it also presented a VLR in 2018.⁷¹

Colombia was one of the first countries in the region that invested in the “territorialization” of the 2030 Agenda. The National Strategy for SDG implementation, which was adopted in 2018, includes SDG localization as one of its guidelines and provides a relevant framework for local government action.⁷² In the local elections of 2019, the national SDG Commission pledged to introduce the SDGs in the local electoral campaign. The National Department for Planning, which is in charge of the coordination of the SDG strategy, has carried out a series of workshops with the new local authorities that were elected in 2019, and has also established a kit for aligning local planning with the SDGs. An analysis of the territorial development plans for 2020-2023 of the different departments (33) shows that the regions with most departments aligned with the SDGs were the Caribbean and Central regions (14 departments, including Sucre and Bolivar), while the regions Sea Flower, Santanderes and Orinoquia Llanos Orientales showed lower levels of alignment.⁷³ The Local Government Strategic Agenda for 2020-2024 of the LGA (FCM) proposes a roadmap that organises the territorial development processes of these municipalities in line with the SDGs. Cities like Medellin⁷⁴ and Bogota⁷⁵ adopted new territorial development plans aligned to the SDGs in 2020; this highlights the importance of using strong leadership and multi-level and multi-stakeholder coordination to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Medellin and its department, Antioquia, have developed dissemination and community empowerment campaigns based around the SDGs. In fact, the Antioquia Development Plan (*Unidos por la vida* 2020-2023) includes the SDGs amongst its 5 pillars and also outlines 5 strategic transversal approaches. These promote an integrative and holistic strategy aimed at guiding development policy towards achieving recovery and creating what will be a more prosperous territory, in terms of environmental, social, economic and institutional considerations.⁷⁶ The vision and structure of Bogota’s District Development

BOX 3.3

The commitment of the *Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia* to the 2030 Agenda

In Bolivia, the *Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia* (FAM) includes 9 departmental associations of municipalities which represent the country’s 336 municipalities and 4 indigenous people’s autonomies. It also includes the *Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia* (AMB), which represents the 16 biggest cities in the country, and the *Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia* (ACOBOL).⁷⁰ According to an interview held with the FAM President, Alvaro Ruiz-Garcia, Bolivia has a National Economic and Social Development Plan (2015-2020) and each province and municipality has received resources to support their local plans, which integrate the SDGs. Over the past year, the country’s political crisis and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have led to modifications in the LGA’s policy priorities. FAM has been involved in a number of demonstrations, strikes and even hunger strikes, organised by mayors and local councillors, to demand sufficient resources from the national government with which to combat the pandemic and continue to provide basic services to the population. As a consequence of such strong advocacy, a COVID-19 solidarity fund was created (with a value of USD 40 million) and Law 1307 was passed in June 2020 to reallocate resources from the hydrocarbon sector. In 2021, transfers from the national government to the municipalities increased by 20%.

Source: Interview with Alvaro Ruiz-Garcia, President of FAM (until July 2021), former Mayor of Uriondo and former President of the Association of Municipalities of Tarija.

Plan: "A New Social and Environmental Contract for the Bogota of the 21st Century", has been developed in conjunction with citizens and local stakeholders. It has 5 main purposes and 30 city goals, including targets that are clearly oriented towards fulfilling the SDGs.⁷⁷ Monitoring is foreseen on a 6-monthly basis, within the framework of the plan and the first VLR should be finalised in 2022. Furthermore, the Red de Ciudades Cómo Vamos (*How are we doing?* city network), which is an alliance between civil society and the private sector, has played a key role in territorializing the SDGs in Colombia, adapting indicators to complement national ones, and promoting the monitoring of progress. The organisation is currently working with UNDP on a set of guidelines for the upcoming Colombian VLRs.⁷⁸

Cuba has been moving towards decentralization since 2016 and has fostered this by adopting new economic and social policy guidelines. It has also recently introduced constitutional reforms (2019) which recognise the principle of municipal autonomy. According to the Cuban VNR, the government must foster the alignment of municipal development strategies and provincial development strategies with the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2030 and the SDGs. It must also promote the participation of all local stakeholders and help to establish shared priorities and encourage co-responsibility in the execution of strategic projects. Several projects have been aimed at strengthening municipal capacities, including the Articulated Platform for the Integrated Development of Territories, and the Capacity Building Programme for Local Development.

In the **Dominican Republic**, the LGA (FEDOMU) is currently implementing a project to support territorial governance and foster the development of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), in line with the National Development Strategy for 2030. This initiative also receives funding from the Spanish cooperation agency. In **Guatemala**, the association ANAM is currently coordinating with the Secretariat for Planning and Programming of the Presidency, at the national level, with international partners (GIZ), and with several of its municipalities, to orient their local development plans towards SDG implementation, based on the K'atun 2032 National Development Plan. Mixco, in the metropolitan area of Guatemala, mentions the SDGs in its Mixco 2032 Local Development Plan with a Territorial Approach, and Salcája has followed the same steps.⁷⁹

In **Mexico**, as mentioned above in the VSR, there are huge differences between the progress



La Habana., Cuba. (Image: diego-gennaro-PLjrql-Yq88-unsplash)

made by some of the country's municipalities and by its states. In recent years, a programme led by UNDP and GiZ has supported the creation of offices responsible for promoting the SDGs at the state and municipal levels and also for the training of local public servants (200). The LRGs of Durango, Guadalajara, Merida, Mexico state, Mexico City and Tabasco have all developed VLRs (see Box 3.4). It should, however, be noted that this process was undertaken within the framework of the local elections that took place in June 2021 and which renewed local authorities in 15 Mexican states and in 80% of the country's municipalities.

The VNR for **Nicaragua** mentions the contribution of LRGs to social housing programmes (Plan sin Techo) and improving the management of public services (urban planning, local water systems, waste management, roads, local markets, maternal houses and pre-scholar centres, electricity and reforestation).⁸⁰ As in previous years, there has been contradictory information from **Paraguay**: while the national government stresses a participative approach in the VNR, the LGA stated, through the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey, that local governments were not involved in the consultation process, although they did receive support to tackle the impact of the pandemic and to strengthen the management of natural resources.

In **Uruguay**, Montevideo's new *Intendencia* (starting in December 2020) is currently assessing the relevance of developing a new SDG plan for the territory.⁸¹ Montevideo developed its first VLR in 2020.⁸² Furthermore,

BOX 3.4

Knowledge Hub for VLRs in Mexico

The GiZ 2030 Agenda Initiative and the Partners for Review network, in collaboration with: the Mexican Technical Secretariat of the National Council for the 2030 Agenda (Ministry of Economy); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); Monterrey's Technological and Higher Studies Institute, working on behalf of the Mexican Chapter of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN); the DeLoG Secretariat; and the Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Municipal Associations (FLACMA), have created a "Knowledge Hub" to help states and municipalities to develop their VLRs. This unprecedented multi-stakeholder collaboration initiative has provided ad hoc technical assistance to the federal entities of Tabasco, Durango and Mexico, Mexico City and the municipalities of Guadalajara and Merida in the development of their VLRs. Through their respective reports, these LRGs review the main implementation policies, programmes and actions that have both a direct and an indirect impact on the ability to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda. The VLRs also highlight the importance of paying particular attention to the health, economic and environmental emergencies that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This box includes an example.

Mexico City's VLR

The third VLR of Mexico City shows the severity of the impact of the pandemic and highlights the challenges facing its urban development model. The objective of the city, based on the 2019-2024 Governmental Programme and the vision of the General Development Plan through to 2040, is to foster a recovery process with 6 lines of action: respect for rights and equality; a sustainable city; improving mobility; promoting culture and making Mexico the cultural capital of America; eradicating violence and providing more security; and promoting science, technology and accountability. The VLR assesses various sectoral policies and initiatives. These include: the network of services for inclusion and well-being; improving access to education; the COVID 19 strategy; gender equality; carrying out urban retrofitting and providing inclusive housing; climate action; zero waste; protecting biodiversity; promoting soft mobility and renewable energies; culture; digital platforms; open data; social and solidarity economy; and zero violence. The city has created a new Institute for Democratic and Prospective Planning that, together with the Evaluation Council, will revise and implement development policies. Several municipal districts (Miguel Hidalgo, Iztapalapa and Azcapotzalco) have also aligned their government plans with the SDGs.

Source: contribution from GiZ Mexico and Mexico City's 2021 VLR

each of the priorities of the Canelones Strategic Plan for 2040 is aligned to the SDGs⁸³ and their participatory budgets have recently taken the SDGs into account. No information has been provided about the local implementation of the SDGs in **Antigua and Barbuda** and **Bahamas**, in the Caribbean region.⁸⁴

Other world regions (Eurasia, MEWA)

With regard to other regions, only **Azerbaijan** is reporting from the Eurasia region. The country is currently emerging from conflict, therefore the rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration of recently liberated and conflict-affected areas feature amongst the main priorities of the country's development priority. The VNR makes very little reference to local governments. Due to long-standing conflicts, violence and weak governance in both **Afghanistan** and **Iraq**, SDG

localization in these countries has been difficult to monitor. In **Afghanistan**, only the municipality of Balkh has reported carrying out awareness-raising campaigns for local stakeholders (older people, activists, young people and civil society organisations). In **Iraq**, decentralization is considered a useful instrument for promoting sustainable development. Even so, the decentralization process still remains limited (except in the governorates of the Kurdistan region). A Social Fund for Development has, however, been established to support the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Frontrunner cities in the governorates of Al Basra, Al Anbar and Kerbala have taken the initiative to develop local reports.⁸⁵ Very little information is available for **Saudi Arabia**, while in **Qatar**, there are no local self-governing bodies.

Local and regional government action in non-reporting countries in 2021: region-by-region briefs

As well as the efforts made over the last year by LGAs and LRGs in the reporting countries, the localization movement has made progress, albeit at different paces, in all regions of the world. European countries continue to lead the localization movement, while in Africa and Latin America, despite the presence of a group of frontrunner LRGs (particularly in Benin, Brazil and Kenya), the pace of progress has slowed down in several countries which have been affected by social and political crises. Asia-Pacific continues to show a huge contrast between countries where cities are driving SDG action and linking it to COVID-19 responses (as in South Korea, China, Indonesia and Japan, as commented above) and those in which there have been no clear localization efforts. In MEWA, Turkish and Russian cities have shown greater involvement in the process in the past two years.

Facing the urgent need to gear the main policy priorities towards containing the spread of the pandemic and activating initiatives to start the recovery, local governments that had already committed to the 2030 Agenda have continued to defend the global framework, usually as part of this response. This Subsection aims to showcase the efforts made by LGAs and LRGs from non-reporting countries in these trying times, paying specific attention to the initiatives from the 64 countries shared through the GTF/UCLG 2021 Survey. Earlier reports are also available for a broader view of the localization movement.⁸⁶

Africa

For the 22 surveyed LGAs and LRGs from 15 non-reporting countries in Africa, the SDGs are well-known and form part of local action conducted in around 50% of them. This commitment has been translated into political statements (in 17% of the LGAs), strategies, action plans and roadmaps (25%), and VSRs or other reports (33%). LGAs and LRGs are actively working with civil society and local stakeholders to support the localization process. While UNECA estimates that “the region is not on track to [deliver either the 2030] Agenda [or meet] the aspirations of [the 2063] Agenda”,⁸⁷ there is a need for a stronger African localization movement and to actively disseminate the SDGs in the different countries. LRGs from Benin, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda are actively taking the lead in this respect.

In **Benin**, the association ANCB is particularly committed to the SDGs. Following the development of the 2020 VSR and its involvement in the “spatialization”, or localization, of the SDGs in the development plans of the country’s 77 municipalities, during the past year, this LGA has created a thematic commission to mirror the newly-created General Direction on SDGs at the national level. The ANCB commission is composed of elected officials, technicians, civil society actors and government officials who work on the localization of the SDGs. The commission has developed a study of the financing of the SDGs at the municipal level. This complements the national-level study on the “costing of the SDGs” and an analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on local taxes. The ANCB has continued to develop training initiatives and to award best practices. During the pandemic, it has also helped to promote access to hand washing facilities in all the 77 municipalities.

In the **Ivory Coast**, the national associations UVICOCI and ARDCI are involved in the process of localization and encourage their members to align their local plans with national priorities and the SDGs. In **Kenya**, the two associations—the Council of Governors (CoG) and County Assemblies Forum (CAF)—have continuously participated in activities to raise awareness of and disseminate the SDGs. This has been done, for example, through the Devolution Week events, which target the citizens of major cities, and the Kenya SDGs Workshop. For the COVID-19 response, both associations participate in the national coordination mechanism created by the national government and ensure food supply and relief on the ground. In 2019, Busia, Kwale, Marsabit and Taita Taveta counties developed the first VLRs in the African region and the CAF and CoG jointly developed a VSR.

In **Mali**, political instability (recent *coups d’état* and regional conflict) and the pandemic have had a major impact on all state institutions and this has limited the action relating to the SDGs undertaken by the association AMM. However, AMM has managed to carry out training sessions for 100 municipalities to promote the inclusion of the SDGs in their local development plans. The AMM has also been very active developing a local strategy to combat the pandemic for its members. In **Mauritania**, the national Association of Mayors of Mauritania (AMM) is developing a series of guidelines for SDG localization. Nevertheless, awareness remains very limited at the LRG level. The region of Nouakchott is currently updating its regional plan with the aim of integrating the SDGs. In **Morocco**, the city of Chefchaouen continues to be one of the frontrunners and has



developed an action plan with a strong focus on renewable energies. Rabat has also shown a strong commitment to tackling the COVID-19 crisis (to ensure livelihoods, support children and women who are the victims of violence, reutilise green spaces, and include migrants, etc.).

In **Mozambique**, despite publishing its 2020 VSR, the association ANAMM has not been integrated into the national working group for SDG coordination. The LGA has advocated maintaining tax transfers from the central government to municipalities which had been adversely affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In **Rwanda**, the association RALGA has mainstreamed the SDGs in its Strategic Plan for 2020-2025. It is also implementing phase two (2021-2022) of a project that has been underway since 2017 (with the support of the EU and CLGF). Together with the National Institute of Statistics, RALGA has also developed a monitoring tool for SDG implementation at the national level. Several LRGs from **Gabon**, **Senegal** and **Seychelles** (those of Libreville, Rufisque and the District of Victoria, respectively) have also reported initiatives to incorporate the SDGs into local plans, putting the emphasis on different priorities (e.g. risk prevention and climate change, in Libreville).

In **South Africa**, the association SALGA has focused its efforts on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. According to SALGA, SDG implementation and monitoring processes “do not join up seamlessly; in part this is due to the fact that indicators are not standardised and reporting is not compulsory”.⁸⁸ Johannesburg is currently reviewing the city’s long-term plan: Growth and Development Strategy Joburg 2040, and ensuring the SDGs are properly referenced and used as a framework. Cape Town is now preparing its VLR for 2021, building on its localization report, as part of the SDG implementation plan adopted in 2019.⁸⁹

In **Uganda**, the association ULGA has made the SDGs an important focus for the recent 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. ULGA participates in the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda with support from UNCDF and the EU. Within this initiative, it is developing an awareness-raising campaign for local leaders, roadmaps, and training sessions for community facilitators.⁹⁰ ULGA is supporting several districts in the development of their VLRs in 2021 (Nebbi, Sheema, Sironko, Kitagwenda, Kyotera and Bugiri). The Ngora district developed its VLR for 2020 with the support of UNECA, and in coordination with the national VNR process. The VLR prioritises food security and better livelihoods, quality healthcare, increased tree

The localization movement has made progress, albeit at different paces, in all regions of the world. European countries continue to lead the localization movement, together with a group of frontrunner LRGs in Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America.

cover, quality primary and secondary education, and increased access to clean water. As part of the pilot VLR project, the Ngora district compiled an SDG localization manual for other localities in the country and took positive steps towards establishing linkages between VLRs and VNRs.⁹¹ To address the challenge of localizing financing, Kampala is co-leading the EU-funded Programme on Integrated Local Finances for Sustainable Urban Development in Greater Kampala. The Harare and Ngora district VLRs have been accompanied by those of Victoria Falls (**Zimbabwe**), Accra (**Ghana**), Cape Town (**South Africa**) and Yaounde (**Cameroon**).⁹² In **Zambia**, the LGAZ has strengthened its collaboration with the Ministry of National Development Planning for SDG implementation and created the COVID-19 Advisory Centre for Local Authorities.

Asia-Pacific

In the Asia-Pacific region, 21 surveys returned from 11 non-reporting countries show a high level of awareness of the SDGs, particularly among 12 national associations from 9 of these countries (83% of the replies) and, to a lesser extent, within LRGs (50%). The majority of the LRG replies came from Cambodia and the Philippines. Within the LGAs, the SDGs are only used as important references for strategy development in 33% of cases, while 36% adopted SDGs strategies and action plans. Among the LRGs, 56% of the replies mentioned political strategies in favour of SDG localization and 33% referred to monitoring mechanisms. As well as China, Indonesia and Japan, which have already been analysed in the previous Subsection, South Korea, New Zealand and the Philippines were among the countries in which LRGs have been especially active in the localization process.

In **Bangladesh**, the association MAB is committed and active and works in close coordination with the national government in pursuit of the SDGs. The MAB participates in the World Bank programme for COVID-19 Response and Recovery Project. In **Cambodia**, the local government replies to the GTF/UCLG 2021 Survey underline the fact that, since the last local government elections (2017), the implementation of decentralization and deconcentration policies has made notable progress at the subnational level. Decentralization has contributed to improvements in public service delivery in various districts (e.g. Pursat Province and the Monkul Borey district). In **Kiribati**, the association KiLGA has underlined the importance of advocacy work, sharing information on SDGs, and—especially—including them in the strategic plans of councils. KiLGA actively contributed to the 2019 VNR. With the support of UNESCAP, this association is helping Betio Town Council to produce its VLR.

In **Nepal**, where the implementation of the federal system—which was adopted in the 2015 Constitution—is progressing slowly, the three LGAs collaborate with the High-Level Steering Committee for SDG implementation, which is headed by the Prime Minister. The National Planning Commission requested their support to disseminate the SDG localization guidelines and to help set out a number of SDG-related plans and programmes, with some pilot projects being currently underway. However, their capacity to deliver is rather limited. In 2020, the LGAs produced a VSR. In **Pakistan**, the Association for Development of Local Governance (ADLG) is working with UCLG ASPAC within the EU-funded LEAD for SDGs programme. This aims to support pilot localization initiatives in 4 districts of Balochistan and Sindh.⁹³ Within this programme, the Local Councils Association of the Sindh (LCAS) is currently carrying out training sessions.

In the **Philippines**, the national government's localization strategy continues to follow a top-down approach (e.g. mandatory regulations and incentives). The League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) integrated the SDGs into its Strategic Plan for 2019-2022 and is leading various initiatives for SDG dissemination: partnering with the Liveable Cities Challenge in organising the Liveable Cities Labs; developing the LCP City Database Project to consolidate city data and show how cities are achieving the SDGs; developing the Cities' System Capacity Development Project to strengthen city planning; and promoting projects such as Gender and Development, and Building Climate Resiliency through Urban Plans and Designs. LCP was also mobilised to help with the

COVID-19 response (e.g. quarantine and travel protocols, economic recovery, and vaccination rollouts). Cities such as Baguio, Iriga and Makati have adopted resolutions and strategic frameworks anchored in the SDGs (e.g. 2019-2025 Makati Comprehensive Development Plan). The Iriga Strategy for SDG localization includes, amongst other actions, setting up 5 sectoral committees for the formulation and integration of the SDGs within comprehensive land use and development plans.⁹⁴ However, cities have underlined the difficulties that they face in ensuring appropriate monitoring and evaluation (e.g. Vigan).

In **South Korea**, early engagement with the Local Agenda 21 process by local governments and civil society organisations played a significant role in spreading policies and practices for sustainable development. Five metropolitan and regional governments (Seoul, Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do, Chugbuk-do and Chungnam-do) and 8 local governments (Suwon, Dangjin, Yeosu, Damyang, Dobogn-gu, Gangbuk-gu, Michuhol-gu and Bupyeong-gu) have developed local SDG monitoring systems.

In **Sri Lanka**, there is no clear national strategy for localizing the SDGs. The outreach of the initiatives of the association FSGLA has been limited due to a lack of national government support. The Association of Cities of **Vietnam** (ACVN) benefits from an international project to share SDG information and practices. In the Pacific region, Local Government **New Zealand** (LGNZ) has worked with the central government to design grant programmes to help councils promote investment in specific sectors and stimulate recovery (e.g. water). LNGZ is now working with universities and NGOs on activities to disseminate the SDGs and collaborates with the government to define indicators adapted to local communities (e.g. Community Well-being Indicator Framework).⁹⁵



In Asia-Pacific, as well as China, Indonesia and Japan, which are reporting this year, South Korea, New Zealand and the Philippines are among the countries in which LRGs have been especially active in the localization process.

Eurasia

In Eurasia, SDG localization remains a critical and pending matter. Nevertheless, **Russian** cities have been making progress in SDG implementation. Twenty-seven regions and cities answered to the survey (including Kazan,

Nizhniy-Novgorod, Omsk, Rostov-on-Don, Sevastopol, Volgograd and Yekaterinburg). Half of them claimed to have a good knowledge of the SDG framework, and 6 had either adopted a resolution relating to SDG implementation or had integrated the SDGs into their strategic plans (Kurgan, Naberezhnye Chelny, Perm, Rostov-on-Don, Tomsk, and Ulyanovsk). Irkutsk, Kazan, Naberezhnye Chelny and Rostov-on-Don have developed outreach activities to disseminate the SDGs among their populations.⁹⁶ Some cities also participate in a working group called “Piloting of the experience of Moscow in integrating the SDGs in mono-cities of the Russian Federation” established to create a modern urban economy for single-industry cities which is structured around the SDGs. This includes policy priorities such as improving and/or modernising roads, healthcare, housing, early childhood centres and public spaces. Various regions are also engaged in this process. In 2019, the Rostov region presented its own report: *Towards the Sustainable Development Goals*, and in February 2020, a second report, *Regions of the Russian Federation: the Republic of Tatarstan and the SDGs*, was published. Moscow has prepared a VLR for the 2021 HLPF (see Box 3.5).

BOX 3.5

Moscow's 2021 VLR

In Moscow, the VLR has been prepared in a favourable implementation context, after the publication of Russia's first VNR in 2020. It has received the support of UN-Habitat. The momentum of the VNR has made it possible not only to strengthen the alignment between the two reports, but also to include innovative methodologies and approaches that make Moscow's VLR a relevant reference within the VLR ecosystem. For instance, the preparation of the report took firmly into consideration the role of Moscow as a global megacity. This approach entailed assessing the relevance of each of the SDG goals for the city, resulting in a differentiated weighting and priority being given to each goal, although also recognising their complementarity and integrity. Based on this rationale, the VLR for Moscow deploys SDG reporting and analysis in three priority-based categories.

Moscow's VLR also has a strong focus on improving the evidence presented through updated and innovative data provided not only by the city government but also by several federal entities and stakeholders from the civil society and the private sector. As a result, the report covers a remarkably high number of SDG indicators. In addition, the report also includes innovative qualitative and perception-based data, providing a more nuanced analysis of city conditions and the perception of its inhabitants. The participatory process has been a critical workstream and included engagement activities such as questionnaires, seminars, interviews, technical meetings, and review sessions to collect input from all kinds of stakeholders. All of this has resulted in an increased level of awareness of the 2030 Agenda.

The report also connects efforts to localize the SDGs to current city strategies, particularly regarding the Smart City strategy and creating synergies for more sustainable urban development. The report also mainstreamed a gender approach during its preparation through the participation of international gender experts, the inclusion of tailored gender data, and the use of inclusive language.

Source: facilitated by UN-Habitat, based on Moscow's 2021 VLR

In **Kyrgyzstan**, since February 2020 UNECE, UN-Habitat and the city of Bishkek have been cooperating on a project that aims to promote capacity-building for SDG implementation amongst both the city's and the national government's staff, under the UNECE approach “Sustainable Smart Cities with Innovative Financing”.⁹⁷ This multinational project is being carried out in parallel in Grodno (**Belarus**), Nur-Sultan (**Kazakhstan**), Tbilisi (**Georgia**) and Podgorica (**Montenegro**).

Europe

Continuing the trend of previous years, European LGAs and LRGs are leading the way in SDG localization. In line with the results of this year's CEMR/Platforma report, based on the survey conducted in collaboration with the GTF/UCLG, 73% of the 26 responding LGAs that were from a country that is not reporting to the HLPF this year show a high level of awareness of the SDGs (compared to 92% of LGAs in reporting countries) and commitment to the 2030 Agenda: around 52% have adopted a political statement or a specific strategy or have developed an action plan to deploy resources in favour of the 2030 Agenda. In the case of LRGs, 64% have developed a strategy or action plan, in addition to the 22% that have adopted a political statement (see Box 3.6).

BOX 3.6

CEMR/Platforma study: *European Territories Localise the SDGs. Continuity and Change in Times of COVID-19*

In Europe, as in other regions of the world, the COVID-19 crisis has had an impact on the speed at which LRGs and their associations have been working on the Global Agendas. However, the 2021 edition of the CEMR/Platforma study: *European Territories Localise the SDGs. Continuity and Change in Times of COVID-19*, demonstrates that the pandemic has not adversely affected the localization process. On the contrary, whilst some municipalities and regions have had to put their SDG efforts on temporary pause, others have found an opportunity to use the framework and vision of the 2030 Agenda to help create, plan and monitor recovery strategies that are sustainable, inclusive and coherent, and which can allow them to build back better.

When responses by LGAs to the CEMR/Platforma study, from both reporting and non-reporting countries, were compiled, of the 39 responding LGAs, over 76% know about and understand the 2030 Agenda. A third of them (34.2%) said that they use the SDG framework as an important reference in their strategies. This compares with 29%, from only 34 respondents, in 2020. 81.6% of these LGAs (31 respondents) were involved in some way in national coordination mechanisms for the SDGs and 13.2% said that they had become more involved than in previous years. 55.3% of the responding LGAs have now set up some sort of indicator or mechanism for monitoring and reporting.

Platforma has carried out numerous activities to promote the mainstreaming of the SDGs in all its members' decentralized cooperation activities. As a result, the study shows that 78.9% of the responding LGAs had taken some sort of action related to the international dimension of the SDGs and 55.3% had set up some sort of dedicated activities for supporting their partners in other countries. These actions have included providing training sessions and capacity-building activities (45%),⁹⁸ organising study visits (23%),⁹⁹ co-creating local SDG strategies (19%) and peer-reviewing activities (6%),¹⁰⁰ amongst others.

Based on the analysis of the survey results, CEMR/Platforma have made a set of recommendations: increasing support provided, in the form of human resources, to work on SDG localization; promoting multi-level governance, multi-stakeholder partnerships and policy coherence; sharing and learning from peers, both inside and outside Europe, including through decentralized cooperation; increasing recognition and support from national governments; and allocating funds and increasing support and means dedicated to the localization of the SDGs.

Source: CEMR/Platforma, *European Territories Localise the SDGs. Continuity and Change in Times of COVID-19* (2021)

Progress in Europe has, however, been unequal. Since 2015, Europe has made great strides forward thanks to the actions of some of the more advanced LGAs and LRGs from the Nordic countries, and also Belgium and the Netherlands, which have invested significant effort and resources in raising awareness, aligning plans to the SDGs and creating specific SDG monitoring systems. The number of initiatives of all kinds is currently mushrooming in all the European countries, but particularly in Germany and Spain (as reported above), Austria, France, Italy, Portugal, the UK, and in the Baltic states and some Central European countries. According to the association NALAS and individual interviews between CEMR/Platforma and partners from Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Kosovo in South-East Europe, LRGs are still between the awareness-raising stage and that of increasing the use of the 2030 Agenda as an overarching framework for pursuing sustainable

and inclusive development. There are, according to NALAS, several problems with this, which include the "heavy technical burden and the challenge to grasp [the 2030 Agenda] in its complexity", along with a "tech-speak jargon" that makes it difficult to translate the Agenda into practical messages.

The following paragraphs present a selection of some of the best practices observed amongst the experiences compiled from the 2021 Survey and several other sources.

In **Belgium**, the Flemish Region has held its Sustainable Municipality Week campaign for the fourth time in 2021. In it, each participating municipality (92 out of a total of 300) and their local heroes (schools, local organisations and citizens) are identified and the mission is to raise awareness about how to contribute to the SDGs. In 2021, the Flemish association VVSG is organising a "Tour de Flandres" for the SDGs. In it, a working group of around 15 municipalities

holds regular sessions relating to this subject in order to help advance localization efforts through the SDG monitor¹⁰¹ and to build upon the lessons learnt from the SDG pilot project that was held between 2017 and 2019.¹⁰² VVSG promotes the SDG Academy through webinars and workshops and has ensured long technical support through the SDG pioneer programme.¹⁰³ At the individual level, cities such as Ghent (with its VLR in 2020), Harelbeke (with its SDG-voice programme)¹⁰⁴ and Herne (where the 17 councillors are ambassadors for each of the SDGs) are also contributing to this Decade of Action.

In **Finland**, in early 2021, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (Kuntaliitto) held a series of workshops focusing on SDG localization for local officials and technical staff to promote sustainability and their role in strategic leadership. Within the framework of the country's municipal elections, held in spring 2021, the LGA provided newly elected councillors with a wide range of materials on SDGs and related. The municipalities of Tampere, Oulu and Vantaa have joined their peers Helsinki, Turku and Espoo (Finland's six largest municipalities) in producing VLRs, on which they have been working with the association Kuntaliitto and the national government since January 2021.¹⁰⁵

In **France**, the guidelines *Pour l'appropriation de l'Agenda 2030 par les collectivités françaises* (Enhancing French LRG ownership related to the 2030 Agenda) developed by Comite 21, with the support of the national LGAs and other partners, continue to be used to help LRGs with their efforts to localize the SDGs.¹⁰⁶ The French association Cites Unies France (CUF) has also created a committee for the SDGs and to promote international municipal cooperation. The LGA AFCCRE has organised workshops, conferences and publications. Several local governments have reported progress made in the use of the SDGs as a reference framework in their respective reports on sustainable development and also in various local and regional plans (Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, Chartres, Hauts de Seine, Nouvelle Aquitaine, etc.). In 2021, Paris has carried out a self-diagnosis related to the SDGs, based on the AFNOR Barometer on the performance of public institutions. Bordeaux created an Observatory on the contribution of the French territories to the SDGs. Awareness-raising campaigns aimed at citizens and local stakeholders (Montpellier, Grenoble) and training (Nouvelle-Aquitaine region) have been the main initiatives undertaken in 2020 and 2021. In 2019, Montpellier adopted a manifesto based on citizen consultation and the 2030 Agenda. Several LRGs are currently developing strategies to integrate the SDGs into

their international cooperation activities (Aude, Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Grenoble).

In **Italy**, the association AICCRES, along with Fondazione Eni Enrico Mattei and Bertelsmann Stiftung, has integrated all the indicators in the Italian City Index into an international SDG Portal.¹⁰⁷ The association is also working on the publication of 80 local case studies relating to this matter. Florence is presenting its first VLR in 2021 with the support of UN-Habitat. In the Baltic countries, the LGA from **Latvia** (LALRG) has organised several seminars for municipalities and will continue this work during 2021. Other municipalities have also launched awareness-raising campaigns. Kuldiga and Liepaja have focused on youth. Preili has identified the most important SDGs for its day-to-day work. The LGA of **Lithuania** (ALAL) is actively involved in the country's National Commission for Sustainable Development that coordinates SDG implementation.

In the **Netherlands**, the association VNG has continued to raise consciousness both with SDG Netherlands and through the SDG Flag Day. In the 2020 edition, it managed to involve the national government, CSOs, academia, and both public and private local stakeholders. VNG has also become an "SDG 11 house", opening its doors to anyone wishing to know more about this SDG and organise joint events. At the LRG level, the 12 municipalities that have participated in the survey have shown a high level of commitment.¹⁰⁸ Utrecht continues to organise a local campaign ("Utrecht4GlobalGoals") to get citizens and stakeholders (schools, universities, social entrepreneurs, businesses and associations) involved in SDG implementation. Its SDG dashboard connects the city's local strategy for Healthy Urban Living for Everyone and related policies with the SDGs and then tracks progress.¹⁰⁹ In order to turn the 17 SDGs into a reality, Oosterhout has used a dedicated website to make local projects, activities



Local governments that had already committed to the 2030 Agenda before the crisis have continued to defend the global framework, usually as part of the response and the initiatives to start recovery from COVID-19.

and initiatives from a range of stakeholders more visible.¹¹⁰ Zoetermeer has an active policy for SDG localization in the education, culture and welfare sectors, including the international dimension. Noordenveld has combined the SDGs with its Local Inclusion Agenda,¹¹¹ and Sudwest-Fryslan has done the same with its Local Environmental Vision.¹¹² The Mayor of Oss has highlighted how the SDGs can be used as a compass to help guide recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.¹¹³

In Southeast Europe, **NALAS** started to raise awareness amongst its members in 2018. It has been doing this via conferences, “training of trainers” workshops, and other capacity-building initiatives. It also promotes project implementation in 5 Western Balkan countries, following the guidelines of the 2019 publication *Agenda 2030 in my municipality: a handbook for practitioners for localising the Sustainable Development Goals*. It has done this with the support of GiZ.¹¹⁴ As a consequence of these efforts, some scattered progress has been noted in the region. For example, within the framework of the “PFM Reform: Financing the 2030 Agenda”, the **Serbian** association (SCTM), the national government and GiZ have held several awareness raising events for LRGs. They have also drafted *Guidelines for the drafting of local development plans* that have a clear focus on the SDGs.¹¹⁵ This action has also been accompanied by a training cycle of webinars relating to the Guidelines (reaching 185 participants from 75 LRGs).¹¹⁶ The Guidelines have already been tested by 5 LRGs and are currently being implemented in 5 others, within the framework of a UNDP programme funded by the Slovak Republic.¹¹⁷ The Association of Kosovo Municipalities has produced the study *Enhancing local capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Leave No One Behind Principle*. The Association of **Albanian** Municipalities is working on a roadmap for implementing the SDGs during 2021.

In the **United Kingdom**, Local Government Association (LGA) was particularly active in the VNR process in 2020 and has continued to carry out intensive outreach actions over the past year, although these have tended to mainly focus on the impact of the pandemic on local governments. **Scotland** published its VLR in 2020. In it, the SDGs were mainstreamed into the National Performance Framework, which was prepared by the Scottish Government and endorsed by the local association COSLA.¹¹⁸ COSLA joined the Scottish Government crisis centre, known as the Resilience and Recovery Group, during the first phase of the pandemic.

Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries)

In the countries from Latin America and the Caribbean that are not reporting this year, the SDGs are already well-known amongst both LGAs (67%) and LRGs (50%). This has led various institutions to implement SDG localization through political statements, strategies and action plans (50% of LGAs, 76% of LRGs) and even to produce reports such as VSRs (Ecuador’s CONGOPE and Costa Rica’s UNGL) and 11 VLRs.¹¹⁹

In **Argentina**, 20 out of 24 federated governments or *provincias* have signed a national commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda, aligned their strategies or policies with the SDGs and established a Federal SDG Network for Provincial Governments. Also, large cities, such as Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Rosario, have aligned the SDGs with various plans and policies and developed a set of indicators.¹²⁰ Buenos Aires (2019, 2020) and the province of Santa Fe (2019) have already published VLRs; Cordoba is working with the OECD on a Territorial Development Approach for SDGs.¹²¹ Other local governments, such as those of Avellaneda, General Villegas, Lincoln, Quilmes, Santa Fe city, Tandil and Villa Maria, have also made notable progress in integrating the SDGs into their plans and in developing awareness-raising activities with their staff and with civil society. Lincoln, for example, has already achieved 58% of the targets that it initially defined.

In **Brazil**, the dissolution of the original national commission for the SDGs, which included representatives from all sectors, including local governments, has had a negative impact on coordination and effectively stopped national-level support. The association CNM has, however, continued to work with CSOs and to develop SDGs through awareness-raising actions. The CNM seeks to continue working on the 2030 Agenda and to include it in all its projects. It also promotes awards that highlight the applicability of the SDGs in good municipal management practices. The CNM’s interactive platform: Mandala, allows Brazilian mayors to assess how their municipalities are doing in the process of achieving the SDGs and makes it possible for them to prepare local reports and goal plans.¹²² An improved version of the Mandala is currently being developed, however, due to the unfavourable national political climate, the project has not been finalised.¹²³ The Frente Nacional de Prefeitos (FNP) also actively participates in the multi-stakeholder SDG Strategy, together with representatives

from civil society organisations, the private sector, academia and local governments.¹²⁴ The LGA is running training sessions, delivering communications, aligning municipal management instruments with the SDGs and their indicators, sharing methodologies, and establishing and consolidating a bank of best practices. The *Índice de Desenvolvimento Sustentável das Cidades Brasil* (Sustainable Development Index of Brazilian Cities) is an initiative of the Sustainable Cities Program in alliance with the SDSN. It has classified 770 Brazilian municipalities and monitors their implementation of the SDGs.¹²⁵

At the local level, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo have integrated the SDGs into their strategic plans.¹²⁶ Sao Paulo has created an Inter-Departmental Working Group on the SDGs pursued by the municipal government and developed a consultative process, in 2020, identifying at least 500 localized and locally measurable indicators.¹²⁷ Linking the SDGs with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Federal District (Brasilia) published a report listing the main measures taken in line with the 2030 Agenda.¹²⁸ The municipality of Belo Horizonte published its VLR in 2020¹²⁹ and, since 2015, created a multi-stakeholder Millennium Observatory which has contributed to the monitoring of the SDGs.¹³⁰ In Santana de Parnaíba, all communications relating to specific projects are also associated with the SDGs that they contribute to. At the federated state level, the state of Parana has mainstreamed the SDGs within its budgetary planning.¹³¹

The *Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades* (ACHM), in **Chile**, has designed training sessions for local authorities and their technical staff, but it considers that the SDGs have not yet permeated the majority of the country's municipalities. People's attention has, instead, been mainly concentrated on large-scale social mobilisation and constitutional reform. For the **Ecuadorian** association of provincial governments: CONGOPE, SDG localization is "the only way to solve structural problems and where the efforts of institutions and their planning processes should be directed". It launched in 2021 its second VSR (see Box 3.7). The city of Quito has confirmed the alignment of its development plan and Climate Action Plan with the SDGs.¹³² It is also developing a plan for risk prevention associated with natural disasters. Riobamba was recognised among the 55 best practices identified by the *Pacto Global Red Ecuador* as having made a key contribution to the SDGs.¹³³

The *Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales* (UNGL) of **Costa Rica** continues to organize

BOX 3.7

The second VSR presented by CONGOPE: the Ecuadorian association of provinces

The data collected in 2021, for the 2nd VSR, show that 17 provincial governments have mainstreamed the 2030 Agenda into their territorial development plans and land-use planning, while 58.8% of them have generated indicators to monitor implementation. However, 76% of provincial governments have not been involved in the national reporting process. This shows a regressive trend in relation to the 86.7% that participated in the first report. Currently, eight provincial governments have strengthened local alliances with universities, civil society organisations and other partners. A further 4 provincial governments have indicated that international actors have also been involved in the process, while 3 provincial governments mention that their work with central and international networks has increased. 65% of the provincial governments have promoted training and awareness-raising action among their local populations.

The main challenges identified for the localization process are: financing, better collaboration with the national government, strengthening partnerships with the private sector in order to support decentralization and promote territorial development; reinforcing local information systems and improving international projection of the provincial governments. They propose a "New Territorial Pact" to strengthen collaboration between the different levels of government and the main actors in each territory and to build a joint vision for the future, support territorial development, and promote greater decentralization.

Source: CONGOPE, *2nd Voluntary Subnational Review* (2021)

training sessions on SDGs for the municipalities in all the country. The city of San Jose is currently adopting the Municipal Development Plan 2021-2025, which includes the SDGs. Other cities in Central America, such as San Salvador, in **El Salvador**, and Tegucigalpa, in **Honduras**, have also integrated the SDGs into their urban plans. In the former, this was done in 2018; in the latter, it is planned for 2021.¹³⁴ In **Peru**, where the national development strategy is aligned with the SDGs and includes the territorial dimension, Lima is preparing its 2021 VLR, while Chimbote and Trujillo drafted theirs on SDG 11 last year.¹³⁵

The Middle East and West Asia

In spite of the complex political and humanitarian situation in the MEWA countries, LRGs in Lebanon, Palestine and, especially, Turkey, continue to promote SDGs localization. In fact, according to the survey results, LGAs from these countries show a high level of awareness of the 2030 Agenda (75%) and, in the case of LRGs (14 answers), 69% of their respondents have either adopted a political commitment, a formal strategy, or an action plan to localize the SDGs in their territories.

In **Lebanon**, in 2019, Cites Unies Liban/BTVL held SDG training sessions within the framework of a decentralized cooperation project involving the French department of Aude. The Union of Dannieh Municipalities has been working on the SDGs since 2017 and is now in the process of opening a specific centre dedicated to SDGs (Dannieh Sustainable Development Centre), working with NGOs to spread the word about the SDGs.

Despite the present critical situation, the Association of **Palestinian** Local Authorities (APLA) has issued a booklet (SDGs: What Local Administrations Need to Know), targeting local authorities with a simplified roadmap for achieving the SDGs.¹³⁶ The LGA has also raised awareness of the importance of the SDGs through the “Good Citizenship and Good Governance” campaign: a set of short videos disseminated via local media and social media sites. APLA will also develop a web platform to showcase the contribution of local authorities towards achieving the SDGs.

In **Turkey**, the Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU) continues to disseminate the SDGs¹³⁷ and organised a training session entitled “Cities 2030: Sustainable Development Goals at Local Level”, in 2020, in cooperation with UN SDSN and Bogazici University.¹³⁸ In the 2020 edition of the Golden Ant Award, organised by the MMU, the LGA rewarded good practices implemented by its member municipalities which were aligned with the SDGs.¹³⁹ The Turkish municipalities of Karatay, Sultanbeyli and Izmir are also developing a VLR in 2021. In October 2020, Konya organised the Municipality Academy, with the support of UCLG-MEWA, in order to increase cooperation among municipalities and exchange best practices under the umbrella of the SDGs.¹⁴⁰ Since 2019, the Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net) has gathered together 20 of the country’s municipalities to exchange knowledge and learn from each other in order to work towards achieving the SDGs.¹⁴¹ Amman is currently developing a VLR, to be launched in 2021.

North America

US cities and territories lead the race towards sustainability despite some of the difficulties posed by the previous Administration’s policies. Examples, in terms of SDG localization, were the VLRs published, in 2020, by Hawaii and Pittsburgh, following those by the pioneering cities of New York City and Los Angeles (2018 and 2019). The Los Angeles VLR’s structure was designed so that groups of residents could participate not only in the analysis, but also in the adaptation of the indicators set. This made it possible to use indicators that were more representative of the reality of the different neighbourhoods involved, which helped to localize the SDGs by really adapting them to local contexts and the needs of their communities.¹⁴² In **Canada**, following those produced by Winnipeg, in 2019 and 2020, Kelowna’s first VLR was published in 2021, thanks to a joint undertaking involving the CSOs British Columbia Council for International Cooperation and Global Empowerment Coalition of the Central Okanagan, working in close consultation with the City of Kelowna, as well as with regional, provincial and federal government agencies, CSOs, academia, and indigenous organisations.¹⁴³ The Federation of Canadian Municipalities helps to implement the SDGs through its domestic and international programmes and makes reference to them in its communications to its Board of Directors, in relation to women in leadership and international programming.

Actions of the global networks of local and regional governments

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped the global networks of local and regional governments, gathered together in the GTF, from promoting the SDGs and fostering alliances to accelerate the localization process. On the contrary, many of them have linked their recovery action to the SDG process. The following pages summarise (in alphabetical order) the main action undertaken by some of the 25 major international LRG networks that have contributed to, and advocated, global policy processes that incorporate local views.

The **Assembly of European Regions** (AER) has continued to foster exchanges of experiences in localizing the SDGs amongst its members: webinar on “Localising Agenda 2030: How regions can help meet the SDGs” and a workshop on “Achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Cohesion policy”. AER is

now preparing the Conference: “Agenda 2030: Transforming Regions, Changing the World”, which has been postponed until October 2021 due to COVID-19. AER has also worked with the European institutions and advocates the fullest possible involvement of regional governments in the follow-up process and a review of the goals established. It has written a position paper on what is needed to localize the SDGs and accelerate progress towards achieving them.

In 2020, the Euro-Latin American Alliance for Cooperation among Cities (**AL-LAs**) published the 10th issue of its Learning Notebooks collection: *International Action in Times of Crisis: A Euro-Latin American perspective*.¹⁴⁴ This publication was based on learning workshops and consultation sessions used to gain knowledge from practical experience. It also highlights challenges and opportunities identified by local governments as a result of the public health emergency and how they could be linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, it sets out a series of guidelines to follow in order to take advantage of the international action carried out by local governments.

Over the last year, the **CEMR** has adopted its multiannual strategy, which is aligned with the 2030 Agenda, to make sure that the SDGs are mainstreamed into all of the work areas.¹⁴⁵ The CEMR has launched its 2021 study in conjunction with Platforma on the role of national associations of LRGs in localizing the SDGs in Europe and beyond. In 2021, the CEMR has also partnered the URBACT network of the European Commission in launching a new 18 month-pilot project called “Global goals 4 cities”. This supports a group of 19 municipalities, spread across Europe, and helps them to develop their own local SDG agendas, using the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities tool. Together with UCLG, Platforma has developed a new training module on SDGs and decentralized cooperation. **Platforma** has collaborated with the Joint Research Centre and with the Directorate General for International Partnerships of the European Commission, as well as with members of the European Parliament. It has done so in an attempt to ensure that SDG localisation remains a key topic within European development cooperation initiatives and strategies.

Cites Unies France (CUF) has a thematic group on SDGs that focuses on promoting international action and decentralized cooperation involving local governments to help achieve the 2030 Agenda. Its work has taken advantage of increased interest in the SDGs in France thanks to a context of political renewal. CUF has adapted UCLG and Platforma’s Learning Module 4 to suit

the requirements of French LRGs.¹⁴⁶ It is currently carrying out training action to help French local authorities and their partners to promote the inclusion of the SDGs in their decentralized cooperation projects.

In 2020-2021, the **Commonwealth Local Government Forum** (CLGF) has contributed input to the biennial Heads of Government Meetings regarding the important role of local government in achieving the SDGs. It has also contributed to specific focal areas: women’s political empowerment, and local economic development (LED), where the CLGF action has been supported by a project for the development of LED strategies and the implementation of bankable projects, involving over 20 different councils, and another involving ministries and LGAs from 12 countries. The CLGF is also offering support in localizing the SDGs to 9 countries, in partnership with their respective national LGA and pilot councils. The project focuses on developing plans for localizing the SDGs, implementing demonstration projects and advancing with monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure local government actions are fed into national SDG monitoring and reporting. Since 2016, its regional offices in Southern Africa, West Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific have organised 22 regional events, focusing on raising awareness and sharing experiences relating to localizing the SDGs.

FLACMA has worked with UCLG in contributing to the VSR integration process in Mexico and Latin America. In Mexico, the focus has mainly been on integrating the technical team responsible for its preparation and coordinating local government collaborations. In Latin America, the work has involved raising interest among LGAs in developing VSRs in their respective countries and liaising with the relevant national bodies. These actions form part of the priorities established by FLACMA to promote the localization of the SDGs on a permanent basis. They have taken various forms, such as: political and technical forums and debates; exchanges of replicable experiences; learning and training events for technicians; partnerships with specialised international organisations; and the promotion of sustainable models for metropolitan areas, intermediate cities and rural areas, among others.

The **Global Fund for Cities Development** (GFCD, or FMDV in French) operates as a network of local governments dedicated to developing and promoting solutions to finance a sustainable urban transition. It has continued to support local and regional governments and to finance programmes that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through the International Municipal Investment Fund (IMIF), which was established



Local and Regional Governments' Day, held fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 10 July 2020 (image: UCLG-CGLU)

with the help of UCLG and UNCDF. The GFCD has also contributed to the development of country programmes dedicated to the challenge of financing cities in line with the SDGs (national policies, strengthening the intervention of national public banks at the local level, building up the capacity of national and local actors, etc.) and supported local authorities in organising specific tools to localize the SDGs. The latter have included: the preparation of an SDG bond by a European city, aligning city budgets with the impact of the SDGs, and organising a participatory budget targeted on achieving the SDGs.

Early in 2020, the **Global Parliament of Mayors** (GPM) launched the Mayors Act Now initiative to address the pandemic response (SDG 3/SDG 17). Mayors shared their best practices, solicited advice, and debated the impact of COVID-19 on the right to adequate housing¹⁴⁷ and how to improve the safer cities strategy¹⁴⁸ (SDG 11) while responding to the pandemic. The GPM mayors committed to the Resolution on Reducing Violence in Cities,¹⁴⁹ which supports SDG 16 and aims to reduce all forms of violence by 50% by 2030, in line with the UN Secretary General's Decade of Action Campaign. More than 60 cities, plus city networks representing over 1,500 cities and metropolitan areas, have signed this Resolution. The GPM pushes for structural change through actions like the UN75 open letter,¹⁵⁰ which was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General and included in the UN75 Report.¹⁵¹

Between 2018 and 2021, more than 1,200 cities, towns and regions, in more than 100 countries, took part in 146 activities organised by ICLEI. These included: charting the path towards low-emissions; promoting nature-based, resilient, circular and equitable development; and building a more sustainable urban world for everyone. While these 146 activities have addressed all 17 SDGs, those relating to cities (SDG 11), climate (SDG 13), energy (SDG 7), and consumption (SDG 12) have received the most intensive attention in ICLEI activities. Of these 146 activities, the Korean national programme—which has been organised in collaboration with the Local Sustainability Alliance and the Korean Ministry of Environment since 2018—is recognised as one of the best practices. As of 2021, ICLEI members were responsible for more than 60% of all the VLRs submitted to UN DESA. Building on this programmatic approach, and the pioneering work done by its network, ICLEI has become one of the leading institutions in accelerating SDG localization in this Decade of Action.

After investing EUR 8.35 million, in 2019, the **International Association of French-Speaking Mayors** (AIMF in French) has allocated EUR 8.53 million to finance specific projects and to localize the achievement of the SDGs in 2021. This will be used to provide access to essential services, to improve governance and local democracy, and to foster the deployment of culture and innovation. This sum has made it possible to deploy a quick response to the

COVID-19 pandemic. Other actions have included rehabilitating the main hospital in Beirut, after its destruction on 4 August 2020, and implementing COVID-19 response plans in more than 150 cities, in 15 different countries. The AIMF has provided continuity to all existing programmes and also sought to strengthen the capacity of LRGs to provide basic services to local populations. This has included providing sanitation facilities (in Yaounde, Hue, and Siem Reap, SDG 6), education (in Banfora, SDG 4) and healthcare (in Rusizi, SDG 3), as well as improving governance (for example, through a project to reduce corruption in Tunis, SDG 16).

The **Mayors Migration Council** (MMC) is a mayor-led advisory and advocacy organisation dedicated to migration and refugee-related governance. It has launched a Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response¹⁵² to respond to the needs of cities in low-income and middle-income countries which have had to provide support to migrants and displaced people during the COVID-19 crisis. The Fund's inaugural round financed 5 city-led projects, directly contributing to SDGs 11 and 17, and made possible projects for promoting access to healthcare for migrants (SDG 3), providing migrants and displaced residents with jobs (SDG 8), and strengthening sanitation services (SDGs 8 and 5). Convinced that local governments are essential for creating and implementing "well-managed migration policies" called for in SDG 10, the MMC partnered UCLG and IOM as part of the Mayors Mechanism to take 90 local government representatives to the 13th Global Forum on Migration and Development.¹⁵³ The MMC has also launched a Climate Migration Resource Hub,¹⁵⁴ which recognises the inherent link between SDGs 10 and 13.

Mercociudades has partnered local governments, universities and civil society organisations in working to develop awareness-raising campaigns and other localization projects. This year, these have focused on SDGs 5, 6, 10, 11 and 17.¹⁵⁵ This network also promotes the exchange of good practices for SDG localization through two different platforms. The first one is the *Observatorio de Cooperación de Ciudad y Universidad*, in alliance with the Uruguayan network of public universities.¹⁵⁶ The second one is promoted in partnership with the city of Rosario, Argentina.¹⁵⁷ Mercociudades has also taken the SDGs into account in action carried out under the umbrella of the "Mercociudades responds to COVID-19" strategy.¹⁵⁸ This strategy has led to the development of communication tools, financing opportunities, solidarity and cooperation actions, and exchanges of experiences for its

members, involving its partners. The second edition of the Mercociudades Resilience School also sought to offer a space for the exchange of information and experiences that could foster capacity building in this field.

Metropolis contributes to the 2030 Agenda through its strong commitment to the gender mainstreaming strategy present in 38 metropolitan indicators (23 of which are aligned with the SDG indicators) and the Urban Sustainability Exchange platform, which includes more than 390 urban cases that have been categorised in line with the SDGs. Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this association launched the website citiesforglobalhealth.org¹⁵⁹ in conjunction with AL-LAs and UCLG, to which over 660 initiatives were uploaded by almost 100 LRGs. Through the Pilot Project programme, Metropolis has also supported capacity development and knowledge exchange amongst more than 20 metropolises about specific challenges related to urbanization and SDG implementation.

ORU-Fogar collaborates with the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's work programme for 2020-2022 to strengthen the effectiveness of development at the subnational level in order to achieve the SDGs. Its aim is to provide leverage to the 2030 Agenda in order to find effective ways for development cooperation to support capacity building, foster knowledge brokering and promote practice-based innovation in local and regional administrations, all in line with SDG target 17.9. This is a key element as it facilitates the process of transferring and adapting the development effectiveness principles to the local level and, at the same time, ensuring that communities can influence national policies and priorities through local participatory processes that bring together a broad range of actors.

Regions4 has helped regional governments to accelerate their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda: the Community of Practice Regions4SDGs¹⁶⁰ is Regions4's flagship initiative for the localization of the SDGs. Its "RegionsVoice in UN reporting" series analyses the contributions of different regions to the 2030 Agenda through the "Voluntary Subnational Reviews". The series explores experiences on aligning the SDGs with legislation, annual budgets, indicators and disaggregated data. It does this by discussing practical tools and sharing knowledge and lessons to help improve the efficiency and coherence of current policy. It also supports further contributions by regional governments and the GTF to the HLPF. Regions4 also contributes to the SDGs through its thematic

initiatives. For example, RegionsAdapt¹⁶¹ seeks to help accelerate climate adaptation, and the Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform¹⁶² has been designed to support capacity building and cooperation on issues related to biodiversity.

The **Resilient Cities Network** seeks to provide a cross-cutting accelerator for the localization of SDGs 10 (reducing inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 13 (climate action). In putting its three thematic priorities (COVID-19 resilient recovery; climate resilience; and circular economy) into practice, the network looks to ensure that the actions it promotes are aligned with the overall scope of the SDGs. As an international organisation, the network also plays a leading role in global initiatives related to the localized implementation of the SDGs. Examples of this include: the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Campaign,¹⁶³ 1,000 Cities Adapt Now¹⁶⁴ and Cities for a Resilient Recovery.¹⁶⁵

Over the last year, the **Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities** (UCCI) has continued to run training sessions and exchanges amongst its cities, particularly associated with SDGs 8, 11, 13 and 17. It has also supported over 16 projects for SDG localization and for strengthening public services. Paulo's VLR and developing its SDG monitoring tools; Buenos Aires' project on climate action (SDG 13); several projects undertaken with Quito, San Salvador, Santo Domingo and Tegucigalpa, relating to resilience (SDG 11); Bogota's and Mexico City's projects for sustainable tourism (SDG 8); Lima's strategy to better understand human mobility and integration (SDG 10); Guatemala's initiative on digital governance (SDG 16); Brasilia's strengthening of socio-educational policies aimed at young people who have had problems with the law (SDGs 10 and 16), and La Paz's efforts to strengthen its institutions and disseminate best practices.

Building on the learning, advocacy and research activities undertaken in recent years, **UCLG** has strengthened its efforts on the localization of the 2030 Agenda and supported VLRs and VSRs. As mentioned above, UCLG has developed a new Learning Module on SDGs, which is linked to decentralised cooperation, in collaboration with Plataforma. UCLG also held the second edition of its Course on SDG localization with the Barcelona Provincial Council. **UCLG's regional sections** have also continued to contribute to accelerating SDG localization in this Decade of Action. For example, UCLG ASPAC, UCLG Africa and FLACMA, working closely with the UCLG World Secretariat, have been supporting the development of VSRs in their different regions (Indonesia in Asia-Pacific; Zimbabwe, Cape Verde and Tunisia in Africa, and

Mexico in Latin America), as explained above.

UCLG Africa has supported the LGAs of 34 countries in the region and helped to develop a roadmap. It did this taking into account state actors, such as local authorities, in the implementation of the new 2021-2027 phase of cooperation between the European Union and the African Union. This takes into consideration the 2030 Agenda, which emphasises the need to localize the SDGs. In line with the Addis Ababa Action Plan on Financing for Development, and to support the localization of the SDGs, UCLG Africa has also developed the Africa Territorial Agency (ATA). This is an instrument that allows local governments to access financial markets, working alongside development banks, institutions specialising in the financing of cities and local authorities, international financial institutions and investment funds.

UCLG ASPAC has continued to implement its two EU-funded flagship projects on SDGs: LOCALISE SDGs, which is aimed at strengthening the capacity of local governments and their associations to implement the SDGs in 16 provinces and 14 cities in Indonesia; and LEAD for SDGs, whose mission is to support the national government and provincial governments of Balochistan and Sindh, in Pakistan, and to strengthen local government public service delivery and to help it contribute to the localization and achievement of the Agenda 2030. As mentioned above, UCLG ASPAC is also cooperating with Surabaya City and UNESCAP to produce the city's first VLR.

UCLG-MEWA has been a key partner in facilitating work on the VLRs of Sultanbeyli (a district of Istanbul), Izmir Metropolitan Municipality (with SUD-Net and UN SDSN), Karatay (in Konya province) and Greater Amman (with UN-Habitat support, foreseen for 2022). These are the first VLRs produced for this region. Advisory board meetings, training programmes for staff and local partners, and awareness raising activities were all organised with the participation of NGOs, universities, unions of municipalities, central governments and representatives of the private sector. UCLG-MEWA will sign a memorandum of understanding with UN-Habitat to implement its SDG Cities initiative in the Middle East Region, which will include the follow-up to the previously mentioned VLRs and their objectives. Thanks to the strengthening of cooperation with the Union of Municipalities of Turkey, more cities within Turkey are now seeking UCLG-MEWA's assistance in preparing their respective SDG implementation strategies and VLRs. ●

3.4

Conclusions

As already underlined in this brief analysis of the process of SDG localization, there has been global progress and setbacks, particularly due to the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disparities between countries and local governments are currently growing with regard to the reporting process. As shown in Subsection 3.1, at the global level the involvement of LRGs in the national reporting process has not made much progress in 2021 compared with previous years (they have been consulted in 37% of the countries, as against 40% over the past 5 years). While progress is particularly significant in Europe and Asia-Pacific regions, the consultation of LRGs has decreased in Africa and Latin America and has been non-existent in the rest of the regions. Paradoxically, LRG efforts to report on SDG achievements through VLRs and VSRs have, however, been increased despite the pandemic. As mentioned above, these reports are paving the way for a new stage in the involvement of subnational governments in national and international dialogues to achieve the SDGs. Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go.

Similarly, with regard to national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs, figures show noticeably slower progress. LRGs have been consulted by, or are associated with, national coordination mechanisms in 21% of countries (29% in 2016-2020). Again, progress can be observed in Europe and in Asia-Pacific, but in Latin America and Africa setbacks have been observed. The evolution of national government policy may have a negative impact on local government action (e.g. in Brazil). In other regions, LRG involvement in coordination mechanisms continues to be very weak (Eurasia, MEWA). In all countries, the impact of COVID-19 has changed priorities, with administrations putting health and economic recovery at the centre of their local agendas. Meanwhile, LRGs have been developing local responses to protect their communities.

At the same time, the number of countries that mention LRGs in their VNRs has increased. Even so, the majority of countries have yet to define

or adopt specific strategies to promote and/or support the localization or territorialization of the SDGs and complement central sectoral strategies driven by their ministries. As seen during the pandemic, the absence of SDG localization strategies can undermine the policy coherence required for the recovery process and to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Countries with clear national localization strategies and with an enabling institutional framework for local governments are more advanced and make more progress in SDG localization (e.g. Colombia, Germany, Indonesia, Norway and Sweden, among the countries reporting in 2021). As shown from several examples, with adequate support and political commitment, LRGs in low-income and middle-low-income countries are also leading the localization process (e.g. Bolivia, Cape Verde and, in previous years, Benin, Kenya and Rwanda). However, as expected, LRGs in less developed countries stress their limited capacities and resources to fully engage in this process (e.g. Chad and Madagascar), but even in developed contexts, some countries are lagging behind in their localization efforts (e.g. Cyprus).

In federal countries, such as Mexico (and to a lesser extent Germany), federated states are often more involved than municipalities (with the exceptions of a few larger cities). This is also the case in some unitary countries with regional authorities (e.g. Niger). While regional authorities are associated with, or regularly consulted by, national coordination mechanisms, local governments often are not. Therefore, further efforts, and specially adapted programmes, need to be made to reach cities and municipalities.

In countries with a strong tradition of decentralization, local governments can be even more ambitious than many of their national goals, as shown by Norway's VSR targets for a green transition. In Spain, several regions and cities have also been developing localized SDG strategies that are more advanced than those of the national government. In countries where LRGs benefit from the legacy of a Local Agenda 21 (as in Denmark, Germany and South Korea), they have been quicker to adapt their commitments to the SDGs.

Countries with national localization strategies are currently developing policies to improve the capacities of their local governments, through actions such as decentralization policies (e.g. in Bolivia and Cape Verde). In contrast, in many countries with only limited degrees of decentralization (e.g. Angola, Azerbaijan and



Egypt), or where institutional arrangements to operationalize decentralization are not yet in place, localization strategies remain a pending issue (Chad, Tunisia, Zimbabwe).

In a few countries where the fragile institutional context limits the development of local government (e.g. Afghanistan and Iraq), and in a last group, in which local administrations are appointed by national governments (e.g. DPR Korea, Qatar and Saudi Arabia), the space for local ownership to support localization initiatives is very limited.

The country briefs reflect that, globally speaking, there has been progress in the alignment of the SDGs with local plans in almost all regions. In this regard, national policies and guidelines that support local development plans have played a decisive role. Since its first VNR in 2017, Colombia has pioneered the monitoring of the integration of the SDGs in local development plans. In other countries, conflicts and tensions have underlined the fact that strict and inflexible top-down approaches can limit local government initiatives. Therefore, the experience of some countries can show flexible ways. In Japan, the SDGs FutureCities initiative encourages autonomous local governments to integrate SDG priorities and promote greater local ownership. In China, which combines a traditional top-down approach with a system of relatively strong local government autonomy, particularly in its largest cities, cities like Guangzhou have developed ambitious strategies aligned with the SDGs.

Similarly, the coordination between different subnational levels of government to harmonise their plans and priorities has become central to supporting SDG strategies and monitoring efforts. In Indonesia, for example, divergent priorities between municipalities and provincial governments can act as an obstacle to coordination and reporting. The report from Mexico also stresses the need for

better integrated local governments and local stakeholder representation within the monitoring and implementation offices that are responsible for pursuing the SDGs at the federated state level. In this regard, the experience of Sweden, where municipalities and regions have a long tradition of network governance, based on collaboration between the two different levels and with strong involvement of citizens, can serve as an important reference.

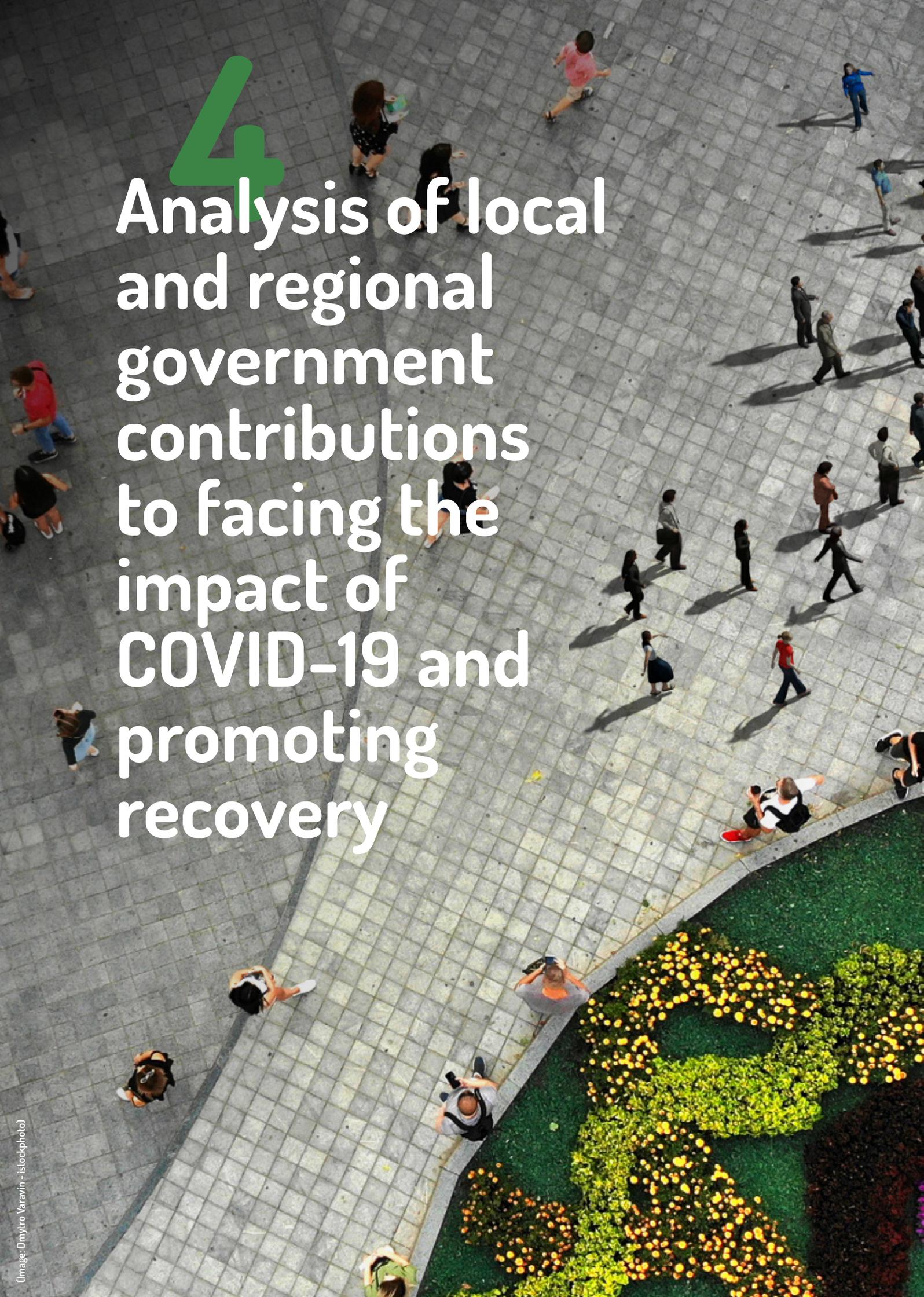
It is essential to monitor the implementation of local plans in order to ensure that the holistic approach envisaged by the SDGs is reflected in local projects and investments. The prioritisation of a specific set of goals and targets in local plans, which can be observed in almost all countries, also requires a deep analysis. While it seems natural for each territory to adapt the goals to its priorities, it is essential to support an integrated approach to the 2030 Agenda. Failure to create synergies, minimising trade-offs, and avoiding what is known as the silo approach can result in incoherent policies and have an adverse impact on development. Here, the question of monitoring and using indicators is critical, but remains a problem for the majority of LRGs. Even if some progress in developing localized indicators can be observed, this is a domain in which LRGs and countries are sadly lagging behind. With few exceptions, the national mechanisms used to collect subnational-level data are not working effectively (see Subsection 5.2, below).

At the global level, as in previous years, LRG networks and the GTF continue to play a key role in encouraging and supporting a more systematic local and regional implementation of the Global Agenda. Over the last year, there has been a multiplication in the number of virtual gatherings, conferences, workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, training actions, technical support sessions and pilot projects organised to promote greater SDG localization.

However, in all countries, limited multi-level governance arrangements and insufficient national government support and financing have been identified by LRGs as critical obstacles to accelerate the pace of the localization process. These are important challenges, and particularly so in Africa, Latin America and some countries in Asia-Pacific. Among the main opportunities generated by the SDGs, LRGs and LGAs both identify the possibility to improve planning processes and to make progress in the involvement of local stakeholders in local policy-making. All the LRGs and LGAs consulted hope to benefit from enhanced multi-level governance and improved national support in the future. ●



LRG networks and the GTF continue to play a key role in encouraging and supporting a more systematic local and regional implementation of the Global Agenda.



4 Analysis of local and regional government contributions to facing the impact of COVID-19 and promoting recovery



4.1

Introduction and methodology

This Section analyses local and regional government contributions towards the recovery from COVID-19. It adopts an approach based on the concept of “Health in All Policies” (HiAP). This provides a powerful and operational lens through which to conduct public policy across different sectors and to systematically consider the health implications of different decisions, detect synergies, and avoid harmful impacts on health (see Box 4.1). This Section therefore particularly focuses on health (SDG 3), looking for interlinkages with poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), employment and decent jobs (SDG 8), inequalities (SDG 10), addressing climate change and building up resilience (SDG 13), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), effective institutions (SDG 16) and partnerships for the SDGs (SDG 17).¹

The analysis of the initiatives implemented by LRGs is structured around 4 “pillars”, which have been inspired by the “5 Ps” of the 2030 Agenda: People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnerships. All the pillars follow the same structure. Firstly, they introduce a brief explanation of the pillar and the main impacts that COVID-19 has had on the SDGs concerned. Secondly, COVID-19 responses are presented by type and are related to concrete experiences

from LRGs around the world. The analysis takes into account the wide variety in the distribution of responsibilities across different LRG levels (also called “subnational government levels” or “SNG levels”; see Table 4.1) and the fact that responses may not necessarily apply to all the different levels of subnational government. The majority of countries have either one level or two levels of subnational government (approximately 30% and 48% of countries, respectively), whereas a minority of countries (28%) also have a third level (departments, districts, counties, etc.).² Furthermore, complexity in the distribution of responsibilities can also lead to competing and overlapping competences. For instance, in most federal countries, state governments (provinces, regions, *Länder*) have wider responsibilities than lower tiers of government. In general, state constitutions or laws, decide on the responsibilities devolved to, or shared with, municipal levels. In contrast, in unitary countries, the assignment of responsibilities is decided by national laws. Some of the responsibilities devolved to subnational governments may be mandatory, while others are optional. All these considerations are key factors to bear in mind, as they have a direct impact on how LRGs are responding to the pandemic and promoting sustainable responses and just recovery.

TABLE 4.1

Breakdown of responsibilities across subnational government levels: a general scheme

MUNICIPAL LEVEL	INTERMEDIARY LEVEL	REGIONAL LEVEL
<p>A wide range of responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General clause of competence • Eventually, additional allocations by the law <p>Community services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education (nursery, schools, pre-elementary and primary education) • Urban planning & management • Local utility networks (water, sewerage, waste, hygiene, etc.) • Local roads and city public transport • Social affairs (support for families and children, elderly, disabled, poverty, social benefits, etc.) • Primary and preventive healthcare • Public order and safety (municipal police, fire brigades) • Local economic development, tourism, trade fairs • Environment (green areas) • Social housing • Administrative and permit services 	<p>Specialised and more limited responsibilities of supra-municipal interest</p> <p>An important role of assistance towards small municipalities</p> <p>May exercise responsibilities delegated by the regions and central government</p> <p>Responsibilities determined by the functional level and the geographic area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary or specialised education • Supra-municipal social and youth welfare • Secondary hospitals • Waste collection and treatment • Secondary roads and public transport • Environment 	<p>Heterogeneous and more or less extensive responsibilities depending on countries (in particular, federal vs unitary)</p> <p>Services of regional interest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary/higher education and professional training • Spatial planning • Regional economic development and innovation • Health (secondary care and hospitals) • Social affairs, e.g. employment services, training, inclusion, support to special groups, etc. • Regional roads and public transport • Culture, heritage and tourism • Environmental protection • Social housing • Public order and safety (e.g. regional police, civil protection) • Local government supervision (in federal countries)

Cities and regions have reported that they are implementing a mixture of relief and recovery measures, while gradually restoring the capacity of local economies to transition to the post-COVID-19 phase in the medium-to-long term. However, in general, **there is no clear division between immediate responses (i.e. providing relief or emergency assistance) and recovery/rebuilding measures.** In fact, the immediate response phase is lasting longer in some

countries than was initially expected. In turn, this is holding back many measures specifically related to the recovery phase. It may therefore be more appropriate to **discuss the overall response in terms of “early recovery”**³. This involves providing support or relief measures as well as help with medium-to-long-term recovery. This entails policy measures that foster both human and economic resilience among other dimensions of sustainable development.

BOX 4.1

Health in All Policies

While health and well-being are explicitly addressed in SDG 3, health is also present as either a pre-condition, or a collateral endpoint, in other SDGs. Understanding the interlinkages between SDGs therefore remains critical for sustainable development and if societies are to address the current pandemic and recover from it. SDGs can be used to draw attention to the need to close gaps in the distribution of health impacts as well as to promote health gains. The Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach relies heavily on the use of scientific evidence and evaluation tools, such as health impact assessments. These assessments may include local-level quantitative analyses of disease estimates, health economic assessments, and the involvement of citizens and other stakeholders in integrating health recommendations into other sector-specific policies.⁴ **The term “SDG 3+” promotes the permeability of health and well-being as both a means and an end in the 2030 Agenda, looking beyond SDG 3. It considers health holistically and explicitly establishes connections with the other SDGs.**⁵ Nevertheless, only a few cities have adopted this approach so far. Although its potential is significant, it requires using tools such as health impact assessment planning and management. These, in turn, require adequately resourced and skilled LRG staff capable of effectively implementing the HiAP approach.



Example of a HiAP approach. Source: Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Humboldt County (USA)

4.2 “People” pillar



COVID-19 impact on SDGs 1, 2 and 3

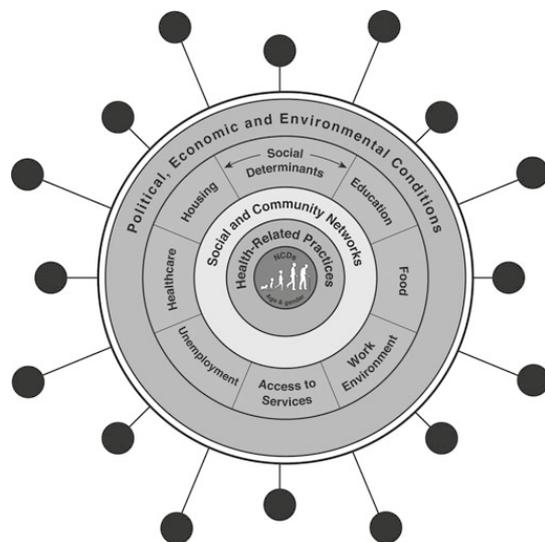
COVID-19 could reverse decades of progress in the fight against poverty and hunger: 119 to 124 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 and living standards could have fallen by 23%.⁶ The World Food Programme forecasted that **COVID-19 would double acute hunger globally by the end of 2020**, pushing an additional 83-132 million people into chronic hunger in 2020.⁷ Currently, with close to 170 million COVID-19 cases and over 3.5 million deaths worldwide (as of the end of May), the effects of the pandemic and the measures taken to mitigate its impact have overwhelmed health systems worldwide and threaten to reverse the progress made so far towards achieving SDG 3. **This public health crisis has exposed the risks for humanity of allowing poverty and underlying inequalities to continue increasing:** both have fuelled the risk of COVID-19 infection transmission, hospitalisation and mortality.⁸

Women, young people, older people, people living and working informally, ethnic and sexual minorities, people with functional diversity and structurally discriminated populations, in general, have all been disproportionately impacted by the health, economic and labour-related consequences of the crisis. This synergy of simultaneous epidemics has been referred to as a “syndemic”: the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic have been magnified by the effects of poverty and the existence of concurrent health problems, such as epidemics, obesity and malnutrition, and other sources of vulnerability, such as the effects of climate change. The pandemic has also been accompanied by a series of social and political crises (see Figure 4.1).⁹

Many cities and territories are currently seeing a dramatic increase in poverty. The impact has been greatest amongst structurally discriminated populations, who are most vulnerable to having their livelihoods disrupted. At the same time, the pandemic has exposed weaknesses at all levels of the food system,

FIGURE 4.1

The COVID-19 syndemic, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the social determinants of health



Source: Bambra C. et al. (2020)¹⁰

particularly affecting food supplies into cities on every continent. Over 70 countries have halted childhood vaccination programmes and, in many places, health services such as screening for cancer, family planning, and the treatment of non-COVID-19 infectious diseases have also either been interrupted (e.g. global campaigns to eradicate polio) or neglected. Health service disruptions could reverse decades of improvement and adversely affect public health for years to come, leading to a spike in illnesses and deaths from both communicable and non-communicable diseases.¹¹ The pandemic has also highlighted the shortage of medical personnel worldwide, as well as the heavy burden placed on women, who comprise the majority of the health and social sector workforce (e.g. 90% of nursing personnel are women).¹² Mental health is in an unprecedented global crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered bouts of mental illness, sometimes resulting in depression and even suicide.¹³

Even so, the COVID-19 crisis provides a historic opportunity to innovate and provide a full range of essential local public services, including health and social services, and to make these available to all populations. **The crisis has brought to the fore the need to develop cities and territories that care for their citizens and uphold their essential rights of access to public health, adequate housing, basic services and a livelihood.** In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis has shown how approaches based on participation, solidarity and respect for human rights can generate new paths towards inclusive development.



The containment and mitigation measures undertaken by LRGs have been key to limiting the adverse effects of COVID-19 on poverty and hunger, and to extending access to social protection and basic services for the populations which are most vulnerable.

Local and regional government actions to take care of their communities and preserve health and well-being

The containment and mitigation measures undertaken by LRGs have been key to limiting the adverse effects of COVID-19 on poverty and hunger. LRGs have played an important role in extending access to social protection and basic services for the populations which are most vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic. The efforts of LRGs have had a critical role in alleviating the plight of the 4 billion people that still live without social protection.¹⁴ While national governments have played diverse roles in responses to the pandemic, **in many regions, it has been largely subnational levels of government that have been directly involved in providing responses and mitigating the effects of the pandemic on a day-to-day basis.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, SDG 3 has become the overarching goal for all the pillars of sustainable development. The health crisis has focused attention on access to vaccines, ensuring access to medical care, and the thorough cleaning of shared spaces. LRGs have also addressed the need to ensure essential livelihoods, encouraged solidarity in their communities and promoted healthy lifestyles beyond the pandemic.

Addressing urban poverty and the right to adequate housing

The pandemic, and especially lockdowns and “Stay at home” campaigns, have spotlighted a housing crisis that pre-dates the pandemic, but which COVID-19 has worsened.¹⁵ The number of slum dwellers continues to grow, as underlined earlier this year by the UN Secretary-General’s report.¹⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the health risks posed by inadequate and unaffordable housing (see Figure 4.2). In addition, the economic recession, a lack of resources and limited options for recovery have led people already at risk of losing their homes to do so in a matter of weeks, rather than within 6 or 7 years of them becoming unemployed, which was the typical time from job loss to homelessness.¹⁷

FIGURE 4.2

How housing can improve health and well-being



Source: WHO¹⁸

Many cities have taken urgent action to stop evictions and help homeless people who suffer a high risk of infection and death from COVID-19. **Such actions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that addressing homelessness, and the global housing crisis, is indeed possible. Toronto, Bratislava and Madrid** have rehoused their homeless populations in secure, socially distanced accommodation. **Vienna and Barcelona** have suspended evictions when residents cannot pay their rent due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. **New York City** has called for a rent freeze for 2.3 million tenants across the city amid the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁹ Many other LRGs, such as the **Tokyo Metropolitan Government**, have made hotel rooms and municipally-owned housing temporarily available for people pushed into homelessness by COVID-19.²⁰ One critical question remains: how will cities and territories maintain such emergency provisions to support the most vulnerable after the last wave of COVID-19 has been controlled?²¹

Another key issue relates to the **measures implemented to prevent contagion and**

provide emergency housing. These must be combined with the implementation of social protection measures to reduce long-term socio-economic vulnerability. LRGs are currently implementing innovative initiatives in this regard. In **Brussels**—with the support of municipal public services, neighbourhood committees and CSOs—the L'ilot association has established means of helping homeless people to find housing and to re-enter society through the labour market. Moreover, the Centre for the Prevention of Conjugal and Family Violence has provided housing to women escaping situations of domestic violence.²² **Kuala Lumpur** and its surrounding areas are now implementing a similar initiative: homeless people are actively contacted and provided with housing and basic needs, as well as given medical attention. They are also offered professional assistance to re-enter the labour market.²³

The COVID-19 crisis has also brought to the fore the need for quality living space, especially during lockdowns. Contrary to the first general assumption that population density was the main factor responsible for increasing the

spread of COVID-19, other factors have been proven to play key roles in making certain populations and territories more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others. In this regard, inadequate housing conditions and limited access to basic services and public space are particularly important. This is especially the case in areas with a high concentration of urban poverty and in which pre-existing health conditions and social infrastructure have made populations more vulnerable to the pandemic.²⁴ The living conditions of many slums and informal settlements have led to higher incidences of infection and fatalities and often put health infrastructure under severe stress.²⁵ In response, LRGs are implementing a wide range of measures to contain the virus in these contexts. These include deploying emergency public service facilities to underserved areas and expanding existing medical care and containment facilities. Such initiatives are often accompanied by social policies and the rapid provision of new infrastructure in order to provide access to water and public sanitation in poor neighbourhoods and marginalised areas. Initiatives to upgrade informal settlements have been key during the pandemic and will continue to be important in building up preparedness for future crises.²⁶ In the Dharavi slum, which is one of the largest in Asia, **Mumbai's** local authorities have introduced or increased measures such as: free tests for residents; fever camps to scan for symptoms; quarantine facilities; and strategies to overcome vaccine hesitancy. In **Freetown** (Sierra Leone), the city government has accelerated plans to install large rainwater harvesting systems in 68 of the city's most water-deprived communities.²⁷

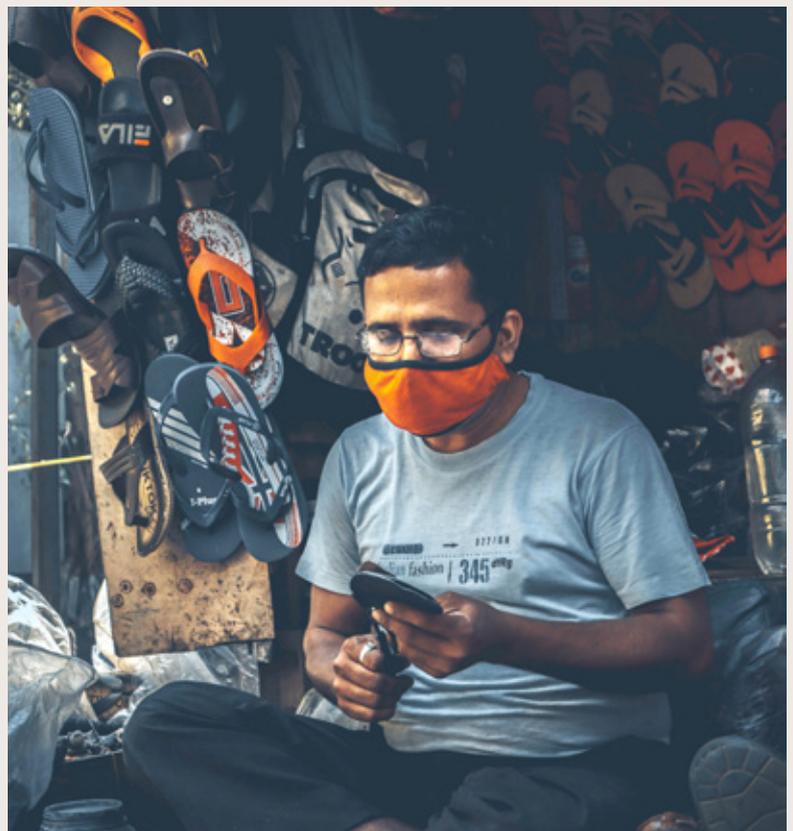
Overall, the health crisis has rekindled the debate about whether dense or sprawling cities should be promoted. So far, the conclusion is that **it is not so much a question of the density of the city but rather the quality of housing and living standards that must be questioned.**²⁸ The number of slum dwellers in the world will undoubtedly increase as a result of the crisis. As such, it is critical that recovery policies include urgent measures to guarantee all populations the right to adequate housing; if not, the already critical housing crisis being faced worldwide will worsen dramatically. Ensuring the right of populations to adequate housing is an increasingly important priority for LRGs. Particularly since 2018, the global movement of cities for adequate housing has been campaigning for increased capacities with which to address the global housing emergency facing their territories. The municipalist "Cities for Adequate Housing" declaration, presented

at the 2018 HLPF, is currently supported by over 50 LRGs from around the world.²⁹

Ensuring access to healthy food for structurally discriminated populations

The pandemic has intensified the already important vulnerabilities and inadequacies in global food systems, pushing more people into chronic hunger.³⁰ Covering basic food needs requires coordinated, multi-sector action and LRGs can play an important role in this. For example, during the pandemic, the **Lazio region** (Italy) brought together many stakeholders (including regional authorities, the association of municipalities, and business federations), through a memorandum of understanding, in an effort to **coordinate food supplies to the most vulnerable sectors of society and those suffering food insecurity.** The targeted population included older persons, people with health problems, and pregnant women, amongst others.³¹ A similar initiative was implemented by **Iriga** (the Philippines): during lockdowns, the "Vegetables on Wheels" project seeks to help citizens with mobility issues by bringing them goods produced by local farmers.³² In **Ahmedabad** (India), the city government has

Mumbai, India.
(Image: omkar-thali-uxCIYDtUrGA-unsplash)





facilitated collaboration between rickshaw drivers and street vendors to enable the latter to sell their produce along designated routes.³³ **Dakar** has organised a food aid programme in all 19 municipalities of the city.³⁴ Via the "Full Plate" project (*Prato Cheio*), the **National Confederation of Municipalities of Brazil** has organised the distribution of products to meet basic necessities in municipalities with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants and with low scores on the Human Development Index.³⁵ In Serbia, following an initiative of the **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities**, hygiene and food packages were distributed to vulnerable families from the Roma community in the cities of **Belgrade** and **Prokuplje**.³⁶

All over the world, many children heavily rely on school meals to guarantee their basic daily food intake. As schools were closed due to the pandemic, families faced an even bigger need for food. **Makati** (the Philippines) distributed around 82,000 food packs to students after school closures left children without school meals.³⁷ **Curitiba** (Brazil) is giving families enrolled in a national programme ("*Bolsa Familia*") an additional BRL 70 (around USD 13) a month for food credits to be used at local markets. Around 120,000 children are covered by this programme.³⁸

In cities with a high prevalence of informality, LRGs are implementing targeted initiatives to promote food security. Adopting a strategy of food market decentralization, especially in informal settlements, **Lagos** has used closed schools as markets. This initiative allows people to buy food and medicine closer to their homes, thus avoiding the need to travel long distances and encounter large crowds in central markets.³⁹ **Mexico City** has implemented food voucher programmes to support low-income households and micro-businesses in 13 of its 16 municipalities.⁴⁰ **Delhi** has set up food kitchens and school meal programmes that are helping to feed low-income communities, people paid daily wages and others unable to work due to lockdowns.⁴¹ **Cape Town** has also launched a website where NGOs can register to map and track food distribution during the COVID-19 crisis. The data will be used to identify and address oversupply and undersupply, thus promoting a more efficient and effective use of resources.⁴²

Urban agriculture has also contributed to food security. The FAO has launched City Region Food Systems in various cities in collaboration with their local governments. This approach helps to organise food systems in a more effective and sustainable manner in order to meet producer and consumer demands. It does so by promoting

Approaches such as FAO's City Region Food Systems help to organize food systems in a more effective and sustainable manner in order to meet producer and consumer demands by promoting local food production, fostering shorter supply chains and strengthening urban-rural linkages.

local food production (especially by farming families and small landowners) and fostering shorter supply chains. This approach also helps to strengthen urban-rural linkages and to maintain (or promote) diversity in the food supply chain and distribution channels (from farm to fork).⁴³

Some of these experiences may be lasting and complemented by other pre-existing international initiatives to combat climate change and reduce food shortages. Several local government networks have been created to share experiences on food security and sovereignty.⁴⁴ The **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact**, signed in 2015 by over 100 cities, aims to tackle food-related issues at the urban level.⁴⁵ Mayors are working with their citizens to achieve a "Planetary Healthy Diet" for all by 2030, providing balanced and nutritious food which reflects the culture, geography and demography of local populations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have also played an important role in reducing food waste.⁴⁶ **Many LRGs are developing local food systems to foster new, more local and shorter food and agricultural chains.**⁴⁷ **Quito's** assessment of its urban and peri-urban agricultural system, within the RUAFA global partnership, and its adoption of the Quito Food Strategy helped to make the food problem facing the city during the pandemic more visible. It has also served as the basis for drawing maps that allow the municipality to identify and target where assistance is most needed.⁴⁸

Similarly, LRG action to foster solidarity at the community and neighbourhood levels has been crucial in providing direct care to people, especially during national lockdowns. Many of these initiatives will be continued. They constitute promising alternatives for promoting care and localizing food systems.

COVID-19 prevention measures in public places and physical and mental health

LRGs have played a key role in redefining public spaces for the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These have included providing free mass COVID-19 testing at community facilities. Many cities have temporarily repurposed sport halls, stadiums or public parking lots to establish provisional health centres. Cities like **London**,⁴⁹ **Daegu**,⁵⁰ **Dubai**⁵¹ and **Taipei** have also promoted drive-through testing sites in order to alleviate overcrowding at hospitals and reduce the risk of contagion. Several villages in **Andalucia** (Spain) set up community testing at mobile clinics.⁵² Many other LRGs, worldwide, have made hand sanitisers available in streets and other public spaces. They have also installed handwashing points in some streets. These are connected to public water supply facilities in different parts of the city and seek to allow citizens to wash their hands frequently, thus curbing the spread of the virus.⁵³

With regard to vaccines, the ability to locally address inequalities in access to vaccination depends on how much control LRGs have over their own vaccine allocations. It often also depends on whether the political leadership of some LRGs is aligned with that of their respective regional, state or national authorities. In Brazil, for example, the **Frente Nacional de Prefeitos** has led a collective initiative: the National Vaccine Consortium of Brazilian Cities, which has advocated the acquisition of vaccines, medicines, supplies and health equipment at the municipal level.⁵⁴ In the **District of Columbia**, after recognising the disproportionate access to vaccines of the wealthier sectors of the population, specific measures were implemented to correct this imbalance. These included increasing the number of vaccines available to the less wealthy, as well as increasing the number of workers helping people make appointments through its call centre. A similar strategy is being implemented in the **Seine-Saint-Denis** department in France. This is one of the country's poorest areas and only slow progress has been made there with vaccination.⁵⁵

Some cities have used smart city technologies to prevent and control the spread of the COVID-19 virus. For instance, **Seoul** undertook advanced targeted testing and contact-tracing to curb the spread of the virus from the initial outbreak.⁵⁶ **Newcastle** (Australia) monitors whether or not citizens are respecting social distance.⁵⁷ **Los Angeles** is working in partnership with a citizen-led mobile app to improve contact tracing.⁵⁸ **Gijon** (Spain) has designed a personal and non-

FIGURE 4.3

Why cities need more green spaces and even more than ever



Source: ISGlobal⁵⁹

transferable “citizen card”. This has replaced other identification systems and includes personal data that has allowed the city to create a vast database with which to manage future public health crises. There has, however, been some concern about the capturing and use of personal data during the pandemic. Some city networks advocate the protection of digital rights. They have pledged to respect and protect digital rights and to uphold them as human rights on the internet, both at the local and global levels (see below, in the Subsection on “Communications and digital connectivity”, the example of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights).

The importance to public health of ensuring that populations have access to public and open spaces has been highlighted more than ever by the pandemic (see Figure 4.3). At the start of the pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions on the mobility of the populations led to the public spaces being perceived as potentially dangerous places. As the crisis unfolded, however, populations and LRGs alike increasingly acknowledged that access to quality public and green spaces was essential for the health of all.⁶⁰ Natural or green urban spaces provide places for physical activity and socialisation that also allow security distancing. In **British cities**, green space has played an important role in allowing people to meet family and friends. People with easy access to a nearby garden or park are more likely to report feeling calm, peaceful and energetic.⁶¹

New York City rapidly deployed its parks departments to reconfigure its public green spaces (through tactical interventions; modified signage; civic agents; and the repurposing of certain areas) to ensure that people could safely engage in outdoor activities.⁶² **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) has been very successful in curbing the spread of the virus thanks to the use of its public spaces (see Box 4.2).

Public, open spaces also foster local, active mobility. Over the past year, many cities have reconfigured traffic lanes to increase the space available for pedestrians and cyclists. At times, this has been done in the hope that these tactical, emergency interventions could become permanent after the recovery phase (for more information see the “Planet” Subsection, below). For instance, **Melbourne** (Australia) is planning to reconfigure a business area to create a livelier urban environment for walking, eating and other outdoor activities. Meanwhile, **Vancouver** has prioritised the development of a plan for parks and recreational areas to ensure adequate and equitable access for all of its inhabitants.⁶³

BOX 4.2

How Freetown mobilizes its public spaces to curb the spread of COVID-19

In Freetown, congestion at markets has been a major source of concern for the city council. The municipality has taken various initiatives to rehabilitate 15 markets, facilitating social distancing and providing access to water to enable proper handwashing and access to sanitation. The upgrading of facilities has been extensive. The work done has included reforming roofs, ceilings, interior railings, windows and doors. It has also entailed providing markets with water tanks and water harvesting systems. There are also new initiatives underway to prevent COVID-19 contagion at markets. These include the designation of market monitoring teams at 23 markets around Freetown. These teams are made up of marshals from the traders’ council and market stakeholders. Their aim is to raise the awareness of traders and buyers of the importance of respecting COVID-19 prevention measures during trading hours. They also seek to ensure that traders and buyers use face masks and wash their hands properly before entering the market. They also promote measures to ensure that markets do not become overcrowded.

Source: Aki-Sawyer, Y., Freetown City Council (2021)⁶⁴

This crisis has also shown that the design of public space must take into account the daily needs of people in an inclusionary manner.⁶⁵

In **Oakland** (USA), this inclusionary perspective has been operationalised through consultations with local inhabitants. These have taken place in the city’s poorest neighbourhoods, such as East Oakland, where black and Latino communities do not generally participate in citizen consultation mechanisms. The city has also implemented the “Slow Streets: Essential Places” programme. This is a mixture of permanent and temporary improvements relating to traffic safety, which seeks to provide residents with safer access to essential services in their respective neighbourhoods. This includes, for instance, improving access to grocery stores and COVID-19 testing sites.⁶⁶ Overall, these initiatives have helped to shift the perception of roads from being spaces associated with pollution and accidents to being healthy spaces that promote active mobility, biodiversity, and the celebration of local culture.⁶⁷

In sum, the crisis has highlighted the problems posed by current urban development trends and the need to profoundly rethink cities. Planning could play an important role in this regard.⁶⁸

Too often, cities are designed for cars that erode public recreational and green space.⁶⁹ In the densest urban spaces, it is crucial to create interstices: small nearby green public spaces. Thinking about this may lead to renewed considerations of mixed-use areas, proximity and polycentric urbanism. It is particularly important to ensure access to essential public services and open and green spaces. The potential of these spaces having positive impacts on the health and well-being of citizens can be enhanced by including such objectives in the design of urban spaces. Some LRGs have taken into account spatial inequalities in order to tackle the urgent need for a more equitable distribution of access to public services, open public spaces and amenities for all. Ensuring the inclusiveness of these spaces is critical. Moreover, it is particularly important that such spaces should be equally available to people living in overcrowded areas, who face a high risk of COVID-19 contagion, as well as to neighbourhoods that are poorly connected to public infrastructure and services, such as informal settlements and certain suburban areas.⁷⁰ These lessons could play a determinant role in curbing the current trend towards spatially fragmented cities and growing territorial inequalities (for a deeper analysis, see the Subsection on “Local government mitigation and adaptation initiatives within the framework of the pandemic” in the “Planet” pillar, below).



Sao Paulo, Brazil.
(Image: dennis-siqueira-
TqSVEKceq3Q-unsplash)

Cities and regions that care for their public service workers

The crisis has highlighted the importance of protecting public employees, and particularly those who provide healthcare and social services. These are people who are directly exposed to potential COVID-19 contagion, work exhaustion and psychological harm. They also include, but are not limited to, those who provide care services in other people's homes and who take care of people with disabilities or children. **The pandemic has also highlighted the need to properly acknowledge the crucial role played by other public service professionals who ensure the functioning of our cities and territories.** These include, but are not limited to:

people working to provide water, energy, waste, sanitation, transportation and/or energy-related services; cleaning and maintenance staff; funeral service workers; firefighters; and municipal police officers, to name but a few. In some cases, as in that of **Sao Paulo**, these public workers have taken action to guarantee that more people can work in public services and thereby reduce the pressure placed on services that were under stress.⁷¹

Managing waste has emerged as another priority area during the pandemic; this can have a direct impact on public health. In cities around the world, inefficient, insufficient or simply non-existent waste management and disposal systems affect more than 2 billion people, and particularly in low-income countries.⁷² The

pandemic has increased the challenge of waste management. This has been largely due to the increased need to dispose of sanitary materials, such as gel, masks and other protection kits. It has also been due to the increased need for service delivery during lockdowns. In the initial phase of the pandemic, LRGs had to ensure the continuity of solid waste management during lockdowns. They often did this by declaring it an essential activity, subject to emergency measures and new regulations.

Additional protection measures for waste management workers, together with measures to increase the availability of information, and raise awareness, have been promoted in the majority of countries. These initiatives have sought to ensure workers' safety and the continuity of public service provision. They have usually been complemented with COVID-19 prevention campaigns and the provision of adequate waste management at the household and business levels.⁷³ Examples of this have included: engaging in dialogue with public service unions to find shared solutions; applying the highest possible safety standards for public service workers (including providing personal protective equipment) and users; maintaining and ensuring the continuity of vital services; and guaranteeing adequate service staffing levels, training, and retention policies.⁷⁴

Based on these experiences and lessons, **the concept of "caring cities and territories"** has arisen as a critical dimension for ensuring the future of cities. It is based on the enforcement of the right to the city, an approach which was adopted by the UN Habitat III Conference. ●



Key topics for further reflection:

- Throughout the worst of the pandemic, LRGs, supported by their associations, have worked tirelessly at the frontline of the crisis in order to safeguard the rights and health of communities via local public service delivery and the implementation of sanitary measures.
- The crisis has highlighted the crucial need to develop cities and territories that care for their inhabitants: supporting the essential rights of their citizens to have access to health, adequate housing, essential services and livelihoods. Experience shows how approaches based on participation, solidarity and respect for human rights can generate new pathways towards more inclusive development.
- The Health in All Policies approach provides a framework through which to include health transversely, across different sectors, and simultaneously address most of the SDGs. However, to date, relatively few cities have adopted this approach or required the application of tools such as health impact assessment planning and management.
- The COVID-19 crisis has revealed deep vulnerabilities in health systems, essential services and food security, and also a lack of preparedness on the part of many governments, at all levels. Cities and regions that implemented social distancing, promoted the widespread use of protective personal equipment, and adopted testing and contact tracing at an early stage, were able to mitigate many of the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic. Effective practices that have been developed during the pandemic should be documented and disseminated in order to share understanding of the lessons that can be learned from successful strategies to curb the spread of the virus.
- The crisis has also highlighted the need to revise urban design and public policy, and to foster solidarity, in line with the notion of "caring cities". More and more local governments are understanding the importance of: addressing spatial and social inequalities; providing a more equitable distribution of services; safeguarding livelihoods; and guaranteeing open public spaces, cultural activities and amenities for everyone. These spaces must be inclusive and contribute to meeting the daily needs of local inhabitants.

4.3

“Prosperity” pillar



The impact of COVID-19 on SDGs 8 and 10

The scale of job losses triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic is difficult to overlook. According to the 2021 report of the UN Secretary-General, 255 million full-time jobs were lost in 2020. This represents USD 3.7 trillion of labour income being lost, or 4.4% of global GDP in 2019.⁷⁵ **Almost all economic sectors have been negatively impacted and the economic fabric of cities and territories has suffered greatly.** The largest numbers of job losses have been concentrated in the manufacturing, transportation, culture and recreation sectors. They have mostly affected women, young people, low-skilled workers and people working under informal conditions.⁷⁶ The impact of job destruction has been particularly relevant in cities and territories that heavily rely on tourism and hospitality for their income.⁷⁷ This is, for instance, the case of cities that economically depend on attracting visitors to their historic sites.

The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted territorial imbalances, both in terms of human and economic losses. These imbalances are not only found between countries, but also between regions and municipalities within the same country. They are especially suffered by intermediary cities, whose economies—which are widely based on rural-urban linkages—have been particularly hard hit by restrictions on mobility and inadequacies in the provision and delivery of certain services, including public health. Several factors have made it more

difficult to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in poorer countries, territories or even neighbourhoods. These include, but are not limited to, the limited capacities of health systems to deal with unexpected events and/or a higher than normal prevalence of existing public health conditions, many of which are related to a lack of income or deficient education.⁷⁸

LRGs have experienced a sharp decline in their revenue, while—at the same time—they have faced new demands for expenditure resulting from the pandemic. This “scissor effect” has created budgetary shortfalls that curtail their capacity to effectively deliver public services, city planning, maintenance and capital investment. The decrease in revenue hampers prospects for job creation and the promotion of local economic activity. It has also had an important impact on the ability of LRGs to deliver essential health, social, cultural and safety services. It is estimated that cities will lose between 15 and 25% of their revenue due to the COVID-19 crisis, with this dropping to around 65% in some African countries.⁷⁹ A recent survey conducted by local governments and academia in 22 countries from different regions showed that cities and regions featured in the sample faced a 22% drop in tariff and fee income, an 18% fall in revenue from assets, and a 14% drop in income from local taxes.⁸⁰ The annual EU regional and local barometer conducted a survey, involving 300 municipalities and regions,

which highlighted that COVID-19 had had a major impact on the subnational-level finances of over half the LRGs consulted. Without adequate support, a large majority of the EU's regional and local authorities forecast that the situation will worsen in 2021 and 2022.⁸¹

Notwithstanding these challenges, many cities and territories have sought to implement measures to mitigate job losses and the economic impact of the pandemic. LRGs around the world have advanced initiatives to support structurally discriminated groups so as to mitigate the important negative effects that the pandemic has had on inequalities, particularly in territories with a large rural component.

Local and regional government action to support prosperity and reduce inequality

LRGs have implemented a wide range of policies to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on the economy and on the sectors of the population which are most vulnerable to economic shocks (SDGs 8 and 10). These have included providing financial assistance and implementing fiscal measures, particularly directed at MSMEs. Other measures have sought to support people working in the informal sector and other economically marginalised groups. These have included resuming municipal services and advancing initiatives to keep economies running in safe, physically-distanced formats. In order to provide direct support to the businesses, workers and marginalised groups affected by the crisis, some LRGs have also postponed tax payments and provided specific services, information and, in some cases, funding. Some of these measures are described below.

Supporting businesses and promoting economic recovery

Evidence shows that MSMEs have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 crisis.⁸² In the absence of, or in order to complement, the support provided by national governments, LRGs have tried to mitigate economic losses through measures such as providing direct financial assistance to businesses (e.g. providing grants and zero-interest loans in **Moscow** and

Seoul) and easing business taxes.⁸³ According to the OECD, in the EU, 30% of the subnational governments surveyed provided large-scale, direct, support to businesses and self-employed people in 2020.⁸⁴ **Montreal** has offered emergency financial support, postponed municipal taxes and implemented an automatic moratorium on loan capital and interest as part of its municipal economic support programme.⁸⁵ In the Philippines, **Baguio** and **Makati** have supported micro and small businesses through financial facilities and grants.⁸⁶ **Sydney's** Planning Strategy aims to contribute to the post-COVID-19 recovery by rebuilding business confidence and supporting job creation in small and large businesses.⁸⁷ **Freetown** introduced the #MaskUpFreetown campaign which involved sourcing the production of masks to local tailors in order to support local livelihoods.⁸⁸ **Kuala Lumpur, Vancouver, Belo Horizonte** (Brazil) and **Yakutsk** (Russia)⁸⁹ have rescheduled and extended payment periods for all municipal business taxes and licensing fees, while **San Francisco** has issued a moratorium on commercial evictions for small and medium-sized businesses.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the scope of the support that LRGs can provide is limited by the challenges posed by the pandemic and its impact on subnational-level finances. The "scissor effect" facing the majority of LRGs around the world has led to a need to reprioritise subnational-level expenditure. The capacities of LRGs to respond have also been affected by the type and amount of fiscal support that they have received from their respective national governments (or



The "scissor effect" facing the majority of LRGs has led to a need to reprioritise subnational-level expenditure. Together with increasing uncertainty about national economic recovery packages, it will have long-lasting effects on different policy sectors.

federal states) to face the crisis. Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Korea, Norway, Sweden, UK and the USA, amongst other countries, have therefore included LRGs in their emergency and recovery packages. In all countries, LRGs have been forced to redefine their priorities and revise their budgets (see Section 5 on “Means of implementation”). For instance, **Subang Jaya** (Malaysia) has reduced its administrative expenditure by 20%, while the allocation of public funding in **Hanoi** has prioritised expenditure on public health, medical supplies and providing money to take care of COVID-19 patients. This has, for example, included funding hospitals and centres devoted exclusively to treating COVID-19 patients. These decisions, together with increasing uncertainty about provisions relating to local revenue within national economic recovery packages, will have long-lasting effects on different policy sectors. As a general rule, expenditure has lost priority or been postponed in sectors like culture, capital investment in economic and social infrastructure, housing, and other forms of social protection. This will have long-term consequences for sustainable development and the achievement of the SDGs.⁹¹

The social economy has played a noticeable role in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the economy and on society as a whole.⁹² In many regions, social and solidarity-related practices provide millions of jobs. These are often provided by SMEs created by local actors in cooperation with local authorities and CSOs.⁹³ In many cases, such initiatives have proven vital in ensuring the provision of welfare services to structurally discriminated groups (such as older people, children or people with disabilities, to name but a few). Moreover, their potential to help increase local resilience to crises has often proved greater than that of traditional for-profit companies; this has particularly been so in the case of local food systems. Supporting socially-oriented businesses that champion equality also provides an opportunity to help lay the foundations for solid recovery after the crisis is over. In **Lisbon**, the BIP/ZIP grant system, which began in 2011, shows the potential for contributing to local socio-economic vibrancy even with very little financial support. This programme is now looking to address the immediate needs generated, or aggravated, by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁴ Likewise, **Bamako** (Mali) has included the social and solidarity economy in its development programme in order to promote and support cooperatives, professional associations and groups of economic interest.⁹⁵ **Barcelona** and the



Hanoi, Vietnam. (Image: dave-weatherall-Cw9lmmj9T4c-unsplash)

Île-de-France region support city cooperatives as part of their socio-economic contingency and recovery plans. LRGs provide these cooperatives with direct subsidies and by providing them with advice about the availability of financial support and about issues related to tax and social protection.⁹⁶ At the international level, local governments and civil society networks have been working together to promote the social economy since 2014 and, in particular, through the **Global Social Economy Forum**.⁹⁷

Many LRGs are also actively promoting other alternative economic development systems within their respective territories. Examples of this include the **circular economy** (which will be discussed in greater depth in the “Planet” pillar) and the **sharing economy**. The latter is also gaining growing attention, as it is effectively transforming the world of work.⁹⁸ This does not only apply to large-scale examples of the sharing economy. Particularly since the COVID-19 outbreak, small-scale sharing economy initiatives have also gained increased attention. They include, for instance, initiatives related to remote working in a variety of sectors, such as fab-labs in the knowledge and creative economy. Other examples are initiatives related to promoting direct local exchanges that seek to make little or no profit, such as those involving food provision, domestic work or providing care. Many cities have acknowledged the importance of the



sharing economy as a driver for new business opportunities during the recovery phase which provide social and environmental benefits. Since 2015, **Seoul's** Sharing City and **Amsterdam's** Sharing Economy Action Plan have sought to make the most of the multiple opportunities for innovation that the sharing economy can offer. These include potential innovations related to housing, proximity services, product sharing and transportation.⁹⁹ Other cities, like **Malmo** and **Gothenburg**, recognise the sharing economy as an important pillar that contributes to sustainability and their strategic agendas.¹⁰⁰

It is worth noting, however, that there is no general consensus concerning the net effect of the sharing economy on the well-being and opportunities to prosper offered to the population in general. Some argue that the net effect is the shift from traditionally secure jobs to part-time, low-paid, unprotected work with difficult working conditions that undermine labour rights. It also poses problems in relation to conventional means of taxation and highlights gaps in current regulations. The differences in digital infrastructure between the global North and South also pose concerns regarding equality when advocating and promoting the sharing economy. The **gig economy**, which is one particular modality of the sharing economy, deserves particular mention. This has been positively affected by the COVID-19 crisis: the average number of tasks/jobs posted and fulfilled on a day-to-day has notably increased.¹⁰¹ In the USA alone, the gig economy grew by 33% (approximately USD 1.6 trillion) in 2020.¹⁰² In India, it provides up to 90 million jobs in non-agricultural sectors, with the potential to add 1.25% to the country's GDP.¹⁰³ Laws and regulations are, however, catching up to the gig economy and its challenges, albeit slowly. **New York City** has now introduced a minimum wage for drivers. It has also added a new license category for ride-hailing companies, at the same time as freezing the issuing of new ride-hailing licenses for a year.¹⁰⁴ The **State of California** has allowed ride-hailing workers, on-demand delivery drivers, manicurists, and janitors working in California the same benefits as workers in more traditional forms of employment: access to the minimum wage and paid holidays.¹⁰⁵

Many LRGs acknowledge the role played by **culture as a pillar of sustainable development and a fundamental tool for promoting freedom, solidarity, cooperation, building a strong social fabric and bridging economic gaps**. **Icherisheher** (Azerbaijan), **Bordeaux** (France) and **Aranjuez** (Spain) have all invested in digital visits to museums. Access to heritage and

Many cities have acknowledged the importance of the sharing economy as a driver for new business opportunities during the recovery phase which provide social and environmental benefits.

culture was considered particularly important during lockdowns. LRGs have made efforts to guarantee cultural rights and maintain activities to ease people's feeling of isolation and bring hope for a better future, and have contributed to promoting solidarity and fundraising to support the public health sector and workers. Emergency measures have been implemented to support workers in the cultural sector, who are very often in an already precarious situation (self-employed, freelancers), and to maintain the sustainability of cultural initiatives at all levels. It is paramount that LRGs find ways to support cultural activity and protect and strengthen local cultural systems, ensuring their sustainability in the long term. This should include cultural actors and their creation and production processes and ensure that they can endure the crisis.

LRGs can play an important role by improving their local environments and thereby attracting and diversifying economic activities and creating more local jobs. This is of particular importance in intermediary cities, where informality has provided an economic escape route during lockdowns. LRGs can support endogenous sustainable local development through public investment in local services and also by promoting local public procurement and fostering synergies between various sectors of the local economy. They can support and help to regulate alternative and innovative economic models. **It is therefore important that recovery packages include financial support mechanisms that allow LRGs to strengthen local economic development and which attend to the needs of their communities during the post- COVID-19 recovery phase.**¹⁰⁹

Support for the informal economy

As previously mentioned, the COVID-19 crisis has had a disproportionate impact on people working in the informal economy. Women

have been particularly adversely affected in this area. It is estimated that approximately 1.6 billion people work in the informal economy worldwide and that their revenue suffered a 60% fall during the first month of the crisis.¹¹⁰ A recent study of 2,200 informally employed workers in 12 cities worldwide showed that the first wave of lockdowns radically reduced their earnings. The same study showed how these workers received little, or no, governmental support.¹¹¹ Many had no option but to take out exploitative loans. **The impact of the pandemic on people working informally has been particularly hard for women, who are over-represented in the most precarious forms of employment.** Within this context, measures implemented to waive, or delay, municipal taxes and fees (e.g. for informal vendors) have positively affected the ability of informal sector workers to continue their operations. Other measures, such as bans on evictions from municipal and even privately-owned properties, have also been very important and allowed informal micro and small enterprises to continue their economic activity.

Many LRGs have noted the important role played by the informal economy in ensuring food security and have consequently advanced efforts to support informal workers in this sector. For instance, **South African cities** have issued temporary trading permits to **informal food traders** in order to enable them to continue operating under lockdown conditions. They have also cancelled street traders' historic debts and granted them a 50% reduction in the cost of their licences and permits for a period of 3 months.¹¹² The state of **Uttar Pradesh** (India) has provided compensation to poor workers, such as vegetable vendors, construction workers or rickshaw pullers, via online payments, if they have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.¹¹³ **Accra** has also worked to reopen its informal markets. These have recovered successfully through a "combination of policy interventions, including the fumigation of markets and moving some vendors to new locations in order to ensure social distancing". Another important aspect of the city's strategy has been facilitating "the access of micro, small, and medium scale businesses to a central-government-sponsored soft loans facility".¹¹⁴

Informal recycling activities have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 crisis, particularly during lockdowns. The impact on them has been particularly evident in developing countries with large markets for informal recycling. People undertaking waste picking activities are often members of structurally discriminated populations. They tend to be women, children,

migrant workers, or people that have lost their jobs and had to turn to waste picking to secure their livelihoods. It is estimated that over 15 million people around the world are informally employed in waste picking.¹¹⁵ A collaborative and integrated approach is also critical for supporting those working in the informal economy. This has been achieved, for instance, by including and recognising such informal workers and systems in the provision of public services. **Santiago de Chile** has demonstrated how LRGs can collaborate with innovative entrepreneurs and informal waste pickers to improve waste management, from prevention through to recycling and reuse.¹¹⁶ Since **Ankara** banned waste picking, it has provided housing and food to former waste pickers who would otherwise be left homeless and hungry.¹¹⁷ The **Recycle Beirut** Initiative has tackled the waste crisis by offering job opportunities to Syrian refugees.¹¹⁸ Prior to the pandemic, **Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, Curitiba** (Brazil), **Bogota** and **Accra**, among other cities, had already integrated informal waste and public transport operations into their public service systems.¹¹⁹ These cities are now better equipped and able to mobilise these networks in response to future pandemics.

There is growing recognition of the fact that the informal economy needs adequate policies to respond to the crucial needs of its workers. It needs to better integrate them into the urban fabric, ensure them decent working conditions, and provide them with social protection.¹²⁰ LRGs

Ghana. (Image: efe-kurnaz-8hi9WGb4qMA-unsplash)



are also finding ways to provide immediate economic support to the populations that are most vulnerable to the economic crisis that has been triggered by the pandemic. This has been the case with **Bogota's** cash transfer initiative and **Milan's** Mutual Aid Fund partnerships, which match municipal funding with private funding and the provision of other public resources.¹²¹ The local government of the **Punjab** has announced a tax relief package and a cash grant programme with a collective value of 28 billion Pakistani rupees (USD 168 million). In Brazil, some municipalities have created emergency aid funds to financially support families in need.¹²²

Formal re-employability through upskilling

A lack of formal employability skills is a challenge for many people, including those who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic. Skill levels and skill utilisation were cited among the main factors driving economic performance in business surveys conducted in the post-COVID-19 scenario.¹²³ **Stockholm**¹²⁴ and **Lima**¹²⁵ have promoted different stimuli packages to encourage adult education and "re-skilling" training. Municipal services have also helped to match thousands of unemployed people, from different sectors, with companies looking for workers. **Quebec** supports recruitment and retention in the food sector by helping to connect unemployed people with local farms in need of workers.¹²⁶ The **Occitania** region of France has launched a plan to promote training for employees instead of firing them, in order to support access to opportunities to develop work skills.¹²⁷ In the **eThekweni** municipality of South Africa, 55 homeless people successfully completed training to develop computer skills during the lockdown period. The social affairs department of **Dori** (Burkina Faso) has set up a communal solidarity fund to support people who lost their jobs following the introduction of confinement measures.¹²⁸ To support the families most affected by the economic crisis, **Sao Paulo** hired the unemployed mothers of many students enrolled in the public school system.¹²⁹ **New South Wales** (Australia) has helped injured workers return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The support offered includes financial incentives for employers and employees through the State Insurance Regulatory Authority.¹³⁰

Investing in skills, providing support to enter the labour market and offering subsidised employment opportunities have been key strategies for promoting prosperity during the recovery phase.¹³¹ Re-employability and

upskilling policies implemented by LRGs have helped to better connect people and jobs. They have also been used to prepare existing workers for changes in the labour market triggered by digitalisation. Moreover, international studies advise that **investing in skills and education is vital for ensuring a successful transition to a green economy and one that is inclusive of all communities.**¹³²

Communications and digital connectivity

The use of digital technology has been fundamental in the response to the pandemic. A general consensus is emerging that the COVID-19 recovery must be underpinned by an inclusive use of digital technology and connectivity.¹³³ The **Basque Country** (Spain) and the region of **Baden-Württemberg** (Germany) have focused on implementing digital solutions so that companies can continue with their activities. These measures have included providing support in the form of cyber security and digital infrastructure.¹³⁴ **Seoul, Tel Aviv-Yafo** and **Cape Town** have expanded online and digital tools such as smartphone solutions. These have been used for communication, awareness-raising, teleworking and learning purposes, but also to track the spread of the COVID-19 virus.¹³⁵ **Barcelona** has implemented a digital inclusion plan to improve access to digital tools. This helps people to gain the skills required to use them and to ensure access to the electronic services provided by the City Council.¹³⁶ For the City Council of **Singapore**, digital inclusion is an important pillar of its digitalisation efforts.¹³⁷ In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has consolidated a plan to provide students in secondary education with personal learning devices.¹³⁸

Notwithstanding the importance of digital solutions in the response to the pandemic, their rapid diffusion has raised certain **concerns relating to the challenges posed by the digital divide. Poor households, and particularly those living in rural areas, often face difficulties in having access to the internet, computers, smartphones and other technological solutions.**¹³⁹ This digital divide has been particularly pernicious for young people during periods of school closures. Since the beginning of the crisis, an additional 101 million children and young people have fallen below the minimum reading proficiency level. This constitutes a huge step backwards from the progress made over the past two decades.¹⁴⁰ Cities such as **Daegu** (South Korea) and **New York City**, among others, have sought solutions to help bridge the

digital gap facing those in education in order to leave no student behind.¹⁴¹ The consequences of the digital divide are particularly harsh for older people who have not been included in digital literacy training programmes or in the development of technological solutions. This has further excluded and isolated them from the benefits and opportunities of digitalisation. LRGs are currently showing their commitment to addressing and reducing barriers to technology and the digital divide. They are doing this through participatory policies and programmes that seek to actively include groups and areas that have previously been marginalised.

The rapid expansion of e-work, e-education, e-commerce and e-health, prompted by the pandemic, has opened a new debate about the development of urban areas (“virtual vs real city”) and the protection of the rights of their citizens.¹⁴² The **Cities Coalition for Digital Rights**, an initiative launched by **Amsterdam, Barcelona and New York City** and which currently brings together over 50 cities worldwide, works to prevent the abuse of people’s digital rights. These rights include, amongst others, equal and universal access to technology, the protection of privacy and data, and freedom from discrimination by artificial intelligence and algorithms. This work is particularly relevant within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic because of the need to tackle misinformation and the concentration of power resulting from the mistreatment of digital rights.¹⁴³ **London** has given the Chief Digital Officer of the Smart London Board the task of developing a “Tech Charter” to ensure that citizens are engaged



Perhaps no sector of the population has felt the impact of the crisis harder than women: although they have played a key role in response and recovery efforts there is a real risk that, without proactive measures from all levels of government, the economic gender gap could take decades to close.

and listened to during the process of creating new technologies. One of the main principles of the Charter is respect for digital rights and the promotion of equality and diversity in both the design and use of emerging technologies.¹⁴⁴

Local policies to tackle increasing inequalities and discriminatory policies (SDG 10)

The growing inequalities in access to resources, services, knowledge and economic benefits, which have been aggravated by the pandemic, have put increasing pressure on cities and regions to ensure a more sustainable and inclusive form of development. Low-income regions and deprived neighbourhoods have been hardest hit by the pandemic, and especially those with high concentrations of older people and structurally discriminated minorities. Many of these regions and neighbourhoods show higher mortality rates than elsewhere. Regions and cities whose economies are specialised in sectors particularly exposed to the crisis (such as tourism), with high shares of MSMEs, or with limited “teleworking-ability” (e.g. rural areas), have also suffered disproportionately from the crisis. There have also been notable regional disparities in the access to vaccines, as well as in capacities for vaccine deployment. These have had a direct impact on more marginalised regions and, more generally, in developing countries.¹⁴⁵

Perhaps no sector of the population has felt the impact of the crisis harder than women: they make up the majority of frontline workers, are often employed in low-paid care-providing jobs, and at the greatest risk of falling into poverty. Although they have played a key role in response and recovery efforts, they remain under-represented in leadership positions, and their needs and views are not sufficiently taken into account when planning response and recovery measures.¹⁴⁶ Evidence from previous economic crises has shown that women’s incomes tend to take longer to recover than those of men.¹⁴⁷ There is a real risk that, without proactive measures from all levels of government, the economic gender gap could take decades to close.¹⁴⁸ In addition, during the pandemic, violence against women has risen. In some countries, calls to helplines have increased five-fold, although it is important to note that, in far too many cases, women were often unable to seek help as they were trapped at home with their abusers. It is estimated that with every three months of lockdown, an additional 15 million women are exposed to risk of gender-based violence.¹⁴⁹

In **Paris**, women have been allowed to break confinement to file complaints at police stations and emergency telephone lines have been made available to report abuses 24/7. In **Istanbul**, some buildings have been restructured to provide shelter for women. Close cooperation has also been established with women's NGOs to give priority to those facing emergency situations. **Vienna** has put particular emphasis on the need to provide practical support for women. For instance, it has helped women to set up home offices via its Vienna Business Agency and has increased the funding given to women's organisations.¹⁵⁰

Implementing different types of communication and awareness campaigns has been another response of many other cities and territories. In **Hawassa** (Ethiopia), messages from city authorities about the prevention and responses to domestic violence and sexual violence have been shared with religious authorities to increase community outreach.¹⁵¹ **Rabat** (Morocco) has also helped to raise awareness of gender-based violence during the pandemic with the support of UN Women.¹⁵² **Cuenca** (Ecuador) launched a campaign entitled "24/7 without sexual harassment"; **Guadalajara** (Mexico) uses radio programmes to reach indigenous peoples; while in rural areas of **Kericho** and **Bomet** (Kenya), a multi-lingual, multi-media communications campaign on the prevention of COVID-19 and violence against women has been set up to reach local communities. The campaign has included posters, radio talk shows and social media in order to increase its outreach.¹⁵³ **Barcelona** has implemented a gender contingency plan and has incorporated a gender perspective into all participatory spaces in the city, following consultations with relevant stakeholders.¹⁵⁴

Cities are also leading **global initiatives** to promote greater gender equity. The **City Hub and Network for Gender Equity** is a partnership between **London, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Freetown, Mexico City** and **Tokyo** to share best practices in tackling sexism, misogyny, and gender-based injustice.¹⁵⁵

Social isolation, a high prevalence of conditions that increase the risk of more severe cases of COVID-19 disease and higher mortality, problems with mental health, job losses, poverty and financial distress, discrimination and abuse, are amongst the main impacts of the crisis on the LGBTIQ+ community.¹⁵⁶ Some cities have attended to the needs of this collective with special support lines. This has been the case of **Montevideo**, through its "We are with you" call.¹⁵⁷

Older people are amongst the most vulnerable to the pandemic. In many countries, up to 60% of COVID-19-related deaths have been amongst those in the social and medical care system.¹⁵⁸ **This high mortality rate amongst older people has revealed serious shortcomings in the management models of these structures in many countries, and also in the coordination between the different authorities and management companies.** At the start of the pandemic, restricting mobility was the main measure adopted by cities and regions to protect older people. **Beijing's** neighbourhood residents' committees distribute all types of goods so that older people do not have to go outside.¹⁵⁹ There have been similar initiatives in **Masiphumelele** (South Africa),¹⁶⁰ **Victoria** (Australia), **Mexico** and **Brasilia**,¹⁶¹ where different groups of civilians and soldiers provided support to older people who live alone and without family members. These support groups ensured that they received medical services, free medicine and food packages during the early stages of the pandemic. Hotlines also



helped to coordinate food deliveries to them and to put them in contact with volunteers who could help them.¹⁶² Cities in Germany (such as **Berlin** and **Tuebingen**) and in the USA (**Miami**) have offered free in-home COVID-19 testing to minimise the exposure of older people to the risk of infection.¹⁶³

Experts suggest that after the COVID-19 pandemic, several generations will suffer a wave of mental health issues resulting from isolation and anxiety, etc., which will include eating disorders. These are expected to be particularly prominent amongst older people, young people and those with disabilities. It is therefore critical that social and mental health services receive special attention. They have been amongst those most extensively affected by the crisis as they have had to deal with the increasingly frequent neurological disorders and substance abuse.¹⁶⁴ LRGs are currently implementing measures to promote mental health and well-being. They are also addressing the importance of equal access to public space as a way of promoting personal well-being and ensuring peace. In this way, they have

therefore begun to expand their scope. **Palermo** (Italy) established a special hotline for citizens seeking psychological support and several local psychologists have made themselves available and offered their services.¹⁶⁵ Cities like **Athens**,¹⁶⁶ **Barcelona**,¹⁶⁷ **Istanbul**,¹⁶⁸ **New York City**,¹⁶⁹ **Rio de Janeiro**¹⁷⁰ and **Munich**,¹⁷¹ among others, have implemented similar initiatives to provide mental health support to their populations.

The socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and the measures taken to control it have taken their toll on people with disabilities who live in cities. This group is four times more likely to be injured or die than non-disabled people, because their needs are rarely sufficiently catered for by urban health policy and planning.¹⁷² **The pandemic has shown that equity and accessibility are more critical now than ever before.** **Sao Paulo** has established an emergency response centre to aid with accessibility. It seeks to ensure that people with disabilities, and particularly those in informal settings, receive safe shelter and are cared for on a daily basis.¹⁷³ Those responsible for this service are people with disabilities of their own. They include the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of People with Disabilities. Marginalised and often excluded groups need to be given decision making roles in order to ensure greater equity of treatment. **Montevideo** has delivered food directly to the homes of at-risk groups and people with reduced mobility.¹⁷⁴ Other LRG measures have also aimed to ensure accessibility and equity in the delivery of public services.¹⁷⁵ **Toronto**, for example, created the Accessibility Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccines to provide advice on how to enhance support and access to the COVID-19 vaccine for people with disabilities and their caregivers and families.¹⁷⁶

Disparities in health and disease outcomes associated with racial, ethnic and socio-economic status are not new. **COVID-19 has simply reinforced these disparities and has made social conditions far worse for non-hegemonic ethnic groups.** Black, Hispanic, and Asian people have suffered substantially higher rates of infection, hospitalisation, and death than white people in the USA.¹⁷⁷ Similar patterns have also been observed in Asian and Nordic countries and in the UK.¹⁷⁸ In Latin America, in the case of Brazil, COVID-19 mortality rates have been much higher in indigenous populations than in the rest of the population.¹⁷⁹ Many LRGs have introduced specific policies and budgetary changes to prioritise the promotion of racial equity in their cities, towns and villages. Examples of this include: **Minneapolis'** Strategic & Racial Equity Action Plan through 2022; San



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
(Image: erik-hathaway-
FyN5iVW6IZc-unsplash)

Francisco's Racial Equity Framework; and the **Boston** Racial Equity Fund.¹⁸⁰ These initiatives include priorities such as diversifying spending, increasing racial representation in the workforce, using race-based data, engaging with different communities, and prioritising issues related to housing, economic development, and public safety. Similarly, **Ottawa** has recognised racism as a public health issue, worked to increase awareness of discrimination related to COVID-19 and fostered actions to counter racism.¹⁸¹

Migrants, refugees and displaced people have been severely affected by the pandemic in terms of their health, livelihoods and inclusion within host communities. Some of the measures adopted by LRGs have sought to secure the access of these populations to public services and housing so as to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis. In **Fez** (Morocco), the municipality has identified a reception site for populations on the move. The regional government of **Campania** (Italy) has set up a line of finance to provide special funding for members of African communities who are employed in local harvesting work and who would otherwise be unprotected.¹⁸² **Ouagadougou** has launched a project called "Innovative Social Enterprises and Migrant Participation for Social Inclusion in Burkina Faso", which aims to fight unemployment and promote the inclusion of migrants. The city is simultaneously making green belt areas available to women and young people, including migrant communities from different districts, for market gardening.¹⁸³

Rabat is carrying out an educational follow-up with minors who are on the move. In **Gaziantep** (Turkey), coordination with CSOs has been crucial for overcoming literacy and language barriers when implementing COVID-19 support measures for refugees.¹⁸⁴ **Johannesburg** has introduced translation services as part of its migration policy. It has also integrated migrant

populations as health workers at certain clinics. **Barranquilla** (Colombia) will expand the city's Opportunities Centre to help refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, and other structurally discriminated populations, gain access to the labour market and improve their ability to obtain income. **Praia** (Cape Verde) has launched the Municipal Plan for the Integration of Migrants, which aims to ensure the full integration, citizenship and well-being of migrants and their families through a series of inclusive strategies and projects.¹⁸⁵

As part of ongoing efforts to reshape the global governance of human mobility in accordance with the 2030 Agenda, LRGs have strengthened their commitment to global processes like the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) and the implementation of the Global Compacts for Migration (GCM) and Refugees (GCR).¹⁸⁶ As human mobility is a cross-cutting issue within the 2030 Agenda, many of these LRG initiatives were reported in the previous Report to the HLPF in 2020.¹⁸⁷ LRGs have been particularly active in promoting a shift in the narrative from border-centred perspectives to multi-stakeholder efforts and community-driven approaches. This was highlighted by the "It Takes a Community" campaign, which was launched by the GFMD Working Group on Narratives and supported by the **Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM) Project**.¹⁸⁸ In collaboration with the municipality of **Lampedusa and Linosa** (Italy), UCLG has also launched a co-creation process that will culminate in the **Lampedusa Charter**: a global call to shift the narrative concerning, and governance of, human mobility in compliance with the Global Compacts and the 2030 Agenda.¹⁸⁹ Despite limited mandates, resources and capacities to support migrants, refugees and internally displaced people during the COVID-19 crisis, LRGs have made great efforts to include migrant communities in their responses to COVID-19. In order to support cities in these efforts, the **Mayors Migration Council**¹⁹⁰ has launched the **Global Cities Fund for Inclusive Pandemic Response**. This initiative seeks to provide direct financial and technical support over one year to 5 cities in low-to-middle income countries. The support provided by the fund aims to help cities implement projects related to public health, employment, livelihoods, and social protection.¹⁹¹ While the full effects of the pandemic are yet to be known, it is important for LRGs to find ways to ensure that many of the emergency measures adopted, and particularly those relating to migrant inclusion, will become permanent after the pandemic.¹⁹² ●



Despite limited mandates, resources and capacities to support migrants, refugees and internally displaced people during the COVID-19 crisis, LRGs have made great efforts to include migrant communities in their responses to COVID-19.

Key topics for further reflection :

- Despite budget restrictions and even reductions, the crisis has propelled many LRGs to adopt dynamic responses in order to support their local economic and social fabric. They have prioritised local expenditure to protect jobs, support MSMEs, strengthen local economic circuits, and foster alternative forms of production and consumption based on the social and shared economy. Many cities, particularly in the global South, have developed responses to address the needs and working conditions of people who are informally employed, acknowledging informality as an integral part of their cities and territories. However, it is likely that the impact of the pandemic on subnational finances will be even more important in 2021, as reduced tax income will reflect the reduction in economic activity in the previous year. Such impacts need to be considered in recovery packages and it will be necessary to support more equal and sustainable economic development.
- The COVID-19 crisis has particularly highlighted territorial inequalities. Some cities and territories face more intense and/or longer-lasting consequences than others. These are often urban spaces and territories that were already facing various challenges before the pandemic (including insufficient public services and resources, limited connectivity and a significant concentration of poor and marginalised populations, etc.). These disparities should not be overlooked when discussing measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and to plan and support recovery: one-size-fits-all approaches will not help all cities and territories in their recovery. Adopting a territorial-scale approach to issues such as the provision of public services, health policy, tourism and/or depopulation could help to promote greater cohesion and to tackle disparities both between cities and within countries.
- Recovery policies should also take into consideration rural life and its ecosystems, whether these are human, natural or social. Rural-urban linkages are the guardians of local production and consumption. They are also fundamental to local ecosystems and ways of life, including food provision and circular economies. Establishing a virtuous cycle between urban and rural environments and, particularly, taking into consideration the roles of intermediary cities and small towns should be one of the priorities of recovery plans.
- The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis could accelerate a paradigm shift towards alternative economic pathways based on responsible and local production and consumption patterns (e.g. social and solidarity economy). Providing support for workers who have lost their jobs due to the crisis, and those who see their activities being threatened by digitalisation and new technologies, will also be key to the recovery from the crisis. Technology can be a powerful tool and facilitate access and inclusion, if human rights, including digital rights, are adequately protected and promoted. To this end, it is essential to understand digitalisation as far more than just a question of technology. LRGs can develop place-based initiatives to help workers facing upheavals in their working lives and provide long-term solutions. Achieving this will require going beyond providing one-off urgent actions; it will be necessary to choose and develop appropriate urban and territorial strategies and policies.
- The recovery phase must also address inequalities. Gender-sensitive approaches to recovery must be mainstreamed in all local policies in order to address gender inequality. The roles of women and feminist leadership should be given particular consideration. Their knowledge and expertise should be harnessed to enhance crisis responses and improve decision-making, thereby strengthening the focus on peoples' needs and care.
- Likewise, recovery strategies must support other structurally discriminated populations that have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 crisis. In the case of migrants, refugees and displaced communities, for example, frontrunner LRGs have been implementing place-based policies to protect their basic needs and rights, addressing the digital divide and targeting social protection policies. These measures now need to be continued beyond the emergency stages and intersectional approaches must be adopted to tackle cross-cutting, intertwined forms of discrimination, such as those based on gender, class, ethnicity or migratory status. Such initiatives need to be mainstreamed in order to foster more inclusive urban governance.



4.4

“Planet” pillar



The impact of COVID-19 on SDGs 12 and 13

The impact of the pandemic on SDGs 12 and 13 is complex, multi-faceted and difficult to measure. The lockdowns implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic have had a direct impact on GHG emissions, reduced noise and improved air quality. However, they have only been temporary, as shown by the steady growth in global emissions during the second half of 2020.¹⁹³ Preliminary data show that global greenhouse gas emissions increased in 2020 and that “the world fell short on 2020 targets to halt biodiversity loss”.¹⁹⁴ There is wide consensus that health and climate are interwoven and there is extensive evidence of their interactions.¹⁹⁵ For instance, the emergence and spread of COVID-19 has been closely linked to urbanization, habitat destruction, the trade in live animals, intensive livestock farming and global travel. The COVID-19 pandemic has also affected the consumption and production of energy, food and waste, among others.¹⁹⁶ The increase in medical waste and single-use plastic waste, together with a reduction in reuse and recycling, highlight the negative impacts of the pandemic on achieving SDG 12. They have also made progress towards achieving this objective more challenging.¹⁹⁷

Cities and regions have developed a wide range of initiatives to promote agreements on climate change and integrate climate

action into local and regional planning. They are also currently working to: reduce GHG emissions; promote sustainable mobility and green infrastructure; facilitate the transition to renewable energy; and make the urban landscape greener. At the same time, LRGs are seeking to ensure social inclusion for all. A global movement for a green and just recovery is expanding around the world. This can be seen through the campaigns of many city networks (e.g. GTF, ICLEI, C40) and NGOs. It is also evident from the emergence of “planetary health” and “one health” approaches, which are striving to consolidate a global agenda based on links between environment and health.¹⁹⁸ This paradigm shift underscores the importance of environmental health, climate action and resilience as critical complements of public health. The success of a transition towards more sustainable models of production and consumption and healthy urban life largely depends on reducing emissions in all sectors of the economy while, at the same time, decoupling economic growth from its more negative environmental repercussions. **One entry point from which to address these challenges is the promotion of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies in an integrated manner,** thereby enhancing resilience while also transforming production

and consumption cycles (for instance via the promotion of circular economic systems). Nevertheless, **the long-term impact on SDGs 12 and 13 will depend on the content of the economic recovery packages, and also on how governments, at all levels, promote green transition measures as opposed to emission-intensive practices.**¹⁹⁹

Local and regional action to address climate change and build more resilient and sustainable territories

Local policies to address climate change²⁰⁰

Over the past decade, LRGs have been at the forefront of climate action and have helped raise targets in global negotiations. In the run-up to COP 26, numerous cities and regions embraced the global Race to Zero Campaign, which was launched during the UN Climate Action Summit, in 2019. The Campaign's main objective is to rally climate action and to work towards the ambitious goal of achieving net zero GHG emissions by no later than 2050 (See Box 4.3).²⁰¹ Even during the COVID-19 crisis, cities and regions have remained places of innovation and promoted climate policies. **The number of LRGs that have adopted commitments to reduce their GHG emissions through mitigation and adaptation policies continues to grow.** More than 10,500 cities have passed CO₂ emission reduction targets. Global networks also grow rapidly: the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate Change and Energy (GCoM) gathers now more than 10,700 members (see Figure 4.4). GCoM is a global coalition that includes the major global and regional organisations of LRGs. It is supported by UN-Habitat, the European Commission and Bloomberg Philanthropies.²⁰² Similar initiatives are also being developed in several other countries. These include Climate Mayors, a bipartisan network of more than 470 USA mayors who are committed to climate progress. The cities in the network represent 48 states and 74 million inhabitants.²⁰³

In Europe, 1,800 cities of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, representing

90 million inhabitants, produced a 25% reduction in their GHG emissions between 2005 and 2017, surpassing the EU's 2020 target of -20%.²⁰⁴ The implementation of mitigation and adaptation plans is now slowly progressing in all regions thanks to the regional covenants. In the Maghreb and Mashreq, more than 100 cities are currently preparing to publish their respective climate plans, which include mitigation and adaptation components. In Latin America, the adoption of action plans is also making clear progress: over 50 mitigation and adaptation plans have been published since 2019. In South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, many cities now benefit from funded pilot projects.

BOX 4.3

Race to Zero Campaign

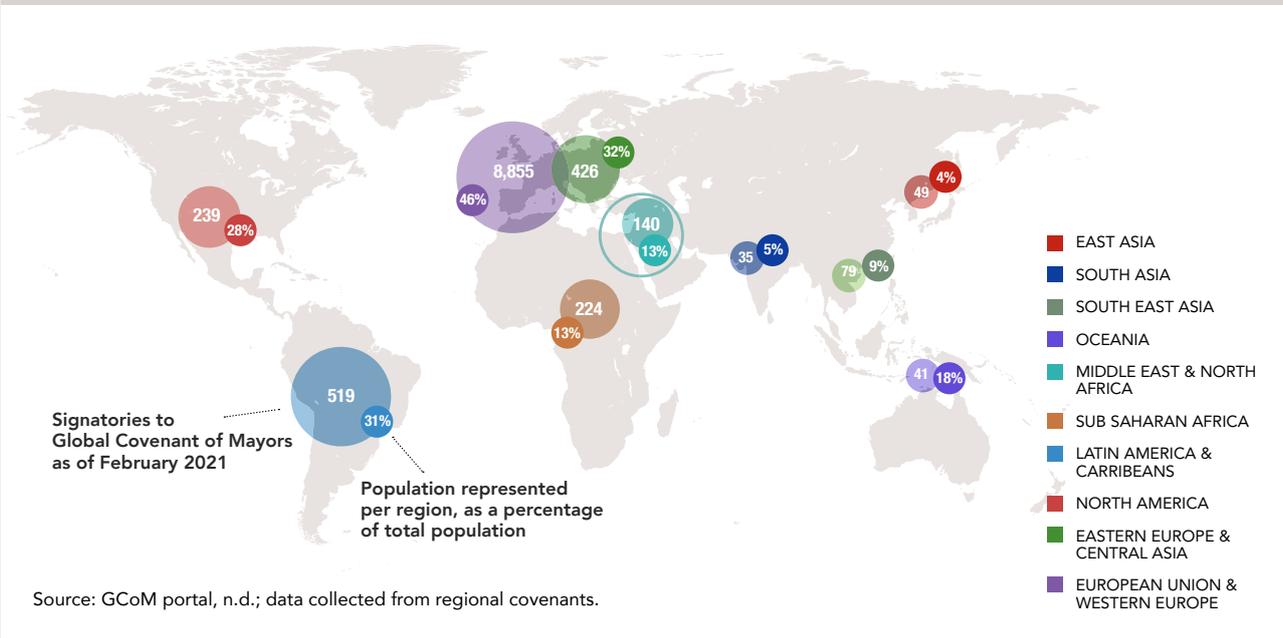
Race to Zero is a global campaign to rally climate leadership from non-state actors and to promote a healthy, resilient, carbon-zero recovery that will prevent future threats, create decent jobs and unlock inclusive, sustainable growth. It mobilises a coalition of leading net zero initiatives which, so far, represent 24 regions, 708 cities, 2,360 companies, 624 universities, and 163 investors, which together account for over 15% of the global economy. These "real economy" actors bring together 120 countries in the largest ever alliance whose mission is to halve emissions by 2030 and to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. Collectively these actors currently account for nearly 25% of global CO₂ emissions and over 50% of GDP. The Race to Resilience—a sibling campaign to Race to Zero—was announced by the High-Level Climate Champions for Climate Action at the UN-convened Climate Ambition Summit on 12 December 2020. These initiatives already have a combined global reach of over a billion people and focus on a wide range of issues, from water resilience to nature-based solutions, disaster risk reduction, agricultural resilience, and finance and insurance.

One specific segment of both Race to Zero and Race to Resilience is that they focus on city engagement and support local and regional commitment to these campaigns. A dedicated platform and pledge for cities has been established by a coalition that includes: C40 Cities, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, UCLG, the not-for-profit organisation CDP, the World Wildlife Fund and the World Resources Institute.

Source: <https://racetozero.unfccc.int/first-round-of-initiatives-join-the-race-to-resilience/>, <https://www.globalresiliencepartnership.org/race-to-resilience>, <http://citiesracetozero.org/>.

FIGURE 4.4

Signatories to the Global Covenant of Mayors, as of February 2021



By 2020, 617 cities (with between 100,000 and 500,000 inhabitants) from around the world had pledged to using 100% renewable energies; most of these were in Europe and the USA.²⁰⁵ LRG networks, such as Energy Cities, and thousands of LRGs are currently incentivising reductions in energy consumption and promoting the use of renewable energy within their communities. Projects to process local landfill gas emissions are making progress in all regions, as in the case of **Addis Ababa**. Similarly, smart technologies and renewable energies are being increasingly used to reduce municipal energy costs (e.g. **South Tarawa City, Shenzhen, Melbourne** and its wind farms), and to promote the decarbonisation of municipal district heating and cooling networks (e.g. **Helsinki** and **Linköping**).

Regions are proving to be the preferred scale at which to plan climate change adaptation at the ecosystem level. An increasing number of regional climate change adaptation agencies are being created. They seek to strengthen the connections between science and policy. Examples include **Occitania**, which created its own agency in 2019²⁰⁶ and the **Ontario** Climate Risk Institute.²⁰⁷ Of the 28 members of the RegionsAdapt initiative that reported on their adaptation practices, 80% have already developed, or are in the process of developing, risk vulnerability assessments, while 70% have already put an adaptation plan in place. These include 7 Brazilian states,

5 Canadian provinces, 5 regions in West and Southern Africa, 2 Australian states, and 1 USA state, which together represent 233 million people.²⁰⁸

In this regard, **many countries could certainly increase their ambitions about Nationally Determined Contributions by building upon existing city and regional commitments in their respective national climate policy formulation processes.** Fifty-six countries (of 112) have involved LRGs in the elaboration of their enhanced NDCs.²⁰⁹ **A stronger involvement of local governments in multi-level coordination and governance related to climate policy would permit a true acceleration in its implementation.**

LRG mitigation and adaptation initiatives within the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic

Many of the LRG initiatives aimed at mitigating and adapting to climate change have already been mentioned above. These include: initiatives to promote sustainable public services, including mobility, water and waste management; greening public spaces; promoting local food systems; and fostering integrated urban planning for more compact, better connected and cleaner cities.

In this regard, one of the intervention areas that best symbolises the response of LRGs to

the pandemic is the widespread deployment of sustainable mobility initiatives. Due to COVID-19, access to public transport in cities has been significantly disrupted worldwide (except for essential workers).²¹⁰ **Biking and other soft mobility modalities have expanded as alternatives to mass public transport.** These initiatives have progressed from offering low-cost social resilience measures to becoming genuine instruments for mitigating long-term urban transport emissions. Examples of this abound: bicycle lane construction, shared transportation schemes, technological innovation that reduces the need to travel, etc. Examples can be found in all world regions, in cities such as **Auckland, Belo Horizonte, Cape Town, Kinshasa, Shanghai, and Tel Aviv**, to name but a few.²¹¹ Other longer-term recovery measures include **Seoul's** smart green mobility initiatives, which are based on: introducing driverless vehicles, using robots to deliver goods, and developing smart parking lots. These measures come in addition to fast tracking the creation of a bicycle lane system with a cycling expressway, with the objective of attaining a 15% modal share by 2030.²¹² In the aftermath of the pandemic, when economic activity has fully resumed, it will be important to recover quality public transport, promote the use of renewable

energies, and implement appropriate policies to discourage the use of private motor vehicles, particularly in the centres of urban areas.

The pandemic has also shed light on the importance of quality living space. Ensuring that populations have access to adequate living spaces must be underpinned by energetic efficiency. When the emissions related to construction are taken into account, it is estimated that the housing sector globally accounts for 38% of all energy-related CO₂ emissions. **Recovery packages provide an opportunity to greatly advance building renovation initiatives and introduce sustainable performance standards for newly constructed buildings.**²¹³ Doing this could have important implications for addressing climate change. Moreover, it could significantly contribute to economic recovery, while also promoting health. For example, for the city's recovery from the crisis, **Montpellier** (France) plans to invest massively in sustainable development and an energy transition, which will include housing insulation.²¹⁴

Particular attention should be paid to **addressing climate change mitigation and resilience in informal settlements.** In **Cape Town**, for example, an upskilling and capacity-building project initiated in 2014 to install

Auckland, New Zealand.
(Image: thant-zin-oo-
ULAwIM4ISaw-unsplash)



insulation in informal settlements reduced the demand for fuel to heat homes in the winter by 74%. This sharp reduction resulted in residents reducing their energy bills and saving approximately 7,400 tonnes of CO₂ per year.²¹⁵ In **Ahmedabad** (India), as part of its Heat Action Plan, the city government is working with local partners to paint the roofs of informal settlements white and thereby reduce the incidence of extreme heat.²¹⁶ Building renovation strategies and retrofitting projects form a central part of transformative actions that LRGs can, and do, support. These are often implemented in combination with other policies, such as the recovery and reuse of building materials, in order to enhance the positive impact of such action.

As mentioned above (see “People” pillar), **the pandemic has also called for a rethink on urban public space. This includes improving green and open spaces in order to reduce urban hotspots, as well as rethinking urban proximity and the importance of social mixing.** At the city level, promoting proximity and the densification of services are strategies increasingly used to limit polluting transport, promote mixed-function neighbourhoods and improve the living environment. The concept of the “15-minute city”, where all essential services are within reach of everyone, either by bicycle or on foot, was at the heart of the municipal campaign in **Paris**.²¹⁷ This notion is also becoming widespread on the other side of the Atlantic (**Portland, Minneapolis**) and has even been modified to the “1-minute city” in the Swedish metropolises of **Stockholm** and **Goteborg**, and to the “Superblock” strategy in Barcelona (see Figure 4.5).²¹⁸

In short, investment in mitigating climate impact, developing renewable energies, and improving urban design and the urban environment can help to improve public health, reduce inequalities and contribute to the transition to more sustainable practices and ways of living.²¹⁹ It will be crucial to keep track of these measures and the resulting transformations in the long term.

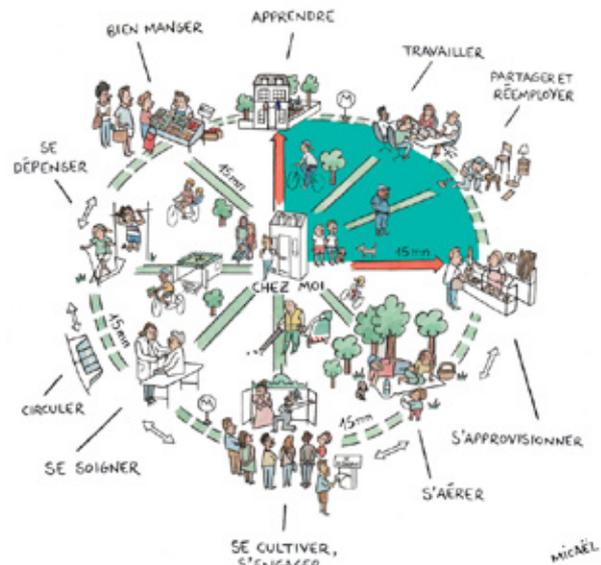
Building more resilient cities and regions

Building up city resilience means helping communities, businesses and economies to better prepare for, and recover from, the current crisis, other ongoing crises and potential future ones. Building resilience enables cities and regions to thrive despite the impact of new threats. It is essential that resilience plans look to tackle global stress factors and

FIGURE 4.5

Paris’ 15-minute city and Barcelona’s Superblock model

Paris’ 15-minute city



Source: Paris City Council (2021)

Barcelona's current model



Superblock model



- Public transport network
- Private vehicle passing
- Dum proximity area
- Bicycles main network (bike lane)
- Residents vehicles
- Access control
- Bicycles signposts (reverse direction)
- Urban services and emergency
- Basic traffic network
- Free passage of bicycles
- Dum carriers
- Single platform (pedestrians priority)

Source: Sweco Urban Insight (2021)

major disruptions, such as pandemics. It is also critical that they include conservation policies that take advantage of existing ecosystem services and seek nature-based solutions.²²⁰ The Sendai Framework acknowledges the role of LRGs as the main authorities responsible for responding to and dealing with disasters. LRGs are committed to this key role: in 2019, 55,200 LRGs from 56 countries adopted disaster risk

reduction strategies in line with national ones.²²¹

Although this represents significant progress since 2015, the 2020 target was not reached. In October 2020, the new **Making Cities Resilient 2030** (MCR 2030) initiative was launched by UNDRR within the framework of ICLEI's Daring Cities Conference. This will be conducted in partnership with the main global local government networks and international institutions. The campaign will build on the experience gained from MCR 2010-2020. The objective is to raise awareness and to increase the commitment of local governments and political leaders to reducing disaster risk while, at the same time, bringing together practitioners, experts and service providers to accelerate the process of building resilience.²²² The Global Resilient Cities Network, which replaced the former 100 Resilient Cities initiative, is committed to building and investing in urban resilience. It has developed the **Cities for a Resilient Recovery** initiative within the framework of the pandemic.²²³

Local strategies for disaster risk reduction must include pandemic preparedness as a priority: this must be part of recovery processes in order to build up resilience to future disease outbreaks.²²⁴ For example, the County Assemblies Forum in **Kenya** has developed business plans and model legislation which its county assemblies have then customised for their specific localities. These efforts have allowed them to continue to legislate, approve budgets and fulfil their functions when unforeseen issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have arisen.²²⁵ Through its COVID-19 Advisory Centre for Local Authorities, the **Zambia** LGA has been supporting local authorities and helping them to adopt new planning and development strategies for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery as resilience strategies for times of crisis.²²⁶ The 2018 **Guayaquil** Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction had already identified viral diseases as posing a threat to the city. Its response to the COVID-19 crisis therefore took advantage of the existing crisis management structure and plan. In **Santa Fe** (Argentina), the existing municipal risk management system was used to connect and coordinate all areas of government, NGOs, civil society and the private sector. The existing structure facilitated the quick and efficient deployment of response measures.²²⁷

As part of the **Accra** Metropolis' contribution to the national disaster risk reduction effort, the city developed, and is currently implementing, disaster risk management strategies within its medium-term development plan for 2018-

2021. The strategies involved place particular emphasis on the impact of COVID-19 on the informal economy and on vulnerable residents.

Pune (India) has adopted a Resilience Plan and a Disaster Management Plan, and there is also a Disaster Management and Epidemic Act, which is to be implemented at the country, state and district collector levels.²²⁸ Other cities, such as **Yaounde** (Cameroon), **Hargeisa** (Somaliland), **Alexandria**, **Bishkek** (Kyrgyzstan), **Kharkiv** (Ukraine) and **Tirana** (Albania) are working on their own long-term resilience plans. Moreover, in order to build up greater community resilience, **Helsinki** regularly performs emergency drills on climate change and related issues, working closely with the city's management leaders.²²⁹ This helps to build awareness of environmental threats and potential emergencies, which are then reflected in contingency planning.²³⁰

Promoting sustainable production and consumption

Decoupling economic growth from its harmful environmental impacts is one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary societies.

This is, however, a crucial step to take if we are to achieve the SDGs: the current economic system is exceeding the limits of a planet, whose resources are already over-exploited.²³¹ According to UNEP, "policies that reward the reduction, reuse and recycling of materials in production or that penalize waste generation can accelerate the shift to a circular economy".²³² Cities are increasingly recognising the potential of the circular economy as a catalyst for both efficiency and innovation and thereby providing benefits for their respective economies and environments, and the quality of life of their citizens.²³³



Local strategies for disaster risk reduction must include pandemic preparedness as a priority: this must be part of recovery processes in order to build up resilience to future disease outbreaks.

The circular plans developed by different LRGs may differ in scope and focus. They may be holistic (**Brussels, Gothenburg, London, Samsø**), centred on waste management (**Copenhagen, Phoenix**), support greener business development (**Kristiansand, Glasgow**), or promote innovation and urban labs (**Helsinki, Ljubljana, Tel Aviv, Seoul**).²³⁴ The Circular **Glasgow** initiative, for example, aims to promote good practices and to build up capacity to advance a circular economic system. It helps businesses identify opportunities to support and implement ideas and initiatives related to the circular economy. **Umea** (Sweden) has requested the inclusion of circular economy projects in the core activities of the business incubators supported by the city, while enhancing circular upgrading activities and promoting their valorisation and associated new business opportunities. Other cities, like **Paris** and **Groningen**, already supported circular economy hubs prior to the pandemic. The Eco Parks in **Kitakyushu** (Japan) are a good example of how to take advantage of recycling waste

while, at the same time, producing energy, saving water and creating new business opportunities. Meanwhile, in **Granada** (Spain), the public-private water utility company has transformed its wastewater treatment plant into a bio-factory by producing energy and new materials.²³⁵

The promotion of proximity models for global production and consumption must also be at the heart of the policy models that are promoted as part of recovery strategies.²³⁶

Cities and territories have implemented a wide variety of measures in this regard: Madrid has created a “proximity ecosystem” to protect and deliver basic services to those most vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic. The Government of **Cundinamarca** (Colombia) has set up short marketing circuits in the municipality of **Facatativa** to support farmers and producers in the department. **Montevideo** has developed a website to promote local market producers, and particularly organic farmers, providing a delivery service to facilitate food acquisition by those most vulnerable to the virus. Similarly, **Lima** has developed the platform “*Yo compro en mi barrio*” (I buy in my neighbourhood) to promote local commerce and prevent crowded supply markets, while Barcelona’s provincial government has launched a campaign to promote the local food trade and municipal markets and to help local shops and generally support the economic recovery.²³⁷ LRGs can also support local farmers and producers by buying food directly from them and distributing it to the local population; this has been done by the **Federal District of Brasilia**. This can also be done by promoting home gardens, in homes and at schools, and raising seedlings that can then be distributed to households, once they are ready to be planted; this has been done by **Accra**.²³⁸ Indeed, according to the FAO, proximity models have helped to reduce product loss and waste, particularly in the case of food. They have also proved useful in increasing the resilience of systems while contributing to the reduction of GHG emissions and to empowering local economic development.²³⁹

LRGs have a large responsibility regarding the procurement of goods and services that can be equitably distributed and utilised by their communities. As such, they can set standards for others by incorporating sustainable public procurement clauses that encourage, or even compel, contracting enterprises to contribute to achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability goals. This is key for promoting sustainable consumption and production models at all levels of public governance. To meet these goals,

Raquira, Colombia.
(Image: jose-gil-w7YaZYssDd8-unsplash)



cities and territories are currently implementing a wide range of different initiatives. In **Berlin**, for example, they have embedded ecological criteria in the public procurement process, to a value of up to EUR 5 billion each year. **Paris** has established a transnational responsible procurement working group made up of private companies in order to define new criteria related to efficiency and responsible procurement policy. **Tokyo** has developed measures to embed circularity into Tokyo's 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games by maximising the use of existing venues in the city. This will imply a saving of 80,000 tons of CO₂ emissions.²⁴⁰ LRGs can also promote action to increase transparency in

the private sector and encourage companies to be more sustainable and to commit to reducing their resource consumption and waste generation throughout product lifecycle and the delivery of their services.²⁴¹ ●



Key topics for further reflection:

- The combination of vulnerability to climate change, natural disasters and COVID-19 has hit structurally discriminated groups (women, children, older persons, poor families and people with disabilities) hardest, particularly in developing countries. This has brought to the fore the need to address equality at each step and to build resilient communities in cities and territories. This can be done through the development and adoption of local plans based on disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Such action must, however, take into particular consideration the differentiated impact on those most vulnerable to climate change, pandemics and similar global crises.
- Even in times of COVID-19, cities and regions have remained places of innovation and experimentation for climate policies. The agenda for a just and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic entails a paradigm shift for urban and territorial development. This shift must be supported by innovative solutions that literally build back better: including building more sustainable housing and infrastructure, promoting green jobs, enhancing crucial public services, protecting mass public transit, supporting essential workers, and planning urban public spaces designed to support both people and biodiversity. These strategies need to be at the centre of recovery plans.
- The need to improve building and housing conditions and to make them more accessible and energy efficient has been brought to the fore by the COVID-19 crisis, as has the need for quality space for living. Soft mobility solutions have bloomed during the past year, but COVID-19 has reduced the demand for public transport systems worldwide. This threatens an increase in the use of private, motorised vehicles, which are major contributors to negative health and environmental impacts. Investment in improving housing and safeguarding sustainable public mobility options, as well as advancing soft mobility and proximity, and greening cities through planning can provide benefits across multiple sectors.
- Pathways for achieving more sustainable models of production and consumption for cities and territories continue to grow. These include models based on the circular economy and proximity-based models of production and consumption. However, the pace at which these models are expanding is still insufficient. Their adoption also entails certain challenges and requires a systemic and holistic approach that goes beyond any one particular sector. For instance, those related primarily to the waste sector need to identify synergies with water, energy, transport and land in an integrated manner and to involve the private sector and civil society in the planning and implementation of policies.

4.5

“Peace and partnerships” pillar



The impact of COVID-19 on SDGs 16 and 17

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit at a time when the relationship between governments and their citizens was already under pressure. The social and economic effects of the decade of austerity that followed the 2008 economic and financial crisis has had a major impact on democratic institutions and the political system. However, **without trusted and effective governance institutions, the “peaceful, just and inclusive” societies advocated by SDG 16 and the constellation of alliances and partnerships needed to strengthen the means of implementation (SDG 17) and achieve the SDGs will be even more elusive.** From the global to the local level, these institutions are of pivotal importance for tackling poverty, reducing inequality and providing the effective and inclusive public services demanded by citizens, and even more so in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has forced governments to adopt a number of drastic temporary measures; the most notable of these have been the national states of emergency declared in many countries.²⁴² For citizens, the rights that have been most curtailed have been freedom of expression, personal integrity and security,

and freedom of movement and assembly.²⁴³ National governments have transitioned back and forth from recentralization to entrusting local authorities with new responsibilities.²⁴⁴ While the recentralization of powers has often been justified as a way of avoiding the fragmentation of political action and of reducing potential inequalities in the provision of resources, the differentiated impact of the pandemic on different territories has tended to favour the transferring of certain powers and responsibilities to the local level.²⁴⁵ Taking a more general perspective, the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergency responses to it have raised the question of which coordination mechanisms need to be prepared for possible future crises. It is also important to decide which actors should be involved, their modes and territorial scales of intervention, and their relations and interdependencies with other actors and territories. In the months and years to come, the future of local and regional governance will be marked by the extent to which recovery packages are able to take into account the crucial role that local governments can play as frontline responders to up-coming crises. It is crucial to learn important lessons from

the present pandemic: **faced with COVID-19, countries that were able to respond quickest and most effectively to the crisis had some similarities: firstly, they had strong multi-level coordination mechanisms that were specifically designed for crisis situations; secondly, they had strongly integrated their LRGs in such mechanisms, and thirdly, they had guaranteed LRGs sufficient administrative, fiscal and technical capacities.**²⁴⁶

The pandemic has not only generated new demands in the health sector, but also in terms of economic and social policies, education, policing, mobility, e-services, transparency and access to information, amongst others. As a consequence, LRGs have had to reach far beyond their allocated powers to respond to urgent social needs. In a survey conducted in July 2020 by the Emergency Governance Initiative, LRGs from 35 countries identified uncertainty and lack of funding; effective multi-level governance at both the vertical and horizontal levels; and a lack of local autonomy as their main governance challenges.²⁴⁷ The impact of COVID-19 has since revealed many grey areas and gaps in the distribution of powers, responsibilities and resources.

(Image: jon-tyson-
QzvkdN-yQGA-unsplash)



Defining the main challenges for local governance in the face of crises, such as the current pandemic, local government networks have raised their concern over the need for improved multi-level systems of governance at all levels that can better interact with communities. As defined in the UCLG Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath, it will be crucial to develop a system that builds on the principle of subsidiarity, that brings stakeholders together to respond to crises and that protects those who most need protection.²⁴⁸ Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been defined above as a “syndemic”, as it creates, or reinforces, other economic and social crises, could be accompanied by, or even aggravate, political crises.²⁴⁹

Different ways have been identified to enable local governance to tackle this crisis. Adopting a systems-based approach, rather than sectoral perspectives, and also engaging in local, multi-level and international cooperation and partnerships are now more necessary than ever (SDG 17). Multi-level governance, or, in other words, a combination of both vertical and horizontal collaboration across different sectors and between different tiers of government, has proven crucial in the response to the current crisis and this needs to be reinforced in preparation for up-coming emergencies. Furthermore, **the institutionalisation of these emergency governance mechanisms would serve as a vector of stability and resilience and help society to collectively face the challenges to be met in troubled times yet to come.**²⁵⁰

Global collective action based on successful collaborations—such as the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative, one of the three pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-Accelerator)—has also shown that multilateral collaboration involving different governments, scientists, businesses, civil society, philanthropists, and global health organisations can deliver the desired results. However, it has also been shown that such initiatives need to receive greater support.

The COVID-19 crisis, combined with other emergencies, such as climate change and various social and political crises, represents an unprecedented challenge.²⁵¹ Present and future problems will not be overcome without a major global effort to ensure collaboration between all countries and levels of government. Strengthening multilateral and multi-level governance approaches and reinforcing commitment to local democracy and inclusive governance will be crucial.

Local and regional government action to build more peaceful and inclusive societies and to revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Multilateral and multi-level governance is indispensable for building a more inclusive and equality-driven system that fully involves LRGs, their associations, and local stakeholders. Such a system must be capable of providing essential universal services and caring for their communities. It must be driven by a green and sustainable vision and led, at all levels, by responsible inclusive institutions and enriched through peer cooperation.

Fundamental freedoms, transparency and raising awareness

Notwithstanding the crisis, many LRGs have fostered the resilience of democracy and its innovative mechanisms for citizen participation along with other initiatives to guarantee transparency and accountability. New forms of collaboration between democratic institutions, the media and civil society actors have emerged in response to the pandemic. However, technology-based pandemic control measures, such as tracing people and their data through applications, have led to discussions about the citizens' freedom of movement and the safety of their personal data and digital rights, which are basic human rights in the era of internet.²⁵² Seeking a compromise, some cities, including **Mexico City** and **Budapest**, have opted for using less individualised monitoring options and, on the contrary, using urban data to assess collective densities and mobility trends.²⁵³

LRGs have also played a critical role in ensuring transparency and keeping citizens abreast of the evolution of the pandemic. They developed specific initiatives, such as mass media campaigns (see Box 4.4), for this purpose and also accelerated the digitalisation of public administrative procedures, created hot lines to

answer questions, provided social assistance, etc.

To reduce the digital divide, many cities have invested in the digitalisation of public processes and in ensuring their citizens had access to information. **Palermo** (Italy) did this by mobilising private funds,²⁵⁴ while **Subang Jaya** (Malaysia) and **Guangzhou** (China) shared information with their citizens on successful practices, including ongoing research into technologies used to fight COVID-19. Social media has also been extensively used to create more interactive dialogues between communities during the pandemic. For example, the Mayor, Deputy Mayors and high-level representatives from the health sector at **Chemnitz** (Germany) opened a dedicated space to allow their citizens to ask questions. The answers were then published on the city's website.²⁵⁵ *"DialogandoBA"* in **Buenos Aires** provides another good example of how to build

BOX 4.4

Uniting the public through risk communication

Facing an increase in the number of cases of the new strains of coronavirus and with inadequate public awareness and protective practices, the city of **Yangon** undertook an effective mass media campaign via radio, TV and social media; this was entitled "Let's Beat COVID-19 Together". With a positive tone and a message of solidarity, the campaign helped to unite the public and encouraged people to play their part in preventing the spread of COVID-19 and in supporting patients and healthcare workers on the front lines. The **Federal District of Brasilia** and the city of **Kyiv** have organised campaigns to provide greater transparency about public responses and to prevent the distortion of information, which could undermine efforts to defend public health.

Seoul is a good example of the use of transparency, accountability and communication to tackle the spread of the virus without losing sight of the populations that are most at risk. Similar examples of transparency include the emergency contracting and transparency measures undertaken in **Barcelona** and **Sao Paulo**. These actions show the relevance of enhancing open government and mechanisms that guarantee transparency across a wide range of sectors, in both emergency and non-emergency contexts.

Source: Cities4GlobalHealth platform



To reduce the digital divide, many cities have invested in the digitalisation of public processes and in ensuring their citizens had access to information.

trust by helping local inhabitants to share their input. These contributions were then taken into account to help identify effective health and safety measures. This initiative was also useful for combating the spread of misleading and unreliable information about COVID-19.²⁵⁶ Civil society has also played a role in promoting more open and accessible information. For example, the “*DirectorioCovidMX*” is a web platform for enhancing local government transparency during the management of the COVID-19 crisis in Mexico. The platform is an innovative, open-source example of public sector and civil society collaboration to improve the reliability of information and to facilitate access to it.²⁵⁷

Some cities have designed inclusive information campaigns targeting certain marginalised communities because potentially at-risk groups also face multiple barriers to accessing information, such as language, segregation and a mistrust for authorities.²⁵⁸ For example, awareness-raising and information dissemination campaigns were aimed at minorities, migrant and refugee communities in **Montreal** and **Ioannina** (Greece).²⁵⁹

Local governance in the face of the crisis: multi-stakeholder partnerships

The pandemic has shown how essential whole-of-society approaches are in responding to crises. It has led to innovation in governance and to the rapid formation and/or reinforcement of partnerships with local stakeholders. Private institutions and civil society organisations have played a key role in helping LRGs to take care of their inhabitants during the crisis.²⁶⁰ For example, **Tokyo** has worked with private-sector partners to ensure the continuity of businesses. It has provided support and training to small firms through the promotion of employment and schemes designed to improve skills, management and labour relations. In **Toronto**, the city government, partnered by ICT companies, has provided free internet access to low-income neighbourhoods, shelters and long-term care

homes.²⁶¹ Many LRGs have engaged in multi-stakeholder platforms and created networks to share roadmaps with organised civil society and to advance towards a stronger and more collaborative governance culture.²⁶² **Bristol's** (UK) One City Economic Board is an example of an innovative, multi-representative platform that involves the private sector, academia and CSOs. The Board's objective is to encourage joint reflection by all of the actors involved in the One City Approach mechanism, which has brought together hundreds of actors from different sectors.²⁶³ In **Kazan** (Russia), the city council has also promoted cooperation with civil society through volunteer groups that have attended to the needs of the populations most at-risk. In **Nairobi**, religious leaders have been working with the local government to provide worshippers with information on how to protect themselves from COVID-19. Although many CSOs have acted independently during the pandemic, these examples show that LRGs have the capability and tools to reinforce their links with them and to thereby strengthen bridges with local citizens.²⁶⁴

In the elaboration of local recovery plans, partnerships have also been established to facilitate more coordinated and multi-disciplinary policy responses. For instance, **Chicago** has created a COVID-19 Recovery Taskforce that includes stakeholders from different sectors, ranging from industry to government, and involving local leaders and policymakers. In **Maringa** (Brazil), the city government has partnered with Sebrae (Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service) to create the Economic and Social Development Recovery Plan. The **Toronto** Office of Recovery and Rebuild has followed a city-wide approach when coordinating different sectors (residents, communities, indigenous communities, businesses, city council members and other stakeholders) and defining a recovery and rebuild strategy for the whole city.



Private institutions and civil society organisations have played a key role in helping LRGs to take care of their inhabitants during the crisis.

Local democracy: promoting more inclusive and participatory decision-making

Around the world, participatory practices in local governance have been adversely affected by the restrictions imposed during the pandemic.²⁶⁵ It is, however, essential to ensure the continuity of the mechanisms of local democracy and citizen participation in decision-making, even during the crisis. Their continuity is vital to maintain trust in local authorities. They are especially needed in the midst of social and political turmoil. Likewise, they are key to ensuring the protection of the most vulnerable from the impact of the pandemic. Citizens must jointly decide on effective solutions and ensure the continuity of deal-making processes among competing interests. In sum: it is necessary to counter any retreat in democracy; democratic processes need to be reinforced in times of crisis.²⁶⁶ Examples of citizen-led practices that have resulted in practical strategies for tackling COVID-19 include consultation processes of the type undertaken in the French department of **Haute-Garonne**, which has sought to involve local citizens in decisions concerning the future of the territory.²⁶⁷

Inspired by citizen assemblies—a form of deliberative democracy that has increased in popularity in recent years—**emergency assemblies have been organised to ensure that measures are responsive to local needs.**²⁶⁸ For example, in order to engage young people in decision-making during the pandemic, **Lima** hosted a COVID-19 Virtual Youth Assembly with the support of the Commission of Teenage Women Leaders of Metropolitan Lima.²⁶⁹

Participatory budgeting is a modality of participation in local decision-making that was already well-disseminated before the pandemic at all micro-local to metropolitan and regional scales.²⁷⁰ Some LRGs have taken action to ensure the (re)activation of such mechanisms during the pandemic (see Box 4.5).

Overall, the pandemic has accelerated the **shift to e-participation through the use of digital tools.**²⁷¹ Melbourne has opened an on-line platform that allows its inhabitants to share their perspective of the city's future; this will be used to contribute to the city's recovery plan. Despite such innovations, which are mainly aimed at guaranteeing continuity and even reinforcing citizen participation in the management of the crisis, inequalities in the access to, and use of, these mechanisms need to be taken into consideration. Such inequalities include not only disparities in the representation

of views and interests between different generations but also between different socio-economic groups. Furthermore, in order to make the most of these participatory mechanisms, they should be closely linked to other means of sharing local information, opening access to governmental data, and triggering public oversight of political decisions.²⁷² It is also key to systematise local democracy and channels of participation so as to guarantee their long-term importance in local political agendas and to ensure continuity in the face of political changes and future crises.

BOX 4.5

Promoting decision-making through technology in Barcelona and Madrid

Barcelona encourages the use of technology to facilitate active democracy. This means developing new models of engagement within open, secure and free digital environments for new forms of policy-making that are experimental and able to build on the collective intelligence of citizens. The democratic platform "*Decidim.Barcelona*" aims to increase citizen digital sovereignty by enabling people to fully exercise their freedom and digital rights, including their right to data protection, privacy, information and self-determination. During the pandemic, Madrid City Council has been able to use an existing platform: "*Decide Madrid*", which was launched in 2015; this is likely to provide stable support and to yield positive long-term results.²⁷³

Source: Barcelona²⁷⁴ and Madrid²⁷⁵ city councils' websites.

Increased multi-level coordination

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 crisis has led to instances of both recentralization and decentralization in different countries and during the different stages of the response to the pandemic. Multi-level governance mechanisms are essential for preventing conflicting interventions in this type of context; instead, they can help ensure a coherent and integrated response to the crisis at all levels.²⁷⁶ More collaborative and cooperative governance is also called for by the 2030 Agenda, in order to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development (SDG 17.14).

However, **responses to COVID-19 have also shown divisions and tensions between national and subnational governments over**

emergency declarations and measures. In the EU, fewer than half of the LRG representatives considered the mechanisms used during the crisis to coordinate with their respective national governments as being effective.²⁷⁷ Several countries have experienced political tension in relations between different levels of government at various moments of the crisis. The national level has not always taken into account the views and needs of local governments.²⁷⁸ In the **USA**, this was particularly true during the previous administration, and in **Brazil** the resistance of federal governments to take action to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis has led many states and municipalities to take measures of their own. In various countries, LRGs and their associations have complained that they were not consulted over the elaboration of local aid packages.²⁷⁹

LRGs often report not having been made part of national coordination mechanisms charged with designing recovery plans. In the **EU**, for example, only a minority of national governments have consulted their local governments regarding their proposals for implementing the EU recovery package ("NextGeneration EU"). LRG involvement is critical for ensuring that recovery funds reach the cities and territories that are most in need, for strengthening essential services, for guaranteeing territorial cohesion and respon-

ding to local realities, and also for allowing local innovation. **LRGs must participate in decision-making processes that lead to the adoption of recovery policies. The role of LRGs in the recovery must therefore go beyond the mere implementation of nationally-determined plans and policies.**

In spite of the worrying trend identified above, various multi-level governance measures have been reinforced or implemented. Some countries have co-ordinated their emergency responses in accordance with pre-established emergency or disaster frameworks; one example is **South Africa's** Disaster Management Act, which operates at the national level. In other cases, temporary structures have been implemented, new task forces have been formed, and ad hoc coordination or specific emergency bodies have been institutionalised in preparation for future crises. **Chile's** Social Committee for COVID-19 includes national-level institutions and representatives of municipal associations, academics and professionals from the health sector.²⁸⁰ **Korea's** Central Crisis Management Committee includes representatives from all relevant central government ministries, as well as from Korea's 17 provinces and its major cities.²⁸¹ In **Kenya**, the National Coordination Committee on the Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic allows both national and county-level government bodies to jointly coordinate their



Barcelona, Spain. (Image: polina-kocheva-28InVv-8dc-unsplash)

efforts.²⁸² Even so, the degree of participation of LRGs in national crisis structures and in the decision-making processes responsible for designing recovery strategies varies enormously, ranging from information sharing and ad hoc consultations to a few, rather rare, cases of regular and equal participation.

Associations of local and regional governments have played a key role in supporting vertical coordination. In the midst of the crisis, they have proved essential interlocutors in strengthening links between national and local governments. For example, the **Norwegian** association of local and regional authorities KS acted as a contact point and coordinator between the country's local governments and its national government, parliament and directorates. The association **Local Government New Zealand** has collaborated with high-level authorities in the design of grant programmes to assist local authorities to stimulate recovery in specific sectors of the national economy. **Dutch** LGAs have been particularly active in discussing the inclusion of local priorities, including investment and funding, in recovery packages. Other LGAs have participated in discussions organised by national governments relating to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic (**Finland, the Philippines**) or have collected data and communicated the views and needs of local authorities to national governments (**Bolivia, Indonesia, Palestine, Sri Lanka**). Almost all LGAs have increased their advocacy work and lobbied their national governments to provide more support to LRGs.

In summary, as these experiences show, maintaining regular dialogue and exploiting specific vertical coordination mechanisms between national and local authorities, and also with their associations, is extremely valuable. Such actions have helped to reduce tension between different levels of government and to improve responses to the crisis. This has been achieved throughout whole countries, in a locally-adapted and more coherent way.

At the same time, LRGs have fostered inter-municipal cooperation, collaborating with neighbouring municipalities and small towns to provide emergency responses relating to public transport, food supplies, water, sanitation and waste management.²⁸³

Coordination across the rural-urban continuum and in metropolitan regions has also been key to taking the fullest advantage of the cumulative benefits of such complex territorial and urban systems.²⁸⁴ For example, the **Metropolitan Area of Guadalajara** (Mexico), **Grenoble-**

Alpes Metropole (France)²⁸⁵ and **Izmir's "Crisis Municipalism"** directives all include paths for cooperation with neighbouring municipalities, businesses and civil society.²⁸⁶ In **Kenya**, all 47 county-level governments have established interagency disaster response committees to facilitate response coordination between different agencies operating at the county level.²⁸⁷ The governors of **New York, New Jersey, Connecticut** and **Pennsylvania** have coordinated their efforts and resources in the formulation of health policies.²⁸⁸ Finally, in some cases, local government cooperation has even extended across borders, as in some European border regions (in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Austria).²⁸⁹

During the pandemic, local and regional government networks have also created, reactivated or reinforced numerous initiatives to share challenges and solutions with LRGs related to the impact of COVID-19. For instance, **UCLG, Metropolis** and the **AL-Las network** have launched online learning series to support peer-to-peer exchanges, as well as the **Cities for Global Health** platform, in partnership with UN-Habitat (see Box 4.6). **ICLEI, the Commonwealth**

BOX 4.6

Live Learning Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

With the objective of bridging the gap between the local and global levels, and with special emphasis on creating partnerships, UCLG, UN-Habitat and Metropolis have joined forces to support LRGs responding to the COVID-19 outbreak on the ground. These organisations have facilitated weekly meetings that have been organised by topics. These have been Live Learning Experiences (LLEs) in which municipalities and experts from all over the world have shared challenges and initiatives and worked together to find effective solutions and address the multiple impacts of the crisis on urban life. The LLEs have consolidated and empowered a virtual community of local and regional leaders. Their exchanges are available at the "Beyond the Outbreak" knowledge hub and complement the Cities for Global Health online platform. This information bank currently contains more than 600 first-hand experiences from governments and communities responding to the COVID-19 crisis.²⁹⁰

Source: Beyond The Outbreak and Cities4GlobalHealth platforms (2021)

Local Government Forum, the **Global Cities Resilience Network** and the **Mayors Migration Council** have also facilitated multiple learning events, networks and trackers, and curated guidance and the development of useful tools. The **C40 Knowledge Hub** has repurposed its climate networks to deliver support in response to COVID-19 and develop a **Mayors COVID-19 Task Force**.²⁹¹ The **Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments**, together with various regional networks (UCLG Africa, UCLG ASPAC, FLACMA, etc.), has provided key platforms to galvanise efforts in support of LRGs and knowledge sharing.²⁹² At the multilateral level, the global networks of cities and regions gathered together in the Global Taskforce have helped to address a number of global challenges, as explained in Subsection 3.3, above.

Finally, local government networks have rapidly joined the voices of NGOs and health institutions all around the world in calling for “the temporary release of vaccine patents so that vaccines can be produced by any country in the world”.²⁹³ They are also calling for vaccine equity and for the “free and equitable distribution of vaccines to recover better and leave no one behind”, in line with the principles of: universal and fair distribution; cost-effective pricing; government involvement; and free inoculation.²⁹⁴ At the local level, the **Barcelona Declaration for the Release of Patents**, which has been signed by both public and private stakeholders from the city, is aligned with this initiative,²⁹⁵ and **Seoul** has guaranteed access to COVID-19 vaccines for foreign nationals.²⁹⁶ ●

Key topics for further reflection:

- The COVID-19 pandemic poses a global challenge for health, but also for peace and justice. It has affected relations between different spheres of government, their respective capacities for action, and their interaction with citizens. It has caused a redistribution of power and created a level of political turmoil capable of undermining the objective of achieving accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- The participation of citizens in local governance has also been severely affected by the crisis, with restrictions of freedom and the concentration of power. It is essential to reinforce and ensure the continuity of citizen participation mechanisms and to protect local democracy both during the crisis and in its aftermath. To achieve this, it will be essential to build solid foundations for the recovery phase and to take measures to ensure preparedness for future crises.
- The crisis has shown the importance of multi-level collaborative governance providing coherent policy responses to complex emergencies. In contrast, siloed approaches to emergency response have proven counterproductive. Vertical coordination mechanisms, based on the principles of subsidiarity and respect for local autonomy, are critical for local-level action, innovation and context-sensitive responses. The same logic applies for horizontal coordination between local governments, be that inter-municipal, between regions, or even across borders.
- Improving the institutional, operational and financial capacities of LRGs and their implication in national crisis management mechanisms will be key to being better prepared for up-coming emergencies and to adapting responses to meet the needs of local communities, without leaving anyone behind.
- In short, effective multi-level governance and participatory mechanisms are essential for materialising the whole-of-society approach needed to recover from the socio-economic crisis triggered by the current pandemic. Such governance frameworks are crucial for rebuilding the social contract between our societies, local and national public actors and institutions, other sectors (private, civil society) and the plurilateral system. Local ownership and partnerships must play an essential role in all of this.



5 Means of implementation

5.1 Financing the localization of the 2030 Agenda



State of play: Mobilisation of financial resources to support SDG localization in times of pandemic

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, there was an **estimated USD 5.6 trillion investment gap in the infrastructure required to achieve the SDGs** in the Decade of Action.¹ This was on top of an estimated annual shortfall of USD 0.4-1.1 trillion required to make this infrastructure low-carbon and climate-resilient.² Addressing this infrastructure gap for sustainable and resilient public services remains a vital priority for all levels of government, including LRGs, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This shortfall has been further exacerbated by the current crisis, which has affected all aspects of the financing required for the implementation of the SDGs. The 2021 Financing for Sustainable Development Report (FSDR) highlights a global decline in tax revenues, direct foreign investment, trade and remittances, coupled with increasing debt vulnerability. Unprecedented public funds have been mobilised to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis, but this has been done in an uneven manner, resulting in the worsening of existing disparities and inequalities, both within and between countries.

By the end of 2020, only **20% of the USD 16 trillion in fiscal stimuli and recovery funds globally mobilised to curb the worst effects of the pandemic had been spent in developing countries,**³ and only **USD 1.1 trillion had been committed to local governments.**⁴ Aligning recovery plans and spending with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement has been recognised by UN Member States as a key commitment and necessary precondition for financing the emergency response and building a sustainable, resilient and risk-informed development pathway towards the 2030 objectives. The UN Secretary-General further stresses the need for these stimuli and relief packages to be used to build up local government capacity.⁵

However, the key messages from the 2021 VNRs provide **very little detail about the costs of national-level implementation of the SDGs in the reporting countries, and even less about the financial resources needed to localize the Global Agendas.** Some countries have tried to estimate their needs, such as Nicaragua, where the national government assesses its funding gap for addressing the climate emergency at USD 2 billion per year,⁶ and Benin, who developed a costing analysis of the SDGs (see

the 2020 VNR). The Namibian government reports an increase in domestic resource mobilisation to implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures since 2015, highlighting fund mobilisation of around USD 90 million for this purpose.⁷ Enhancing domestic resource mobilisation is also a strategic pillar of both Zimbabwe's and Sierra Leone's financing strategies for achieving the SDGs and also securing other sources of funding, including loans, grants, direct foreign investment, diaspora remittances and the promotion of public-private partnerships.⁸ A comprehensive strategy to align financial resources with local, regional and national planning and SDG-related programmes has been rolled out in Indonesia. Something similar, but to a lesser degree, has also been planned in Guatemala.⁹ Some reporting countries also stress the need for debt relief and cancellation to support SDG financing. Finally, Cape Verde's VNR specifically highlights the need to consider the inherent vulnerabilities of small island developing states (SIDS) and to facilitate their access to official development assistance (ODA) and concessional financing, as well as the need to create a SIDS compact to finance sustainable recovery.¹⁰

When addressing the localization of financing for sustainable development, **the 2021 FSDR provides only a partial overview of LRG contributions as policy makers and financial partners in sustainable recovery strategies.** Despite the crucial role many LRGs have played in their country's respective emergency and recovery responses to the pandemic, the report does not capture their specific funding needs to implement sustainable policies and achieve the SDGs. Indeed, local and regional revenues have been significantly affected by emergency measures and the shutdown of their local economies, while they have also had to incur extraordinary expenses to respond to the pandemic. At the same time, they have been required to invest more money in social protection to protect those worst affected by the crisis.¹¹ This has weighed heavily on their finances: **on average, LRGs may lose from 15% to 25% of their revenue in 2021** (see Figure 5.1).¹² The pandemic has also highlighted disparities between LRGs and their respective capacities to exert effective control over access to, and the management of, their finances. Such challenges in accessing municipal financing are particularly acute in developing countries, where LRGs are often faced with inadequate institutional frameworks, lack of creditworthiness, and limited capacity to prepare projects deemed investment-worthy by financial stakeholders.

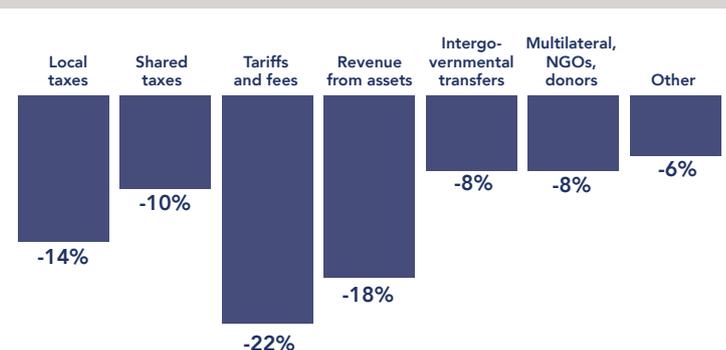
In addition, they must often meet the needs of fast-growing urban populations. This crisis is a stark reminder of the importance of **diversifying and scaling up local and regional authorities' sources of funding in order to increase their flexibility and autonomy, and resilience** to future shocks.¹³

These institutional, regulatory, technical and financial barriers have led to a growing mismatch between the demand and supply sides. This has caused a dramatic underfinancing of most LRGs, which has undermined their financial potential and their capacity to localize the SDGs. Although many credit lines and project preparation facilities have been established by financing institutions to support LRGs in making the investments needed to deliver the global agendas, several of these lines are currently underperforming. Finding solutions and ways to **address the failure of municipal finance markets** is therefore imperative if LRGs are to be provided with adequate access to funds with which to finance local projects and foster the required socio-economic, environmental and cultural changes. Ongoing negotiations relating to public investment recovery packages, set up at the national and regional levels, may also have a lasting impact on the capacity of LRGs to provide public services to their communities and deliver the Global Agendas. Box 5.1 presents examples of countries reporting this year where LRGs and their associations have been involved in the definition and implementation of such packages.

FIGURE 5.1

EGI Survey: Average income loss since the COVID-19 outbreak across different sources of revenue

Emergency Governance Initiative



Source: UCLG, Metropolis, LSE Cities. Emergency Governance Initiative Policy Brief 03: "Financing Emergencies in Cities and Regions: Ongoing Lessons from the Pandemic".

BOX 5.1

Spotlight on LRG involvement in national and regional financial recovery packages

A myriad of fiscal stimuli and recovery packages were launched in the second half of 2020 and at the beginning of 2021 in different countries. They sought to lay the foundations for an inclusive, just and resilient recovery. The inclusion of LRGs in the design and implementation of these recovery packages is crucial given the key role that they play in public investment worldwide and that they have had in the response to the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁴

In **Indonesia**, regular meetings held between the national government and LGAs that have provided localized data on the needs and priorities of LRGs. The national government has set up the National Economic Recovery Programme comprising various policies, including national loans to LRGs to help restore and/or boost provincial and local economies. USD 24 billion have also been allocated to accelerate the implementation of this national programme; this includes USD 9.6 billion for ministries, institutions and local and regional authorities.¹⁵ The **Norwegian** association of local and regional authorities KS has also provided input to the national government's crisis packages. In 2021, an additional USD 879.6 million will be allocated to local authorities, on top of nearly USD 1.9 billion that the country's municipalities have already received as COVID-19 financial support in 2021.¹⁶ In **Kenya**, the Council of Governors has coordinated and developed 3-year COVID-19 socio-economic reengineering and recovery strategies at county level. The LGA is currently assisting Kenyan counties in implementing this USD 1.19 billion recovery plan, which will largely be funded by county government budgets, supplemented by resources from development partners.¹⁷ Finally, in **Mexico**, although no LRG participation in national recovery plans was reported from the federal government, a number of state governments, such as those of Yucatan, San Luis Potosi and Coahuila, have adopted fiscal measures aimed to financially assist their municipalities in dealing with the emergency.¹⁸

In many instances, LGAs have been instrumental in demanding a greater role for their members in the recovery plans. Some of them have been successful in their attempts,¹⁹ while

others keep advocating for a greater involvement of their members in these packages, notably in the EU, in the context of the adoption of a new long-term budget.²⁰ In **Spain**, the local government association FEMP was able to join the Sectoral Conference for the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan created by the national government alongside the regional governments. This allows the LGA to have a direct say in the negotiation on the allocation of EU funds for the recovery.

At a global level, the 2021 Survey carried out by the GTF/UCLG for the purpose of this report, and additional desk research, reveals that out of 97 countries analysed, **LRGs in only 19 countries reported that they had been consulted, either directly or indirectly, on behalf of their respective national associations regarding the definition and/or implementation of their country's recovery plans.** Even when not directly involved in recovery plan negotiations, LRGs in 11 other countries reported having received additional financial support to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. LGAs in the remaining 67 countries either declared not having been consulted (10 countries), having engaged in advocacy for financial support to LRGs in response to the pandemic (5 countries), or did not provide any details about the involvement of their members in the design and implementation of these recovery packages.²¹

There is still uncertainty as to whether the national recovery packages that currently support LRGs will continue to do so beyond 2021. Many national governments have already announced that any support for LRGs will now be targeted at those most affected by the pandemic and/or those facing specific socio-economic challenges.



LGAs have been instrumental in demanding a greater role for their members in the recovery plans.



Province of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. (Image: sebastian-staines-SBCvP6i8hR8-unsplash)

Solutions to bridge the financing gap at the local and territorial levels in order to achieve large-scale transformation

Finding new pathways to finance the required urban investment is a top priority. This is now even greater in the context of the pandemic, which has created increasing uncertainty about future local and regional government revenue. Several innovative mechanisms may, however, prove successful in improving the access of cities and regions to finance. The development of **national programmes for financing and investing in urban and territorial development**, based on national urban policies, is critical for providing instruments to connect long-term urban spatial planning and for financing investment at the local and regional levels. The Indonesian government recently launched a National Urban

Development Project to help cities improve how they target their capital investment depending on their infrastructure priorities, and enhance their ability to access alternative sources of financing.²² At the local level, **Trondheim** provides an interesting example of how to apply an SDG budgeting approach to municipal financing in order to relate urban planning to financial resources.²³ Equally important is the **setting up of technical assistance facilities at the national level** to help LRGs structure their investment projects and match their local investment needs to available resources. In doing so, these mechanisms address the lack of capacity of LRGs to structure investment-ready projects, and hence contribute to overcoming market failure. At the global level, a number of project preparation facilities focusing on urban infrastructure has also increased in recent years.

These facilities provide technical assistance to cities and regions, sometimes accompanied by investment. Examples include the International Municipal Investment Fund, which is jointly promoted by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and UCLG, in collaboration with the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV). The Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (CCFLA) has identified 35 project preparation facilities that can help cities in emerging and developing economies to achieve the SDGs through the implementation of green and resilient infrastructure.²⁴ Other examples include: the C40 Cities Finance Facility, ICLEI's Transformative Actions Programme, and finally the GCoM and the European Investment Bank. These initiatives have resulted in better mapping and matching of projects with financial opportunities.²⁵

The 2021 FSDR further highlights the **potential of national and local intermediations**—and in particular, subnational development banks (SDBs)—**to provide LRGs with access to domestic and international public and private finance** for sustainable local and territorial investment projects that are aligned with the SDGs. Besides being financial intermediaries, they are key instruments that can help foster LRG capacities to develop a portfolio of investment-worthy projects and stronger municipal credit markets in the long run. Efforts have recently been made by the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV), in its capacity as UCLG's consultation mechanism for local finance, to strengthen spaces for dialogue between LRGs and financial intermediaries. Such initiatives have included the **creation of regional alliances of SDBs** both in Africa (the Network of African Financial Institutions for

Local Governments) and, more recently, in Latin America.²⁶ SDBs are also critical when it comes to providing contracyclical responses during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the Colombian territorial development bank FINDETER launched the “*Compromiso Colombia*” (Colombia Commitment) credit line with total funding of USD 199 million. This includes benefits to municipalities and departments, helps to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and provides finance for public investment in areas such as guaranteeing basic public services, tourism, environment and ICTs.²⁷

National governments and international financial institutions also have the capacity to create incentives for investors and de-risking instruments including through SDBs in order to finance local and regional investment in infrastructure and secure funding for its maintenance and operation. The **provision of national and international guarantees and credit enhancement mechanisms** is a powerful instrument for mitigating investment risk and attracting the availability of private resources. This can facilitate LRG access to a wide range of financial resources, including debt and equity. Examples of LRGs gaining access to such blended financing mechanisms in order to help implement the 2030 Agenda can be found in Indonesia, where the Ministry of Finance has launched SDG Indonesia One. This is a platform that also facilitates the participation of stakeholders in financing infrastructure projects through a combination of blended financing instruments, which include: crowdfunding, Islamic finance, and social impact bonds.²⁸ In Japan, the Cabinet Office has set up a Public-Private Partnership Platform for SDG Regional Revitalisation in order to deepen partnerships between local governments and private institutions, with a view to financing the localization of the SDGs.²⁹

Maximising the potential of the above instruments requires having appropriate institutional and regulatory frameworks in place. National governments, together with public and private financing partners, have a key role to play in creating an enabling environment within which LRGs can fully deliver on their mandate and achieve the SDGs. In particular, **it is absolutely critical to provide adequate, timely and stable, intergovernmental fiscal transfers to LRGs**, particularly, and most importantly, in times of crisis. The 2021 Zimbabwe Voluntary Subnational Review acknowledges the crucial role that national allocations have had in supporting local



National governments, together with financing partners, have a key role to play in creating an enabling environment within which LRGs can fully deliver on their mandate and achieve the SDGs.

authorities and helping them to meet their responsibilities in such key areas as health, water, sanitation and improvement works, and to thereby contribute to the global goals.³⁰ In Cape Verde, a Decentralization Fund, managed by UNDP, will equally distribute EUR 2.8 million between all 22 of the country's municipalities, during the period 2020-2022 and support local projects in such areas as climate change, agroindustry, local tourism, social services and gender equality, among others. All the country's municipalities have also been allocated more than 76 urban and rural state-owned properties for residential, commercial, agricultural, cultural and sports purposes and to improve municipal service facilities and thereby increase municipal assets and the potential for the municipalities to generate their own revenue.³¹ While these initiatives have the potential to provide valuable additional revenue to LRGs in the context of the crisis, it is equally important to ensure that intergovernmental transfers are fully commensurate with LRGs' mandated responsibilities. In some countries, **recovery plans have also provided an opportunity to adopt, or accelerate, fiscal decentralization and local finance reform.** In Bolivia, the Federation of Municipal Associations has pushed through Law 1307, which reallocates 12% of the resources obtained from the direct tax on hydrocarbons to the country's municipalities, governors' offices and universities, to help them cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and to introduce measures to ensure food security and strengthen productive activities.³²

Consolidating local fiscal space through own-source revenue mobilisation is another key precondition for LRGs being able to finance and manage their investment projects and achieve the SDGs. As part of its Transform **Freetown** initiative, Freetown city council has significantly reformed its property tax system. This has led to a quadrupling of the number of property owners who are taxed and to a significant increase in the share of the budget coming from own-source revenues: from 50% to 63% by 2020.³³ A similar initiative to tax land and physical properties has been implemented in **Hargeisa** (Somaliland), through a land value capture mechanism. This has also provided the city with a valuable source of income with which to finance the development of its own urban infrastructure.³⁴ The digitalisation of tax collection is another powerful tool with which to optimise own-source revenue collection and increase tax compliance. A number of local authorities have started developing



Kampala, Uganda. (Image: random-institute-oZwH8m9gV7M-unsplash)

digital tools to improve revenue management and public services provided to taxpayers, as well as increasing budget transparency. For instance, **Kampala** is currently implementing an EU-funded Programme on Integrated Local Finances for Sustainable Urban Development, in the Greater Kampala region, to support the roll-out of a digitalised integrated revenue administration system, which will serve three municipalities in the metropolitan area.³⁵ Several cities and regions are also introducing carbon pricing, or taxes, to raise revenue for climate change adaptation and mitigation. The World Bank has identified 35 subnational governments that have either implemented, or plan to implement, carbon pricing initiatives. These include **8 Chinese cities and provinces** and, more recently, the Mexican states of **Baja California, Tamaulipas and Zacatecas.**³⁶

Helping LRGs to become more credit-worthy must also be made a key priority of the



There is a largely untapped potential for LRGs to access borrowing in order to finance investment in the infrastructure and services required to achieve the SDGs, which could not otherwise be met by intergovernmental transfers or own revenues alone.

support provided by finance and investment institutions. This is required to facilitate LRG access to long-term financing mechanisms that are tailored to their needs and designed on their own terms. Many LRGs in low-income countries do not have access to borrowing (through loans or bonds) due to regulatory constraints. Furthermore, where borrowing is legally permitted, a number of cities still lack the financial management capacity and stable revenue streams to be able to pay back their debt. Access to debt and equity can be even more difficult to come by in contexts of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to record levels of sovereign debt, with national and subnational credit ratings being downgraded. However, there is also a largely untapped potential for LRGs to access borrowing in order to finance investment in the infrastructure and services required to achieve the SDGs, which could not otherwise be met by intergovernmental transfers or own revenues alone. In Mexico, the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit issued a EUR 750 million sovereign SDG bond to support projects in municipalities hosting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, with the aim of reducing inequalities and the gender gap, while promoting financial inclusion. In Sweden, the Kommuninvest agency has a long history of lending to municipalities at low interest rates and issuing green bonds on their behalf. In June 2021, it raised its 13th green bond, with a value of SEK 5 billion (USD 6 billion).³⁷ Similar cooperative financing mechanisms have

emerged in other parts of the world, such as the newly established UCLGA Africa Territorial Agency (ATA), which aims to pool LRG resources to leverage private market finance in support of capital investment. The ATA is particularly aimed at intermediary cities and smaller territories that have considerable difficulty in meeting conditions to borrow on their own. Successful examples of individual LRGs being able to access external financing include the city of **Johannesburg**, which was one of the first cities to issue a ZAR 1.5 billion (USD 143 million) green bond to finance green building and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The city is currently leading an initiative, alongside the FMDV, to launch the first pooled green bond in Africa, in conjunction with all the other municipalities in the **Gauteng** province.³⁸ The development of a culture of inter-governmental cooperation and mutual partnership between different spheres of government, as well as support provided by development finance institutions, have certainly played a crucial role in the successful implementation of these financing mechanisms and their replication in other parts of South Africa.³⁹

As we progress through the Decade of Action, the localization of financing in support of sustainable urban and territorial development must be at the heart of the agendas of both national governments and public and private financing partners. The latter find themselves in a unique position to foster adequate institutional and regulatory frameworks and to help secure stable revenue streams and enhance the creditworthiness of LRGs. At the same time, they can also develop strategic public-private alliances and scale up innovative financing mechanisms in order to meet the needs of all their cities and regions. **Renewed platforms for dialogue**, such as the Malaga Global Coalition for Municipal Finance, bring together LRGs and key stakeholders engaged in the local financing value chain. These **are crucial for accelerating the localization of financing for transformative public service and capital infrastructure in the post-COVID-19 recovery period.** ●

5.2

Monitoring as a critical cross-level matter



The UN Secretary-General's report to the 2021 HLPF stated very clearly that: "the ability of governments to respond effectively and recover better will also depend on the availability of data."⁴⁰ The report also recognised that the pandemic has exacerbated critical funding gaps "in national, regional, and global statistical offices, making the need to mobilize international and domestic resources to support data for decision making more urgent than ever". It is important to emphasise that these calls for resources also need to underline the importance of data collection and monitoring at the local level. However, it is widely accepted that most of the indicators identified by the UN IAEG-SDGs are difficult for LRGs to access and use because they are, by and large, conceived for national institutions: it has been estimated that only one third of the 232 official SDG indicators can be effectively measured at the local level.⁴¹

Even though progress has been made, with relatively few exceptions, indicator availability at the subnational level remains notably insufficient. Although more and more countries are taking action to remedy this problem, **the national governments and national institutions in charge of monitoring the implementation of the SDGs are generally unable to disaggregate data down to the subnational level in an adequate and sufficient way.**⁴² Having disaggregated data is key to obtaining a reliable snapshot of the needs and living conditions of poorer communities, women, children, older people, indigenous people, migrants and refugees, people with

disabilities, and other structurally discriminated groups. Likewise, data broken down by area is needed in order to deal with the specific realities and circumstances of each country's diverse territories and communities. Collecting disaggregated data is also crucial for ensuring sound decision-making and policy-making processes. These are vital for reducing the inequalities experienced by many groups and territories and also for supporting systematic place-based development policies.⁴³

Due to the limited availability of data from the ground, local monitoring and reporting are still relatively rare in much of the world. Even in 2021, 41% of the LGAs in reporting countries had yet to develop any form of system for tracking the SDG localization progress. The picture is, however, somewhat better at the local level (with 72% of LRGs having developed some kind of mechanism to do this).⁴⁴ The figures are especially worrying in developing countries (with the gaps in data collection mechanisms in Africa and Latin America being the most problematic, according to information collected in 2021). This is the result of a combination of failings: the approaches to data collection of some national statistics offices, which do not always look to produce and/or collect localized data, and a systemic lack of human, technical and financial resources at the local level to support effective local data collection.

However, some progress has also been observed compared with last year, and LRGs and their associations should be encouraged to build upon this and to foster better enabling

environments in the quest for obtaining better, and more abundant, data. **In addition to producing VLRs and VSRs, which help LRGs and/or their national associations to evaluate their contribution to the SDGs, an increasing number of LRGs are now defining the monitoring and evaluation strategies and tools to be used, and also their accountability mechanisms.** Thus, according to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey, in Europe, a total of 21 (of 34) LGAs have set up some sort of accountability mechanism. Furthermore, 16 of the 22 European VLRs analysed in detail in a recent study by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) included, or used, some kind of data and/or indicators.⁴⁵ Systems developed by national LGAs that are worth underlining include: the

Los Angeles, California. (Image: jack-finnigan-aEkk0KxvPpg-unsplash)



monitoring strategy used by the German association of cities, **Deutscher Städtetag**,⁴⁶ the taxonomy that the **Norwegian** association KS has developed in partnership with the country's national statistics office (Statistics Norway) to classify SDG-related indicators while, at the same time, assessing the implementation of the U4SSC Key Performance Indicators (KPIs);⁴⁷ and the Swedish open database, "Kolada", which has been developed by the Swedish Council for Municipal Analysis on behalf of **SALAR** and the Swedish government.⁴⁸

Several LRGs and LGAs are currently using regular mechanisms and/or previously available indicators as part of their strategies to monitor and report on the SDGs. These include 18% of the LGAs and 26% of the LRGs from the countries which are presenting a VNR this year.⁴⁹ They also include the well-known VLRs of **New York City, Bristol, Buenos Aires, La Paz** and **Suwon**, and the practices carried out by **Los Angeles** and **Sao Paulo** and mentioned below.⁵⁰ Some other systems have been created ad hoc and 23% of LGAs and 35% of LRGs from the reporting countries are currently revising SDG-related indicators and/or systems in order to adapt them at the local level.⁵¹ **Barcelona** and the **Basque Country**, in Spain; **Medellin**, in Colombia; and **Buenos Aires** and **Cordoba**, in Argentina, are other examples of LRGs that are adopting new local indicators and/or monitoring systems. In fact, local reporting processes, such as VLRs, have proven very useful and produced fruitful initiatives that may lead some LRGs to suggest additional targets and indicators.⁵²

LRGs can use different data to keep track of SDG localization; furthermore, making the sources visible and available is a key component of any sound monitoring system. Nevertheless, indicator design and selection have not often been thoroughly developed in the production of many VLRs.⁵³ Generating and/or gathering data from local and/or regional sources may also pose a greater challenge for LRGs. In Europe, for example, only 37% of the indicators used in the VLRs are based on data sourced at the municipal level.⁵⁴ Other indicators are generally built on data collected from regional or national sources, with varying degrees of accuracy in terms of availability and disaggregation. It is relevant to underline that certain examples clearly stand out in this regard. In **Barcelona's** 2020 VLR, which was conceived more as a methodological guidance document than as a fully-fledged policy review of localization, 79% of the indicators were supposed to be sourced from municipal data. The JRC study also highlighted that 67% of the 22 VLRs analysed included some



Local monitoring and reporting are still relatively rare as the result of national statistics offices not always looking to produce and/or collect localized data, and a systemic lack of human, technical and financial resources at the local level.

kind of statistical annex (i.e. a space dedicated to the identification of indicators and their impact on the VLR and its analysis) and at least 33.3% included some kind of metadata containing core information about indicator design and data sources.⁵⁵ If the focus is shifted to indicator design, i.e. the ability or willingness of a LRG to actually define and construct its own indicators in order to measure a specific phenomenon, an optimistic 57% of the indicators used in European VLRs are either locally developed or originally designed by the institutions in charge of the review.⁵⁶

The most effective monitoring systems are based on joint and coordinated efforts between different tiers of government, LRGs at the same territorial level, and/or stakeholders. The latter would include the private sector, CSOs and academia, and also local residents, with their views being obtained through inclusive and participatory monitoring systems.⁵⁷ This was the case in **Los Angeles'** VLR process and in **Sao Paulo's** strategy to identify local indicators (see above in Subsection 3.3). The VLRs of **Chimbote** (Peru), **Ciudad Valles** and **Mexico City** (Mexico) and **Kelowna** (Canada) sought to access a mixture of data sources across different levels of government.

In the countries reporting this year, 23% of LGAs and 21% of LRGs are working with national (or regional) statistics offices to adapt local indicators to national monitoring systems, while 32% of LGAs and 19% of LRGs are collaborating with other institutions, such as academia, CSOs, think tanks, and international peers, etc.⁵⁸ However, such collaborations are not always easy to set up, nor to lead. In fact, governance and, in particular, multi-level coordination

mechanisms and multi-stakeholder approaches present other challenges for local monitoring and reporting. Regions with traditionally well-established governance frameworks, as in Europe, have demonstrated strong involvement and the ability to overcome obstacles relating to monitoring efforts and capacities. The efforts made by national governments therefore seem to be crucial for establishing the desired level of coherence between national and local data collection strategies. Some countries, such as Indonesia and Kenya, are consequently making great efforts to develop a national monitoring system capable of integrating the different levels of government into the reporting process. However, they face important obstacles and gaps. In Indonesia, the OneData portal allows districts, municipalities and provinces to gather data about, compile information relating to, and report on, the SDGs and national development indicators. In addition, the national Local Governments Information System was specifically created to collect municipal data. The monitoring and evaluation system is mandatory for provincial governments but municipalities find it difficult to become fully involved and integrated (see the Box dedicated to the Indonesian VSR in Subsection 3.3).⁵⁹ In Mexico, in 2019, the National Office of Statistics and the National Council for the Assessment of Social Development Policies launched a platform on data for municipal progress called "DataMun". This will allow all municipalities to access key information for local planning and the SDGs.

Focusing on institutional capacities, there are significant differences between LRGs both between countries and regions. Some LRGs have adequate monitoring bodies and teams producing data, statistics and information, such as federated states, strong regions and metropolitan cities. Others have smaller monitoring teams and capacities, and are often dependent on external support (mainly national). This is even the case for large cities in low-income countries and in the majority of LRGs in the global South. There are, however, examples of LRGs that, despite their limited resources, have strongly committed to reporting their efforts for SDG achievement. These include medium-sized LRGs in MEWA, such as **Bakirkoy**, in Turkey, others in Latin America, such as **Barcarena** and **Santana de Parnaiba**, in Brazil, and some regional governments in Africa and Asia-Pacific, such as **Busia** county, in Kenya, and **Riau** province, in Indonesia. All of them have received some support from LGAs, national governments or international organisations.⁶⁰

Regional and international organisations have also been key allies for LRGs around the world.⁶¹ Since October 2020, the **Joint Research Centre** of the European Commission has been supporting a group of European LRGs (Porto, Sevilla, Valencia, Reggio Emilia and Bratislava) in the development of their respective VLRs within the framework of the URBAN2030 project. The baseline document they have used is the institution's first European *Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews* (2020). Its second edition will be presented at the World Urban Forum, in Katowice (Poland), in June 2022. The OECD's programme "A territorial approach to the SDGs" continues to offer support to cities and regions in areas including Latin America (Cordoba province, Para, Parana), Europe (Bonn, Flanders, Kopavogur, Rhine-Neckar, Southern Denmark, Viken), Eurasia (Moscow) and Asia-Pacific (Kitakyushu).⁶² Within this framework, the localized indicator framework allows 601 regions and 649 cities in OECD member states and partner countries to measure their progress in pursuit of the SDGs. According to URBACT, the **Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities** (RFSC), which is promoted by CEMR with the support of the French government, is a suitable tool for the strategies of small and medium-sized cities, as it offers a simple, structured and informative self-evaluation tool. It will be used by the pilot network recently created by URBACT, CEMR and Platforma to provide support to 19 LRGs from across Europe in the different steps towards their achieving the 2030 Agenda in their respective territories.⁶³ UN-Habitat's **New Urban Agenda Platform**⁶⁴ and **City Prosperity Initiative** (which includes a sample of around 600 cities from regions all over the world)⁶⁵ are currently being reformulated into

the UN system-wide **Global Urban Monitoring Framework**,⁶⁶ which is expected to harmonise existing urban indices and tools and to track the performance of both the urban SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. Another example of this is the **Sustainable Development Solutions Network** (SDSN), which is already used in countries such as India, the USA, Bolivia, Italy and Spain.⁶⁷ Importantly, all these monitoring systems include tools such as open portals or graphics to make their findings visible and understandable to the reader.

In summary, **having local data and indicators as part of locally designed and adapted monitoring strategies facilitates the data disaggregation needed to leave no one and nowhere behind, and is crucial for ensuring that the policy-making processes associated with SDG implementation are co-owned and locally-sourced.** However, limited capacities and resources on one hand, and often non-existent multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance schemes on the other, continue to present major challenges for LRGs and obstacles to them being able to locally monitor their efforts towards delivering the 2030 Agenda. While top-down monitoring and reporting (through strategies adopted and led at the national level) are still in the majority, bottom-up approaches also allow LRGs—and in some cases, even their residents and local stakeholders—to adapt SDG indicators and monitoring mechanisms to specific local contexts and communities' needs. Many VLRs and VSRs provide very interesting insights and examples in this respect.

To deepen the discussion, **further reflection is needed and will require us finding the most appropriate balance between obtaining quantitative data (or hard evidence) and qualitative information (or soft evidence).** A proper combination of the two types of input will provide us with a better understanding of the diversity of the situations, needs and aspirations of different communities, which are not always easily translatable into numbers. Local and regional governments, as the levels closest to the population, are optimally positioned to document such diversity and to use their findings for more tailor-made policy-making. Likewise, through the use of suitable monitoring and reporting mechanisms, **LRGs can not only make an enormous contribution to the evaluation of the progress made, or setbacks encountered, within their own territories (context information), but also to assessments of how their own policies are contributing to the 2030 Agenda and to informing further policy.** ●



Bottom-up approaches allow LRGs to adapt SDG indicators and monitoring mechanisms to specific local contexts and communities' needs. Many VLRs and VSRs provide very interesting insights and examples in this respect.

6 Conclusions

Over the past year and a half, the COVID-19 sanitary and socio-economic crisis has put our societies and institutions under unprecedented strain. The pandemic and its multifaceted consequences have had a dramatic impact on all dimensions of human life around the world. The virus has taken well over 3.5 million lives worldwide and undermined decades of development efforts. As stated by the UN Secretary-General in his 2021 SDG Progress Report, the pandemic has stalled and has even reverted advances achieved in what are critical areas for humanity, such as reducing poverty and making improvements in the fields of maternal and child health care, education, and gender equality. It has been estimated that approximately an additional 120 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty, 255 million full-time jobs have been lost, and an additional 101 million children have fallen below minimum reading proficiency levels. These alarming figures underscore a drastic increase in global inequality, the extent of which we will only be able to determine in the medium to long term.

Against this grim backdrop, it is more important than ever to intensify the efforts made to fulfil the commitments of the global sustainability agendas. The 2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement, New Urban Agenda, Sendai Framework and Addis Ababa Action Agenda, together with numerous regional commitments, must guide our actions and the response and recovery from the pandemic in a safe, just, green and sustainable way. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, LRGs have consistently stepped up as the front line of defence for their populations. LRGs have redoubled efforts to ensure the continuity of public services and reorganised their priorities to put care at the centre of the crisis response. In these trying times for humanity, LRGs have reaffirmed their commitment to promoting sustainable development without leaving anyone behind. Nevertheless, the pandemic has drastically affected the means of implementation available to LRGs and the allocation of powers and responsibilities between different levels of government. Indeed, the crisis has shaken public budgets and multi-level governance systems, having a direct impact on how

policy environments can enable or, on the contrary, constrain the localization of the SDGs. Consequently, the extent to which local public services and infrastructure are integrated into recovery packages will be decisive for the future of SDG localization, and therefore also for the delivery of the 2030 Agenda. Achieving the SDGs is currently at risk: we are in urgent need of a renewed social contract and LRGs have a very important role to play in this.

As this report has explained, the global movement for the localization of the SDGs has expanded over the past year despite harsh circumstances, or perhaps even because of them. The expansion of subnational reporting efforts deserves special attention in this regard. Over the past two years, the total number of VLRs available worldwide has doubled (from approximately 40 in June 2020 to more than 100 in June 2021). During the same period, 15 VSRs have emerged in 14 countries, representing more than 16,000 LRGs in total, worldwide. These subnational reporting efforts have a direct positive impact on dimensions that are central to the fulfilment of the SDGs. Elaborating VLRs and VSRs has been demonstrated to lead to increased transparency, accountability and ownership of the SDGs by LRGs and their associations. These subnational reporting exercises, and VSRs in particular, have also had another remarkably positive outcome: they have opened up, and consolidated, channels of dialogue with national governments and international institutions on SDG implementation and coordination. These are decisive elements that are required to accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs in the Decade of Action.

This edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the efforts of LRGs to respond to the pandemic and their connections with the SDGs under review. In order to account for the nature of the current crisis, the analysis adopts the “Health in All Policies” approach, which makes it possible to factor into the analysis the different public health trade-offs that arise from policy implementation; this is in line with the interconnected nature of the SDGs. The analysis gathers experiences from hundreds of cities and territories from all over the world; it also represents the wide diversity that exists within LRGs and their different national contexts. Adopting this methodology has allowed us to extract key takeaways that protect and enhance the pillars of sustainable development: people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships. This approach has been complemented by the mainstreaming of the analysis of culture, another

such pillar, as an antidote to the pervasive impact of the COVID-19 crisis. This must permeate all policies if they are to help us effectively advance towards sustainable development while recovering from the pandemic.

As in previous editions, the report has also provided an extensive overview of how LRGs and their associations are engaging in awareness-raising activities, aligning local development plans with the SDGs, and striving to overcome the manifold challenges being faced, which are also examined in-depth throughout the different sections of the report. The present report provides a detailed account of the extent to which LRGs have been involved in national reporting processes and SDG coordination mechanisms. In short, the analysis undertaken depicts a daunting panorama. The progress of LRG engagement in VNRs and coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation remains slow and unevenly distributed from a geographic perspective. Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the means available for accelerating SDG implementation poses additional challenges and fundamental questions. The following paragraphs pick up on these questions and reflect on the key conclusions from the 2021 edition of the LRG report to the HLPF.



This edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of the efforts of LRGs to respond to the pandemic and their connections with the SDGs under review.

“A safe, just and green recovery”: The SDGs and the global development agendas as a framework for COVID-19 recovery

The COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath are critical inflection points for contemporary societies and must be acknowledged as such; they will largely define the future of our cities and territories. Our efforts to this end must therefore be redoubled and we must complement immediate crisis responses with long-term resilience-building efforts in regions, cities and communities throughout the world. The COVID-19 crisis has been particularly important in that it has revealed major vulnerabilities in health systems, essential services and food security. It has also highlighted the shortcomings of many governments, at all levels, in terms of being prepared for major crises. Building back better entails ensuring that the recovery from the crisis effectively addresses these deficiencies. The response must be just, green and sustainable for all populations and territories.

The global development agendas must be acknowledged as providing appropriate frameworks to guide recovery. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, Paris Climate Agreement, Sendai Framework and New Urban Agenda, among others, are all underpinned by the principles which must be put at the centre of the recovery: the protection of human rights, the fight against poverty and inequality, promoting the ecological transition, and building more resilient communities, to name but a few. Moreover, throughout the crisis, the **LRG constituency has repeatedly stated its commitment to fully deliver all of the sustainability agendas because of their complementarity; in particular, they have called for the New Urban Agenda to be an integral part of public responses during the COVID-19 recovery process because of its tremendous potential to accelerate the delivery of the SDGs in what is an increasingly urbanized world.**

LRGs have been at the forefront of crisis response, despite chronic funding shortfalls

In most countries, the role of LRGs in undertaking response and containment measures has been key to mitigating the effects that the COVID-19 crisis has had on their communities. Key dimensions of the work of LRGs have included ensuring access to essential services for all, and protecting health in their communities. They have also strengthened social safety nets and supported the groups most vulnerable to the economic impact of the crisis, thereby strengthening efforts to promote more caring cities and territories. However, LRG responses to the crisis have been constrained by increased human and financial pressure: new demands have arisen, which are directly related to crisis responses, and LRGs have had to shuffle their priorities accordingly, resulting in the deprioritisation of certain policy sectors, such as culture and long-term investment for sustainable development, and particularly in infrastructure. These reprioritisation exercises will undoubtedly have negative consequences for sustainable development.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, LRGs were already facing a chronic shortfall in the funding required to fulfil their allocated responsibilities and thus contribute to SDG achievement. Implementing the economic slowdown that was required to curb the spread of the virus effectively resulted in a large fall in LRG revenue. Particularly during lockdown periods, LRGs strived to ensure the continued provision of public services, regardless of them being unable to cover operational costs. Those LRGs that depend most heavily on intergovernmental transfers have experienced additional budgetary constraints, as their national budgets have also been hit by the crisis and reprioritised in line with national-level allocations of emergency responsibilities. In some countries, national governments have increased intergovernmental transfers to LRGs specifically in order to enable them to implement crisis mitigation policies. Nevertheless, the funding gap faced by LRGs has been further exacerbated by the “scissor effect” that the crisis has had on subnational finances, with their expenditure having increased while their revenue has declined. This effect may be aggravated in the coming year due to a fall in local tax revenue reflecting the cooling down of the economy in 2020. **It is therefore of crucial**

importance that recovery packages include financial support to allow LRGs to strengthen public services and attend to the needs of their communities during the remainder of the crisis and beyond.

Protecting the people and territories most badly hit by the pandemic is absolutely essential for overcoming this crisis and reducing inequalities

The public health crisis generated by the pandemic has not only exposed, but indeed aggravated, poverty and inequality within our communities and between territories. In turn, this has fuelled the transmission of COVID-19 infection and the resulting hospitalisation and mortality. It is therefore necessary to bring to the fore the need to design new social protection policies and/or to adapt existing public services to meet new needs. This will be required to mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, particularly on women, children, older people, homeless people, those with disabilities, and other structurally discriminated populations. While the full effects of the pandemic are yet to be known, it is important that LRGs find ways to ensure that many of the emergency measures undertaken, such as the introduction of emergency housing solutions and healthcare coverage for all, are transformed into permanent policies. It is key to note that these populations themselves have critical roles to play in their own protection and must be effectively empowered to do so. A particularly noteworthy case is that of initiatives related to protecting the right to housing. Some such initiatives were almost unthinkable prior to the crisis, such as those aiming to house homeless people and that were often based on local alliances between LRGs and other local actors, including the private sector. **However, the pandemic has shown that policies that put caring for people at the centre can, indeed, be implemented; this has effectively disproved the previous allegation that it was outright impossible to do this.**

From a territorial perspective, slums, deprived neighbourhoods and marginalised territories have been hit hardest by the pandemic. These spaces concentrate the populations most severely affected by the health and socio-economic consequences of the crisis. At the same time, they lack appropriate infrastructure

to ensure people access to basic services and to provide them with opportunities for prosperity to help mitigate many of its impacts. Given these self-reinforcing dynamics, a key takeaway must be that territorial disparities should not be overlooked when discussing measures to mitigate the impact of the crisis and support recovery. Furthermore, territorial differences must be appropriately dealt with in terms of fiscal policy, by adequately tailoring intergovernmental transfers and budgeting to meet the needs and capacities of different territories. It is also particularly important to note the key role of intermediary cities and regions in promoting greater territorial equality. It is necessary to avoid one-size-fits-all approaches that might not help all cities and territories in their recovery. Instead, solidarity and cooperation have proven to play a key role in enhancing the effectiveness of crisis responses; they allow place-based, sensitive responses and mutual learning across boundaries. As shown throughout the report, **the principles of solidarity and cooperation have been the milestones that have guided many LRG emergency responses and should be embedded in all dimensions of recovery strategies in order to ensure their effectiveness.**

Recovering from the COVID-19 crisis requires a shift towards alternative economic pathways that are fair and sustainable

The dramatic impact that the pandemic has had on livelihoods has particularly manifested itself at the local level, with people having lost their jobs and/or having been unable to survive on their daily income because of lockdowns preventing their economic activity. In such contexts, which are also characterised by constrained subnational finances, many LRGs have reprioritised local expenditure to protect jobs, support MSMEs, promote local economic circuits, and foster alternative forms of production and consumption based on the social and sharing economy. This approach to local economic development can be understood within the framework of a global movement calling for the adoption of economic models that are socially and ecologically sustainable. The crisis and its consequences have renewed such calls and shed light on the tremendous human,

environmental and economic costs of failing to do so. In this regard, the crisis has brought to the top of political agendas certain debates rooted in local economic development that are directly linked to global sustainability. These include the importance of links between rural and urban territories and the associated role of local food systems in ensuring food security and promoting a more sustainable ecological transition. There have also been interesting initiatives from LRGs, and particularly from cities and regions in which local populations mainly access housing and jobs in informal conditions, to acknowledge informality as an integral part of the urban and territorial reality. **LRGs are well placed to drive place-based policies adapted to their communities and to thereby unlock the associated economic, social and environmental benefits for society of promoting sustainable and green economies.**

The crisis has also had an accelerator effect on the digitalisation of work and education. This, in turn, has widened the digital gap between different populations based on their level of income, digital literacy and the connectivity of the territories in which they live. As a consequence, LRGs have striven to promote inclusive digitalisation strategies and to reach those who are less digitally savvy first. They have often done this by promoting neighbourhood-level solidarity and cooperation, based on the recognition that digital rights are human rights and must be safeguarded. Nevertheless, the challenges faced are large and also have direct implications for the environment. This is where trade-offs between SDGs become clearly visible and where innovation is urgently needed: the ecological transition towards decarbonised economies requires extensive changes to existing economic models. These will include, for instance, reducing GHG emissions in all sectors of the economy and also changing the ways in which cities are managed and planned. This will have implications for transport, construction, basic services and public space management, among other factors. LRG-led innovation can be found in the promotion of models for the circular economy, the use of renewable energies and the more efficient use of natural resources. **Accomplishing a shift towards not only local, but also national and global economic models that are fairer and healthier for both society and the environment is a critical milestone in SDG fulfilment which cannot be achieved by any actor alone. There is a particular need for solid partnerships involving all actors and levels of government sharing a common vision of economic justice in all of its dimensions.**

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on SDG achievement calls for a rapid acceleration in the involvement of LRGs and their associations in national reporting and coordination mechanisms

The analysis advanced by the report on the involvement of LRGs in both VNRs and national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation yields mixed results. On the one hand, the overall extent to which reporting countries have included their LRGs and associations in national reporting exercises seems not to have made much progress in comparison to previous years, although there are notable differences between countries and regions. The increase in the intensity of SDG localization efforts in some countries, and particularly in those in which LRGs and LGAs have led the elaboration of VSRs, has strengthened multi-level dialogues and led to the inclusion of several LGAs in national coordination mechanisms. Moreover, such subnational reporting exercises have increased the availability of local data, which is critical for advancing with the evidence-based policymaking required for SDG implementation. This has also increased the visibility of those instances in which such data were either not available, or could not be not aligned with the SDGs, and generated national debates that were, and are, necessary to strengthen monitoring and reporting processes. Given this reality, **the LRG constituency now calls on the HLPF to fully recognise monitoring and reporting processes, such as VLRs and VSRs, in official HLPF deliberations and to bolster LRG involvement in SDG reporting and coordination mechanisms.**

Even in those countries in which SDG localization is still at an early stage, those engaged in national reporting are increasingly aware of the need to ensure multi-stakeholder participation and local input. However, this awareness is yet to be translated into effective participation in a large number of countries. In those cases in which LRGs have been involved in national reporting, there are some inspiring examples. For instance, some LRGs have joined national delegations in presenting VNRs at the HLPF. Also, some VNRs have dedicated specific sections to local government, which are becoming more complex and are often co-produced with LRGs. These experiences can

help to pave the way forward; they demonstrate how there is political traction to be gained by national governments from enlisting the support of frontrunning LRGs that are highly committed to the SDGs.

Overall, however, the extent to which national policy environments have enabled SDG localization shows that reforms are urgently needed. It is also necessary to provide LRGs with the capacities, resources and regulatory frameworks that they require for the alignment of national and territorial development plans. The need for such reforms is particularly pressing in light of the power shifts triggered by the pandemic and the consequent reallocation of responsibilities and budgets. Delivering the SDGs calls for adopting a whole-of-government approach to sustainable development and that necessitates LRG involvement. LRGs have a critical role to play, usually as part of the daily undertakings that derive from the devolved responsibilities for which they must also be accountable. **SDG monitoring and reporting are key levers that can enhance LRG involvement in SDG fulfilment, while inclusive national coordination mechanisms can ensure that overlaps are avoided and synergies are enhanced instead.**

Governance frameworks based on effective multi-level cooperation and coordination are needed because trust and accountability are critical

Another key lesson to be learned from the crisis is that complex emergencies have a direct impact on public trust and governance. It is also important to harness the potential of the higher levels of trust that citizens tend to have in LRGs and local leadership than in national government. The fact that LRGs have led the response to the COVID-19 crisis, ensured the continuity of public service provision, supported health systems and responded to people's demands has often reinforced the populations trust in them. In many countries, national policies have recentralized responses while others have devolved more responsibilities to LRGs. In some cases, powers have even transitioned back and forth, from one to the other, at different stages of the emergency response. Indeed, as shown by the present report, LRGs have, at times, had to go beyond their allocated responsibilities in order to respond to pressing social needs on the ground.

The COVID-19 crisis and its numerous impacts have revealed many grey areas and gaps in the distribution of powers and responsibilities among different levels of government. There is also a critical need to address other complex and overlapping emergencies, such as climate change and those relating to housing and mass migration. Inter-municipal cooperation has shown its effectiveness in the face of the crisis and needs to be further incentivised. Ensuring the continuity of citizen participation mechanisms will also be essential for articulating more inclusive local governance. Responding to complex emergencies requires radical and rapid action, it is therefore of the utmost importance to ensure decision-making processes that take into account the needs of the most marginalised sectors of the population and to protect democracy. **Improved coordination mechanisms based on the principles of subsidiarity and respect for local autonomy, as well as civil society participation, are critical for local-level action, innovation and context-sensitive responses.**

For COVID-19 recovery packages to be effective, cities and regions must play an active role in them

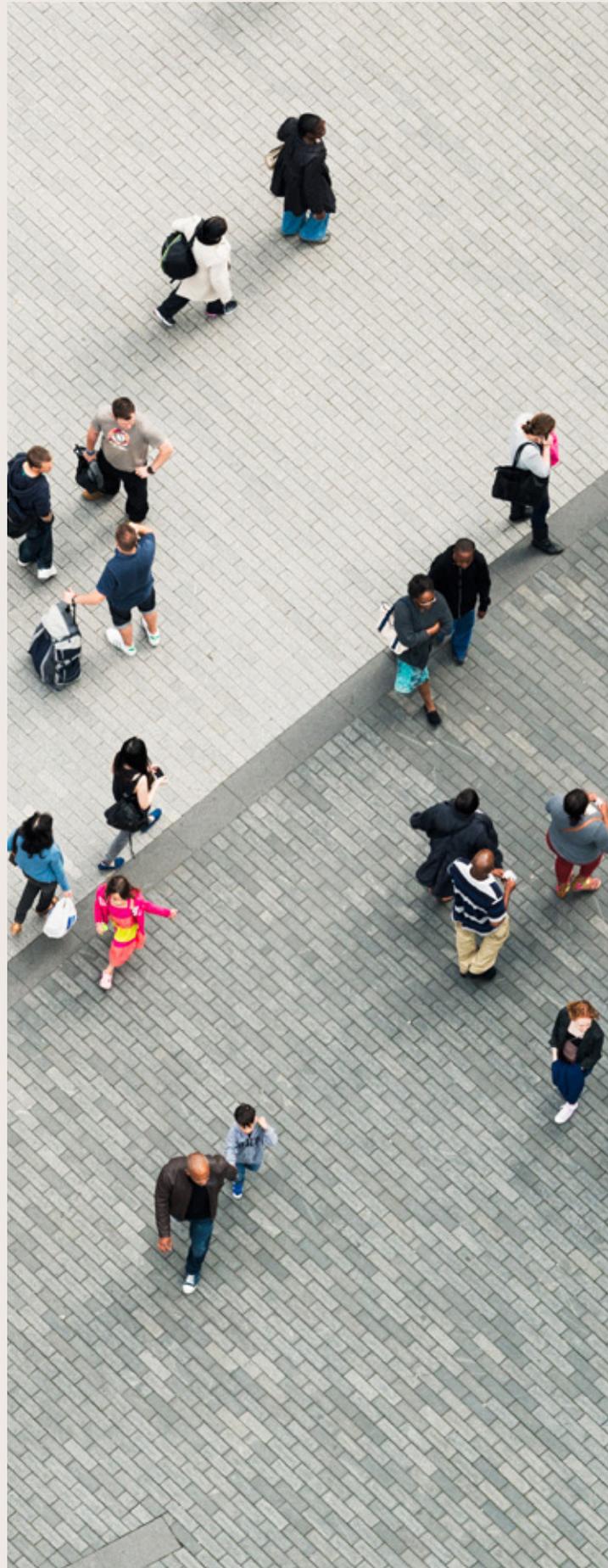
As of May 2021, national governments had already announced over USD 15 trillion worth of fiscal stimuli in response to the COVID-19 health and economic crisis: more than three times the amount spent in response to the Great Financial Crisis of 2008-09. This includes the EU's Next Generation package and the US Biden Package. These funds are vital for LRGs to enact measures to combat the impact of COVID-19 as well as to accelerate a sustainable recovery. These recovery funds also provide an opportunity to highlight and acknowledge the fundamental need for health services, social protection and essential services to reach groups with limited access to such services. Recovery funds can also be used to advance environmental and health benchmarks. This can be done by actively investing in low-carbon and job-intensive sectors, thereby creating more equal and resilient territories. Within this context, national governments should work in partnership with LRGs in the design, implementation and governance of national recovery and resilience plans. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all regions. For instance, only a minority of the EU Member States have consulted their LRGs in the preparation of the recovery and

resilience plans that are part of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility. **In sum, global recovery will only be as resilient as the recovery in all regions, cities, towns, villages and neighbourhoods in the world.**

A renewed approach and commitment to multilateralism are necessary to ensure the safe and fair access to vaccines for all and an inclusive recovery

The mechanisms used to foster coordination among countries and different spheres of government throughout the COVID-19 crisis pose questions about the extent to which the global multilateral system is currently fit for purpose. At this stage, the implications for global vaccination are critical. Prior to the pandemic, the equity implications of the conventional model of biomedical innovation and access to essential medicines had already been subject to debate. This debate has since been radically fuelled by the pandemic, given the urgency and far-reaching implications that vaccine procurement and distribution have for global equality. While national political leaders have proposed lifting patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines, LRGs have stressed the need to ensure vaccine equity by promoting TRIPS waivers and voluntary transfers of technology and know-how, and have joined calls for the lifting of patents. These measures are in line with LRG proposals to allow the production of vaccines in any country in the world and to reduce the impact of inequalities, many of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, involving access to vaccines for already structurally discriminated and at-risk communities.

The global community needs to improve its plurilateral approach to multi-stakeholder cooperation in order to reinforce global solidarity and cooperation. Citizens must also fulfil their own, individual, civic responsibility by getting vaccinated. Undoubtedly, one of the key lessons that we must learn from the pandemic is that, as humans, we are closely connected to each other and interrelated with the planet. **Ultimately, no one will be safe and healthy unless we all are. We must therefore ensure that everyone, everywhere, has access to vaccine, and LRGs should be directly involved in vaccination campaigns and ensure that no one, and no territory, is left behind.**



Ways forward



1.

Acknowledge the need to adequately empower and resource LRGs to ensure they can sustain public service provision and link health systems with the global sustainability agendas, particularly as the COVID-19 crisis endures

As this report has shown, since the COVID-19 outbreak, LRGs have been at the forefront of the emergency response. They have led a wide variety of actions to protect all populations, in particular seeking to reach out first to those most vulnerable to the consequences of the crisis. As such, they have put care at the heart of their responses, which have largely been based on the principles of solidarity and cooperation. LRGs have, at times, gone beyond their responsibilities and the resources allocated to them to ensure the continuity of public service provision; in this way also mitigating the global recoil in SDG achievement. Nevertheless, LRGs must be adequately empowered and resourced to ensure they can sustain these actions for the protection of all, particularly as the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis continue to loom.

2.

To ensure a safe, equitable and green recovery that works for all, strategies need to harness the potential of basic service delivery in reducing inequalities

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed critical vulnerabilities affecting our health systems, and has shed light on the failures and gaps in public social services and infrastructure. The crisis has primarily affected the most vulnerable populations and has exacerbated inequalities—in particular those related to gender. Recovery strategies should help us prepare our communities to be more resilient to face possible recurrent crises of a similar nature.

As such, the present emergency must be a turning point, and the recovery a new opportunity to drive sustainable development. As we enter the recovery phase, it is essential to support stronger frameworks of public services as the only way to bridge the inequalities that COVID-19 has exacerbated. This should include strategies to curb the digital divide, strengthen education and decent work, and safeguard the rights and health of communities.

It is necessary to engage all stakeholders in promoting a recovery that is safe and just for all, including for the environment. LRGs have a key role to play in this regard. This involves advancing towards sustainable urban areas and territories based on solidarity and cooperation, as well as redefining essential services in order to build caring cities that, amongst others: include women in all facets of decision-making; work to empower their communities; are mindful of the role of culture in sustainability; and accelerate the transition towards net-zero carbon emissions.

3.

Account for the backlash on local and regional governments' resources and integrate local public services and infrastructure into recovery packages: key to accelerating SDG achievement

Bridging the sustainability investment gap prior to the outbreak of the crisis was a daunting challenge that has been largely exacerbated in the post-COVID-19 era. The present crisis has had a dramatic impact on subnational finances, hence curtailing LRGs' capacities to contribute to sustainable development. Recovery packages must include effective support to allow LRGs to sustain and upscale their actions towards sustainable development. This includes allowing for place-based investment decisions to reinforce health care, education, essential basic services



and local food systems. Moreover, recovery funds must advance environmental benchmarks and promote investment in low-carbon sectors as well as a fair ecological transition. These funds must also address newly observed gaps, such as those pertaining to equal access to the internet rooted in a global context of increasingly digitalised work and education systems. The involvement of LRGs in recovery packages will be crucial in building resilience and crisis preparedness for a sustainable future.

4. Support local and regional involvement in SDG localization through voluntary local and subnational reporting

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are powerful tools to advance the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals. They go beyond a monitoring and reporting tool, and are drivers of local action to achieve the Global Goals. VLRs and VSRs are essential to transform the local-national dynamic, yet they are not endowed with an official role at the HLPF. Officially acknowledging VLRs and VSRs in the HLPF and its deliberations would be a powerful lever to drive this change, enabling LRGs to become increasingly engaged in SDG implementation, monitoring and reporting. The inclusion of VLRs and VSRs in the official reporting processes provides an exceptional opportunity to consolidate joint efforts and spearhead progress towards the fulfilment of the SDGs.

5. Mobilise the potential and momentum of the global localization movement as a key lever to ensure the effectiveness of the global sustainability agendas

In these trying times, LRGs have reinstated their commitment to the global sustainability agendas as guiding frameworks for their response and recovery initiatives. Nevertheless, the involvement of LRGs in national reporting processes and coordination mechanisms has decreased in comparison to previous years. In contrast, the global movement for the localization of the SDGs has seen an exceptional expansion over the past year. It is worth highlighting the remarkable efforts that

have been made by LRGs and their associations to develop local and subnational reports on SDG implementation (VLRs and VSRs), which are rapidly increasing in numbers. Harnessing the current momentum could trigger a larger expansion of localization efforts, thus allowing for their transformational potential to multiply.

Moreover, it is also of utmost importance to ensure that such voices are reflected in national reporting processes, for these to be truly representative of the state of SDG achievement in the different territories.

As we enter the Review of the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda, it remains essential to ensure that LRGs are also acknowledged in the follow up process, as this Agenda remains a critical accelerator of the SDGs.

6. Renew the multilateral system, building on the strength of local and regional governments and including all stakeholders

A key lesson to be learnt from this crisis is that, as it currently stands, the multilateral system is not capable of providing sufficiently rapid or inclusive responses to the challenges humanity is currently facing. Through their actions on the frontlines and their commitment to sustainable development, LRGs have made it clear that they deserve a seat at the global table in a renewed multilateral system. The role of LRGs, as a lever to ensure multi-stakeholder engagement, can be critical to deliver a multilateral system that emphasises sustainable urbanization and the role of balanced territorial development in achieving the Global Agendas.

A global effort is required to revise existing frameworks of governance, empowering LRGs, and ensuring that those governments at the forefront are strengthened so that they can deliver policies and solutions at the local and territorial levels. Only in this way can we ensure equal access to vaccines, health care, and healthy cities and territories that are resilient and capable of upholding human rights in the face of future emergencies.

It is still necessary to acknowledge this role more explicitly and to make it operational. The role played by the Local and Regional Governments' Forum must be properly acknowledged and strengthened to ensure that international monitoring and reporting efforts truly include local voices and realities.

Notes

1. Introduction

- 1 In Afghanistan, according to the most updated and consolidated list developed by the country's Central Statistics Office and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, there are 34 provinces, 387 districts and 153 municipalities. However, there seem to be other territorial administrations that are popularly but not officially recognised. Afghanistan's 2004 Constitution established new forms of provincial and district government. The national government appoints provincial and district governors and mayors. Provincial council elections were held in 2014 and 2018; however, municipal elections, both for the mayor and members of municipal councils, have never been held despite having a constitutional mandate. Municipalities are allowed to raise revenues and taxes and are responsible for delivering some of the urban services.
- 2 The first local elections since 2018 have been promised by the ruling administration, after consultations with the Council of the Republic. These were originally planned for 2020 but had been pushed back to an undetermined date. According to some accounts, these elections should be held before the next general elections, which are due in 2022. In August 2020, the Parliament failed to finalize all the procedures required to constitute the legal framework required for the elections. Observers have noted that this may be due to the central government's hesitation to promote decentralization. This is a question which preceded the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 The island of New Providence, where the capital, Nassau, is located, is directly administered by the central government. The other islands are administered through the two types of local council that are found in Bahamas: second-schedule and third-schedule district councils, whose chief councillors and deputies are indirectly elected from amongst the elected officials. Local elections initially scheduled for 2020 have been postponed due to the health crisis.
- 4 In Bhutan, local assemblies are elected, but executive bodies are appointed.
- 5 The first local elections were organized in 2012. The second elections were scheduled for 2019 but have been postponed until April 2022. In 2012, the mayors of only 42 municipalities were elected, while the rest of the heads were appointed by the executive, much like in the departments subject to prefects and the provinces administered by governors. Recent changes in territorial organisation have been a consequence of two new ordinances (2019). Only 271 municipalities currently exercise their responsibilities as local self-governments.
- 6 These figures only refer to mainland China; they do not include the special administrative regions of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.
- 7 In Cuba, the municipal assemblies are directly elected and they, in turn, elect the provincial assemblies.
- 8 If the northern part of the island is excluded, there are 380 local governments. Moreover, an on-going reform seeks to empower Cypriot municipal authorities. In particular, it provides for the amalgamation of 30 municipalities and 50 communities into 17 new municipal authorities.
- 9 There are 159 local self-governments in total, including the Santo Domingo National District: the state capital, which has its own special status. There are 3 macro regions, 10 regions and 31 provinces, and there are also currently 235 districts at the submunicipal level.
- 10 In Egypt, local councils/assemblies are elected, but the executives (governorates, presidents) are not.
- 11 There are 340 municipalities in Guatemala, in 22 departments and 8 regions. These are deconcentrated entities with governors and presidents respectively, both of which are appointed by the central government.
- 12 In Iraq, there has been a form of decentralized political and administrative government since 2008, when power was devolved to 18 provinces (governorates). Nevertheless, many challenges remain regarding the concretisation of this system of governance. Provincial councils are elected, but not the heads of local governments. The Kurdistan Regional Government is autonomous. At the municipal level, it is estimated that there are 91 districts and 141 tracts.
- 13 In Lao People's Democratic Republic, the members of the Provincial People's Council are elected, but only from the Lao People's Revolutionary Party's candidates. The provinces are divided into districts, townships and villages. The total number given in the table is an approximation. The heads of local administrations (provincial governors, capital city mayors, district governors, municipal chiefs, and village chiefs) are appointed by the national government. Elected people's committees are the basic units of self-government in villages.
- 14 According to the Constitution, the chiefs of the different regions should be elected. However, there are disputes regarding the appointment or election of provincial governors which, for the moment, remain appointed on the basis of the "gradualism of decentralization": Arena R., "L'Exécutif défend la nomination des gouverneurs," *Tribune Madagascar*, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3wT9lh7>.
- 15 Malaysia is made up of 3 federal territories, 13 states and 154 local governments. Local councillors are appointed by the state government.
- 16 The two regions on the Atlantic coast have a specific autonomous status, with appointed regional coordinators and regional autonomous councils, which are elected for five-year terms. Regional councillors must represent the ethnic diversity of the two regions. The regions are divided into administrative municipalities which are organized by their corresponding regional councils, based on local traditions. The municipalities are administered by municipal councils which are elected every 5 years.
- 17 Since 2020, following a structural reform consisting of local and regional amalgamations, there are 356 municipalities and 11 regional authorities in Norway. Oslo is both a region and a municipality.
- 18 Since 1991, municipal governments have been elected by direct suffrage for five-year terms of office. Since 1992, department governments have also been elected for five-year terms, yet the Constitution states that the departmental government represents the central government. This ambiguity poses numerous multi-level challenges in terms of governance.
- 19 In 2015, elections were held for two-thirds of the council seats. The 1992 Law of Provinces divided Saudi Arabia into 13 regions, each of which is headed by a prince belonging to the royal family. Each region has a regional council headed by an emir, appointed by the king, who has the rank of minister. Each region contains a number of governorates. In total, there are 118 governorates, containing a total of 285 municipal councils. The members of these councils are the local heads of the sectorial ministries, the heads of different government agencies, ten local citizens and local civic leaders. In Saudi Arabia, the local elections of 2005 and 2011 were for half of the council seats and were only open to male candidates and voters.
- 20 There is a dual system and some confusion as to the division of roles between the local councils and the 190 chiefdom councils. The latter correspond to the lowest administrative level and do not have any legislative functions or responsibilities. Further confusion was caused by the reintroduction, in 2011, of centrally appointed district officers.
- 21 Each municipality is led by an elected local council and mayor. The 76 provincial administrative organisations are headed by a chairperson and a provincial committee, alongside an elected legislative provincial council.

1. Introduction

- 22 The first regional elections were scheduled for 2018, but have been postponed until 2022. At present, the regional councils are only partially decentralized and are presided over by the governor, the chairman of the regional council and the direct representative of the head of the central government. The regional councils are made up of indirectly elected officers, municipal councillors, and elected deputies. The municipalities are legally decentralized, but politically and financially dependent upon the central power, with only limited responsibilities and decision-making power.
- 23 UNDP, “Madagascar relance son processus de décentralisation,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/3i6gXbR>.
- 24 Republic of Namibia, “Government Gazette,” 2018, <https://bit.ly/3yPo5Pl>.
- 25 A new law on fiscal rules for local authorities was passed in February 2020. Municipalities can now receive income from tariffs and fees. The Equal Balance of Local Authorities fund was also created to ensure the financial sustainability and health of the country’s municipalities: Martins Chambassuco, “Fundo de equilíbrio vai reduzir dificuldades financeiras das autarquias mais carenciadas,” *Expansão*, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2RZUwdl>.
- 26 Albano Agostinho Troco, “Why COVID-19 Can’t Be Blamed for Angola’s Failure to Have Local Governance,” *The Conversation*, 2020, <https://bit.ly/34yD42r>.
- 27 “São Vicente: Fernando Elísio Freire garante aprovação do novo estatuto dos municípios neste ano,” *Inforpress*, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3ilCJZp>.
- 28 In cases in which the government considers a municipal or a regional council to be out of the capacity to exercise its powers. This exceptional practice of instituting special delegations is becoming increasingly recurrent (Niamey, Maradi or Agadez): Présidence de la République du Niger, “Communiqué du Conseil des Ministres du vendredi 09 février 2018,” 2018, <https://bit.ly/2SNhh4K>.
- 29 Government of Zimbabwe, “Devolution and Decentralisation Policy,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/2S4KFDh>.
- 30 Rovshan Aghayev, “Disempowered and Unfinanced Azerbaijani Municipalities,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/2SNOnS3>.
- 31 European Commission. DG for Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion, “Public Administration Characteristics and Performance in EU28: The Czech Republic,” 2018, <https://bit.ly/3g0MCZD>.
- 32 Council of Europe, “Local Democracy in the Republic of San Marino. Report for the 34th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities,” 2018.
- 33 Gobierno de la República de Cuba, “Constitución de la República de Cuba,” 2019, <https://bit.ly/34EV0sl>.
- 34 Federación Dominicana de Municipios Ministerio de Administración Pública, Liga Municipal Dominicana, “Manual de gestión municipal,” 2020, <https://bit.ly/3g4VYDG>.
- 35 Matías Ruiz Díaz, “Descentralización y desarrollo en Uruguay. Explorando discursos e ideas” (Montevideo, 2018), <https://bit.ly/3wSf2Mc>.
- 36 UN-Habitat, “Saudi Arabia - Urban Legislation, Land and Governance,” 2021, <https://bit.ly/34E7nF1>.

2. Methodology

- 1 United Nations Secretary-General, “Report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals Presented to the Economic and Social Council,” 2021.
- 2 UCLG has elaborated a repository of the 82 VLRs that have been published up to May 2021: <https://bit.ly/34pLcSS>. If you know of any VLR missing from this repository, please contact us and we will include them.
- 3 UCLG’s Community of Practice on VLRs, in partnership with UN-Habitat, launched the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews* in July 2020. The Guidelines seek to provide LRGs with a practical analysis of existing VLRs. The aim is to reflect the diversity of the processes involved in the elaboration of the VLRs; the resources available to each LRG for the elaboration of their VLR; the institutional arrangements made for SDG implementation and coordination in situ; and any other variables that have been identified as forming part of key practical knowledge and that LRGs would benefit from knowing about in order to advance with their own local reporting efforts: UCLG and UN-Habitat, “Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews. Vol. 1: A Comparative Analysis of Existing VLRs,” vol. 1, Guidelines for VLRs (UCLG and UN-Habitat, 2020), <https://bit.ly/3wTWaw2>.
- 4 In 2020, VSRs were piloted in Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Mozambique and Nepal. These countries were chosen from the 47 reporting in 2020. In 2021, 8 more VSRs have been presented by the LGAs of Cape Verde, Germany, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. These were chosen from the 44 countries reporting this year. Ecuador presented its second VSR in 2021.
- 5 Specific information on COVID-19 responses implemented by cities and territories were systematized into a database for analysis. Over 1,000 entries were collected from 55 different sources. LRG policies, strategies and interventions are presented as examples throughout the document and particularly in Section 4. Rather than being a prescriptive list, the examples presented are intended to highlight key pathways and action points that respond to the pandemic. This not only includes providing immediate responses to the crisis, but also promoting long-term recovery. This selection of examples also seeks to encourage reflection on the possible implications for urban futures.

3. Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 1 The information presented in this Subsection comes from an analysis of the VNRs presented to the 2021 HLPF.
- 2 Under the coordination of the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office and with the support of UN-Habitat. More details can be found here: UN-Habitat and UCLG, “Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews. Vol. 2: Exploring the Local-National Link,” vol. 2, Guidelines for VLRs (Nairobi: UN-Habitat and UCLG, 2021).
- 3 However, the participation of the Association of Municipalities in the VNR process of Niger was only sporadic. Responses to the GTF/UCLG 2021 Survey on the localization of the SDGs.
- 4 For Angola, a representative from the city of Luanda responded to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey and mentioned ad hoc consultation. However, as the corresponding VNR had not been published on June 26, this information could not be confirmed.
- 5 These references are: Gladsaxe, in Denmark; Bonn, Mannheim and Stuttgart, in Germany; Subaraya, in Indonesia; the 3 well-known VLRs of Kitakyushu, Shimokawa and Toyama, in Japan; Shah Alam and Subang Jaya, in Malaysia; Helsingborg, Malmö, Stockholm and Uppsala, in Sweden; and Nakhon Si Thammarat, in Thailand.

3. Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 6 Working Together to Promote Sustainable Development while Assuming Responsibility for a Bright Future in Germany, Europe and around the World: Die Bundeskanzlerin, "Gemeinsam für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung – Bund und Länder erklären ihre Verantwortung für eine gute Zukunft," Aktuelles, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3h53r7n>.
- 7 The Delegation, which was created in 2016 to produce the 2019 report entitled *Global challenge – global opportunity*, was composed of representatives from politics, higher education, civil society, trade unions and the business sector. The proposals were drawn up in consultation with county-level administrative boards and other government agencies, collaborative bodies, regions, municipalities and other stakeholders. Based on the findings and key messages, an action plan and a bill were adopted to ensure a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
- 8 *Órganos de Seguimiento e Instrumentación* or "OSI" in Spanish.
- 9 These VNRs focused on themes such as "Localising the SDGs" in 2018, "Community Empowerment" in 2019, and "Volunteerism and Sustainable Development" in 2020.
- 10 This aim is included in the "Strengthening decentralization, local governance, and rural development" section of the Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023, which is aligned with the SDGs.
- 11 In Zimbabwe, the national macro-economic planning and institutional structures were aligned to the SDGs quite soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The VNR even acknowledges the role of LRGs: "Local Authorities are key not only because the impact of the implementation of SDGs is felt at the local level but because their role in implementing Devolution and Decentralisation projects which respond to the requirements of a number of SDGs and their targets."
- 12 In Tunisia, the decentralization process is still very recent and requires more time to be implemented, especially with the new territorial division materialised by the creation of new municipalities and the extension of certain others; along with very limited technical and financial support from the central government. These obstacles hinder effective and efficient implementation of the SDGs. However, the situation seems to be slightly changing towards more integration between the different levels of government.
- 13 The Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development strategy does not mention LRGs, just as there is no mention of LRG involvement in the VNR or any other policy processes for SDG implementation.
- 14 In Chad, even though the National Development Plan 2017-2021 included supporting SDG localization and awareness raising, as well as the adoption of Local Action and Monitoring Committees among its main priorities, decentralization and localization have yet to be deployed.
- 15 The Egyptian government has established empowering local governments as one of its main goals. So far, it has created SDG localization reports for all 27 governorates and these should be updated annually. It has also created a programme to allocate local investment funds among the 27 governorates and, according to the VNR, a simpler system for local districts is also in the pipeline. However, decentralization is still only a latent process and it is difficult to assess the impact of such initiatives.
- 16 In Madagascar, decentralization efforts have been fostered since 2015. A more inclusive and participatory approach at the regional level has made it possible to better define the SDG localization priorities at the local level. As stated by the VNR, the national government plans to continue disseminating the SDGs in order to improve their national, regional and local ownership and to integrate them into national and regional development planning.
- 17 In Namibia, the 5th National Development Plan does not mention LRGs. However, a Bilateral Agreement was established between the governments of Namibia and Germany, in 2019, for the implementation of a new Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Development Project focusing on the upgrading of informal settlements.
- 18 Nicaragua stands out as having the municipalities with the greatest competences and resources in Central America and the Caribbean. Its VNR emphasises the steps taken since 2015 to strengthen local development. These have included offering support to municipalities in the development of their local development plans and other instruments in line with the National Human Development Programme and for the implementation of sectoral projects. However, the current political crisis has severely affected the degree of local autonomy and thus SDG localization.
- 19 Afghanistan's VNR states that efforts will be made to build awareness of the SDGs and to adjust the national SDG goals, targets and indicators at the provincial level. Integrating SDGs into provincial development plans is one of the priorities of the SDG Executive Committee and its 4 technical committees. This policy also includes multi-stakeholder collaboration. However, SDG localization in the country is still very limited due to conflict in the region.
- 20 The remaining 7% corresponds to 3 countries with no elected LRGs and no available information.
- 21 Thanks to the Collaboration Framework Agreement signed between the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda and the FEMP, more fluid collaboration is now to be expected.
- 22 The Paraguayan association OPACI's response to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey mentions that it has not had any participation in the national coordination mechanisms.
- 23 The country's municipalities are represented in the Governorate Committees for Sustainable Development. This body monitors the achievement of the SDGs at the governorate level and submits reports to the National Commission for Sustainable Development. However, no information is available as to the extent and quality of the participation of municipalities.
- 24 The VNR of the Bahamas had not yet been published at the time of finalising this report.
- 25 LGAs that have responded to the 2021 GTF/ULG Survey: *Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia* (FAM) and the *Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia* (AMB); *Association des Maires des Grandes Villes de Madagascar* (AMGVM); *Associação Nacional do Municípios de Cabo Verde* (ANMCV); *Confederación Mexicana de Municipios* (CONAMM), which includes: FENAMM, ANAC, AALMAC and ANAMM; *Association for Local Authorities in Namibia* (ALAN); *Federación Colombiana de Municipios* (FCM); *Association des Municipalités du Niger* (AMN) and *Association des Régions du Niger* (ARENI); *Union of Cyprus Municipalities* (UCM); *Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities* (KS); *Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic* (SMO CR), *Organización Paraguaya de Cooperación Internacional* (OPACI); *Danish Regions* (DR), *Local Councils Association of Sierra Leone* (LoCASL); *Federación Dominicana de Municipios* (FEDOMU), *Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias* (FEMP), and several regional associations (e.g. in Catalonia and the Basque country) and regional municipal funds (Andalusia, Galicia and Mallorca); *Association of German Cities* (DS); *Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions* (SALAR); *Asociación Nacional de Municipios de Guatemala* (ANAM); *Fédération Nationale de Communes Tunisiennes* (FNCT); *Association of Municipalities of Indonesia* (APEKSI); *Zimbabwe Local Government Association* (ZILGA), including the *Urban Councils Association* (UCAZ) and the *Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe* (ARDCZ). In Chad, China, Japan, Malaysia and Uruguay only LRGs have responded to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey. Other organisations from 2 other countries (Afghanistan and Azerbaijan) responded to the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey.
- 26 In three cases (13%) a general statement, such as a political declaration, has been adopted and, somewhat worryingly, it seems that 21% of all the LGAs have not yet adopted any policy documents in this direction.

3. Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 27 Of the LRGs from reporting countries which have submitted the 2021 GTF/UCLG Survey, 24% are metropolises (Freetown, Luanda, Hangzhou, Kuala Lumpur, Bogota, Medellin, La Paz, Mexico City, Montevideo, Madrid and Barcelona); 49% are cities and towns with up to 1 million inhabitants (Sfax, Nabeul, Bandar Lampung, Hamamatsu, Balkh, Mixco, Canelones, Nueva Helvecia, Salcaja, Limassol, Bonn, Terrassa, Peñarroya-Pueblonuevo, Fuenlabrada, Bilbao, Burela, Cadiz, Manlleu, Calafell, Huelva, Sant Vicenç dels Horts and Granollers); 20% are regional and intermediate-level government bodies (Maldonado department, the Basque Country, the *Consell Comarcal de l'Anoia*, Barcelona Provincial Council, Cordoba Provincial Council, Alicante Provincial Council, Navarra, Catalonia and Vastra Gotaland); and, finally, 7% are commonwealths of LRGs that coordinate the decentralized cooperation action of their members (Fons Mallorqui, FAMSÍ and Fondo Gallego). Not all LRGs have responded to all the questions in the Survey.
- 28 These include cities from all the different world regions and of various sizes, such as Luanda, Sfax, Bandar Lampung, Nueva Helvecia and Granollers.
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- 31 In 2020, 6 pilot VSR projects were launched with the support of UCLG. Thanks to the processes and exchanges that were generated, national governments echoed these local government reports in the VNRs submitted to the UN in 4 of these cases (Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Kenya). Even in the cases of Costa Rica and Ecuador, the final VNRs mentioned information contained in the VSRs. In the case of Kenya, the VSR was, itself, specifically mentioned and included as an annex to the national report.
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