9th REPORT

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

Local and Regional Governments report to the 2025 HLPF

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

5 GENDER EQUALITY

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

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GLOBAL TASKFORCE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Facilitated by:

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

2025 UCLG

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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Graphic design and lay-out: Kantō Kreative
Proofreading: Tom Sullivan, Lisa Taylor

Editorial board:
Anna Calvete Moreno, Matteo Fabris

Policy advisory:
Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, UCLG

UCLG World Secretariat:
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T.
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A.
ABBREVIATIONS

A

AACT: Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

ABM: Associação Brasileira de Municípios (Brazilian Association of Municipalities)

AFLRA: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

AI: artificial intelligence

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

ANMC: National Association of Mayors of the Comoros

ANMP: Associação Nacional de Municípios Portugueses (National Association of Portuguese Municipalities)

APLA: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

ASPAC: Asia-Pacific

B

BRL: Brazilian real (currency)

C

C40: C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

CAD: Canadian dollar (currency)

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CO_2: carbon dioxide

COP: United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change

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

CSW: Commission on the Status of Women

CUF: Cités Unies France (United Cities France)

E

EBM: ecosystem-based management

EBSA: ecologically and biologically significant area

ECA: Ethiopian Cities Association

EPSU: European Federation of Public Service Unions

EU: European Union

F

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

FFD4: 4th International Conference on Financing for Development

G

G7: Group of 7

G20: Group of 20

GALGA: The Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities

GDP: gross domestic product

GRB: gender-responsive budgeting

GTF: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

H

HALE: healthy life expectancy

HiAP: Health in All Policies

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development

I

ICLEI: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICZM: integrated coastal zone management

IDR: Indonesian rupiah (currency)

ILO: International Labour Organization

IOC-UNESCO: Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission - UNESCO

ITUC: International Trade Union Confederation

IUU fisheries: illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries

K

KS: Kommunesektorens organisasjon (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities)

L

LALRG: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments

LATAM: Latin America and the Caribbean

LCA: Maltese Local Councils' Association

LCP: League of Cities of the Philippines

LED: local economic development

LGA: local government association

LGA: Local Government Association of England and Wales

LGAZ: Local Government Association of Zambia

LGBTQIA+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual+

LGNZ: Local Government New Zealand

LMMA: locally-managed marine area

LMP: League of Municipalities of the Philippines

LPP: League of Provinces of the Philippines

LRG: local and regional government

M

MEWA: Middle East and West Asia

MPA: marine protected area

MRR: maternal mortality ratio

MSP: maritime spatial planning

MuAN: Municipal Association of Nepal

N

NALAG: National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia

NALAS: Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe

NAMRB: National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria

NDC: noncommunicable disease

NGO: non-governmental organization

NORAM: North America and the English and French speaking Caribbean region

O

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OECM: other effective area-based conservation measures

P

PSI: Public Services International

PWD: people with disabilities

R

RALGA: Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities

S

SALGA: South African Local Government Association

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SEK: Swedish crown (currency)

SIDS: small island developing state

SME: small and middle-sized enterprise

SMOCR: Svaz měst a obcí České republiky (Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic)

SNG-WOFI: World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Spending

SSE: Social and Solidarity Economy

SYVICOL: Syndicat des Villes & Communes Luxembourgeoises (Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities)

U

U5MR: under-five mortality rate

UCAZ: Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe

UCCI: Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas (Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities)

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

UNGL: Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales (National Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica)

UNOC: United Nations Ocean Conference

US/USA: United States of America

USD: US dollar (currency)

UVCW: Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia)

V

VAWG: violence against women and girls

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 Municipalities)

W

WASH: water, sanitation and hygiene

WHO: World Health Organization

J.S.

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT CONSTITUENCY TO THE 2025 UNITED NATIONS HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Organized within the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF)

Localizing care and rebuilding trust: Towards a renewed global social contract grounded in universal public service provision

1. As we approach the final stretch of the 2030 Agenda, the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) meets at a time of deep global disruption—from persistent poverty and inequality to rising conflict, climate and biodiversity emergency, and democratic erosion. These converging crises expose the structural gaps the SDGs were designed to address and call for renewed governance models, revitalized social contracts, and more inclusive frameworks for development cooperation.

2. With just five years remaining, **the countdown to 2030 demands bold, coordinated action**. Local and regional governments (LRGs) are already delivering solutions—impacting millions of lives through **rights-based public services**, local partnerships, and grounded community action rooted in proximity, care, and democratic participation.

3. The LRG constituency, organized through the **Global Taskforce (GTF)** and facilitated by **United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)**, reaffirms its full commitment to the 2030 Agenda. As the democratic level of government closest to people, LRGs translate global goals into local action, **protect human rights**, and co-create solutions with their communities, residents, cities and territories.

4. While national progress on the SDGs remains uneven or stagnant, LRGs are acting across all types of territories—from intermediary and rural cities to coastal and island communities—delivering integrated responses based on **solidarity, territorial equity, and democratic participation**.

5. The 2025 review of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17 offers a critical moment to place care and cooperation at the center of a renewed global agenda. This includes elevating local public service provision, feminist care economies, and multilevel governance as essential levers for systemic transformation.

6. To achieve SDG 3, **advancing health equity and care-centered governance**, LRGs are delivering and coordinating essential services such as water, sanitation, housing, mobility, food systems, and urban planning—key determinants of health. Their proximity to communities enables inclusive, preventive strategies that address the social, environmental, and economic roots of well-being. Recognizing health

as a **public common** and strengthening local public health systems must be central to any renewed global health strategy.

7. SDG 5, **on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls**, will not be realized without the leadership of LRGs in transforming access to care, safety, mobility, and services that shape women's autonomy and rights. Feminist municipalism, practiced by many LRGs, is embedding gender equality into local institutions and budgeting, redistributing care work, and fostering inclusive governance. Yet persistent barriers to women's political participation and underinvestment in local gender equality must be addressed with institutional and financial support.

8. Territories are also where economies are built and transformed, making **SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive local economies** a fundamentally territorial challenge. LRGs support small businesses, public employment, skills development, and social and solidarity economies (SSE) that prioritize equity and resilience over extractive models. Investing in **local care economies** is essential to advancing employment, gender equality, and community well-being. In the face of global transitions, LRGs are also enabling **just transitions** by protecting vulnerable workers, reskilling local populations, and fostering sustainable innovation.

9. For SDG 14, the **protection and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources**, LRGs play a vital yet often overlooked role in coastal governance. From managing fisheries and regulating tourism to restoring marine ecosystems and reducing pollution, LRGs are implementing integrated, community-based solutions that link land and ocean systems. Their recognition as actors in ocean governance—and their access to resources and decision-making—will be key to ensuring that **coastal resilience and ocean stewardship** are grounded in justice, sustainability, and local knowledge.

10. Achieving SDG 17 requires more than partnerships—it requires **renewing governance through multilevel cooperation and inclusive multilateralism**. LRGs must be fully institutionalized as actors of governance, with structured participation in national coordination bodies and multilateral processes. The **Pact for the Future** and **Action 55(e)** provide a mandate for the Secretary-General to advance this recognition, building on the Advisory Group on LRGs and the Global Strategy for UN-LRG engagement.

11. Key instruments for SDG 17, such as **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)** and **Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)**, must be systematically integrated into national SDG processes and reporting. Strengthening territorialized and gender-sensitive data systems is essential for evidence-based policymaking and accountability. Without aligning financing systems with multilevel governance priorities, and without enabling LRGs to access long-term, flexible resources, the global goals will remain out of reach.

12. Across the world, they deliver the services that sustain life—**health**, **education**, **housing**, **water**, **food**, **mobility**, **culture**, **social protection**, and **safety**—ensuring that no one and no place is left behind. But their ability to fulfill this mandate requires **adequate mandates**, **financing**, **political recognition** and **structured dialogue**. In this decisive decade, LRGs call for a structural shift anchored in **territorial action**, **feminist care economies**, and **democratic public governance**.

13. The multiple global crises we face today are the result of **systemic inequalities**, deepened by decades of disinvestment in public goods, weakened social protection, and the commodification of basic services. A **renewed global social contract** must be grounded in care, equity, and **publicly governed services** as pillars of resilience and sustainability. LRGs are central to this vision.

14. As the UN prepares for the **Second World Summit for Social Development** and the follow-up to the **Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development**, LRGs draw attention to the **Pact for the Future's Action 55(e)**, which mandates the Secretary-General to propose enhanced modalities for LRG engagement in UN processes, particularly to advance **SDG localization**.

15. In line with this mandate, LRGs stress the urgency of **institutionalizing inclusive and multilevel governance** as a foundation for accelerated SDG implementation. As key actors in delivering global agendas, LRGs are ready to help shape a new model of governance rooted in **justice**, **care**, and **territorial solidarity**.

16. The multiple global crises we face today are the result of **systemic inequalities**, worsened by decades of disinvestment in **public goods**, weakened **social protection**, and the **commodification of basic services**. A renewed global social contract must be grounded in **care**, **equity**, and **publicly governed services** as fundamental pillars of **human dignity**, **resilience**, and **sustainability**.

17. LRGs are central to this vision. They deliver essential services daily—**health**, **housing**, **water** and **sanitation**, **education**, **food**, **safety**, **mobility**, **culture**, and **social protection**—that uphold human rights and ensure that **no one and no place is left behind**. These **local public services** form the backbone of a **territorialized care infrastructure**.

18. To move forward, the international community must **enable LRGs to realize their transformative potential**. This includes **investing in local care systems**, embedding **feminist municipalism**, ensuring **adequate mandates and resources**, and **rebalancing power** across all levels of governance. In this decisive decade, LRGs call for a **structural shift toward a renewed social contract**—anchored in **universal public services** and grounded in the **leadership and financing of local and regional governments**.

The self-organized constituency of local and regional governments call for:

Advancing health equity and care-centered governance (SDG 3)

- **Embedding LRGs' role** in national and global health systems through structured participation in governance and policy design.
- **Scaling up investment** in territorial health infrastructure and care-centered public services.
- **Building inclusive subnational data systems** that are disaggregated and equity-focused to guide health strategies.
- **Implementing cross-sector, place-based approaches** that connect health with housing, mobility, environment, and social protection.
- **Positioning LRGs as key actors** in mental health promotion and service provision, especially for youth, older persons, and marginalized groups.

Advancing gender equality through feminist municipalism and women's political leadership (SDG 5)

- **Mainstreaming care-centered and feminist governance approaches** in national and international gender equality frameworks, recognizing LRGs as essential to implementation.
- **Ensuring institutional, legal, and financial support** for women's equal leadership and decision-making power at the local and regional levels.
- **Enabling LRGs to implement intersectional, gender-responsive policies**, with the necessary resources, tools, and partnerships with feminist movements and civil society.
- **Guaranteeing local response systems to gender-based violence**, including safe spaces, survivor-centered services, and integrated protection mechanisms.

Promoting decent work, inclusive local economies and just transitions (SDG 8)

- **Mandating LRGs as key economic actors** with expanded competencies to drive local, inclusive, and care-centered economic models.
- **Financing care economies locally** as a driver of employment, gender equity, and sustainable development.
- **Strengthening social and solidarity economy ecosystems**, backed by legal recognition, financing tools, and local procurement policies.

• **Establishing territorial employment alliances** that bring together local governments, workers, unions, and employers in coordinated strategies.

• **Reshaping financial** architectures to provide LRGs with direct, long-term, and flexible funding for inclusive local economic transformation.

Safeguarding coastal resilience and the ocean as a common through territorial action (SDG 14)

• **Recognizing LRGs' responsibilities** in managing coastal and marine areas by ensuring their meaningful inclusion in national and global ocean governance **platforms**.

• **Designing multilevel marine governance frameworks** that reflect the voices of territories, Indigenous peoples, and communities.

• **Enhancing LRG capacities through dedicated technical and financial support** for integrated coastal management, marine biodiversity, and resilience.

• **Grounding ocean policies in rights-based, locally-led approaches**, linking biodiversity and climate goals with social and gender justice.

Renewing governance through multilevel cooperation and inclusive multilateralism (SDG 17)

• **Establishing LRGs as integral actors** within national coordination systems and multilateral structures, in alignment with the Pact for the Future.

• **Institutionalizing the use of VLRs and VSRs** within national reporting and SDG planning to reflect territorial realities and ensure local ownership.

• **Developing territorial data ecosystems** that are disaggregated, inclusive, and supported by national and global institutions.

• **Aligning fiscal systems and international financing** with the needs of local and regional governments, ensuring they have sustained access to resources for SDG implementation.

H.
HIGHLIGHTS

VLRs and VSRs are blooming!

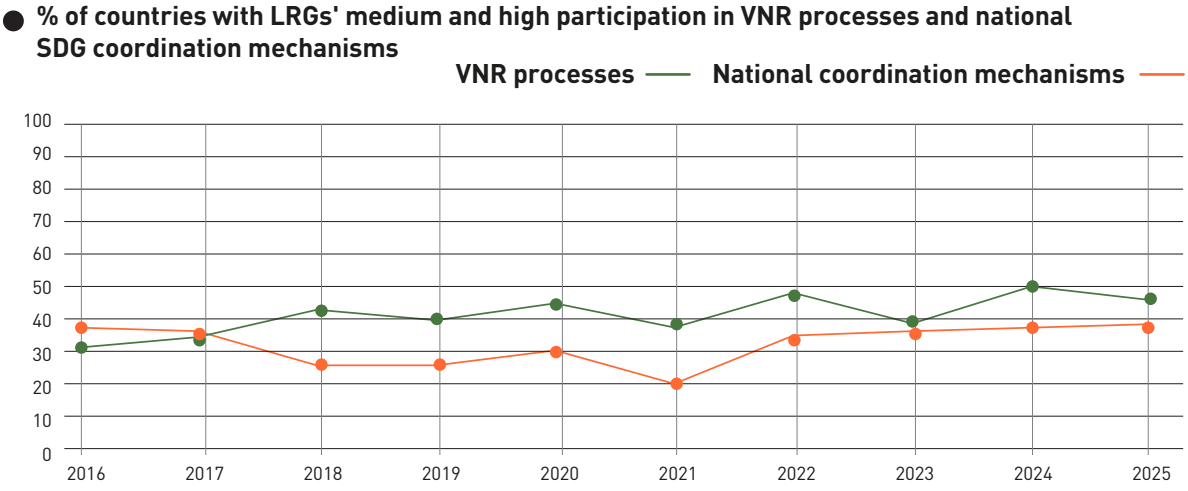
360+ VLRs by 280+ LRGs

45 VSRs in 33 countries

...HOWEVER...

LRG participation in national SDG processes is still very low

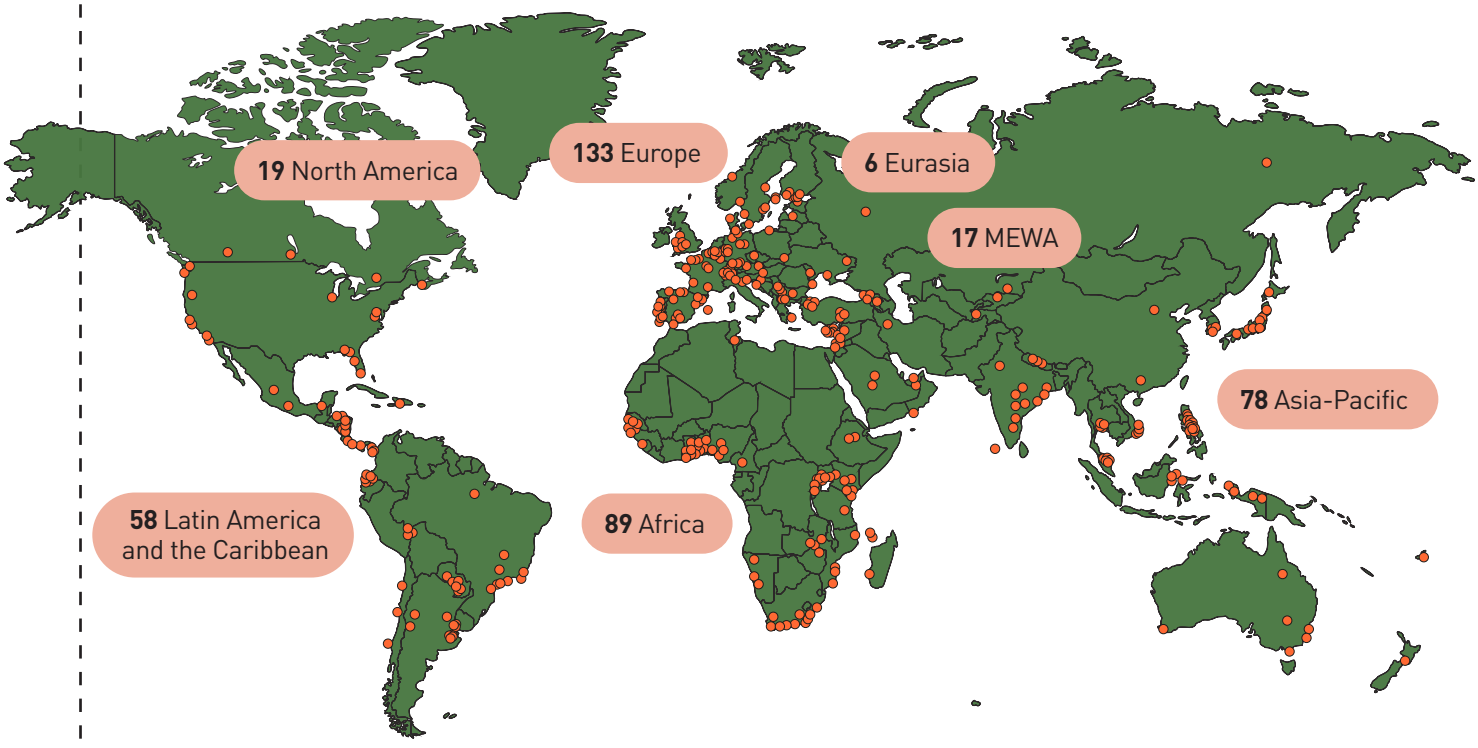
% of countries with LRGs' medium and high participation in VNR processes and national SDG coordination mechanisms



...STILL...

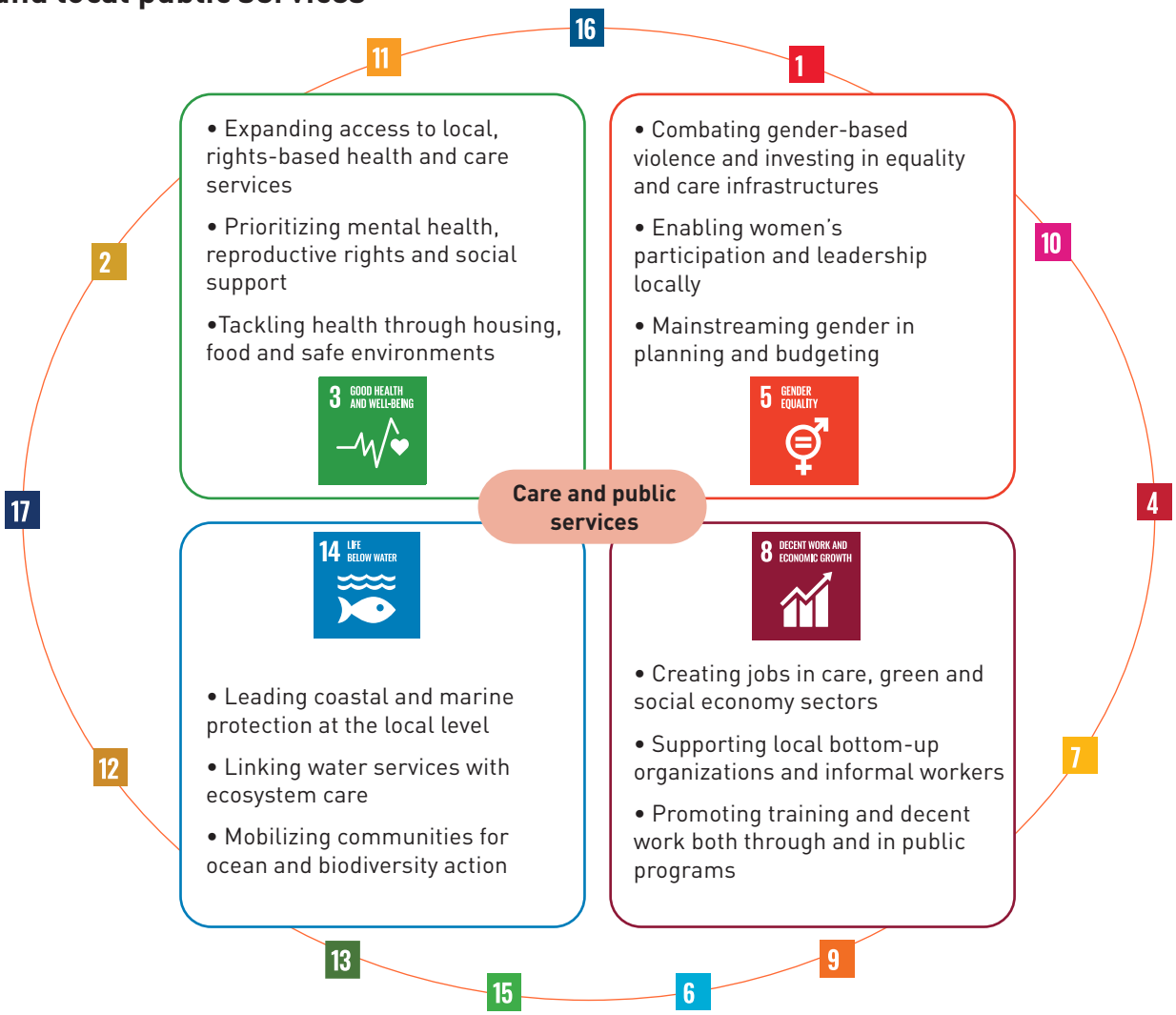
In this report you will find 400+ inspiring LRG practices from around the world

LRG practices included in the papers on SDGs 3, 5, 8 and 14



...CHECK THEM OUT TO LEARN HOW...

LRGs are at the forefront of SDG achievement through care, equality and local public services



...AND FOR ALL OF THE ABOVE...

The GTF has recommendations

Recognize LRGs' leadership

Acknowledge LRGs as essential actors in localizing the 2030 Agenda

Ensure local financing

Secure stable, long-term funding aligned with LRG priorities

Support public local data

Boost disaggregated local data production, access and use

Advance decentralization

Empower LRGs through more competencies and greater participation in SDG governance

Integrate local SDG reporting

Embed VLRs/VSRs into national reviews and processes

Renew multilateralism

Rebuild global systems to give LRGs a seat at the table in international decision-making

Foster new governance models

Promote novel, people- and environment- centered governance models that overcome the current profit-oriented logics

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Uncertainty and resistance during these complex political times inevitably impact efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Support for the Agenda, its values — and sustainable development as the core of multilateralism — have waned. In 2025, it has become clear that several of the targets detailed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are not on track for 2030. It is perhaps even more troubling that 17% of targets indicate regression when compared to the 2015 baseline levels. However, another 17% are well on track, while half show some deviation from the desired trajectory. Although progress varies by region, the UN 2024 SDG Progress Chart identifies key, global challenges that lie ahead. These significant hurdles are the remaining 4 trillion USD annual global investment gap for the 2030 Agenda, sluggish progress on Internet access, the worrisome trend of declining international cooperation and geopolitical tensions. Nonetheless, when it comes to sustainable development, global society cannot afford the luxury of indecision.

As the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations (LGAs), the networks comprising the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) and all their members are reaffirming their unwavering commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda, its SDGs and all other global agendas and compacts. Local and regional governments are persistent in their efforts towards the localization of the SDG indicators in order to achieve truly sustainable development for all, through a renewed multilateral system that is inclusive, networked and effective. From our privileged position, we have been able to forge close collaborations with key international actors and bring the perspectives of LRGs and their communities to the world stage. As tirelessly demonstrated, the municipal movement is here to stay.

A key milestone was the creation of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments, which was proposed in "Our Common Agenda" and co-chaired by representatives of Nouakchott and Spain. UN-Habitat and UCLG facilitated the group, which included 15 GTF-nominated mayors and governors, and five national-government representatives. At the UN Summit of the Future, they presented a global strategy for embedding LRGs within intergovernmental processes — envisioning inclusive multilateralism that values LRG contributions as a catalyst for SDG achievement. **The GTF will continue advocating for formal recognition of LRGs as a self-organized constituency with a special, permanent status within UN bodies and processes.**

Furthermore, UCLG and the GTF are advancing inclusive multilateralism through the Local Social Covenant. To ensure no person and no territory is left behind, this initiative invites members and partners to jointly define local, political- and policy priorities that are essential to achieving the SDGs. Through the covenant and other advocacy efforts, the organized voice of LRGs and LGAs will be amplified across key forums such as the Second World Summit for Social Development, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development and the 2025 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). These efforts reaffirm the subnational commitment to the values and objectives of the 2030 Agenda.

In this context, the ninth edition of the Towards the Localization of the SDGs report is an invaluable source of bottom-up knowledge and advocacy for constructing truly inclusive and sustainable societies.

This year's HLPF examines five SDGs: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). These five SDGs have a broad impact on our cities and territories. Global achievement by 2030 is highly uncertain, a radical renewed effort by all parties involved is needed to meet the goals' indicators. The most relevant challenges include: lingering, negative health outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic; persistent gender inequalities in the public and private spheres; slow progress in decent

employment conditions; continued degradation of our marine ecosystems; and persistent tensions and imbalances in international, political and financial systems. Some progress can and must be highlighted — namely in HIV prevention, tobacco use, gender-sensitive reforms and financial inclusion. However, global trends for the SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF must serve as a wake-up call to truly change the pace of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In light of these momentous trends and the consequent transformations required to achieve the SDG targets, this report seeks to address the state of progress in the localization of these SDGs. Most importantly, this research highlights the inevitable interconnectedness among the SDGs under review and the 12 remaining goals, which reinforces the **crucial — albeit underappreciated — role of LRGs in addressing and solving complex issues, such as good health and well-being, gender inequality, decent work conditions and economic growth, and the protection and promotion of sustainable marine ecosystems**.

In particular, the current edition of the report utilizes UCLG's concepts of Care and the New Essentials as a transformative lens for SDG implementation at the territorial level. In response to global crises and shifting local demands, LRGs are pioneering innovative strategies that reimagine care, inclusion and resilience — from holistic approaches to urban health and gender-responsive systems, to decent employment strategies and local marine governance that protects the commons. These efforts collectively define a new paradigm of development grounded in equality and care.

As the UN Secretary General compellingly stated, "local leaders are vital for global solutions [and] an essential link in the chain of ownership and trust between multilateral institutions and the people we all serve." In that vein, this report will present the myriad of ways in which LRGs initiate, coordinate, design, implement and monitor policies, plans, projects and actions that contribute directly to the 2030 Agenda. Since LRGs are the level of government closest to the population, they experience first-hand (and thus are better suited to act upon) the interrelated set of issues that need to be addressed to achieve truly inclusive and sustainable development. Indeed, LRGs are playing their part across a wide range of topics: climate change and the environment, democratic participation and social inclusion, well-being and prosperity, justice and service provision. This immense flexibility reiterates their vital role in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Through this edition of the GTF's annual report, the organized constituency of LRGs aims to highlight how LRG localization efforts contribute to the HLPF's theme for this year, **"Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for leaving no one behind."**

BOX 1.1

What is SDG localization?

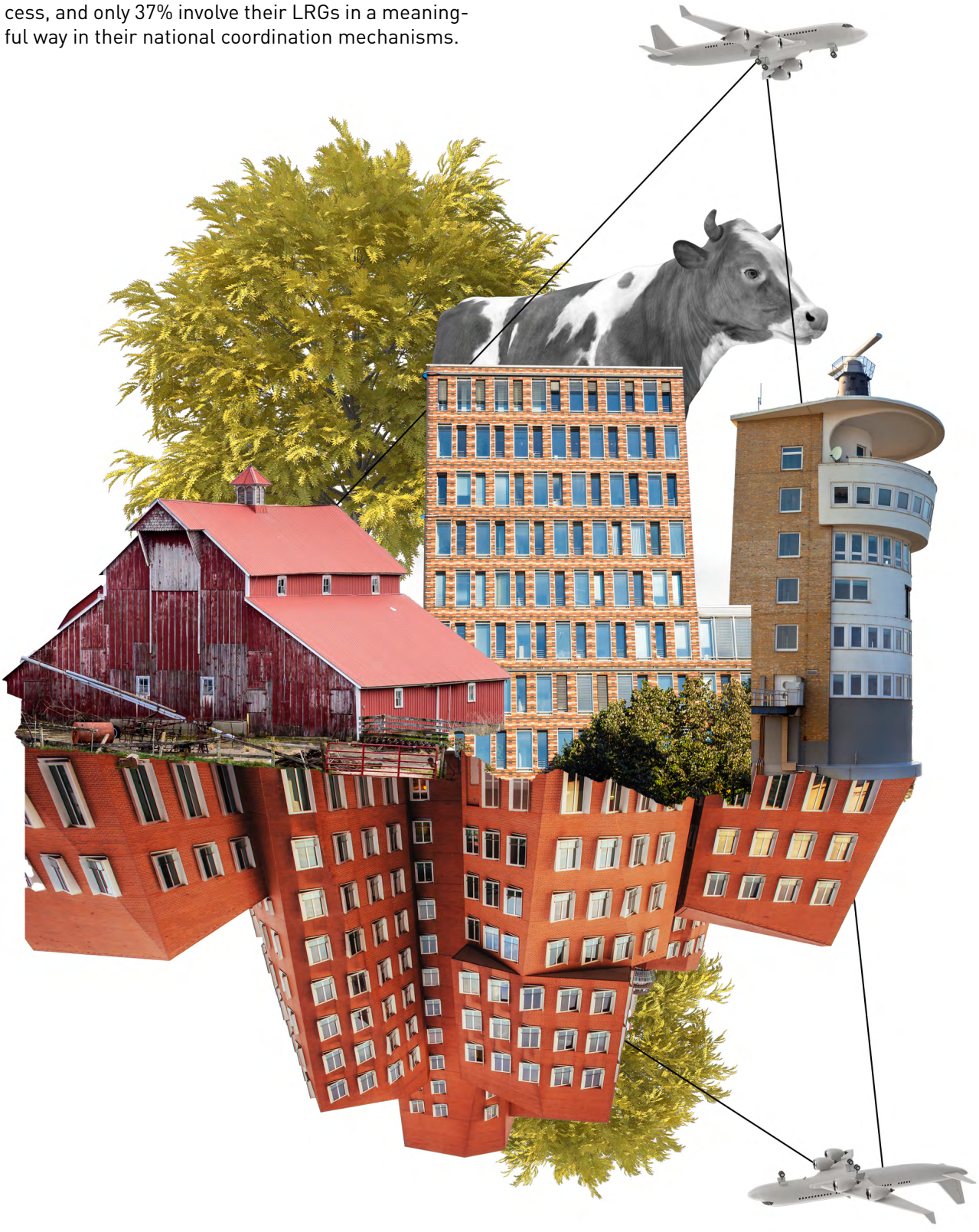
SDG localization refers to the process through which LRGs define, implement, monitor and evaluate strategies to achieve the 2030 Agenda. It involves translating the SDGs into local action by inclusively adapting them to the specific contexts and needs of each territory. This process includes setting localized goals, identifying appropriate targets and means of implementation, and using a range of indicators to measure progress toward achieving the SDGs. This process cannot be unlinked from the localization of other global agendas and compacts, such as the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework or the Global Compacts on Migrants and Refugees.

This report will focus on LRGs' varied localization efforts for the five t SDGs under review in this year's HLPF. **These concrete strategies and reporting commitments on SDG localization are receiving ever-increasing support from effective global advocacy efforts by the international municipalist movement.**

Indeed, **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have formed the backbone of LRG reporting on SDG localization**, and their processes and outcomes have served multiple purposes: influencing policy making at higher levels of government, advocating for more recognition of local and regional efforts in the global sustainable development agenda and increasing awareness of the 2030 Agenda on a local level.

Between 2018 and 2024, there were close to 400 local and subnational reviews, covering a total of 2.3 billion inhabitants. This demonstrates the municipalist movement's unwavering commitment to bolstering SDG localization from the ground up and to collaborating with national and international stakeholders to gather data and design policies in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Despite some positive developments in response to LRG- and LGA efforts, it must be noted that LRG participation in national reporting processes — such as Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) — and in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation has progressed too slowly to effectively support SDG achievement. For instance, in 2025, only 46% of the countries producing a VNR presented medium-to-high levels of LRG involvement in this process, and only 37% involve their LRGs in a meaningful way in their national coordination mechanisms.



1.1 Report structure and contents

Following this introduction, Section 2 assesses how the institutional frameworks of this year's reporting countries either support or hinder SDG localization, through an analysis of LRG involvement in the preparation of each country's VNR. This section also examines LRG participation in national SDG coordination mechanisms and explores the existence of national localization strategies, where applicable. The state of subnational finance with respect to the SDGs is presented as a crucial component in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The section concludes with an overview of recent SDG localization practices across different world regions.

Each of the four papers in Section 3 is related to a specific SDG under review at the 2025 HLPF and how local and regional actions contribute to its achievement. As a whole, these papers provide an in-depth assessment of the challenges that LRGs and LGAs face when working towards the SDGs under review as well as the solutions they are putting in place in their respective territories.

BOX 1.2

526 inspiring practices on SDG localization from across the globe

This 9th edition of the Towards the Localization of the SDGs report features 526 inspiring practices from 405 LRGs and LGAs across all world regions, highlighting their innovative efforts to localize the SDGs.

Since the first edition in 2017, a total of 4,343 practices by 1,526 LRGs have been shared through these nine reports, demonstrating the vital role of LRGs in driving SDG implementation and fostering sustainable, inclusive communities worldwide.

You can find an external repository of the 583 inspiring practices compiled from the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization here.

- Paper 1 **analyzes localization efforts to promote Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) for all.** It focuses on SDG 3 and its connection to other SDGs and to a significant number of LRG mandates. The paper applies an urban health approach that goes beyond SDG 3 targets, and it was produced by UCLG in partnership with the World Health Organization's Urban Health team.

- Paper 2 **studies locally led initiatives on Gender Equality (SDG 5) and women's empowerment.** Building on outcomes of the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the celebration of the Beijing+30, the paper focuses on women in political leadership, inclusive governance, care and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG).

- Paper 3 **assesses LRG-led progress towards comprehensive achievement of Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), including in the role of LRGs as employers.** The paper was produced in partnership with Public Services International.

- Paper 4 **examines the localization efforts for Life Below Water (SDG 14)**, with a particular focus on the multilevel fragmentation that jeopardizes cooperation and holistic approaches as well as on the solutions that LRGs foster to overcome it. This paper has been produced together with ICLEI.

Section 4 discusses the findings and offers a **conclusion and bold policy recommendations** to bolster SDG localization. The pathways to better, more integrated progress on the 2030 Agenda are summarized without neglecting the key remaining barriers to SDG localization efforts.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology employed in the research for this report was twofold. First, a number of academic, non-academic and grey literature (primary and secondary) was analyzed. Second, and most importantly, this research presents a considerable volume of novel data stemming from LRG responses to the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization. This mixed-methods survey (see Box 1.3 and Figure 1.1) forms the backbone of evidence for the information presented.

BOX 1.3

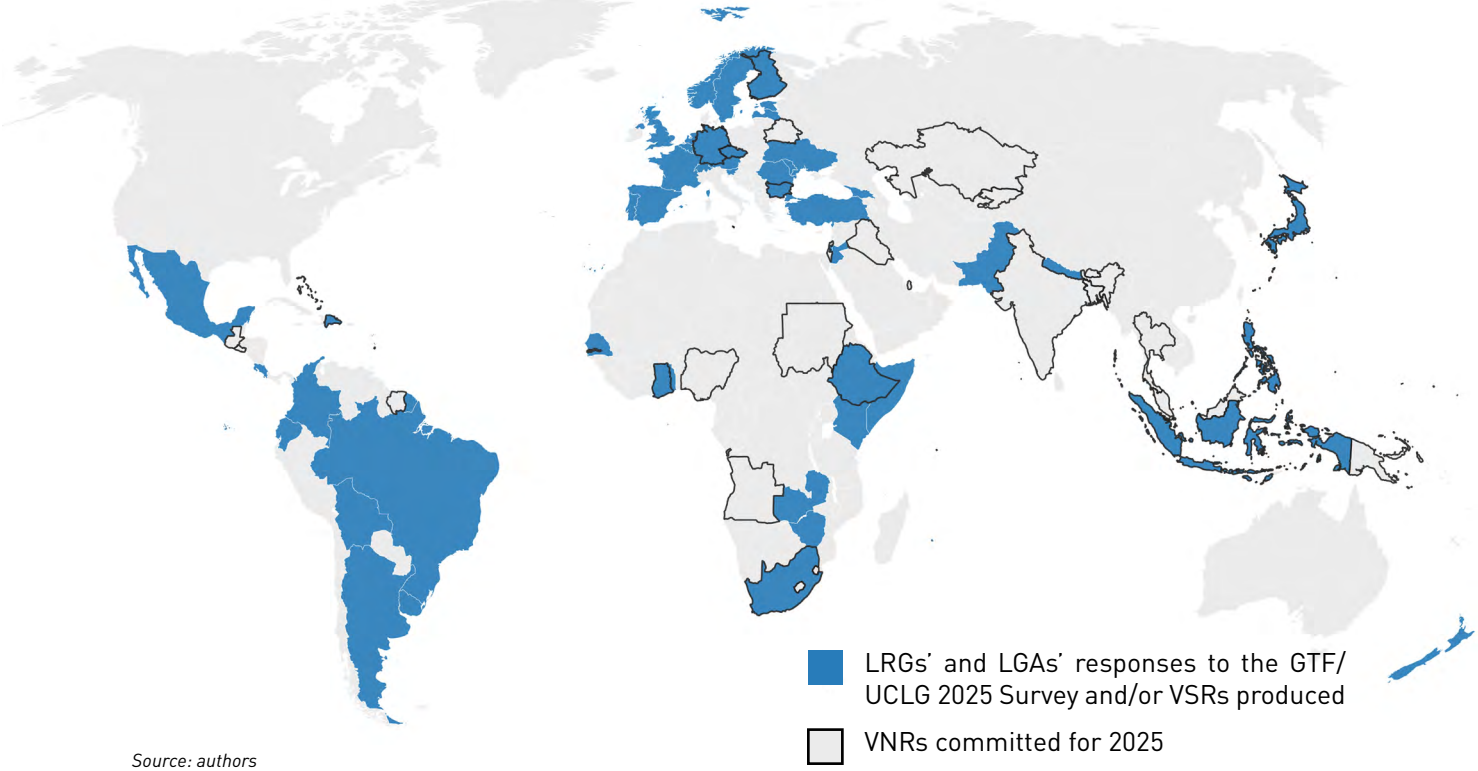
Responses to the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization

Since 2017, the GTF/UCLG has conducted an annual survey on SDG localization, reaching out to all member LRGs and LGAs worldwide. The survey gathers information on two key aspects of localization: (a) the environment that enables local action and (b) the specific initiatives being carried out by LRGs and LGAs to advance the SDGs. Each year, the survey is adapted to focus on actions linked to the specific SDGs under review by the UN HLPF.

This year, the GTF/UCLG received 177 responses from 56 different countries, 12 of which are reporting to the HLPF this year. Of the total responses, 38 correspond to LGAs (8 from reporting countries), 127 to LRGs (including 13 from reporting countries) and 12 to other stakeholders. These stakeholders include regional and global networks of cities, such as the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS). They also include national governments, research institutions and civil society organizations (from Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zimbabwe).

Most LRG- and national LGA responses came from Europe (96 responses from 23 countries), followed by Latin America (29 responses from 8 countries), Asia-Pacific (17 responses from 8 countries), Africa (9 responses from 9 countries) and the Middle East and West Asia (14 responses from 3 countries).

Figure 1.1 LRGs' and LGAs' responses to the UCLG/GTF 2025 Survey and/or VSRs produced, and VNRs committed to for 2025



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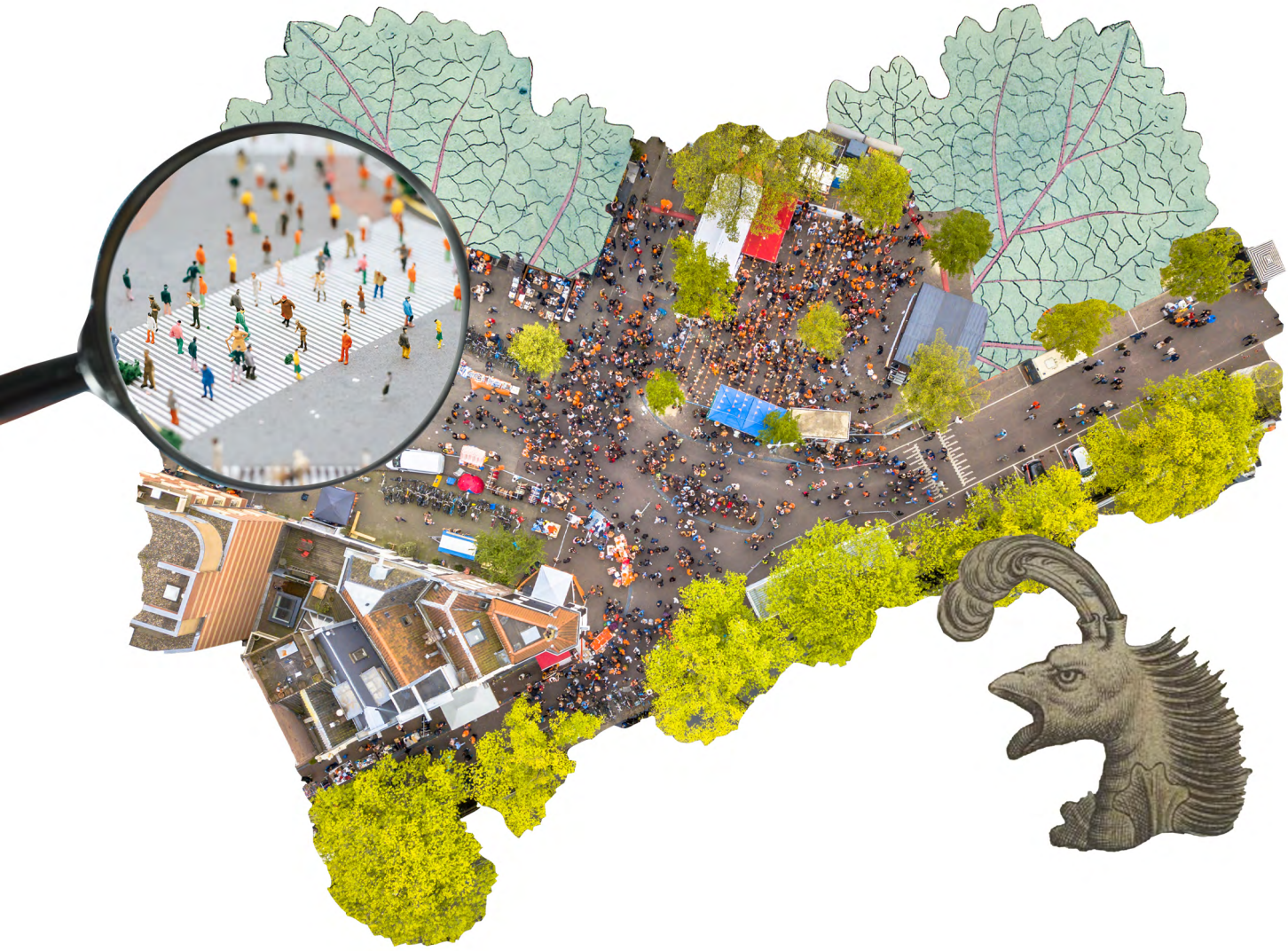


2.
POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

This section analyzes the national policy frameworks and enabling environments that shape SDG localization. It examines the involvement of local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations (LGAs) in preparing Voluntary National Reviews, or VNRs (2.1); their participation in national coordination mechanisms and strategies (2.2); their access to finance for sustainable development (2.3); and their concrete actions to localize the 2030 Agenda (2.4).

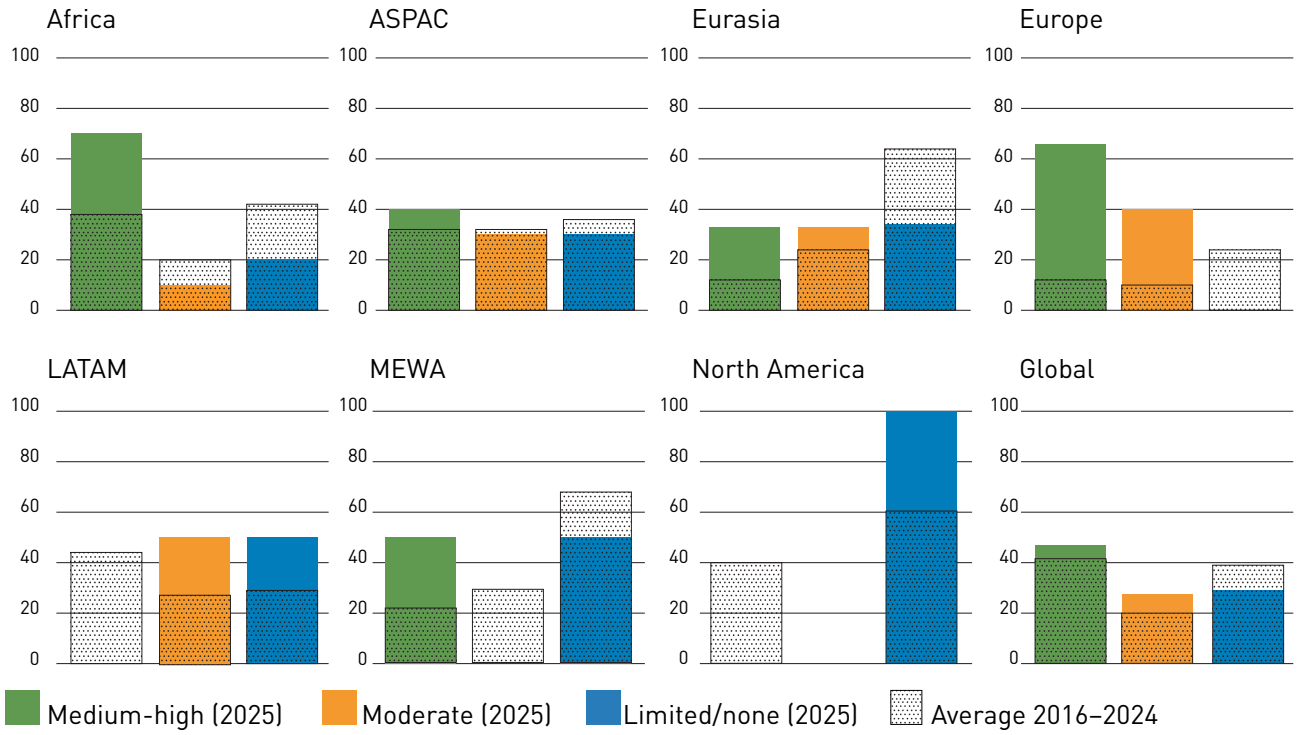
2.1
LRG involvement in VNR preparation

To date, 398 VNRs have been analyzed across the different editions of the Towards the Localization of the SDGs report. In 2025, 37 countries committed to presenting a VNR. As of this report's finalization (June 30, 2025), 35 of these VNRs were made available by the United Nations (UN) and are thus analyzed in this report.

LRGs' and LGAs' participation in national reporting processes has increased slightly since 2016, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.1. In 2025, **46% of countries presenting a VNR reported medium to high levels of LRG involvement** — a moderate increase from the average of 41% between 2016 and 2024. This means countries involved LRGs in national or regional conferences, workshops or bilateral meetings to discuss the report; allowed LRGs to contribute to the report; or invited them to be part of the national reporting unit. The share of countries reporting only moderate LRG involvement (i.e. the national government invited LRGs to answer a survey or join occasional informative workshops, with limited room to contribute to the actual report) is 26% in 2025, up from 20% in the 2016–2024 period. Meanwhile, 28% of countries have little or no LRG engagement, compared to 39% in the 2016–2024 period. This means a country invited LRGs to a VNR's launch after it was finalized, did not invite them at all or does not have any elected LRGs.

As in past years, regional disparities are stark. In 2025, 70% of reporting countries in Africa involved LRGs to a medium or high degree, compared to 38% in the 2016–2024 period. In Europe, 60% of countries involved LRGs to this same degree in 2025, decreasing from 66% in previous years, as did four out of 10 reporting countries (40%) in Asia-Pacific, up from a historical average of 32%. In Latin America, none of the four reporting countries had medium to high levels of LRG involvement, down from 44%. One out of two reporting countries in the Middle East and West Asia (compared to 3 out of 26 in earlier years) and one out of three countries in Eurasia (up from a historical 2 out of 17) had medium to high involvement. In North America, the only reporting country with a VNR available — Saint Lucia — did not include LRGs in its VNR preparation.

Figure 2.1.1 LRG participation in VNR processes in 2025 and 2016–2024, by region and global



Source: authors

The way VNRs refer to LRGs and SDG localization often indicates how countries recognize LRGs' role. Such references vary significantly in both frequency and depth — ranging from a token mention to a thorough acknowledgment of LRGs as essential actors in delivering the 2030 Agenda. They also reveal whether countries are embracing a top-down or a more inclusive, bottom-up approach to localization.

Some VNRs explicitly cite Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), signaling political will to foster collaborative action. Often, this recognition of subnational reporting is a crucial first step towards building stronger coordination frameworks and advancing multilevel governance. In more advanced cases, VNRs dedicate entire sections to detailing LRGs' contributions to SDG implementation or to showcasing institutional mechanisms for multilevel cooperation. Other VNRs may only mention decentralization as a future priority, with little reflection on the current state of local engagement.

This section analyzes the degree to which countries involve LRGs in VNR preparation — categorized as medium to high, moderate or limited/none — and presents qualitative insights into how this year's VNRs address SDG localization and local action.

2.1.1 Countries with a medium to high degree of LRG involvement in the VNR process

In 2025, 46% of the countries reporting to the UN High-Level Political Forum significantly involved LRGs and LGAs in VNR production. Medium to high involvement means that LRGs or LGAs were either directly represented within the national reporting unit throughout the VNR drafting process or played a role by contributing a specific section of the report. This level also encompasses countries that held consultations or working meetings with LRGs or LGAs to shape the content of the VNR.

In five countries, LRGs and LGAs have been part of the national drafting team:

- In **Bulgaria**, the VNR includes nine pages drafted by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) on LRGs' progress and challenges in SDG localization. This section also includes NAMRB's recommendations for boosting SDG localization, primarily

establishing a formal, nationally supported procedure for municipal involvement in SDG implementation — focused on clear roles, priority indicators and unified data collection. Additional recommendations include improving coordination, ensuring political commitment, strengthening decentralization, enhancing awareness and fostering international exchange of best practices.

• In **Eswatini**, the VNR was conducted alongside the VLRs produced by seven LRGs: the Municipal Council of Mbabane, Municipal Council of Manzini, Ezulwini Town Council, Nhlangano Town Board, Matsapha Town Board, Siteki Town Council and Ngwenya Town Board. A joint VNR and VLR working team was established to prepare a joint work plan, which was used to mobilize both technical and financial resources. The working team held several meetings to plan, localize SDG indicators at the municipal level, map stakeholders and periodically review progress, including at VNR and VLR validation workshops. It also conducted regional and local review consultations involving LRGs and other stakeholders. A stakeholder engagement plan was developed for each LRG. The team also produced a local government SDG indicator framework and used it as a data collection tool. Ultimately, the VNR dedicated one nine-page chapter to SDG localization and VLRs. This chapter includes recommendations on topics such as coordination planning, capacity building, data collection and management, and sufficient resources.

• In **The Gambia**, during the 2025 VNR drafting process, the Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities (GALGA) participated in the technical committee. It supported comprehensive consultations with stakeholders across all local government areas of the country.

• In **India**, an SDG task force brought together union ministries, state governments and think tanks to guide SDG adoption, implementation, monitoring and reporting at both national and state levels. Regional and state SDG workshops provided critical inputs for VNR production. SDG workshops organized by NITI Aayog in Jaipur, Rajasthan (March 2024), and in Bhubaneswar, Odisha (February 2025), opened a space for all states and union territories — which are directly governed by the central government of India — to share good practices and learn from each other. The VNR includes a full chapter on SDG localization, which showcases many LRGs' initiatives, such as Chhattisgarh State's district indicator framework, the Northeast region's district SDG index and Bhopal's VLR. It also mentions that over 220,000 gram panchayats (village councils) have aligned their development plans with the SDGs.

• In **South Africa**, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has chaired the VNR working groups on SDG 11, SDG 6 and SDG 7, increasing recognition of LRGs' role. LRGs have provided significant inputs to the VNR, as well as the SDG country report coordinated by Statistics South Africa, especially regarding local implementation challenges, policy recommendations and SDG tracking at the municipal level. According to the VNR, the government engaged with representatives from various provinces and municipalities during the drafting process. The VNR also reflects Buffalo's and Tshwane's VLR findings. However, according to SALGA, timely engagement and more structured national–local communication could further improve the national reporting process. VNR development would benefit from a clearer strategy on how LRGs' inputs can be more systematically integrated throughout the year, rather than just at reporting milestones. In addition, the VNR could have further emphasized local solutions in certain areas, particularly around local data collection and funding for SDG projects, which are critical for tracking progress effectively.

In four other countries, LRGs and LGAs have participated by sharing written contributions, such as subnational reports (e.g. VLRs, VSRs) or other inputs, considered by the VNR drafting team:

• In **Finland**, the National Commission on Sustainable Development, composed of 120 key stakeholders, included LRGs' voices. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) and other LRGs actively participated in the VNR process. Their contributions were included in multiple parts of the report. The VNR includes a chapter with text on SDG localization, which mentions the Strategic Management of SDGs in Cities project (also known as SDG46). This project involves six of Finland's main cities: Helsinki, Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku. Another chapter focuses on the current situation and outlook for local sustainability work (with data gathered from a municipal workshop organized by AFLRA and the reporting party, the Prime Minister's Office). The report also pulls from the data in the Nordic VSR and showcases the VLRs of Joensuu and Ylöjärvi, as well as messages and actions by LRGs such as Tampere and Åland.

• In **Germany**, this year's VNR reflects LRGs' increased participation. The German government conducted two dialogue forums for the

2025 VNR and invited LRGs and LGAs. The 14 German cities that have conducted VLRs in the past, along with the LGAs and the German Institute of Urban Affairs, presented a Voluntary Local Government Review. Building on that review, the VNR dedicates two pages to SDG localization and mentions LRGs in several other locations.

• In **Ghana**, the 2025 VNR integrates the findings, challenges, lessons learned and recommendations from recently produced VLRs, with a dedicated chapter on SDG localization. This information complements the national-level assessment, offering grounded insights and experiences into local SDG progress and challenges.

• In **Micronesia**, the national government conducted consultations across all four states to gather information from national and state government officials, as well as traditional leaders and village councils.

A third group of countries has engaged LRGs and LGAs by inviting them to attend meetings, conferences or workshops to discuss VNR content:

• In **Bangladesh**, divisional commissioners from the national government held consultations with officials from districts, upazilas (subdistricts), LRGs and other stakeholders to assess local progress on indicators and inform the initial VNR draft. Deputy commissioners across 64 districts and upazila nirbahi officers in 495 upazilas organized meetings of local SDG committees, engaging over 20,000 stakeholders. These grassroots and subnational contributions informed the VNR, enriching it with a bottom-up perspective. The participating stakeholders were also called upon to validate the final version.

• In **Ethiopia**, through a detailed survey, all regional governments provided written submissions to be included in the VNR. The final draft report was reviewed and formally endorsed at a high-level consultative meeting that included the deputy prime minister, federal line ministers, regional presidents, mayors of city administrations and chairs of parliamentary standing committees. However, the Ethiopian Cities Association (ECA) states it did not participate in the process. The VNR mentions the first VLRs produced by the Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city administrations. According to the report, during the preparation of the 2025 VNR, all regional states received clear direction to initiate their own localized reviews and develop actionable plans to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

• In **Iraq**, workshops and consultations were held in several governorates to gather inputs and information on gaps and local initiatives from LRGs and local stakeholders.

• In **Kazakhstan**, the national government organized regional discussions of the VNR draft, with active participation by the akimats (local government bodies) of important regions and cities. Akimat representatives participated in consultations to define the VNR's priority goals. The VNR acknowledges the potential of the Almaty VLR to become an effective tool for monitoring SDG localization at the regional level. Beyond this, it devotes three pages to SDG localization. According to the VNR, active efforts are underway to establish institutions for SDG implementation at the local level, with working groups already formed in some regions. However, the approach is very top-down, and the VNR seldom mentions LRGs' efforts.

• In **Nigeria**, the Core Working Group (in charge of producing the VNR) engaged LRGs through structured consultations, in which they shared data and sectoral inputs. In March 2025, this group held regional consultations across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones in coordination with the states of Akwa Ibom, Enugu, Gombe, Kaduna, Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory. LRGs were also invited to participate in the final national validation workshop. The VNR dedicates 10 pages to the country's two VLRs: Lagos and Kaduna.

• In the **Philippines**, the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) was initially not invited to contribute to the 2025 VNR. (By contrast, during the preparation of the 2022 VNR, the country's planning ministry and the LCP held virtual meetings to discuss VNR contributions.) The national government has held few consultations with the LCP or member cities regarding the localization

of SDG implementation and reporting. Rather, the LCP took initiative to meet the national government and provide a brief write-up on local SDG progress. The city of Makati also noted a lack of avenues to participate in VNR preparation, despite the inclusion of a box on local SDG 5 progress in this year's review. Ultimately, the VNR dedicated four pages to SDG localization, showcasing the country's VLRs (including Baguio's and Santa Rosa's) and VSRs. It highlights the SDG Localization for Philippine Cities: An SDG Self-Assessment Monitoring Project Using the CityNet SDG Navigator Platform, initiated by Makati and replicated in eight other cities. The national government plans to pursue greater linkages between national, subnational and local reviews on the SDGs through closer coordination with the LGAs of provinces, cities and municipalities, as well as UN agencies.

• In **Sudan**, LRGs participated in VNR consultations to define areas of discussion, selection of key stakeholders, methodology and issues related to SDG awareness. Information on social services was gathered from the more stable states of Red Sea, Kassala, River Nile and Gazira. This data included assessments of service performance prior to the conflict, the conflict's impact and efforts by these states to continue providing services, thereby supporting progress towards the SDGs. The VNR includes a section on SDG localization, which focuses on the crisis situation in various states. It identifies a need to enhance awareness of SDG localization, engage local communities, improve data collection, produce data on SDG indicators, integrate SDGs into local plans, and monitor and report on SDG progress.

2.1.2 Countries with moderate LRG involvement in the VNR process

Nine of the 35 countries (26%) that submitted a VNR in 2025 involved LRGs and LGAs to a moderate degree. This involvement generally took the form of surveys or occasional consultations, although the final VNRs do not always adequately reflect LRGs' and LGAs' contributions.

• In **Belarus**, the Council for Sustainable Development includes the regional and Minsk city executive committees alongside representatives from state bodies. This national advisory and consultative body, which meets once a year, is tasked with reviewing and approving the VNR. However, the VNR provides no specific information regarding the quality of these executive committees' participation.

• In the **Czech Republic**, the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMOCR), the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic and the Association of Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic are part of the multistakeholder Government Council for Sustainable Development. Through this council, they provided inputs to the VNR at both the beginning and the end of the process in two workshops with other stakeholders. However, SMOCR describes this participation as having limited influence on the report. Indeed, according to the VNR, the Ministry of Regional Development (not LRGs) provided examples of SDG localization. These appear in two pages of the report, accompanied by a rather general text on competence distribution and coordination that does not analyze local progress, challenges or solutions.

• In the **Dominican Republic**, although the national government collected information from the Dominican Federation of Municipalities (FEDOMU), the VNR does not include it. FEDOMU participated in an ad hoc informative session on VNR progress. The VNR devotes a chapter to the territorialization of public policies and strengthening of the decentralization framework, noting an intergovernmental working group for implementing the Territorial Planning Law that includes local and national authorities. However, it does not provide any information on how LRGs participate in achieving the SDGs.

• In **Guatemala**, the VNR showcases the country's second VSR, which was produced by the Secretariat of Planning and Programming of the Presidency (SEGEPLAN) and the municipalities of Cuilco and San Pedro Necta, with support from the United Nations Population Fund. It also mentions the VSR produced in 2023 by SEGEPLAN and several municipalities — Poptún, Morales, Puerto Barrios, Río Hondo, Estanzuela, Teculután, Camotán, Jutiapa and Moyuta — with UN support. However, it includes no information on LRGs' involvement in the VNR process, nor any actions by LRGs to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

• In **Indonesia**, VNR preparation engaged some LRGs, which shared their insights and best practices along with other stakeholders in various sessions. The VNR mentions efforts such as the data platforms by the Special Region of Yogyakarta, South Kalimantan Provincial Government and West Kalimantan Provincial Government, as well as the SDG-aligned plan of North Sulawesi Province. It also mentions the VLRs produced by Surabaya, Nusantara, West Java Province, Jakarta Province, North Kalimantan Province, Jambi, Samarinda, Kutai Kartanegara District, Kendal District and South Central Timor District. However, Bandar Lampung expressed a desire for VLRs' inputs to be more seriously considered.

• In **Japan**, LRGs did not directly participate in drafting the VNR nor in conversations at the SDGs Promotion Roundtable. Rather, the national government asked the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies to draft a comprehensive chapter on SDG localization. The report does mention some LRG achievements, such as Yokohama's, shared by the city itself.

• In **Lesotho**, ahead of the 2025 VNR, the national government conducted a series of awareness-raising workshops. These culminated in a multistakeholder consultation with over 100 participants from central and local governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, development partners and persons with disabilities. However, LRGs were seemingly excluded from the drafting team and the multi-institutional technical committee that oversaw the process. The VNR includes scarce references to SDG localization but identifies empowering LRGs and improving service delivery as key steps forward.

• In **Malaysia**, multistakeholder engagements involved representatives from federal and state governments, local authorities, academia, civil society organizations and the private sector, although information on the quality of their participation is lacking. The VNR dedicates one paragraph to the 15 existing VLRs, which have been produced by Urbanice Malaysia (a center of excellence set up under the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) in collaboration with municipalities. References to LRGs' actions are scarce.

• In **Malta**, LRGs were invited to share insights for the VNR on several occasions. First, a survey was disseminated to collect information on LRGs' SDG-related work and contributions to national targets. In October/November 2024, government ministries and entities held data and information collection sessions with civil society organizations and local and regional councils for VNR production. Also in November, the Sustainable Development Multi-Stakeholder Forum convened LRGs and other parties to document progress, challenges and ways forward. However, the Maltese Local Councils' Association reports responding to a survey but not being involved in subsequent consultations.

2.1.3 Countries with limited or no LRG involvement in the VNR process

Finally, in 10 of the 35 countries (28%) reporting to the High-Level Political Forum this year, LRGs had limited to no involvement in the VNR process or no evidence of their participation is available.

• In **Angola**, the SDG Platform in charge of VNR preparation offers no information on LRG involvement.

• In **Bhutan**, LRGs did not participate in the multisectoral VNR Task Force formed to provide technical input and guidance, nor were they part of the VNR consultation process.

• In **El Salvador**, the report includes no information on LRG involvement in VNR production.

• The **Kyrgyz** VNR does not explicitly evidence LRGs' direct involvement in VNR preparation. The VNR states the government will take measures to strengthen local and regional SDG monitoring and planning and to expand VLRs, referencing Bishkek as a model.

• In **Papua New Guinea**, the report includes no information on LRG involvement in VNR production.

• **Qatar**'s VNR does not mention LRGs, as no local or regional self-government exists.

• **Saint Lucia**'s VNR does not mention LRGs.

• In **Seychelles**, according to the VNR, subnational or local SDG reporting has not been undertaken given the islands' population and geographic sizes.

• In **Suriname**, the VNR provides no information on LRG participation in the reporting process. There is, however, a subchapter on SDG localization. Several projects by district commissioners are highlighted.

• In **Thailand**, LRGs were not part of the Working Group on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the UN, established under the National Committee for Sustainable Development. Although stakeholder consultations were held in Bangkok and across six regions of the country (the Upper Southern, Lower Southern, Northeastern, Northern, Central and Eastern regions) they were coordinated by the national government and local universities. No information is available on LRG participation. The national government requested information on SDG localization and VLRs from UN-Habitat but not LRGs themselves.

At the time of finalizing this report, the Bahamas and Israel VNRs were not yet available.

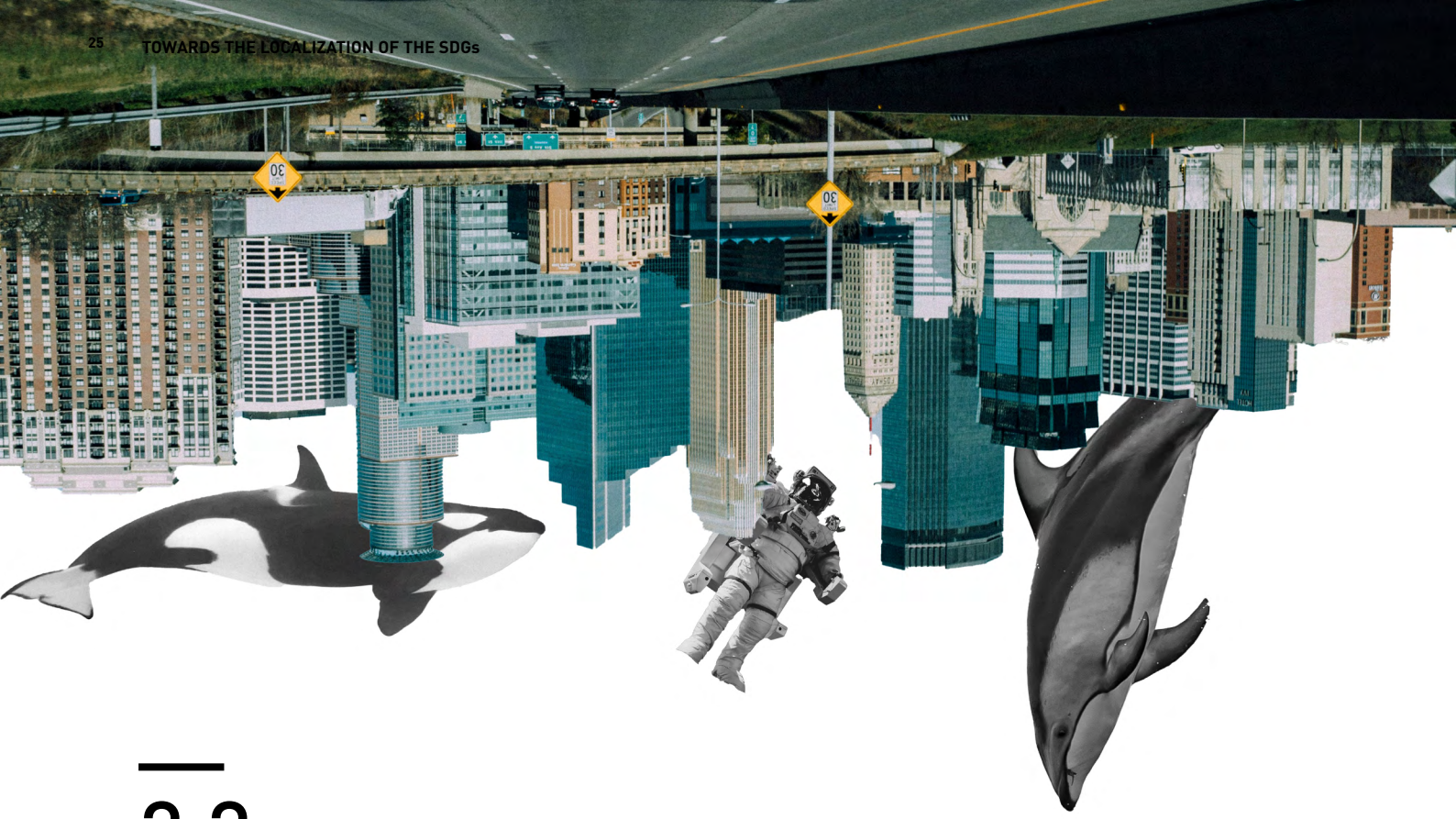
The evidence in this section highlights a slowly growing, though still uneven, trend: LRGs and LGAs are playing a somewhat more prominent role in VNR processes. National governments — whether by including LRGs' direct contributions in VNRs, mentioning VLRs and VSRs, or referencing local realities and decentralization efforts — are gradually acknowledging LRGs' important role in achieving the 2030 Agenda. As noted above, in 2025, 46% of countries presenting a VNR reported medium to high levels of LRG involvement. While this represents a slight improvement over the 2016–2024 average of 41%, it marks a small decline compared to the 2024 cycle, when this figure exceeded 50% for the first time.

This limited but continued progress largely stems from the persistent advocacy of LRGs, often supported by their networks and partners, who continue to push for more consistent recognition of local contributions and perspectives in national reporting. In a few countries, national governments — very often with support from UN agencies — have helped establish more structured spaces for consultation, but such mechanisms remain the exception rather than the rule.

However, progress is far from universal and stark regional disparities persist. Across regions and countries, engagement remains inconsistent, and in many cases, still token. While Africa saw significant improvements in 2025 and a handful of countries showcased strong multilevel collaboration, progress in Latin America reversed. LRGs' participation in the Middle East, Eurasia and small island developing states remains low. In many cases, the central challenge continues to be the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for collaboration, compounded by weak or uneven decentralization processes. Almost one-third of the VNRs analyzed reflect little to no LRG participation, meaning that local actors are not yet fully recognized and integrated into national coordination and reporting frameworks.

It is true that there is increased visibility of LRG actions and initiatives within VNRs, even in cases where LRGs were not actively involved in drafting the reports. Several VNRs include dedicated chapters or references to VLRs, SDG localization tools or municipal contributions to national development plans. **While this does not substitute for direct participation in the reporting process, it signals a growing awareness of local efforts and an emerging effort to reflect them in national narratives.** However, efforts need to be made to ensure LRGs are perceived as institutional stakeholders with institutional mandates and responsibilities, as well as capacities for innovation.

Looking ahead, embedding LRG participation in national reporting cycles and building permanent, well-resourced coordination platforms remain critical tasks. The VNR process can serve as a valuable entry point for multilevel governance and strengthened decentralization frameworks — but only if it is designed and implemented in ways that move beyond one-off exercises and formal inclusion toward genuine collaboration



2.2

LRG participation in national strategies and national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

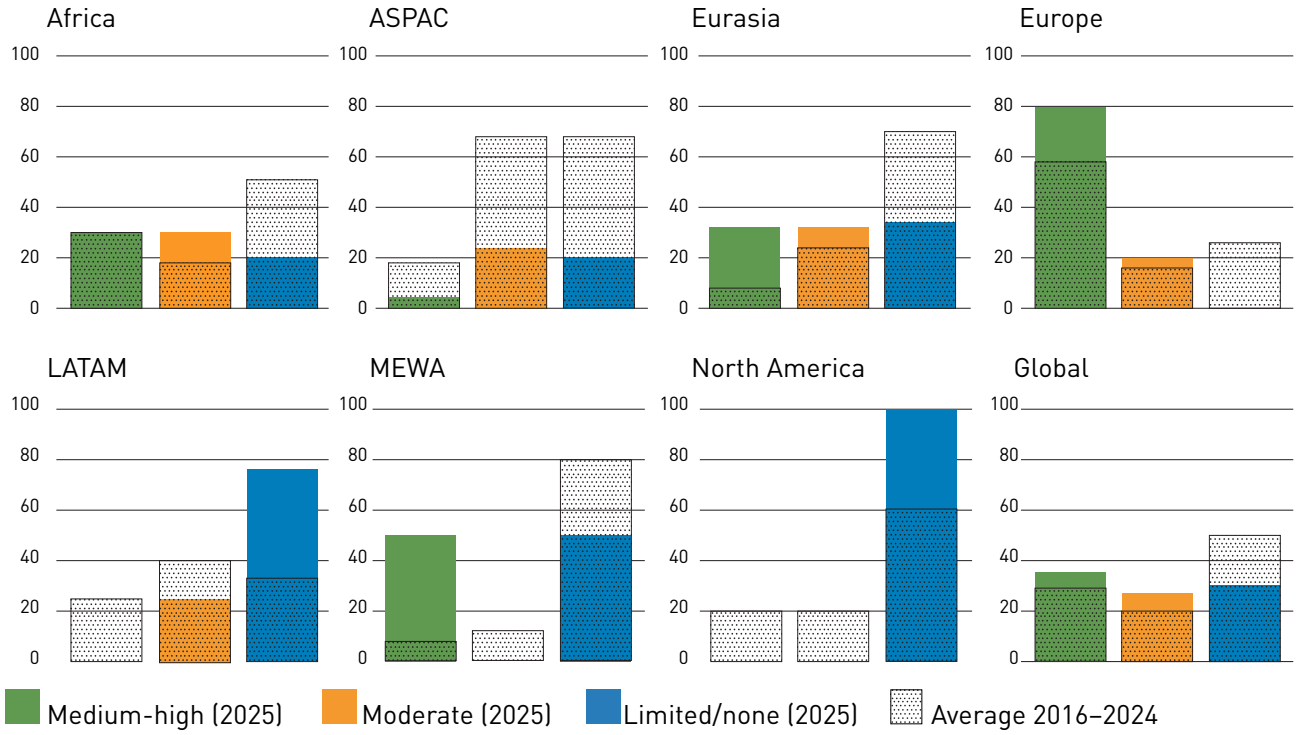
This section discusses how the countries reporting to the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) have included local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations (LGAs) in national planning and coordination mechanisms for implementing the 2030 Agenda. In particular, it analyzes the degree to which LRGs and LGAs participate in strategic country-level planning for the SDGs, alongside the existing national coordination frameworks for comprehensive sustainable development — beyond periodic reporting exercises at the United Nations. The section draws its information from the 35 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) published by the time this report's text was finalized (June 30, 2025), as well as the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey responses submitted by LRGs and LGAs from these countries.

This year's data reveal that **66% of the countries presenting at the 2025 HLPF have included LRGs in some form within their national coordination mechanisms** — an improvement over the 50% average between 2016 and 2024. Specifically, **13 out of the 35 reporting countries (37%) in 2025 engaged LRGs as active partners**, whether through formal inclusion in coordination bodies or regular consultation — up from 30% in the previous period. Ten other countries (29%) involved LRGs through occasional or ad hoc consultations in 2025, compared to a historical 20%. **Twelve countries (34%) still have no LRG participation or no elected LRGs**, down from a historical 43%.

At the regional level, Europe leads the way: four out of the five reporting countries this year (80%) reported medium to high levels of LRG participation in coordination mechanisms. This year, Middle East and West Asia places second, with one out of two countries (50%), followed by Asia-Pacific, with four out of ten (40%). In contrast, only one of the three Eurasian countries (33%) and three out of the 10 African countries (30%) reporting to the HLPF this year included LRGs meaningfully in coordination mechanisms. None of the four countries from Latin America or the one reporting country from North America reported any LRG involvement in national coordination structures.

The following regional and country-specific analysis provides a more in-depth look at the progress achieved and remaining challenges. It also highlights that some countries have adopted national strategies for implementing the SDGs that include subnational efforts.

Figure 2.2.1 LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms in 2025 and 2016–2024, by region and global



Source: authors

In Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana and Nigeria had medium to high levels of LRG involvement in coordination mechanisms, followed by The Gambia, Lesotho and South Africa with moderate involvement. LRGs are not involved in coordination mechanisms in Angola, Eswatini, Seychelles and Sudan.

• In **Ethiopia**, according to the VNR, regional governments participate in the national SDG steering committee and an accompanying technical committee. In a top-down manner, the national government requires regional and municipal governments to cascade the national plan and prepare localized development plans incorporating context-specific SDG indicators. However, the Ethiopian Cities Association (ECA) reports that it has never participated in the national coordination mechanism.

• In **Ghana**, the High-Level Ministerial Committee, the SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee and the Technical Committee lead SDG coordination, supported by the National Development Planning Commission. According to the VNR, they work collaboratively with stakeholders including metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. The VLRs produced in Ghana have received national support. However, LRGs such as Cape Coast report sporadic or ad hoc coordination.

• **Nigeria** established a dedicated office within the Presidency to coordinate SDG interventions at all levels. Coordinating structures exist to promote consistent horizontal and vertical action across the three tiers of government. These structures involve national, state and LRG focal persons. State governments and the Federal Capital Territory have replicated similar organizational and institutional structures. They have also received support to mainstream the SDGs into their medium- and long-term development policies and plans. Many state development plans are aligned with the SDGs. Efforts are underway to encourage local government areas to develop miniature development plans consistent with the SDG framework. Conditional grant schemes are also used to accelerate progress at the state level.

• In **The Gambia**, all LRGs have formulated regional development plans aligned with the SDGs and the country's Recovery-Focused National Development Plan. Regional technical advisory and ward development committees ensure these plans' implementation. Nevertheless, LRGs' decision-making capacity is limited as they serve as implementers.

• **Lesotho** has a Local Government SDG Committee established within the national government that coordinates with the Policy Coordination Committee. District SDG working groups (including LRGs and non-state actors) align their actions to the SDGs at the subnational level. However, LRGs do not seem to participate in the multistakeholder National SDGs Forum, which provides strategic direction and multisectoral alignment. The country's VNR identifies empowering LRGs, building districts' reporting capacity and improving service delivery as critical next steps.

• In **South Africa**, the national government has supported SDG localization processes such as alignment of local plans, VLR production and local data collection mechanisms. Nevertheless, according to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), multilevel coordination is still based on ad hoc consultations, no evolution has been made over time, and resource constraints and data gaps remain major challenges. Greater efforts are needed to streamline communication and ensure a more consistent and effective feedback loop between different levels of government. Slow national decision-making affects the timely implementation of localized solutions.

• The **Angolan** VNR provides no information on LRGs' involvement in coordination mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda in the country.

• In **Eswatini**, despite efforts to coordinate VNR and VLR processes, LRGs are not systematically included in national SDG coordination platforms. This situation limits their voice in policy-making and reporting.

• In **Seychelles**, the VNR offers no information on LRG participation in national structures.

• In **Sudan**, no information is available on LRG participation in national SDG mechanisms.

In the Asia-Pacific region, India and Micronesia stand out with the most advanced and inclusive coordination systems, which treat LRGs as equal partners. Indonesia follows behind with consultative mechanisms. Bangladesh, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand only coordinate with LRGs through ad hoc mechanisms, while Bhutan and Papua New Guinea do not involve LRGs in this regard.

• In **India**, the Governing Council of NITI Aayog serves as a key political platform embodying the principle of cooperative federalism. The council comprises the prime minister, chief ministers of all states and union territories, and key union ministers. Prior to the annual executive-level National Conference of Chief Secretaries, the various union ministries, states and union territories, and experts participate in discussions to advance cooperative federalism and the SDGs. In addition, the State Support Mission helps states and union territories to align their development strategies with national SDG priorities and create their own monitoring frameworks. However, administrative divisions below the state level receive little attention.

• In **Micronesia**, state engagement in SDG implementation has significantly increased. State governments played an active role in developing the national Strategic Development Plan 2024–2043 and now hold defined responsibilities in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Some states have gone further by embedding SDG targets into their long-term strategies, especially on issues such as climate resilience and sustainable resource management. To improve coordination and enhance implementation, the government has proposed creating a dedicated coordination mechanism to better align national and subnational development initiatives. Multiple states have launched regular dialogue platforms that include government agencies, traditional leaders, civil society organizations and community members. Traditional and community leaders are increasingly acknowledged as vital contributors to development, with many now participating in routine planning and coordination forums.

• In **Indonesia**, to ensure effective implementation of the SDG-related National Action Plan, the national government encouraged the adoption of subnational action plans. Technical strategies and medium-term plans have been put in place along with coordination teams at both national (with LRG participation) and subnational levels. Subnational–national coordination mainly consists of aligning local planning with national strategies, and it has facilitated awareness and policy coherence. However, according to Bandar Lampung, cooperation is more directive than interactive, and not institutionalized through permanent representation in national coordination mechanisms — thus limiting two-way dialogue.

• In **Japan**, the national government has made efforts to localize the SDGs in all LRGs. Currently, of the country's 1,788 municipalities, 1,190 are promoting efforts to achieve the SDGs. Among other initiatives, 206 cities have been selected as "SDG Future Cities." A new project called "Regional Revitalization: SDG Challenge-Solving Model Cities," in which businesses also play an important role, has begun implementation.

However, no information is available on LRGs' participation in the multistakeholder and consultative SDGs Promotion Roundtable. Initiatives such as the Kansai SDGs Platform (which involves LRGs, national government agencies and private stakeholders in the Kansai region) may present an opportunity to spark transformation; however, no information is available on whether this initiative is led nationally or locally.

• In **Bangladesh**, the government supports SDG localization in various ways. In 2024, the government unveiled the National SDG Communication Strategy and Action Plan, a comprehensive framework to engage citizens — particularly youth and students — and LRGs in advancing progress on the SDGs. The country has placed emphasis on identifying SDG indicators applicable at the different local levels. The VNR devotes a short section to SDG localization, and one of its five critical ways forward is to strengthen local government in the coming years.

• In **Malaysia**, the VNR includes no information on LRGs' participation in the National SDG Council (decision-making body), the SDG Steering Committee (which oversees SDG localization), the Technical Committee or any of the seven working committees (one of which is on SDG localization). A bipartisan parliamentary initiative for SDG localization, the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on the SDGs, strengthens collaboration with LRGs through structured coordination with district offices and government agencies. The country has developed state- and district-level indicators. In 2023, the national government published its first state-level SDG indicator reports for all 13 states and three federal territories.

• In **Philippines**, despite the guidance and frameworks given by the national government to LRGs, no permanent collaboration mechanism exists between provinces, cities and municipalities and SDG-focused national government agencies. For example, the League of Cities of the Philippines' (LCP's) involvement in national SDG initiatives is mostly ad hoc. LCP participates in sporadic meetings and technical working groups. However, at the regional level (where officials are not elected), special regional committees on the SDGs have been established under the regional development councils (the highest policy-making and coordinating body for regional development in the Philippines) to boost SDG localization. This has been the case in 12 out of 15 regions, while the other three regions have used pre-existing mechanisms. Regional SDG catch-up plans have been developed as a result. Makati, as president of the Metro Manila Planning and Coordinators Association, is part of one of these committees. However, LRG participation is still an exception in these committees, as it is in the regional stakeholders' chambers on the SDGs, which engage private stakeholders. The national government also aims to institutionalize multilevel governance by coordinating voluntary reviews at all levels in the future. Cases such as Baguio also demonstrate horizontal collaboration. In producing its VLR, the city held a knowledge exchange session with Naga City. After that, it shared its methodology with 13 municipalities in the Cordillera Administrative Region.

• In **Thailand**, neither the National Committee for Sustainable Development nor the Working Group on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within the United Nations involve LRGs. The Ministry of Interior leads top-down, area-based implementation of the SDGs, with appointed provincial governors acting as the primary coordinators. Districts are involved along with other stakeholders. Provincial, district and local administrative agencies were instructed to align their development planning processes with the SDGs and to develop subnational SDG data systems.

• In **Bhutan**, although LRGs are acknowledged as key stakeholders for SDG achievement, they do not participate in SDG coordination efforts led by the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Ministry of Finance.

• In **Papua New Guinea**, the VNR provides no information on LRGs' participation in national coordination mechanisms. The country recognizes the need for improved SDG governance and coordination, with a secretariat that active-

ly engages LRGs, as well as national and local institutional strengthening. Next steps include strengthening decentralization and local governance frameworks to embed SDG priorities into provincial and local planning systems through capacity building and policy alignment.

In Eurasia, Belarus includes LRGs as regular consultative partners, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan lack permanent coordination mechanisms for local governance.

• In **Belarus**, although regions and the city of Minsk participate in the national Council on Sustainable Development once a year, the VNR includes limited information on LRGs' role in the implementation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, which runs through 2040. It mentions the development of regional strategies for sustainable development in all six regions. In addition, the country developed a regional data platform for sustainable development that includes 138 indicators, with 78 for the national level and 60 reflecting the specifics of regional development.

• In **Kazakhstan**, national mechanisms only view LRGs as implementers and data-producing bodies. Strengthening coordination between the central government and local executive authorities will be a critical step forward to achieve the SDGs in the country.

• The **Kyrgyz** VNR provides no information on LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms of any kind. At the municipal level, some initiatives have been undertaken to integrate the SDGs into strategic documents on urban development, social policy and economic growth, sometimes in partnership with national government bodies, international organizations and donors, in what seems to be piecemeal coordination.

In Europe, Finland ranks first with a strong multilevel coordination system, followed by Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Germany. The Maltese national government only fosters ad hoc consultations.

• In **Finland**, LRGs such as the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) and Åland are represented in the National Commission on Sustainable Development. This commission includes 120 key stakeholders, convenes three to four times a year and works in between meetings through workshops, seminars and study sessions. LRGs' participation in the Commission, although consultative, is thus regular. For other LRGs such as Tampere, consultations have historically been ad hoc but increasingly present. Collaboration with the SDG Secretariat within the Prime Minister's Office is overall positive and increasing. Coordination has been reinforced by the Finland–UN-Habitat Strategic Partnership for the SDGs, supported financially by the Ministry of the Environment and partners' resources. This partnership brings multilevel actors together to consider effective ways of localizing sustainable development in Finland and Africa.

• In **Bulgaria**, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) is involved in national-level SDG coordination, monitoring and reporting as a partner of two working groups (on SDG 6 and SDG 11). It participates regularly but at the consultative level. While the country adopted a national indicator list, no disaggregated information or data are collected directly from municipalities. At the same time, according to NAMRB, there is a lack of common understanding of what implementing the SDG framework involves in a local context, particularly for smaller municipalities.

• In the **Czech Republic**, the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic (SMOCR), the Association of Regions of the Czech Republic and the Association of Healthy Cities of the Czech Republic are represented in the multistakeholder Government Council for Sustainable Development. This 42-member council is chaired by the minister of the environment and advises on the country's SDG implementation strategy. SMOCR reports participating regularly in this advisory body.

• In **Germany**, the mayor of Bonn represents the local perspective in the advisory German Council for Sustainable Development. The Sustainable City Dialogue of Mayors, organized by this council since 2010, also reinforces local–national exchanges. Beyond that, the German LGAs report regularly participating in the national coordination mechanisms but at the consultative level.

• In **Malta**, the Maltese Local Councils' Association reports coordinating with the national government only through ad hoc consultations. The VNR provides no information.

In Latin America, no reporting country has national coordination mechanisms that actively promote LRGs' full participation. Guatemala has limited LRG involvement, while no LRG participation is observed in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Suriname.

• In **Guatemala**, the national SDG strategy provides for implementation of departmental and municipal development plans, as well as the national government's preparation of two VSRs together with several municipalities. Beyond the necessary coordination to produce those VSRs, information regarding LRG participation in implementing national development priorities, which are aligned with the SDGs and promoted by the National Planning System, is scarce and reflects a top-down approach.

• In the **Dominican Republic**, LRGs are seemingly excluded from coordinating implementation of the National Development Strategy 2030.

• In **El Salvador**, the VNR provides no information on LRG involvement in the national SDG coordination mechanism or strategy.

• In **Suriname**, LRGs are not part of the SDG National Committee.

In the Middle East and West Asia, Iraq only consults LRGs as part of national SDG coordination mechanisms. Qatar's VNR offers no information on LRG involvement.

• In **Iraq**, the National SDG Committee, chaired by the Ministry of Planning, includes representatives from various ministries and stakeholders, including selected governorate representatives and planning directorates. Efforts have been made to integrate the SDGs into local development plans across the governorates, in line with the National Development Plan and in coordination with the Ministry of Planning. Capacity-building programs have targeted local institutions, focusing on planning, budgeting and monitoring.

• **Qatar**'s VNR does not mention LRGs, as they do not exist.

Finally, in North America, Saint Lucia's VNR does not mention LRGs.

At the time of finalizing this report, the Bahamas and Israel VNRs were not yet available for analysis.

The VNRs presented at the 2025 HLPF demonstrate national government's strengthening commitment to include LRGs in SDG decision-making processes, often encouraged by supporting UN offices. Over one-third of reporting countries meaningfully involve LRGs in national coordination efforts. In these cases, LRGs contribute to shaping national policy through stable institutional channels, whether as equal partners or at a consultative level. This is an encouraging signal of the growing recognition of their role in delivering sustainable development through localized, context-responsive approaches.

However, at the other end of the scale, in one-third of the reporting countries around the world, LRGs still lack the possibility to influence national SDG policies. This persistent gap reveals that, in too many contexts, LRGs remain peripheral to national SDG strategies. Multilevel governance is too often cited as a principle, but its institutionalization needs to be reinforced in practice. Coordination mechanisms that do include LRGs are frequently consultative or symbolic, granting them little or no influence over decision-making or implementation frameworks. In many countries, LRGs are either consulted sporadically or reduced to data providers and implementers based on clear top-down approaches to governance — roles that ignore their political mandates and democratic legitimacy. Too often, national governments involve one level of subnational government but not others, failing to adopt a whole-of-government approach. Although many VNRs highlight both SDG localization and the reinforcement of decentralization frameworks as emerging priorities, **follow-up on these commitments will be critical to make sure progress is truly shaped by LRGs and their communities**.

As the 2030 deadline nears, bolstering LRGs' participation in national strategic planning goes beyond mere inclusion — it lays the foundation for effective, equitable and sustainable implementation. Ensuring LRGs are treated as co-creators and political stakeholders, not mere implementers, is central to addressing complex territorial inequalities and ensuring no one is left behind.

2.3

Localizing global finance: A territorial imperative for the SDGs

The current state of multiple global crises — from climate breakdown and biodiversity loss to widening inequalities and fiscal instability — highlights how traditional financing is inefficient when it comes to reducing inequalities and achieving sustainable development for all. This has intensified the urgent call for reimagining the international financing system to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. A renewed framework must not only unlock greater volumes of resources but also channel them in ways that are equitable, place-based and responsive to the realities of communities and governments at all levels. This requires simultaneously strengthening the foundations of global public finance and addressing longstanding structural gaps in local and regional government financing.

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are political actors at the forefront of localizing the 2030 Agenda. They are directly responsible for close to 40% of public investment worldwide and allocate a significant share of their resources to social protection and public services — the foundations of the equality agenda. Yet they remain structurally underfunded and insufficiently integrated into the global financial architecture. Data from the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment (SNG-WOFI) shows that LRGs account for 22% of public expenditure and 37% of public investment, but only a limited share of public revenues.

Indeed, revenue structures remain skewed. In the education and health sector, on average, 43% of subnational revenues come from own-source taxes, 40% from intergovernmental grants and 14% from user taxes. The remainder is derived from fees, miscellaneous revenues and external sources, which indicates persistent dependence on higher levels of government. Meanwhile, subnational debt stands at approximately 22.7% of GDP, representing around 20% of total public debt.

In high-income countries and countries from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), subnational governments manage around 40% of public expenditures and nearly 58% of public investment, and they employ over 60% of public-sector staff. In federal OECD countries, subnational debt levels reach nearly 30% of GDP, reflecting more developed borrowing frameworks. However, even in high-income contexts, dependency remains high: grants and transfers often constitute over 50% of subnational revenues, followed by taxes (33%), user charges (9%) and property income (2%). While these countries show greater fiscal capacity, subnational borrowing still averages just 9.4% of GDP (compared to 1% in middle- and low-income countries), which suggests untapped potential even in advanced systems.

This imbalance reflects systemic constraints: fragmented intergovernmental transfers, weak fiscal autonomy and restricted access to external funding sources, such as climate or infrastructure finance. This gap is particularly alarming given the increasing responsibilities entrusted to LRGs in areas like basic services, housing and climate action, where effective delivery depends on predictable and adequate funding.

These gaps disproportionately affect marginalized and under-resourced territories, including informal settlements, rural communities and climate-vulnerable regions, where LRGs often lack the fiscal space and instruments to respond to rising demands. Financing shortfalls also compound gender inequalities, as underfunded care systems, housing and public services fail to meet the needs of women and girls, particularly those in precarious or unpaid care roles. An equitable approach to SDG financing must ensure that these territories and populations are prioritized in both resource allocation and system reform.

In many countries, LRGs are tasked with delivering essential public services (from education and water to housing and local climate adaptation), but they are not included in a meaningful way in national or international financing dialogues. **This misalignment weakens the territorial implementation of global agendas and perpetuates a structural gap in development financing.**

In this context, **the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4), held in Sevilla, marks a critical political opportunity** for rethinking and rebalancing the global financial architecture. Yet, the role of LRGs in financing sustainable development continues to be one of the most strategic and persistently overlooked dimensions. The organized global constituency of LRGs welcomes the consensus reached through the Sevilla Commitment of the FFD4, which outlines a renewed agenda that is aligned with sustainable development and the revitalization of multilateral cooperation. However, while the final outcome includes a dedicated paragraph on subnational finance that reflects key areas of action and responsibility, it stops short of fully recognizing LRGs as essential actors in the governance of development finance. The current research report builds on this policy moment to highlight the strategic importance of local finance, and it highlights the unfinished commitments of Paragraph 34 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which — now a decade old— acknowledged the need for supporting local authorities through adequate resources, capacity-building and access to funding mechanisms.

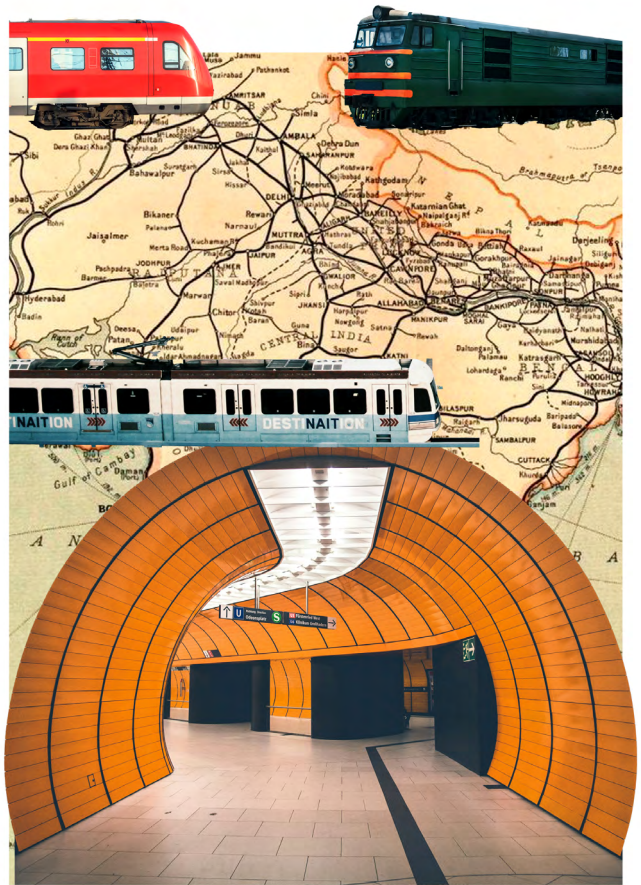
A central obstacle to strengthening subnational public finance is the lack of reliable, standardized and comparable data on subnational finances and governance. This data gap constitutes one of the most pressing yet overlooked blind spots in the international financing system. **While national public finance benefits from consolidated standards and tracking mechanisms, subnational levels remain largely invisible in global datasets and fiscal monitoring systems.**

The lack of disaggregated and granular data on local finance impedes strategic planning, public accountability and the mobilization of international support. In many countries, even basic information on LRG revenue, expenditure, debt or investment is unavailable or inconsistent. Investing in initiatives like SNG-WOFI is not simply about data production — it is about enabling evidence-based reform. Reliable data is essential in order to inform fiscal decentralization, improve accountability and guide the design of targeted financial instruments. Without data, there cannot be transparency, benchmarking and, ultimately, structural reform.

Local and regional governments are also enhancing visibility and accountability through **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)**, which are increasingly used to track SDG progress, assess financing gaps and local financial innovation, and inform national and global policy. These reporting tools not only demonstrate local leadership but also support strategic planning, strengthen coordination with national institutions and attract investment by showcasing local commitment and priorities.

Co-led by the OECD and UCLG and supported by several international partners, SNG-WOFI emerges as a strategic and transformative initiative that addresses this challenge. Covering 135 countries and over 664,000 subnational governments (representing nearly 90% of the world's surface, 93% of its population and 94% of global GDP), SNG-WOFI provides standardized fiscal data and in-depth governance profiles, thereby offering a robust foundation for comparative analysis, policy dialogue and advocacy.

Efforts to localize SDG financing will remain insufficient unless they are backed by a robust knowledge base. Strengthening multi-level governance frameworks depends not only on legal or institutional reforms but also on the capacity to track progress and assess performance. In this regard, **a dedicated and permanent intergovernmental space to monitor subnational finance must be established as part of the FFD follow-up process**, and it must include annual reporting mechanisms based on SNG-WOFI and national multilevel coordination platforms.



To achieve the SDGs and ensure that no territory is left behind, both the outcomes of the FFD4 and the actors involved must demonstrate and effectively realize the commitment of the global community to recognize and activate the full potential of LRGs within a reimagined global financing ecosystem. This renewed financing system must reposition LRGs as decision-making actors, not just delivery agents. This requires systemic shifts across three dimensions:

1. Strengthen fiscal decentralization frameworks grounded in the principles of subsidiarity, equity and territorial cohesion to ensure a better match between local responsibilities and resources. This includes investing in the planning and revenue-mobilization capacities of local governments, improving local public financial management (including budgeting, tax systems and transparency), and reinforcing equalization mechanisms and unconditional transfers to address territorial inequalities.

2. Improve the access of LRGs to diversified financial instruments, including climate finance, blended finance and concessional loans — with eligibility criteria and risk assessments adapted to local realities and needs. This requires concrete reforms to unlock direct or facilitated access to international funds, including climate and investment funds. It also means strengthening territorial financial intermediaries — such as local development funds, municipal development banks or national financing agencies — which can channel and aggregate financing at scale. Subnational access to multilateral guarantee facilities, streamlined procedures and tailored capacity-building must be part of any reform package.

3. Reinforce the availability, quality and transparency of data on subnational finance (especially through tools like SNG-WOFI) to inform reforms, support planning and enable stronger coordination among actors. To support this shift, it is essential to mobilize development cooperation and multilateral actors in favor of territorial approaches. International financial institutions and national governments must ensure that local actors can access technical assistance, capacity-building and dedicated financial windows.

Supporting territorialized finance also means fostering financial innovation tailored to local contexts. This includes tools such as municipal bonds (including green bonds), community-based participatory budgeting mechanisms, and new platforms for local revenue mobilization and investment partnerships.

Localized finance also calls for innovation: pooled funds, municipal development banks, regional guarantee mechanisms and digital platforms for local revenue mobilization. These are some of the avenues being tested in different contexts, and they could inspire scalable solutions. This innovation must be framed by values; feminist economics, inclusive governance and intergenerational justice must guide local investment choices.

Ultimately, unlocking subnational potential is not a technical add-on. Instead, it is a political imperative. Territorial approaches are not just implementation mechanisms; they are vectors of transformation. LRGs must be recognized as full stakeholders in global financing governance, with the capacity and legitimacy to shape the economic norms of the future. A fairer and more effective international financial system must recognize and resource LRGs as such.

2.4
LRG actions for SDG localization

Of the 135 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets that can be comprehensively measured against the 2015 baseline, only 17% are on track to be achieved by 2030**. This poor global performance, paired with** growing income inequalities **within countries, serves as a wake-up call: all levels of government must put the 2030 Agenda at the core of their strategies, policies and actions.**

Local and regional governments (LRGs) often lack the necessary financial resources and have limited support from national and international institutions. Nevertheless, they are reaffirming their commitment to SDG localization and taking accountability for progress in their spheres of action. LRGs and their associations (LGAs) are at the front line of achieving the 2030 Agenda, applying innovative approaches to sustainable governance and serving as global role models in sustainable development.

This section showcases LRGs' and LGAs' commitment and actions to localize the SDGs worldwide. It covers the following:

- LRGs' and LGAs' continuous bottom-up reporting through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)
- Specific activities by LRGs and LGAs in the countries reporting to this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)
- Key innovative local and regional policies and practices around the 2030 Agenda in non-reporting countries

The analysis primarily draws upon the results of the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization, alongside a review of numerous primary and secondary sources.

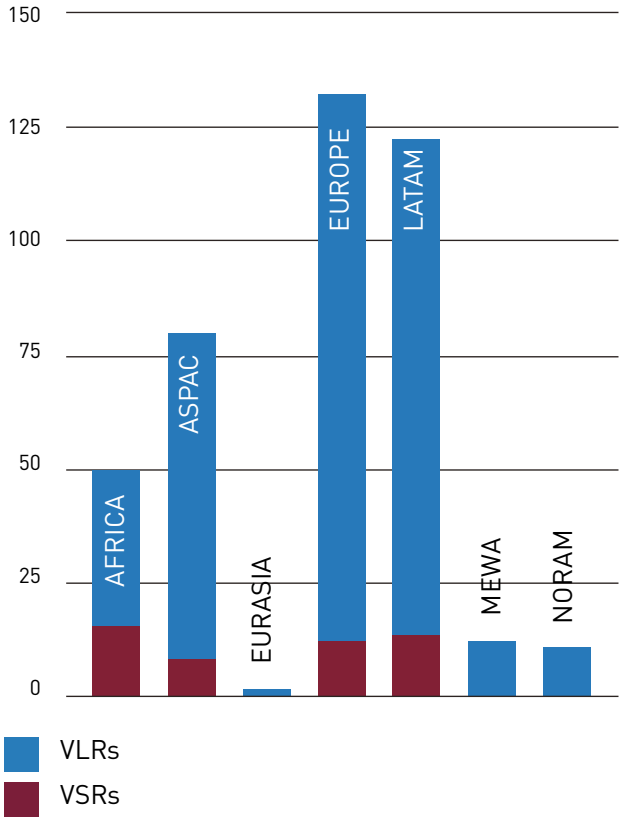
2.4.1 Perspectives from VLRs and VSRs

VLRs and VSRs are bottom-up reporting processes led by LRGs and LGAs, respectively, worldwide. These reviews have played a key role in reshaping how progress on the SDGs is tracked and communicated — not only examining local and regional initiatives but also influencing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, among many others, have recognized the importance of these bottom-up efforts. Such recognition highlights LRGs' and LGAs' increasing influence and inclusion in the global agenda for sustainable development.

VLRs and VSRs, which have evolved from reporting mechanisms to policy and advocacy tools, are an important process for catalyzing local governance. Understanding VLRs as a process, rather than a stand-alone exercise or final product, yields important benefits for LRGs, as highlighted by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies. For example, through the VLR process, LRGs identify key policies, strategies and projects that are effective in their specific contexts and improve coordination for ongoing SDG localization efforts. Between 2018 and 2025, 283 LRGs have produced 363 VLRs. Notably, 44 LRGs have produced more than one VLR, showing their steadfast commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

While the rise of VLRs has strengthened bottom-up accountability and visibility for the 2030 Agenda, challenges in data availability, quality and relevance remain a significant hurdle for LRGs. A recent analysis by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre found that SDGs 3, 4, 8 and 11 appear in over 80% of VLRs — thanks, in part, to established local data systems. However, others such as SDGs 14, 15 and 17 show up in only 27%, 58% and 47% of reviews, respectively. Challenges such as fragmented data and overlapping issues make it difficult to consistently monitor some SDGs, even those widely reported on, such as SDGs 11 and 12. These gaps in reporting reflect a broader need for locally relevant, disaggregated indicators and sustainable monitoring systems to track complex, interconnected challenges effectively. Without this, many territories risk being underrepresented in national and global reporting, which could ultimately hinder inclusive and evidence-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 2.4.1 Number of VLRs and VSRs per region



Source: authors

UCLG's recent insights note highlights how VSRs have positive impacts for LGAs both internally and externally. Internally, VSRs promote a culture of collaborative governance that breaks down institutional and policy silos. This culture has led to stronger institutional priorities, enhanced structures, enriched knowledge and more effective processes. Externally, VSRs have supported LGAs in advancing whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to sustainable development, resulting in better multilevel coordination and increased visibility and recognition in VNR processes.

Since 2020, 45 VSRs have been published in 33 countries, with two more in process as of July 2025. Altogether, these reviews cover 170,000 LRGs and nearly 1.8 billion inhabitants. The boxes below showcase contributions from LRGs and LGAs in two countries that undertook a VSR over the past year.

Figure 2.4.1 above shows the worldwide production of VSRs and VLRs to date. Despite the increasing number of VSRs and VLRs in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, uneven production across regions calls for efforts to not leave any territory behind.

BOX 2.4.1

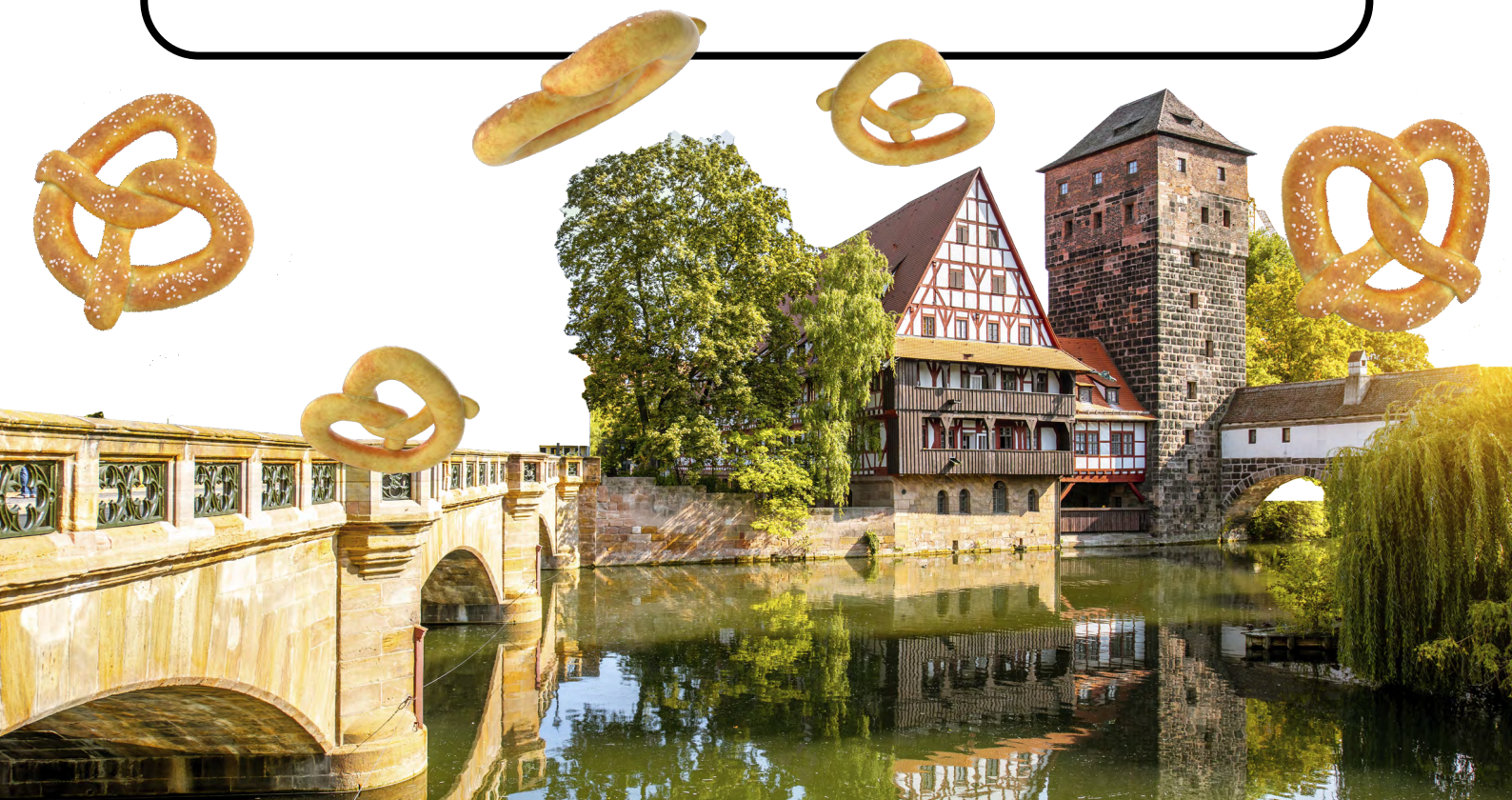
Germany's Voluntary Local Government Review

Germany's Voluntary Local Government Review 2025 intends to build a bridge between municipalities and the national government. Drawing upon municipalities' active implementation of the 2030 Agenda and reporting through VLRs, the national government is introducing a comprehensive municipal perspective into the VNR for the first time. The bottom-up review was initiated by four pioneering cities — **Bonn**, **Hamburg**, **Mannheim** and **Stuttgart** — and developed by the German Institute of Urban Affairs in cooperation with the municipal umbrella organizations. It aimed to synthesize progress on sustainability, highlight concrete implementation pathways and address remaining challenges to accelerate sustainability management.

Contributions from 15 German cities, districts and municipalities that have already published VLRs make up the heart of the report. Individual profiles describe LRGs' strategic direction, the governance instruments they use, and specific outcomes and challenges of various projects. This information is coupled by an evaluation of SDG indicators for municipalities, drawing upon a well-established indicator framework in Germany that serves as a starting point for most municipal sustainability reports, including this review. Additional initiatives and networks for impact-oriented management, such as the Club of the 2030 Agenda Municipalities, the Local Sustainability Reporting Framework (BNK), climate action and Fairtrade communities create an institutional environment for municipal engagement by local stakeholders.

This growing number of initiatives and programs supports municipalities to localize the SDGs, despite increasingly difficult conditions. Rising infrastructure and personnel costs are straining budgets, while political backing for sustainability efforts is waning in the face of geopolitical uncertainties. These conditions, experienced by others in the global VSR community, do not only affect the German context. They make it difficult to tackle well-known systematic challenges such as the modal shift, affordable housing and land conversion — which are visible in the review's indicator evaluation. Nevertheless, municipalities have made remarkable progress. In addition to expanding renewable energy sources and increasing employment levels, they have improved access to child care services, reduced traffic accidents and avoided nitrate and air pollution.

Germany's review expresses support for LRGs' innovative strengths and an enabling policy environment. As the report shows, SDG trade-offs become particularly apparent at the local level; accordingly, they must be addressed there. Multilevel governance and the common development of a post-2030 Agenda are key for sustainable development in municipalities.



BOX 2.4.2

South African Local Government Association (SALGA) VSR

The SALGA VSR highlights meaningful progress in embedding the SDGs within local government systems in South Africa. It shows growing momentum, stronger municipal engagement, and SALGA's leadership in connecting local realities with global development agendas. Achievements include:

- strengthened multilevel collaboration between national, provincial and local governments
- enhanced capacity building, data systems and advocacy for SDG localization
- active engagement in UCLG-led platforms to elevate local perspectives at international forums
- elevation of local government voices through UCLG, UN Development Programme, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and UN-Habitat platforms

In January 2025, SALGA collaborated with Connective Cities and several African and international LGAs to launch a dedicated SDG Localization Network. This initiative accelerates local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 by promoting shared learning, innovation and coordinated action. In addition, in partnership with the city of Tshwane, SALGA hosted the Urban 20 (U20) SDG session during the U20 Sherpa Meeting and African Mayors Assembly, demonstrating its role in shaping an African urban development agenda that resonates globally and accelerates sustainable progress at the local level. These events took place on June 12-13, 2025 in Pretoria and were co-chaired by Tshwane and Johannesburg. They included a high-profile pledge by Tshwane Mayor Nasiphi Moya and support from New York City.

At the U20 kickoff, Mayor Moya affirmed, "This is our moment to lead [. . .] As co-hosts of U20 2025, our mission is clear: to ensure that the voice of African cities is heard on the world stage and that the priorities of the Global South are brought into the G20 agenda."

Despite progress made, SALGA's VSR underlines ongoing issues. Persistent challenges include uneven data quality across municipalities, as well as capacity and resource constraints. Budget limitations and dependence on national transfers often limit innovation and long-term planning.

To address these difficulties and accelerate SDG localization in South Africa, SALGA recommends the following actions:

- develop an SDG-aligned toolkit to standardize integrating SDG metrics into service delivery assessments in line with Section 78 of South Africa's Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000), which outlines the criteria and processes for municipalities to decide on mechanisms for providing municipal services
- invest in the local data ecosystem (data collection) and indicator tracking to support monitoring and evaluation efforts aligned with VSR commitments, with support from Statistics South Africa, universities, civil society organizations and the private sector
- align integrated development plans and local economic development strategies with the SDGs
- unlock blended finance and support municipal project preparation

2.4.2 Summary of LRGs' actions

In the last year, LGAs and LRGs have reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda, carrying out concrete policies, plans and on-the-ground actions to benefit local communities and protect the planet. Hundreds of LRGs and LGAs shared their experience through the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey. This subsection draws upon the survey results, alongside additional written local and regional resources, to present region-specific overviews of LRGs' and LGAs' main initiatives and projects.

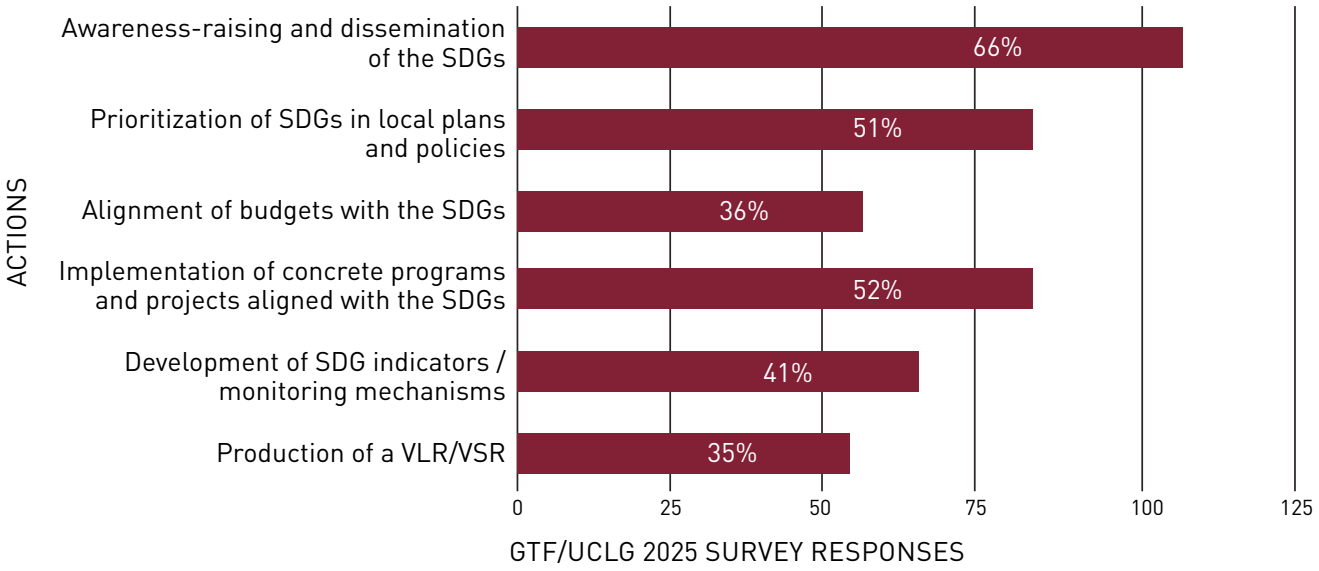
The responses to the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey suggest three key trends:

- **Local and regional awareness around the 2030 Agenda is steadily growing.** Of the total respondents, 82% have made moderate to strong progress in strengthening SDG knowledge and awareness within their LRGs and LGAs. Of these, almost 60% use the SDGs as an important reference point in their local strategies.

- **LRGs are increasingly integrating the SDGs into their strategies.** Around 90% of respondents have made progress on designing an SDG-aligned strategy or action plan. Half of them have also worked thoroughly to implement and monitor these instruments or have even updated them to expand their objectives.

- **SDG localization is gaining momentum on the ground.** More than half of respondents (66%) have raised awareness about the SDGs among the population and local stakeholders through communications, conferences, events, joint statements, festivals, awards, SDG champions or trainings. Meanwhile, 52% have implemented concrete programs and projects aligned with the SDGs, and 51% have prioritized the SDGs in their local plans and policies. Over a third of respondents (35%) have produced or are producing a VLR or a VSR.

Figure 2.4.2 Most popular actions by responding LRGs/LGAs



Source: authors

Overall, the survey results reveal how LRGs' and LGAs' agendas often prioritize localization of the 2030 Agenda. Although implementation levels vary, local political leaders demonstrate sustained promotion of the SDGs in their cities and towns.

Nevertheless, **the survey results also signal numerous cross-cutting challenges**:

- Many LRGs face persistent **financial** constraints, with limited resources allocated to SDG actions and a continued dependence on external cooperation.

- Respondents also pointed to **coordination** challenges, highlighting gaps in multilevel governance and the need for stronger collaboration among institutions.

- They emphasized the need to strengthen **institutional capacity** and ensure both technical staff and political leaders fully understand and integrate the SDGs into daily governance.

- Respondents frequently cited difficulties in collecting reliable, disaggregated and comparable **data** for effective monitoring and evaluation, alongside the absence of standardized methodologies across levels of government.

- While strong political commitment is critical, the sustainability of these efforts often depends on stable **long-term leadership and inclusive stakeholder engagement** at all levels.

- Several respondents highlight the persistence of **poverty, social exclusion and structural vulnerabilities** within their territories, particularly affecting women, rural populations and people with disabilities. In addition to the governance challenges identified above, limited access to employment opportunities, low household incomes, inadequate social protections and insufficient access to basic services remain significant barriers for SDG localization.

Bold and scaled-up efforts need to be made to streamline governance for SDG localization. At the same time, inequalities must be addressed through targeted policies that integrate economic inclusion, care policies and marginalized groups' empowerment as central dimensions of SDG localization.

In parallel, **the survey responses reveal several promising opportunities to advance SDG localization**:

- Many LRGs are developing **innovative methodologies** and tools to monitor SDG progress, often tailoring indicators to local realities.

- **Multistakeholder partnerships** — involving civil society, academia, international organizations and various government levels — play a central role in strengthening coordination and resource mobilization.

- **Capacity-building efforts**, including targeted training programs for staff and political leadership, help embed the SDGs into institutional cultures.

- **Youth engagement** initiatives and community-based programs foster ownership of localization efforts, particularly among marginalized groups.

- Aligning the SDGs with **local planning and budgeting** processes ensures long-term integration into territorial development strategies.

- LRGs have proven experience as **initiators** of collaborative efforts towards localization, moving beyond their traditional role of mere implementers.

BOX 2.4.3

Localized SDG practices

The following subsections summarize the SDG localization practices highlighted by respondents to the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey and other sources. We invite you to review the complete and comprehensive list of the 580 inspiring practices shared by LRGs and LGAs here.

AFRICA

Despite the region having one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world, decentralization levels vary widely across African countries. Indeed, many African territories lack decentralized competences and thus have limited authority over crucial issues such as health, social policies, and economic or labor strategies. There is an urgent need to accelerate efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda: at the current pace, only 3% of SDG targets will be achieved by 2030.

LRGs and their associations are driving this acceleration and promoting sustainable development holistically, connecting key issues such as access to health care, decent job creation, gender equality, quality education and inclusive delivery of basic services. They are addressing climate change while protecting natural and marine resources. In doing so, LRGs are forging strong partnerships with other levels of government and stakeholders to collectively advance the SDGs. In fact, 67% of survey respondents consider their institutions' political and technical staff to be well acquainted with the SDGs, and all of them have made progress on adopting strategies or action plans to streamline action.

In The Gambia, three LRGs conducted their first VLR in 2022: Brikama, Kanifing and Kuntaur. Moreover, the **Gambia Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (GALGA) continued to lead capacity building and advocacy around the 2030 Agenda among LRGs, other subnational stakeholders and the national government. In 2024, **Banjul** started an action-oriented VLR process in collaboration with other stakeholders to better identify the city's sustainable development priorities. These processes in The Gambia have catalyzed sustained collaboration between GALGA and the national government to plan for the country's inclusive and sustainable future.

In Ghana, nine LRGs participated in the "VLR Go Ghana" project coordinated by Engagement Global on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. This project supported them to develop VLRs that reflect their progress on localizing the SDGs. Participating LRGs include the cities of **Kumasi**, **Sekondi-Takoradi** and **Cape Coast**; the municipalities of **Ga West**, **Tema West** and **Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abirem**; and the districts of **Upper West Akim**, **Asunafo South** and **Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira**. The project supported strengthening local capacities, encouraging self-assessment and embedding sustainable development into everyday governance. German municipalities and experts from the German Institute of Urban Affairs contributed through peer learning and strategic guidance. A synthesis report compiled insights from two years of VLR preparation, which has supported national reporting. Several other LRGs have also initiated their VLR processes: **Abuakwa South**, **Accra**, **Ketu North**, **Tamale**, **Techiman** and **Wenchi**.

In 2023, **Lagos State** (Nigeria) carried out a VLR. The review played a crucial role in shaping policy decisions, guiding resource distribution, enhancing collaboration among agencies and stakeholders and establishing a framework for monitoring progress.

In South Africa, an ambitious SDG localization process started in 2023. It brought together 14 municipalities, the **South African Local Government Association** (SALGA), the national government, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Development Programme. As a result, eight municipalities conducted VLRs in the last two years: **Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality**, **Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality**, **Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality**, **Rustenburg**, **uMhlathuze**, **Mogale**, **Mossel Bay** and **Koukamma**. VLR development included regional capacity-building workshops held in **Ekurhuleni**, **Gqeberha**, **Gauteng** and **eThekwini** in autumn 2023; multistakeholder engagement sessions held in **Tshwane**, **Johannesburg**, **Mogale** and **Koukamma**; and a finalization and validation workshop held in spring 2024. Through this process, South African LRGs collaborated on key issues and identified common challenges and opportunities for local and regional sustainable development. In addition, SALGA conducted a VSR in 2024 to build on the VLRs' findings and cover the whole subnational level. By doing so, it facilitated more even progress towards SDG localization, alongside better insights for the national government's future sustainable development planning. SALGA organized additional training sessions, workshops and events on 2030 Agenda localization for LRG representatives and other partners and stakeholders.

No specific information on SDG localization efforts is available for Angola, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Lesotho, the Seychelles or Sudan — four of which are classified by the UN as least developed countries. Worsening humanitarian and security crises in many of these countries have slowed down progress towards the SDGs.

Among non-reporting countries for this year's HLPF, Kenyan LRGs have been particularly active. The country's 2024 VNR featured 17 VLRs produced by LRGs: **Kakamega**, **Vihiga**, **Elgeyo Marakwet**, **Bungoma**, **Kajiado**, **Narok**, **Taita Taveta**, **Homa Bay**, **West Pokot**, **Mombasa**, **Nyeri**, **Embu**, **Makueni**, **Baringo**, **Kilifi**, **Busia** and **Wajir**. **Nakuru** also produced a VLR with UN and UCLG support.

In Togo, **Zio 2** organized a session to raise awareness on the SDGs among public employees, traditional chiefs, national organizations, local cooperatives, private sector representatives and civil organizations. In Senegal, **Saint-Louis** integrated the SDGs into local development plans.

The **Local Government Association of Zambia** (LGAZ) set up a "Local Government Award for Excellence" to incentivize networking and peer-to-peer learning between LRGs and with international organizations. Moreover, LGAZ is raising awareness on LRGs' important role in SDG implementation. The association is supporting **Lusaka City Council** to develop its first VLR, and it recently started its first VSR process. Among the various activities to support the council and other stakeholders, LGAZ designed tools for community engagement in the VLR process. The **Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe** (UCAZ) is supporting its LRGs to develop a communications strategy for SDG localization. UCAZ also works with its membership to advance a virtuous digitalization process aimed at building robust partnerships with other stakeholders and collaborating on 2030 Agenda localization.

ASIA-PACIFIC

Although Asia-Pacific is off track to achieve most 2030 Agenda targets, it is still outperforming the rest of the world on 12 of the 17 SDGs. Its fast-paced progress on reducing income poverty, hazardous waste generation and human trafficking represent encouraging steps forward, especially as the world's most populous region. Nevertheless, concerning setbacks on SDG 13 — one of the few goals on which Asia-Pacific is underperforming — must be addressed. Unless they are adapted to specific local contexts and communities, some sustainable development efforts risk exacerbating existing inequalities instead of reducing them. LRGs can leverage their fundamental role in connecting citizens with higher spheres of government and driving forward comprehensive and inclusive localization strategies in the region. LRGs and their associations are already leading the way in SDG localization efforts, as illustrated by the examples below.

Among countries reporting to the 2025 HLPF, the municipality of **Singra** (Bangladesh) produced the first and only VLR in the country in 2022. The review, developed in consultation with local stakeholders, examined six SDGs in depth (including SDGs 5 and 8, which are under review at the 2025 HLPF). Singra collaborated with the State Minister for Information and Communication Technologies to develop a skills development program to reduce the gender divide in access to and usage of digital technologies. This program aimed to empower women financially, economically and educationally.

In Indonesia, the province of **West Java** published a VLR in 2023 focusing on SDGs 3, 5 and 8. The VLR informed the preparation of several development planning documents, such as the Strategic Environmental Review, the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan 2024–2029 and the Regional Long-Term Development Plan of West Java Province. Moreover, the VLR contributed to bridging the gap between local actions for sustainable development and national and international discussions. The province of **Jakarta** also used its 2024 VLR to tackle major issues contained in its medium-term development plan 2023–2026: livability, the environment and accessibility. Through its VLR, Jakarta reaffirms its role as a key participant in the global sustainability agenda and promotes collaboration and partnerships. The **Nusantara** Capital Authority also produced a baseline VLR to monitor and evaluate SDG achievement throughout the development of Indonesia's new capital as a smart and sustainable forest city. This review was developed through a participatory process involving intensive discussions with experts, academics, local and national NGOs, international organizations and communities. **Bandar Lampung** and

Jambi City also published VLRs in 2023. In Bandar Lampung, the review focused on the six development goals clearly linked to regional and local programs to speed up their implementation. In Jambi City, the review not only integrated five SDGs into local development plans but also facilitated collaboration and new partnerships for sustainable development between the city government and numerous stakeholders. **Samarinda City** is currently drafting its VLR. Kendal Regency published its VLR in 2024; it used a participatory approach to develop its key SDG strategies. These will be implemented collaboratively with local stakeholders to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Since Japan's 2021 VNR, three LRGs have produced new VLRs in the country: Toyota City (2022), Tokyo (2023) and Sado City (2024). Both Toyota City's and Tokyo's VLRs promote an integrated, collaborative, cross-sectoral approach to SDG localization that actively engages citizens, stakeholders and organizations to achieve the 2030 Agenda. With support from the SDGs Future City initiative promoted by the Japanese Cabinet Office, Sado's VLR aims to transform the local community into a model region for sustainable development and an example of self-reliant and decentralized society. **Hamamatsu**, after its 2019 VLR, sustained its SDG localization efforts. In 2024, it participated in the International Mayors Forum, sharing knowledge and best practices around the 2030 Agenda. The city created an SDGs Promotion Platform that involves 753 members. The platform's 571 businesses, 109 organizations and 73 individuals can exchange information on their engagement with the SDGs in line with the city's localization strategy. **Yokohama** implemented an SDGs Certification System (Y-SDGs) to evaluate and sustain private sector and civil society efforts to implement practices and strategies aligned with the 2030 Agenda.

In Malaysia, after the 2021 VNR, many LRGs have produced a VLR. Alor Gajah, Kuala Lumpur, Melaka City and Selangor published their reviews in 2022, while Sepang did so in 2023. These VLRs were developed under Malaysia's SDG Cities Program and Network. The cities showed the importance of localization, collaborating with the national government to empower communities to contribute to achieving the SDGs. North Kalimantan published its VLR in 2023. It focused on four SDGs, necessary means of implementation, and promotion of partnerships for sustainable development.

In the Philippines, after the 2022 VSR published by the **League of Cities of the Philippines**, the **League of Municipalities of the Philippines** and the **League of Provinces of the Philippines** (LCP, LMP and LPP respectively), LRGs have continued to advance SDG localization efforts. In 2022, **Makati** initiated the "SDG Self-Assessment Monitoring Project for Philippine Cities" project in collaboration with CityNet, laying the foundation for data-driven governance around SDGs. The project engaged four national capital regions, namely **Makati**, **Muntinlupa**, **Quezon City** and **San Juan**. Later, the project's second phase expanded efforts in seven cities: **Baguio**, **Balanga**, **Mandaluyong**, **Makati**, **Mandaue**, **Muntinlupa** and **Pasig**.

BOX 2.4.4

VLRs blooming in the Philippines

Baguio City recently completed its first-ever VLR. The process improved data-driven decision-making, enhanced intra-governmental coordination and fostered stronger partnerships with civil society and the private sector. The city of Santa Rosa also produced a VLR, working jointly with local stakeholders to integrate the 2030 Agenda into local plans, programs and activities. The process drew upon peer-to-peer collaboration with **Yokohama** (Japan). The Surigao del Norte province's VLR has a strong focus on planning, resilience and capacity building. **Makati** has also produced a VLR, the first in the Metro Manila region, as is **San Fernando**.

Nakhon Si Thammarat (Thailand) published its first VLR in 2022. The review reflects the city's development plan and aligns with the 20-year National Strategy (2018–2037) and other local and regional plans. More than 200 projects to localize the SDGs are brought forward in Nakhon Si Thammarat every year. With support from the UN and UCLG, the municipality of Udon Thani produced a VLR in 2024 with UN and UCLG support focusing on five priority SDGs: 3, 4, 8, 11 and 16. The city then translated the VLR's findings into actionable strategies that drive local development in collaboration with all stakeholders. Koh Samui is currently working with the UN Development Programme, UN-Habitat and the Joint SDG Fund to conduct a VLR. This review will identify development priorities and new ways to achieve prosperity for the island and its community.

No information has been collected for this report from LRGs in the reporting countries of Bhutan, India, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Suriname.

LRGs in countries not reporting to the 2025 HLPF have also led important localization efforts. In Australia, Albany and **Singleton** have collaborated with the UNESCO Chair of Intermediate Cities to bring together local stakeholders at workshops to develop transformative SDG-aligned actions. Suva City (Fiji)

produced its first VLR in 2025. The review not only assesses SDG localization progress to date but also serves as a basis for developing a five-year strategic development plan for the council. **Lautoka City Council** and **Labasa Town Council** are preparing their first VLRs. **Hwaseong** (Republic of Korea) produced a VLR in 2024, which focused on citizen involvement and democratic decision-making for urban SDG localization. Collaboration among public institutions, the private and third sector, and citizens enabled assessing progress and identifying innovative paths for implementing 2030 Agenda–aligned policies. **Seoul**'s 2025 VLR aims to show the city's pathway from rapid growth to a long-term sustainable future. **Malé City Council** (Maldives) began preparing a VLR and advancing a comprehensive and locally tailored approach to sustainable development. In Nepal, **Chandragiri** produced a VLR in 2024 in coordination with several national institutions, the UN and UCLG Asia-Pacific, aiming to become a blueprint for other municipalities. For this, a VLR template was prepared providing a simple step-by-step guide that any municipality can use. The **Municipal Association of Nepal**'s (MuAN's) 2024 VSR aimed to share experiences, provide an update on SDG implementation status, identify challenges and make recommendations to accelerate progress, particularly on SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation). In New Zealand, the **Local Government New Zealand** (LGNZ) association has encouraged horizontal coordination by publicizing the 2030 Agenda and sharing best practices on local sustainable development planning among LRGs.

EURASIA

Eurasia continues to face significant challenges in achieving the SDGs. Climate change remains a pressing concern, with devastating impacts increasingly evident across the region — affecting ecosystems, economies and marginalized populations. Persistent inequalities also hinder progress: women, children, youth, older persons and people with disabilities continue to experience barriers to inclusion and opportunity. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, 13% of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, which highlights the urgent need for strengthened protections and gender-based violence prevention. However, there are also signs of progress: between 2015 and 2022, women held 48% of elected seats in deliberative local government bodies in Belarus.

Almaty (Kazakhstan) became the first city in the Central Asian region to publish a VLR in 2023, picking up the torch from the national government's 2022 VNR. The VLR's outcomes inform Almaty's development program until 2025 and medium-term prospects until 2030. One of the key motivations behind the review process was to create synergies between national and local policies for improving the lives of the population and driving forward integrated sustainable development.

In Kyrgyzstan, **Bishkek** is participating, together with **Dushanbe** (Tajikistan) and two other cities, in a UN Economic Commission for Europe–sponsored project for SDG localization. The project supports VLR processes, with VLRs produced by Bishkek and Dushanbe with UN and UCLG support. These efforts aim to "advance socio-economic recovery and SDG localization in selected countries in transition," thus demonstrating the potential for LRGs to serve as role models for sustainable development.

No information is available from Belarus, the third Eurasian country reporting to the 2025 HLPF.

Among LRGs in non-reporting countries, **Moscow** has been implementing an SDGs project since the end of 2020 with support from the Russian development bank VEB.RF. The project focuses on single-industry towns. Under the project, Moscow shared its experience in achieving the SDGs. For each participating city, it prepared a report on SDG achievement that analyzes the socio-economic situation, identifies potential areas for development, presents the results of a comprehensive assessment of each city's situation based on the VEB.RF quality of life index, and provides recommendations for the Moscow City Government with an action plan. **Yakutsk**, the capital of Russia's largest region, became the first major city to join the project. With project support, it will assess the city's current development and receive analytical and expert recommendations on improving quality of life.

EUROPE

The region covered by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (56 countries across Europe, North America and Central Asia) is on track to achieve only 21 out of the 125 measurable SDG targets (17%) and needs to accelerate progress for 84 targets (67%). While 19 out of the 20 countries leading the global SDG Index are European, significant challenges remain. The European Union's (EU's) average SDG Index score stands at 72.8% in 2025, but the overall pace of progress has slowed considerably since 2020. Progress on several SDGs, particularly those related to social inclusion and economic equity, has stalled or even reversed. Substantial disparities persist between EU Member States, candidate countries and subregions. Inequalities within countries also remain concerning, as reflected by trends in the leave-no-one-behind rankings. The EU generates substantial negative international spillovers, particularly through unsustainable consumption patterns, exports and global supply chains, which require urgent collective action.

Despite current demographic, economic and geopolitical tensions, current changes and new EU leadership for 2024–2029 offer an opportunity to advance the EU's sustainable development agenda — for instance, through the forthcoming action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. LRGs and LGAs in the region are particularly entrepreneurial and a driving force for sustainable development. The following examples showcase LRGs' multifaceted efforts towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Starting with the 2025 HLPF reporting countries, the **National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria** (NAMRB) is supporting its municipalities' localization efforts, welcoming and accounting for differences in scope, resource availability and local technical capabilities. NAMRB is also working to make sure local efforts for sustainable development in the country are better understood and valued at the national level.

In the Czech Republic, the **Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic** (SMOCR) held several webinars focused on affordable housing (SDG 11) and renewable energy and energy efficiency (SDG 7). These events promoted the exchange of information and best practices among municipalities.

In Finland, even before the country's first VNR was published, LRGs have actively pursued the achievement of the SDGs. Five LRGs recently launched their new VLRs. **Tampere** used a VLR (2022) to assess the city's advancement towards SDG localization, following its *City of Action Strategy* adopted in 2021. Its new VLR will examine progress on sustainable development, reviewing each of the 17 SDGs based on the monitoring indicators already in use in the city. **Turku** produced its second VLR in 2022 and its third VLR in 2025. The city shows how mainstreaming sustainable development objectives across sectors in public and private strategies, plans, actions and communications is key to making progress on SDG targets. **Helsinki**, **Espoo** and **Vantaa** all published VLRs in 2023. Their reviews highlighted the importance of local communities, local and international cooperation, and long-term actions, as well as the need to promote comprehensive sustainable development — not just one target at a time. They followed up on their commitments and published three new VLRs in 2025. Helsinki's latest VLR focuses on four crucial areas — the environment, people, culture and economy — to identify the city's SDG-related successes and gaps. Espoo's 2025 VLR was published in a simple card-based format to facilitate educational activities, while Vantaa's 2025 VLR serves as a foundational input for drafting the city's new development strategy. A policy brief provides detailed key findings and recommendations stemming from the five VLRs published in Finland in 2025.

Joensuu published a VLR in 2023, which focused on advancing the 2030 Agenda in line with key strategic priorities such as the economy and employment, sustainability, education, workers' well-being and social inclusion. **Åland**'s 2024 VLR calls for transformative collective action and highlights the importance of institutionalizing SDG implementation for success. **Ylöjärvi** also produced its first VLR. In 2024, the **Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities** (AFLRA) and the **Åland Municipal Association** participated in an innovative VSR co-produced with LGAs from the other Nordic countries. This joint effort recognized the progress made towards the 2030 Agenda but also identified common challenges or "SDG fatigue," serving as the basis for better subnational cooperation to overcome these challenges. AFLRA also supervises the Strategic Management of SDGs in Cities project, which involves six of the largest Finnish cities in collaboration with the **Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council** and several national institutions. It aims to ensure long-term sustainable management at the local level, build staff and political capacity, and foster cooperation.

In Germany, LRGs have proved their unwavering commitment to SDG localization. In the last three years, 12 German municipalities have produced a VLR. A VSR was published in 2025 to inform the country's VNR. The VLRs developed in **Bad Köstritz**, **Bonn**, **Cologne**, **Dortmund**, **Düsseldorf**, **Freiburg**, **Fürstenfeldbruck**, **Hamburg**, **Münster**, **Kiel**, **Rottenburg am Neckar** and **Stuttgart** have driven SDG localization amid national-level political changes.

This consistent and widespread localization effort reflects how LRGs are playing their part in sustainable development and taking ownership of the SDG targets to improve their populations' lives, local ecosystems and the planet as a whole. In particular, the city of Bonn created the "Bonn SDG Days." Since 2018, this annual event has provided a platform for the municipality and civil society partners to collaborate on raising awareness of the SDGs and implementing them on the ground.

BOX 2.4.5

New CEMR and PLATFORMA report: *European Territories Localise the SDGs*

2025 marks 10 years since the adoption of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change, and 30 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration on women's rights. At the 2025 HLPF, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and PLATFORMA will present their latest annual progress report: *European Territories Localise the SDGs: Getting Local SDG Actions onto the Fast Track*. The report gathers the latest evidence on the role played by European LRGs in SDG localization. This year, it provides an in-depth reflection on SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17. It also analyzes LRGs' involvement in the 2025 VNRs, focusing on contributions from CEMR/PLATFORMA members from Bulgaria, Finland, Germany and Malta.

This year's report shows that CEMR/PLATFORMA members are moving in the right direction for SDG localization. Dialogue with EU Member States on the 2025 VNRs has increased in some cases, and the public is more aware of the relevance and need to expedite SDG implementation. The practices on the SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF demonstrate this.

The report provides several recommendations to the UN, EU and EU Member States:

- Speed up steps to achieve the 2030 Agenda
- Ensure LRGs have adequate autonomy, resources and means of action
- Recognize that localizing equality is not an option but a necessity
- Strengthen LRGs' political voice within decision-making arenas
- Prioritize capacity development, decentralization and multilevel governance
- Recognize LRGs as unique and effective partners in fragile contexts
- Accelerate SDG localization and territorialization

Moving on to non-reporting countries, the Austrian **Association of Cities and Towns** (AACT) provides its members with a specific exchange and knowledge platform on municipal sustainability. Through this platform, the LGA supports networking, makes LRGs' best practices visible, offers tools and funding possibilities, and gathers local and regional stakeholders as well as NGOs and academia.

In Belgium, the **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (VVSG) produced a practical and strategic guide to support Flemish LRGs to use the SDGs as a framework for their local policy plans (being developed in 2025 for the 2026–2031 period). Applying this guidance, a working group of about 20 municipalities is actively exchanging knowledge and methodologies for integrating the SDGs in planning and policy documents. Against the backdrop of the regional/federal and European elections in June 2024, VVSG produced a memorandum responding to the challenges mentioned in the Belgian VNR from a local perspective. This response highlights LRGs' important role in contributing to national sustainable development efforts. The **Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia** (UVCW) has organized conferences for locally elected politicians on the importance of integrating SDGs into local development plans. On the same note, **Brulocalis** (the association of cities and municipalities of Brussels) organized a national meeting with the other Belgian LGAs mentioned above to advance SDG localization in the country. **Ghent** has produced its fifth VLR.

In Estonia, **Tallinn** developed the Tallinn Sustainability Governance Model and a tool for an ex-ante assessment of planned investments and development projects, both based on the SDGs.

In France, **Cités Unies France** (CUF) organized numerous activities on the localization of various SDGs, stimulating networking, partnerships and knowledge sharing for local sustainable development. This LGA is also advocating for more decentralized cooperation on the 2030 Agenda.

In Georgia, the **National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia** (NALAG) is closely collaborating with LRGs to advance the 2030 Agenda. For instance, this LGA is connecting international partners with Georgian LRGs for several SDG-specific projects. Particularly relevant are the collaborations with UN agencies such as UNICEF and UN Women regarding the localization of SDG 3 and SDG 5 in Georgian municipalities. NALAG is actively involved in various projects to strengthen local governance and local capacities for a more effective, SDG-aligned, decentralized framework. **Tbilisi's** VLR shows the city's commitment to localizing the 2030 Agenda and being a role model for other LRGs in the country and region. Among the various successes resulting from the VLR process, Tbilisi improved existing monitoring and reporting systems, expanded democratic decision-making and augmented the city's steering capabilities for sustainable development strategies and actions.

In Latvia, the **Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments** (LALRG) organized the "Sustainable Municipalities Week 2024" for the first time. This event, inspired by the "Sustainable Municipality Week" organized annually by VVSG in Flanders, promoted democratic and inclusive SDG localization, engaging citizens with a particular focus on youth.

The **Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG) has worked with Dutch municipalities to localize the SDGs. It aims to create an adaptable and useful monitoring tool that can translate the global goals into relevant and workable indicators for local and regional contexts. As part of the Global Goals Municipality Campaign project ("Gemeenten4GlobalGoals" in Dutch), VNG organized various activities including two meet-ups with municipal representatives. In these sessions, participants brainstormed how to accelerate the SDGs locally and overcome obstacles.

The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS) created a capacity-building module on SDG localization for LRGs and is developing a course on SDG 5 in partnership with the national government. Additionally, KS is working closely with its members to develop strong partnerships between LRGs and the private sector to comprehensively advance the 2030 Agenda.

In Portugal, the **National Association of Portuguese Municipalities** (ANMP) is negotiating with the national government to provide LRGs with more competences to better localize the 2030 Agenda, especially regarding health and social policies. The ANMP also created a working group of 82 Portuguese municipalities, which meets regularly to discuss various aspects of localization. It is fostering collaboration protocols between LRGs and their SDG-related partners, including the National Energy Agency (SDGs 7 and 17), National Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives and Agricultural Credit of Portugal (SDGs 12 and 17), CEMR's Italian association (AICCRE; SDGs 11, 16 and 17), National School of Public Health (SDGs 3 and 17) and National Anti-Corruption Mechanism (SDG 16). Moreover, the ODSlocal portal has been central for collaboration on SDG-aligned practices for Portuguese municipalities such as **Oeiras**, **Loulé**, **Mafra**, **Lisbon**, **Vila Franca de Xira**, **Valongo**, **Alenquer**, **Idanha-a-Nova**, **Seixal** and **Viana do Castelo**.

In Serbia, the city of **Niš** produced a VLR with UN and UCLG support. It analyzes the role of SDGs in the preparation of cross-sectoral, integrated planning

documents. The city's experience shows VLRs' potential to not only review the state of 2030 Agenda localization but also align and coordinate different aspects of urban development.

In Spain, the province of **Córdoba** took initiative to localize the 2030 Agenda through a multistakeholder project, Alianza 2030, which aims to raise awareness and build SDG-related capacities. The province also developed a collaborative strategic plan for SDG localization. The **Barcelona Provincial Council** remains committed to a comprehensive localization strategy through the VISOR2030 platform, created to comprehensively monitor local progress towards the SDGs. The province produced its first VLR and continues to actively raise awareness of the SDGs, adapt all its plans and strategies for sustainable development, and open spaces for collaboration with its municipalities to jointly advance the SDGs through the XarxA2030 project. The **Basque government** published its eighth VLR. It also participates in the 2030Catalysts strategic initiative promoted by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre to improve SDG indicators and foster collaboration among regions on sustainable development. **Bilbao** is developing an operational action plan to localize the SDGs and implementing an SDG-sensitive municipal budgeting framework. The **Fons Mallorquí** development cooperation fund adopted SDG indicators to track progress.

BOX 2.4.6

Málaga's longstanding commitment to SDG localization and review

Since 2018, the Spanish city of **Málaga** has carried out an ambitious SDG monitoring process. Led by the CIEDES Foundation, annual VLRs have been produced to assess the urban area's progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, including in 2025. Crucially, the review processes have centered participation, fostering collaboration between the public sector, private enterprises, academia, civil society and citizens. More than 250 context-specific indicators to track Málaga's progress on each SDG have been developed, serving as a solid database to inform political and policy decisions. The city has complemented this indicator tool with a digital budgeting platform that interactively shows the direct connections between the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets. This platform helps municipalities in the urban area align their investments and public policies to the 2030 Agenda, and it has the potential to be implemented in all Spanish municipalities.

In Switzerland, **Geneva** published a VLR in 2025 that considers international, national, regional and metropolitan levels. It reviews the state of SDG achievement and identifies remaining challenges for sustainable development.

Basildon (UK) collaborated with the city of Bristol to produce its first VLR, which focuses on culture from a multisector, multidisciplinary perspective. This process offered data-driven insights and highlighted the crucial role of culture, cultural ambassadors and artists in responding to social and environmental injustices, alongside their potential to localize the SDGs in line with local and communities' priorities. The English **Local Government Association** (LGA) backs its members' localization efforts by supporting LRGs with sustainability and local economic growth initiatives. It also advocates strongly for devolution vis-à-vis the national government. LGA has produced an online guide on localizing the SDGs for LRGs.

Finally, the **Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe** (NALAS) has been particularly active in promoting the 2030 Agenda, fostering regional cooperation around SDGs 5, 7, 13 and 16.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to achieve only 23% of SDG targets by 2030. Progress on 41% of targets is too slow, while progress on 36% has either stalled or reversed compared to the 2015 baseline. Despite challenges such as limited financing and competences, inequalities, climate change and violence, LRGs "have taken on an essential role in territorializing the SDGs, adapting global goals to specific realities in their communities and promoting citizen participation in development processes." VLRs serve as critical tools for citizen participation and multilevel policy coherence.

Reporting countries have taken several actions for SDG localization. In the Dominican Republic, the **Dominican Federation of Municipalities** (FEDOMU) is in the initial stages of its first VSR process. The VSR will have a twofold purpose: first, to assess LRGs' awareness around the 2030 Agenda and review their technical expertise and local strategic plans, and second, to begin a comprehensive capacity-building program on local sustainable development in the country. In Guatemala, **Mixco** produced a VLR in 2022 to align the city's efforts with national sustainable development strategies and the 2030 Agenda. For the purposes of this report, no information is available for the Bahamas or El Salvador.

In non-reporting countries, LRGs and LGAs have been actively engaged in SDG localization. **Rosario** (Argentina) promoted the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development in its secondary schools, directly involving youth in designing sustainable solutions and innovations to address common issues experienced by the community. More than 300 young people participated in creating SDG-aligned plans. In addition, the city developed a local climate action plan called "Rosario 2030" that is entirely based on the SDGs and their localization in Rosario's context. The province of **Santa Fe** also strengthened its commitment to SDG localization through targeted collaborations with national and international organizations. **Lincoln** mainstreamed the SDGs in every relevant public event in the municipality and fully aligned its local agenda to the 2030 Agenda. To share its experience, it is collaborating with other municipalities in Argentina, including **Bragado**, **Trenque Lauquen**, **La Rioja** and **Mendoza**, to further localize the SDGs.

The **Bolivian Association of Municipalities** (AMB) has worked closely with national and international partners on SDG localization, organizing workshops, on-the-ground projects and strategic sessions on local planning that integrates sustainable development.

In Brazil, the **Brazilian Association of Municipalities** (ABM) is engaging with national authorities to institutionalize partnerships for local SDG implementation. One program, developed through Brazil's National Commission for the SDGs at ABM's request, provides formal mechanisms for LRGs to access resources for SDG localization and for knowledge sharing among municipalities.

Bogotá (Colombia) is currently drafting a new VLR. The city has taken a participatory approach, engaging stakeholders such as academia, civil organizations and international agencies in the reporting process. As a result, Bogotá has advanced towards fully aligning its general development plan with the 2030 Agenda.

In Costa Rica, the **National Union of Local Governments** (UNGL) initiated several capacity-building workshops on specific SDGs, including SDG 5, and held a series of regional workshops on the participatory development of SDG-aligned municipal plans for 2026–2030. The municipality of **Goicoechea** is raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda among other municipalities and has created a strategic plan to achieve the SDGs at the local level.

In Ecuador, in 2024, the city of **Cuenca** produced a VLR. The report not only assesses the state of SDG implementation at the local level but also serves as a key tool for evidence-based decision-making to align policies and plans with the 2030 Agenda and community needs and aspirations. The **Azuay** province aligned its annual operational plans with the SDGs, focusing in particular on the localization of SDGs 1, 2, 10 and 16 through two high-impact projects. These projects supported disadvantaged social groups and communities through quality public services, capacity-building programs and strengthened social networks. The provincial government of **Manabí** integrated the SDGs in its strategies and plans and produced three VLRs (2022, 2023, 2024) as well as an updated VLR methodology to inspire peers from around the world.

BOX 2.4.7

Building a resilient and inclusive Quito through the VLR

The Quito VLR underscores the city's leadership in localizing global agendas, grounded in its established vision. Quito has promoted urban management that integrates the 2030 Agenda with the principles of the Pact for the Future, addressing specific challenges of migration and seeking inclusive and resilient development.

The city has prioritized consolidating its participatory strategic vision, which it understands as the only way to address complex contemporary challenges from the climate crisis to social equity. The VLR results show strengthened multilevel and multistakeholder planning and progress on adapting global policies to the local context, demonstrating Quito's commitment to a sustainable urban future and the dignity of all people.

In Honduras, **San Nicolás** produced the country's first VLR. It focused on three specific goals — SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) — as the basis for creating the human capital necessary to lead its communities towards comprehensive development.

In Mexico, the state of **Chiapas** produced a VLR in 2023. This effort marked an improvement in the state's collaboration with its 124 municipalities, as well as national authorities and civil society organizations. The VLR reviewed the state's priorities and aligned them with the 2030 Agenda. Similarly, in 2024, the state of **Aguascalientes** published a VLR organized along five key strategic lines: a just and safe state, a human and inclusive state, a competitive and innovative state, an orderly and sustainable state and an intelligent and open state. Aguas-

calientes assessed the progress made around the SDGs and integrated them into the state's plans and programs, both in the short and long term, for improved, inclusive and sustainable responsiveness to the population's needs.

Montevideo (Uruguay) has taken action to follow up on its three VLRs (2020, 2022, 2023). It created a specific SDG localization course for public workers, which presents localization strategies and describes how they connect and intersect with global dynamics. This course forms part of the city's broader strategic effort to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in all departments of the city administration to achieve the SDGs organically and inclusively. The department of **Canelones** produced VLRs in 2022 and in 2024. It also developed an institutional course on the SDGs to raise employees' awareness of the 2030 Agenda.

Regionally, the **Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities** (UCCI) supports its member cities through technical guidance and funding for sustainable projects. It has promoted alliance-building and cooperation frameworks to achieve the SDGs.

MIDDLE EAST AND WEST ASIA

Since 2020, the Arab region has made significant advancements in SDG data collection: between 2020 and 2024, the percentage of SDG indicators with sufficient data increased from 38% to 56%. Specific SDGs, such as SDGs 3, 4 and 7, are making progress (although not yet on track to be achieved by 2030), with high-income Arab countries demonstrating solid improvements across most SDGs. Nevertheless, major issues remain, with a large number of targets in SDGs 8, 9 and 16 off track. Progress remains sluggish in middle- and low-income Arab countries, illustrating strong inequalities in the region. Efforts to plan and implement effective SDG-aligned policies in the region have faced major challenges, including political instability and conflict, economic disparity and resource scarcity, which lead to poverty, displacement and violence.

Across the region, although not in the reporting countries of Iraq and Qatar, LRGs are steadily driving localization of the 2030 Agenda, often bridging the gaps in implementation created by unstable regional dynamics. One significant initiative is the Arab Mayors Academy, launched by UCLG ASPAC, UNESCWA, and UN-Habitat to support mayors and LRG leaders across the Arab region in advancing sustainable urban development. The first edition, implemented between July and November 2024, strengthened the leadership capacities of eleven mayors and senior city officials from across the region. Participants reported significant growth in their skills across various urban development areas. During the reporting period, the Academy also facilitated technical collaboration with over 20 global and regional partners.

In Jordan, **Irbid**'s first VLR will focus on five SDGs (SDGs 6, 8, 9, 11 and 13), with cross-cutting areas on refugees, gender, youth and people with disabilities. The municipality is benefiting from a participatory approach through stakeholder consultation and validation workshops.

The **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities** (APLA) continues coordinating SDG reporting at the local level. It drafted an SDG localization plan for local governments, which aims to raise awareness, build capacity and monitor progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. In particular, APLA created an SDG taskforce that promotes cooperation around SDG implementation and capacity building. **Ramallah** has produced a VLR, recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach to sustainable development. The VLR informs and corroborates the strategies described in the Strategic Plan for Ramallah (2023–2026) and the Resilience Plan (2050).

In Saudi Arabia, **Qassim Municipality** produced the 2024 **Buraidah** VLR with UN support. This process promoted three cross-cutting areas — multilevel governance, capacity building, and advocacy and visibility — to strengthen the VLR's positive impact on internal and external municipal action.

Avcılar Municipality (Türkiye) continues its multistakeholder and participatory implementation of SDG-aligned practices. The municipality draws upon the results of its 2022 VLR to establish strong partnerships with all stakeholders, and it has put in motion a holistic and shared transformation that is positively affecting social, economic and environmental dimensions in the area. To capture this transformation and streamline the progress made, the city released a 2023 progress report that also presents a roadmap with further localization objectives. **Selçuklu** produced its first VLR, which includes specific municipal targets for each SDG by 2030.

In the United Arab Emirates, **Abu Dhabi** and **Dubai** are preparing their first VLRs.

NORTH AMERICA

English- and French-speaking Caribbean countries are caught in the broader "development traps" affecting all of the continent (except for Canada and the USA): low capacity for growth, high inequality and limited social mobility, and weak institutional capacities and governance. The subregion is generally lagging behind others such as South America, Central America and Mexico in SDG achievement, with less than 15% of targets on track. In Saint Lucia (a 2025 HLPF reporting country), the economy remains highly dependent on tourism, which accounts for 52% of GDP. Structural vulnerabilities are compounded by low investment in public services such as health, as well as high public debt. In contrast, Canada ranks 25th out of 166 countries in the SDG Index (score: 78.83), though it still faces major challenges in four SDGs and worsening trends in 27% of targets. The USA ranks 46th (score: 74.43), with major challenges in six SDGs and 28% of targets worsening.

Among non-reporting countries, the city of **Sacramento** (USA) has produced a VLR in collaboration with the University of California, Davis. The process prioritized democratic engagement to better understand and address challenges faced by the population. Sacramento's VLR reviewed progress and encouraged achieving SDG indicators, while also improving the local government's partnership with academia for sustainable development. Another city in California, **San Diego**, announced its commitment to develop its first VLR in partnership with ICLEI USA. The upcoming VLR will focus on five key SDGs: 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

3.

LOCALIZING CARE AND THE NEW ESSENTIALS THROUGH SDGs 3, 5, 8 AND 14

The global landscape for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) achievement is increasingly marked by setbacks and tensions. The impacts of overlapping crises — ranging from the pandemic and climate emergency to geopolitical instability — have slowed or even reversed progress on key SDG targets. Simultaneously, the rise of populist narratives and policies fostered by national governments in various countries has further weakened trust in international cooperation, undermining multilateral efforts and commitments to global agendas. This backlash against shared governance frameworks and rights-based development has left adherents to the 2030 Agenda more isolated, with local and regional governments (LRGs) often left to uphold the principles of inclusion, sustainability and justice on their own.

SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) is falling short of its 2030 targets. The pandemic has left long-lasting effects on global health systems, such as a stagnating maternal mortality ratio and reduction in life expectancy, which exacerbate pre-existing inequalities in access to essential services. While some progress has been made in areas such as HIV and tobacco reduction (in 150 countries globally), broader determinants of health — like education, decent employment, adequate housing and clean air — are deteriorating. This calls for an integrated approach to health that combines local service delivery with holistic social policies.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remains one of the most stubbornly off-track goals. Parity in political representation will not be reached until 2063. Discrimination persists in legal systems, labor markets (with over 50 percent of countries around the world still maintaining laws that restrict equal access to employment for women) and within the distribution of unpaid care work, which continues to fall disproportionately on women; they spend 2.5 times as many hours as men on such work. Although strides have been made in gender-sensitive legislation (in 56 countries between 2019 and 2023) and in reducing gender-based violence, deep structural inequalities remain. The road to gender equality requires transformative, care-centered policies that tackle both visible and invisible barriers.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) presents a mixed picture. As the global economy grows at around 5% yearly, working poverty and global unemployment (which was at a historic low of 5% in 2023) have fallen. However, informal work continues to affect over two billion people, and modern slavery (which has increased by 10 million people since 2016), forced labor and child labor are on the rise. The slow pace of productivity recovery and limited progress in universal social protection highlight the need for a new, territorial economic model that champions equity, decent work and community-based livelihoods.

Finally, progress in SDG 14 (Life Below Water) is largely underreported. Ocean acidification and eutrophication continue to increase, thereby endangering ocean ecosystems, and the sustainability of global fishery resources has declined from 90% in 1974 to 62.5% in 2021. Tangible progress has been made due to the implementation of ecosystem-based strategies for marine-area management, the protection of key biodiversity areas and the increasingly comprehensive fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The first binding, international agreement on this matter (the Agreement of Port State Measures, PSMA) was signed by over 100 countries.

Despite growing constraints, LRGs have consistently reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. Through networks such as the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF), LRGs have mobilized to defend multilateralism, champion territorial equality and

demand recognition as co-decision-makers in sustainable development processes.

Across the four SDGs reviewed in this section, LRGs are addressing urgent global challenges through concrete and context-specific initiatives. In Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), LRGs are developing integrated, public health policies that connect healthcare access with other key determinants, such as housing and urban infrastructure, often through community-led and participatory-governance models. In their interventions, LRGs are fostering the well-being of all people. In Gender Equality (SDG 5), LRGs are advancing feminist municipalism by creating care systems, investing in shelters and legal support for survivors of violence, and promoting women's leadership in local decision-making. In terms of Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), LRGs are supporting Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE), facilitating formalization pathways for informal workers, using public procurement as a lever to ensure decent labor standards, and promoting local economic development. Regarding Life Below Water (SDG 14), coastal LRGs are fostering symbiosis between urban planning and marine sustainability, coordinating local marine protected areas, addressing pollution through territorial regulation, and strengthening food systems through the sustainable management of small-scale fisheries.

UCLG's concepts of Care and the New Essentials offer a transformative lens to rethink how SDGs are implemented at the territorial level. In response to current global crises and shifting local needs, LRGs are pioneering innovative strategies for public-service provision that reimagine care, inclusion and resilience. The four SDGs under review serve as entry points for operationalizing Care and the New Essentials. The latter includes health services rooted in community well-being, care systems that enable women's full participation, employment strategies that prioritize informality and economic justice, and local marine governance models that protect common goods. As a whole, the New Essentials represent a new development paradigm centered on equality and care.

This section aims to analyze how LRGs are localizing key SDGs that reflect emerging priorities and interconnected challenges. It highlights how local actions on health, gender equality, decent work and ocean sustainability contribute to redefining development through the lens of the New Essentials.

The objectives of the four papers in this section are as follows:

- **Paper 1 on SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being)** emphasizes the strategic importance of health in sustainable development, exploring both direct and indirect LRG contributions to health outcomes and their role in shaping holistic, integrated approaches to well-being.

- **Paper 2 on SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** focuses on feminist municipalism, transformative care and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG). It highlights the role of LRGs in implementing inclusive, participatory and rights-based approaches.

- **Paper 3 on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)** explores how LRGs can drive just transitions by reorienting local economies around decent work, care, the creation of opportunities for all and collective bargaining. They can address informality and structural inequalities through feminist, rights-based, local, economic development.

- **Paper 4 on SDG 14 (Life Below Water)** addresses the challenges and opportunities in localizing ocean governance; overcoming institutional and thematic fragmentation; and stressing LRG leadership in marine conservation, sustainable fisheries and local resilience strategies amid climate threats.

The analyses presented in these papers are grounded in thorough secondary research and the results of the GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey on SDG localization. The papers draw from strategic collaborations within the GTF and beyond, engaging organizations such as the World Health Organization (paper on SDG 3), Public Services International (paper on SDG 8), ICLEI (paper on SDG 14), academic experts and professional networks. This multi-actor approach has led to meaningful interactions with LRGs and local government associations (LGAs), which have enriched both the research process and results. The papers are valuable tools for both advocacy and policy development, as they synthesize local experiences, policy innovations and the institutional knowledge of cities, regions and associations that are active within the GTF.

3.1

Paper 1. Local and regional governments towards SDG 3: Integrated approaches and holistic solutions for good health and well-being

3.1.1 Introduction

Improving health and well-being is among the most pressing and pervasive challenges facing sustainable development. That is not only due to the scale and intensity of health problems as they manifest around the world but also because of the strategic significance of health as an input to development. Healthy populations are a precondition for achieving any goal or target related to sustainable development. Consequently, ensuring health and well-being is of critical strategic importance, not only in and of itself but also as a pathway to other developmental targets and objectives.

A global assessment of health and well-being does not present a straightforward picture of either progress or backsliding. Significant gains have been made in key areas since the start of the 21st century, yet some progressive trends have stalled or lost ground as a result of emerging challenges and crises. Moreover, stark inequalities among world regions, countries and subnational contexts remain and may in fact be intensifying. Progress hinges on localizing the health and well-being agenda and on understanding the roles of all health stakeholders, including actors and institutions largely working outside the biomedical health sector, such as local and regional governments (LRGs).

Five years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that, without addressing the socio-ecological and governance challenges undermining equitable health and well-being, our collective efforts to create more sustainable, just and prosperous futures will fall short of the ambitions set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The fourth report submitted by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) focused on LRG efforts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[1] That report highlighted how **LRGs were at the frontlines of guaranteeing the safety of communities and ensuring the continued provision of essential public services amid the crisis**. It further pushed the need to accelerate transformative actions towards a "new framework" of post-pandemic governance rooted in local actions.

The fifth report submitted to the HLPF re-emphasized how crises stemming from the pandemic demonstrated "the intrinsic link between local public service provision and health systems" and that LRG policies and actions are critical for preserving community safety, by creating links among health systems, public services and global development agendas.[2] In fact, **given that many LRG competencies (housing; air quality; water, sanitation and hygiene; transport…) have a strong and undeniable impact on health, LRGs have already been linking health to other policy agendas for a long time**. While the report advocated for a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach, whereby health "permeates all other policies," it noted that few LRGs (in addition to national governments and supranational organizations) had adopted such an approach.

This report goes a step further, to argue that linking health systems, public services and international development agendas is a necessary but insufficient condition for addressing the diverse determinants of health and well-being. Non-health sectors also have a key role to play within an overarching, integrated and holistic approach to health that transcends a health-action focus on particular health outcomes, sectoral interventions or vulnerable groups.[3] **LRGs have, and have been playing, a leading role in forging such holistic and integrated approaches to health, offering valuable examples for other organizations and actors to follow.**

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The present report provides an assessment of progress towards SDG 3 — whether we are on track to achieve it; if not, where the main gaps exist; and what this means for actions by LRGs and their relationship with other key actors. Accordingly, the report provides advocacy messages addressed to a range of stakeholder groups, including national governments and the international community. Due to the lack of availability of data disaggregated to the local level, a systematic and quantified assessment is not possible. A global overview of progress, using available data from the World Health Organization (WHO) and other sources, allows for an indicative qualitative assessment of progress, guided by a United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) survey of good practices and by voluntary local and subnational reviews of SDG progress.

While this paper focuses on progress towards SDG 3, it emphasizes that meeting the targets linked to this goal is not the only agenda that is relevant to health and the health-related actions of LRGs. In fact, even though the SDGs include carefully selected indicators, they represent neither the whole picture nor the primary objective of local and regional governance. The paper aims to assess how LRGs are progressing toward improved health and well-being through the *perspective* provided by the SDGs. For example, the means of implementation identified in the SDGs (as exemplified by SDG 17 and other goal-specific "letter targets") are indicators that are representative of a larger, enabling framework

for action that must be addressed for sustainable development to be achieved generally.

The paper builds on the lessons gained from general environmental and settlement management and service provision, and from the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates that LRGs have indeed shown their political will to address, and actually addressed, health and well-being issues in their territories — often without adequate resources — and have prioritized their communities' well-being. In doing so, they have shown their willingness to engage with one another and partner with many other kinds of institutions and organizations in the pursuit of health-related targets set out by the SDGs, including but not limited to those of SDG 3. This reflects real and sustained demand from LRGs to think about health and well-being in new and innovative ways. We underscore the importance of strengthening subnational capacity to prevent and respond to the challenges of health and well-being alongside effective public health and biomedical interventions. It is critical that we capitalize on this established and growing interest in LRGs' health-facing roles and partnerships as we head into the final years of the United Nations Decade of Action for the SDGs (2020–30).

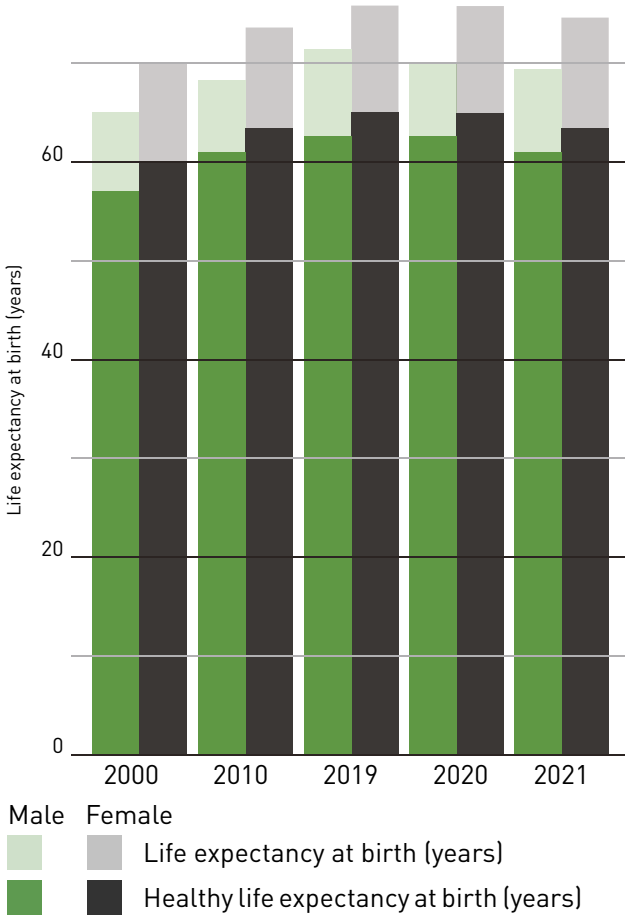
OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

The following section presents a global assessment of progress on key indicators of health and well-being, demonstrating that LRGs are and will be central to efforts to achieve SDG 3 and health-related objectives of all kinds. Next, Section 3 sets out why LRGs are essential to driving progress towards SDG 3 and better, more equitable health and well-being outcomes. Section 4 outlines the various modalities and parameters through which LRGs can and do contribute to progress in health and well-being outcomes through SDGs. Section 5 focuses on LRG experiences, challenges faced and opportunities for mutual learning. This section draws upon a wide range of examples and several case studies of particular interest and value for mutual learning. Finally, the paper examines the challenges LRGs face when promoting pathways to better health and well-being. Without overcoming these challenges, we will fail to achieve marked progress, not only on SDG 3 but also on all other development goals and targets. Therefore, a set of conclusions and policy recommendations are proposed; they are addressed to multiple sets of actors and stakeholders.

3.1.2 A global assessment of progress on health and well-being

There are numerous ways to track macro-scale trends in health and well-being, underscoring the positive impacts of health interventions on sustainable development. On the global scale, life expectancy at birth and healthy life expectancy (HALE) at birth have increased markedly since 2000. Between 2000 and 2016, global life expectancy at birth increased by 5.5 years, from 66.5 to 72.0 years, while HALE increased from 58.5 to 63.3 years in the same period. However, the number of equivalent years of full health lost through living in unhealthy states also rose, from 8.0 to 8.6 years.[4] Both measures plateaued and decreased marginally between 2019 and 2021, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 3.1.1).

Figure 3.1.1 Global trends in life expectancy and HALE at birth, by sex, 2000–2021



Source: WHO, World Health Statistics 2024: Monitoring Health for the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals *(Geneva, 2024).*

A marked worldwide reduction in maternal mortality was achieved between 2000 and 2015. In this period, the global maternal mortality ratio (MRR, SDG indicator 3.1.1) dropped by one third, from 339 to 227 deaths per 100,000 live births. However, progress has since stagnated, and by 2020 the global MMR had fallen modestly to 223 deaths per 100,000 live births — well above the SDG target of 70.

Substantial progress has also been made in reducing childhood mortality since 2000, when the global under-five mortality rate (U5MR, SDG indicator 3.2.1) was 76 deaths per 1,000 live births. By 2022, that rate had dropped to 37 deaths per 1,000 live births, a 51% decline, but left considerable progress to be made in order to achieve the SDG target of 25 under-five deaths per 1,000 live births.

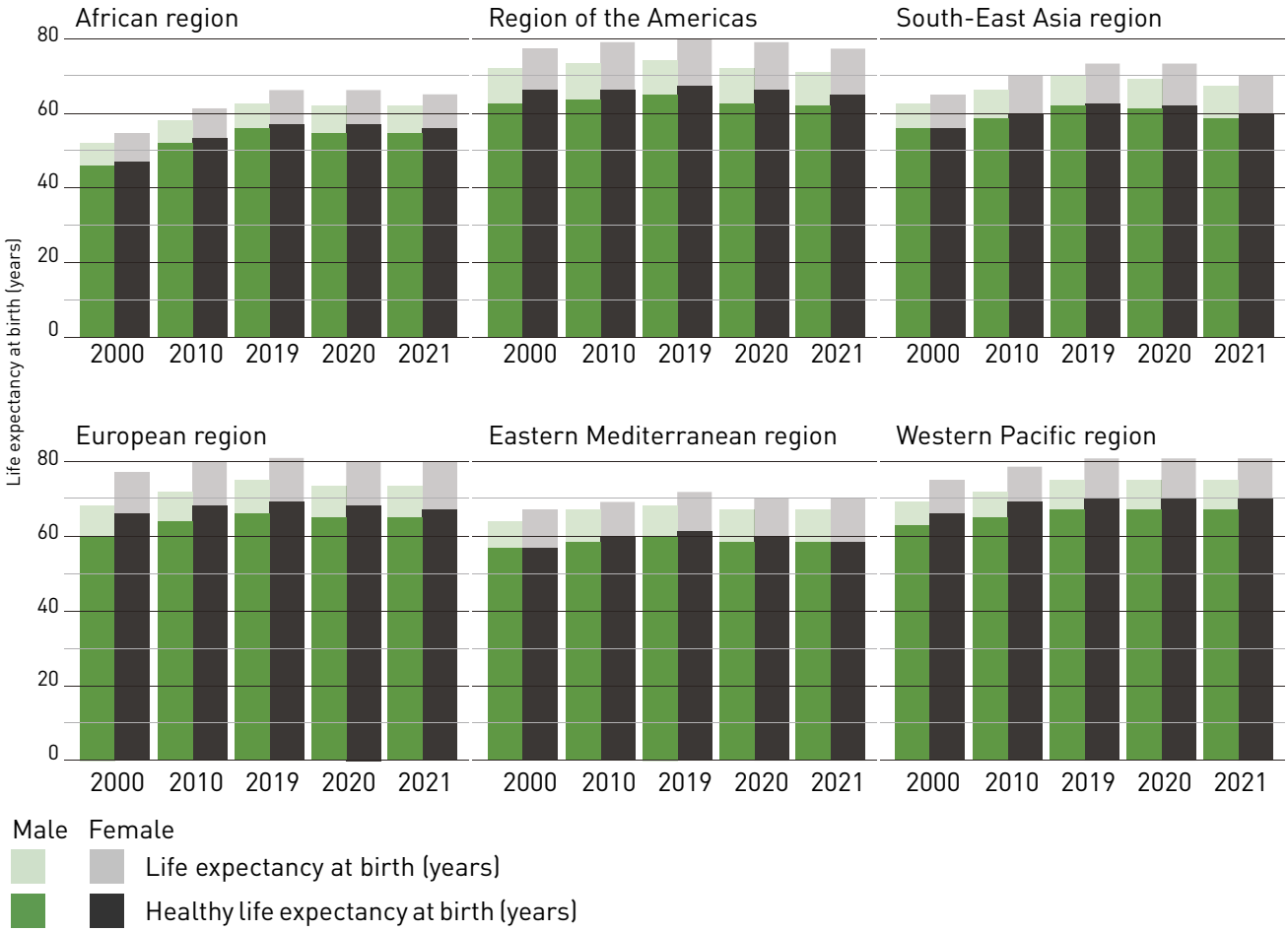
With respect to the significance of non-biomedical determinants of health, **the world has seen limited progress in reducing mortality attributed to environmental factors, including air pollution and WASH** services. In 2019, the global age-standardized mortality rate attributable to household- and ambient air pollution (SDG indicator 3.9.1) was 104 deaths per 100,000 population, a 21.8% decline from the 2010 level of 133 deaths per 100,000 people.

Meanwhile, the mortality rate attributed to exposure to unsafe WASH services in 2019 was estimated at 18.3 deaths per 100,000 population.[5] In 2004, around 1.9 million deaths were attributable to unsafe WASH services;[6] it is estimated that in 2019 safe WASH services may have prevented 1.4 million deaths,[7] which indicates some progress. As the level of government best positioned to act on the environmental drivers of health and well-being, LRGs have played a central role in delivering this progress and will be core to future efforts in these areas.

REGIONAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Despite noteworthy progress at the global level, stark inequalities between countries and WHO-defined regions persist. The African region enjoyed the greatest progress in increasing life expectancy and HALE between 2000 and 2019 (an 11.2-year gain in life expectancy alongside a 9.8-year gain in HALE), although it still has the lowest performance of all regions, followed by South-East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean (see Figure 3.1.2). Indeed, life expectancy outcomes are closely correlated with national levels of income. Lower-income countries consistently perform worse than their higher-income counterparts. However, low-income countries did see a 10.6-year gain in life expectancy and 9.3-year gain in HALE between 2000 and 2019.

Figure 3.1.2 Trends in life expectancy and HALE at birth, by sex and by WHO region, 2000–2021

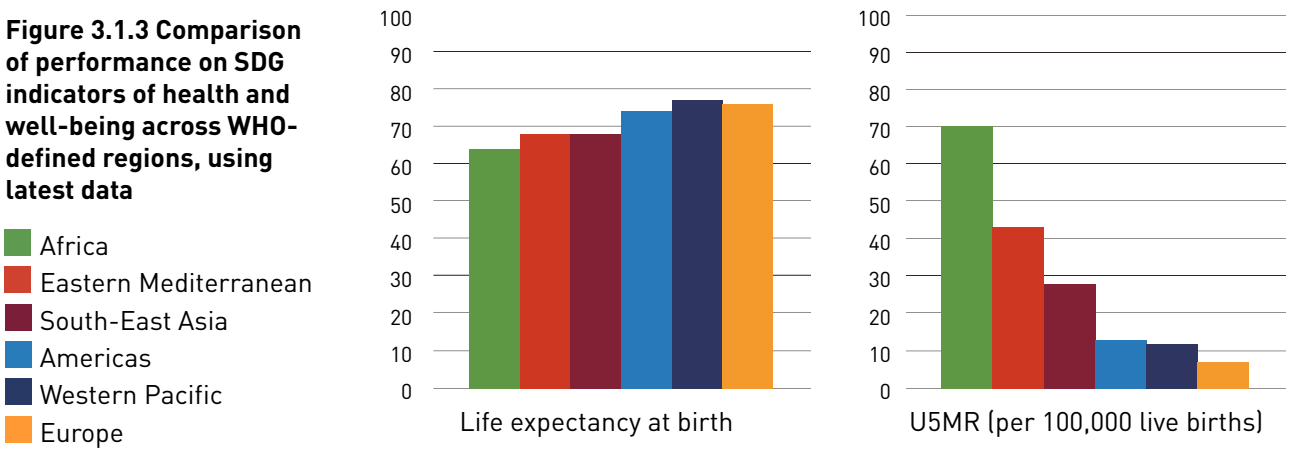


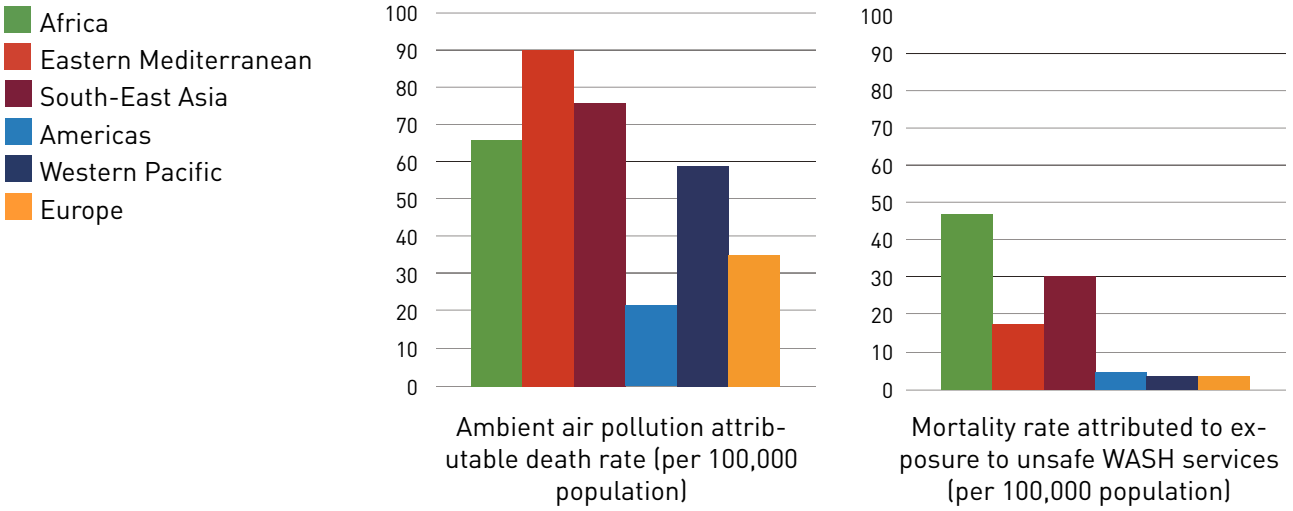
Source: WHO, World Health Statistics 2024: Monitoring Health for the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals *(Geneva, 2024).*

Children in Africa continue to have the highest risk of dying before reaching the age of five, again followed by the Eastern Mediterranean and then South-East Asia. The same regional patterns are reflected in neonatal deaths. Against the SDG target of 12 neonatal deaths per 1,000 live births, in 2022 Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean sat at 26 and 25 respectively.

Figure 3.1.3 shows that the African, Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Asia regions also have the highest mortality rates attributable to air pollution (SDG indicator 3.9.1) and unsafe WASH services. WASH-attributable mortality rates (SDG indicator 3.9.2) range from 3.7 deaths per 100,000 population in high-income countries to 41.7 deaths per 100,000 population in low-income countries. Africa averages 46.7 deaths per 100,000 population, which is well above South-East Asia's rate of 29.6 deaths per 100,000 population.

Figure 3.1.3 Comparison of performance on SDG indicators of health and well-being across WHO-defined regions, using latest data





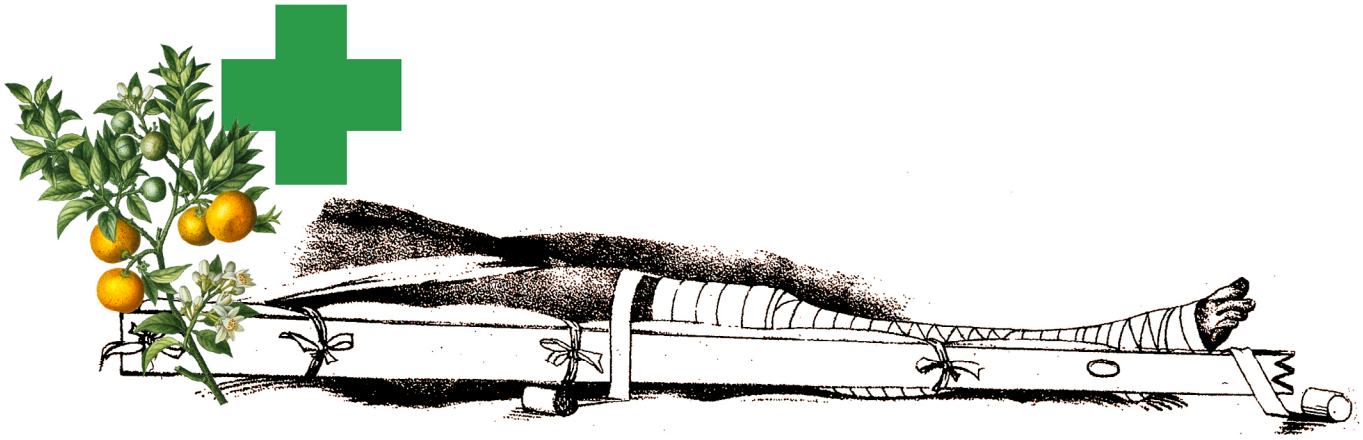
Source: WHO, World Health Statistics 2024: Monitoring Health for the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals *(Geneva, 2024).*

There is evidence to suggest gaps between middle- and low-income countries are gradually closing for average health indicators, including life expectancy and child mortality rates. Some scholars have taken this as evidence of international "convergence" in development.[8] However, at all scales, health and well-being are marked by pressing and lingering, social and geographic inequalities in risk exposure, access to care and outcomes. Within poorer countries, life expectancy may in fact be deteriorating for some marginalized groups.[9]

Except for the Eastern Mediterranean, the regions performing worst on health indicators (Africa and South-East Asia) are those urbanizing at the fastest rates. Moreover, these are the regions where large proportions of future urban population growth will take place in settlements of smaller population size. That is a marked trend in Africa, in particular. By 2030, it is predicted that fully 44% of the African urban population will live in settlements of fewer than 300,000. Consequently, achieving significant global progress in health and well-being will require concerted, proactive health-promoting interventions in smaller, rapidly growing urban places of Africa and Asia, in which significant new investments in infrastructure and services are needed. This progress will also require improvements and retrofitting within larger, more established cities. Moreover, **achieving global public health targets will require actions that dramatically improve health for residents of informal and slum-like settlements situated in poorer settings**.[10]

SUBNATIONAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health-related inequalities and risk amplifiers are expressed differently in urban and rural contexts. Overall, urban populations are often better off than rural populations in terms of social and health outcomes. Urban groups tend to enjoy greater access to social and health services and tend to have higher literacy rates and average life expectancy.[11] However, this is not a general truth, and such an assumption should not foster complacency in addressing urban health challenges. **Intra-urban inequalities in care and service coverage, and in access to key health-promoting services are significant and sometimes greater than urban-rural inequalities** — particularly in places experiencing high rates of urban growth.[12] In a number of countries, the poorest urban children — particularly those living in slum-like settlements in regions like sub-Saharan Africa — are worse off



than the poorest rural groups across a range of key measures and indicators.[13] Socioeconomic inequalities in local contexts are reflected in the conditions of marginalized communities and population segments, in aspects such as access (or lack thereof) to primary healthcare and key basic services such as water and sanitation, housing, food insecurity or clean air — the poorest urban dwellers often happen to live in areas with higher pollution indexes. Such specificities are often not accounted for in health policies, thus perpetuating the vulnerability of these groups. Therefore health-related inequalities have a spatial and a social dimension, both of which must be addressed in a context-specific manner to create more equal policies and interventions.

3.1.3 Health and well-being as a multidimensional phenomenon with multiple complex drivers and links to LRG actions

The health inequalities and inequities described in the previous section arise in part because drivers of health risks and outcomes are exacerbated by a range of other risks, inequalities and emergencies. These factors include but are not limited to:

- **climate change**
- **conflict, violence and injury**
- **poverty and income inequality**
- **education**
- **food insecurity**
- **demographic change**
- **the (in)accessibility of basic services and infrastructures**

Due to the complexity of their socio-spatial distributions and systemic interactions, health and well-being challenges are always context-specific and place-based. Living in certain, natural or built environments (including deprived neighborhoods or polluted parts of a city) decisively shifts health risk exposures and outcomes among populations and individuals. Moreover, social and environmental inequalities often translate into health inequalities at the local or regional levels.[14]

Health inequalities have a self-perpetuating, intersectional and compounding nature. Populations in vulnerable situations face heightened health risks, and, in turn, those exclusions exacerbate health inequalities. Promoting health equity is imperative so that local places and communities can avoid negative pathways of systemic change that undermine the foundations of good health and well-being. Doing so calls for not only effective overall strategic approaches to health but also targeted efforts to reduce disparities and improve the conditions that create them.[15]

BOX 3.1.1

Improving sanitation in Rio de Janeiro

The OECD case study on the "blue economy" in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) highlights the positive health impacts of improving sanitation. In Guanabara Bay, the socio-economic gains of pollution reduction through the universalization of sanitation systems have been estimated at 25.4 billion BRL from 2016 to 2046. These gains can be attributed to factors such as increasing tourism revenue, growth in real estate value, reductions in public health costs associated with waterborne diseases, and boosted incomes via improved health and productivity of the local workforce.

THE IMPERATIVE OF STRATEGIC ACTION ON THE DIVERSE DRIVERS OF HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

LRGs, the health sector and other institutions involved in governance face the key challenge of how to shift away from a biomedical framing of (ill)health and a narrow focus on health systems, services and care. Instead, we must promote a holistic, universal care agenda that grasps the broader range of socio-ecological factors that bear upon health and well-being (see Table 3.1.1), and, by extension, the full range of modalities through which LRGs contribute to achieving SDG 3. Integrated and holistic approaches to health prevention and promotion are now well accepted in policy and academic domains. They are articulated through ideas that underpin a socio-ecological model of health and through conceptual frameworks such as "one health" or "planetary health."

Table 3.1.1 Key differences between biomedical and socio-ecological models of health and well-being

	Biomedical model	Socio-ecological model
Focus	Biological and medical factors	Systemic and multi-level factors
Cause of illness	Biological and individual behavioral factors	Social, economic and environmental factors
Treatment approach	Medical interventions, including formal health systems and care	Prevention and health promotion
Responsibility	Medical professionals, governments (particularly health systems) and individuals	Society, governments, communities and individuals
Definition of health	Absence of disease	A state of health influenced by multiple factors

Source: authors

3.1.4 The varied modalities through which LRGs can and do contribute to advancing health and well-being

Delivering better health and well-being requires partnerships and interventions stretching across multiple sectors of government and domains of development. Many health-related drivers and service-delivery domains are vested in formal health sectors operated by national governments or in non-health sectors that are not typically operated by LRGs according to a health-promoting focus. Nevertheless, LRGs have a critical and leading role to play in achieving better health and well-being outcomes, driving the localization and realization of SDG 3, and meeting broader aspirations for sustainable development, at all scales. That is because LRGs are the level of government:

- **most concerned with frontline service delivery and planning;**
- **most responsive to localized and context-dependent development challenges and needs;**
- **often at the forefront of delivering care and health services;**
- **best positioned to enact non-health sector policies or interventions that impact health, which are generally implemented at the local (and therefore predominantly urban) scale; and**
- **with the greatest opportunities and responsibilities to address the diverse social, spatial and ecological determinants of health.**

LRG experiences (see Section 3.1.6) have demonstrated that many LRGs have moved beyond a narrow focus on biomedical problems and responses to recognize the broader socio-ecological and institutional factors that impact health and well-being outcomes. Securing that recognition and support, which is not always a given, requires a focus on strengthening the "means of implementation" by which LRGs can and do promote good health and well-being. Such a focus draws our attention to the basics of what must be done, by whom, when, how and with what resources. LRGs have led the way in showing that the provision of local services and the development of infrastructures (according to a HiAP approach) must involve, at minimum:

- sufficient competences, decision-making power and capacities to meet the health needs of their communities[16]
- integration across sectors, levels and domains of governance, including coordination within the institutions that hold authority over health promoting actions
- appropriate mechanisms to finance such interventions
- a forward-looking perspective
- an overarching strategic approach
- the consideration of geographical and environmental factors
- interventions that target specific places, population groups and/or health needs, acknowledging the social and spatial distributions of burdens of disease, which mean that health problems cannot be captured adequately through simplistic urban/rural or slum/non-slum framings

• accurate data and evidence on health and well-being determinants and outcomes at the local level — including the health impacts of diverse kinds of interventions

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF LRGs AND TYPICAL LRG COMPETENCIES

LRGs do not have uniform competencies, powers or functions. Rather, their functions, sectoral focus areas and mechanisms vary significantly across contexts with differing degrees of devolution. However, there are typical functions executed by LRGs (see Table 3.1.2) that impact the social and spatial determinants of health, and that can be aligned with the targets and goals of SDG 3.

Table 3.1.2 Breakdown of responsibilities across subnational levels: a general scheme

Municipal level	Intermediate level	Regional level
Broad responsibilities, such as: • General clause of competence • Additional allocations by law (potentially) Community services, such as: • 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, older people, people with disabilities, poverty, social benefits, etc.) • Primary and preventive healthcare • Recreation (sports) and culture • Public order and safety (municipal police, fire department) • Local economic development, tourism, trade fairs • Environment (green spaces) • Housing, including social housing • Administrative and permit services	Specialized and more limited responsibilities of supra-municipal interest Assistance for small municipalities Any specific responsibilities delegated by the regions and central government Responsibilities determined by functional level and geographic area, such as: • Secondary or specialized education • Supra-municipal social and youth welfare • Secondary hospitals • Waste collection and treatment • Secondary roads and public transport • Environment	Heterogeneous and varying responsibilities depending on the country (in particular, federal vs unitary) Services of regional interest, such as: • 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 for special groups) • 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)

Source: OECD and UCLG, 2022 Synthesis Report World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment *(Paris, 2022),* https://doi.org/10.1787/b80a8cdb-en.

Simply knowing what LRGs have the *potential* to do in service of health and well-being is not sufficient because different resources are allocated to their various governmental functions. These resources may be provided from an LRG's own revenue or via transfers from other spheres of government.

Given the complex landscape of LRG functions and funding, there is no single prescription for what LRGs can or should do to advance health and well-being. Specific contexts of LRG governance must be properly understood for other health-related actors to partner with them, identify synergies and intervene effectively. Precisely because of this contextual variation, effective health interventions rest, in part, on building expertise in utilizing LRG capacities.

Understanding — and finding ways to intervene within — the complex and context-specific ways in which local and regional governance interfaces with health will always be challenging. As a starting point, and at a general level, we can reason that:

- Effectively addressing **infectious diseases** involves the LRG competencies of water and sanitation, housing, and the management of green spaces.
- Preventing and responding to **noncommunicable-disease** burdens calls for LRG interventions in areas like sports, parks and recreation (to promote physical activity), planning and transportation (to reduce private transport dependence), and environmental management (to lessen air pollution).
- LRGs alleviate **social-environmental** health problems by implementing policies that promote sustainable-land-use planning, improve access to clean water and sanitation, invest in green infrastructure, educate communities about environmental risks, and actively engage residents in planning and decision-making processes to address local concerns.
- Delivering better **perinatal and reproductive health** outcomes calls for LRG actions in areas such as family planning and education.

However, to give a more detailed picture, it is possible to map the linkages between LRG actions that address health (either directly or indirectly, via other SDGs) and the specific targets of SDG 3. This enables us to highlight opportunities to strengthen the means of implementation for LRGs to act in the health domain. A non-exhaustive example of such a mapping is presented in Table 3.1.3.

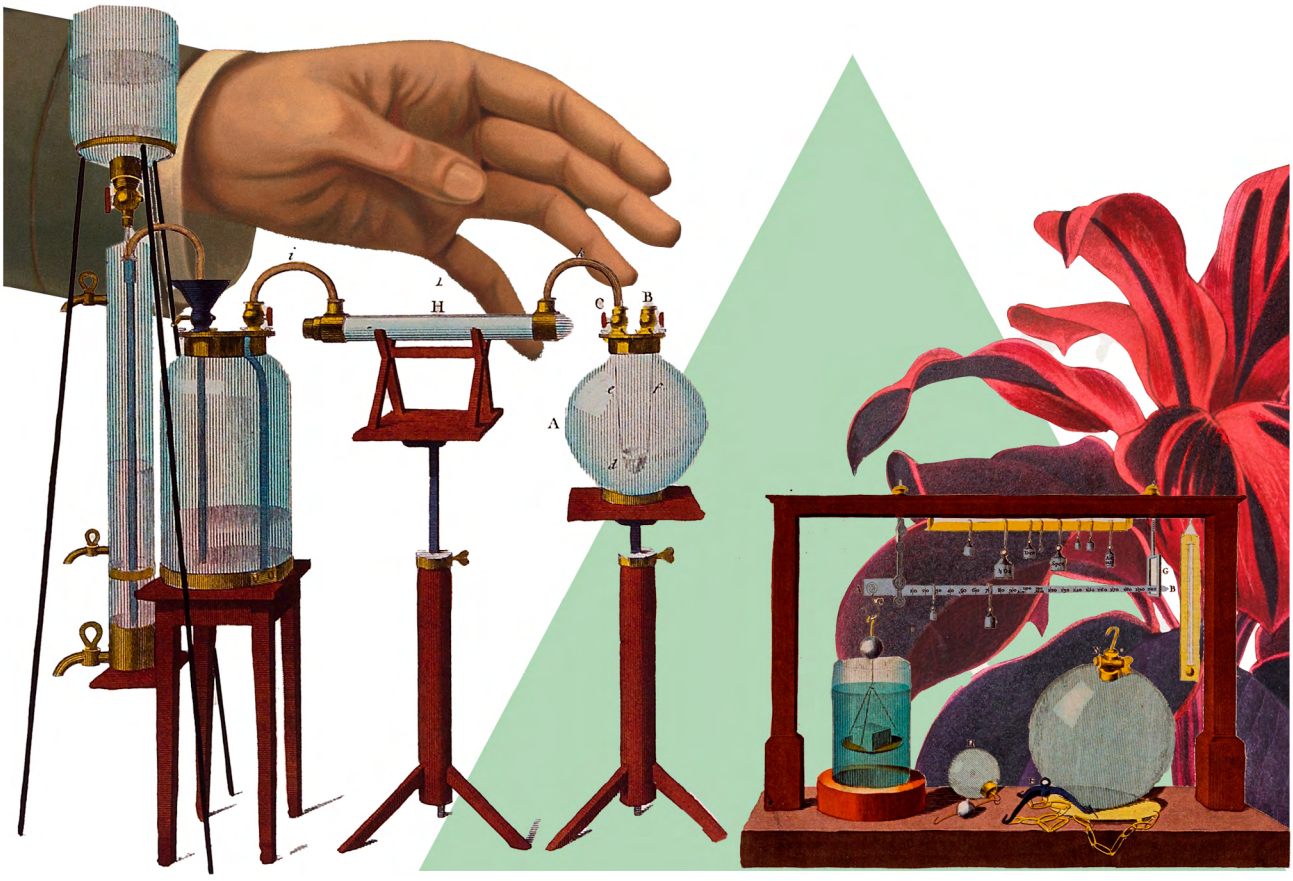


Table 3.1.2 Breakdown of responsibilities across subnational levels: A general scheme

SDG 3 targets	Typical LRG competencies	Related SDGs
3.1 Maternal mortality	Primary healthcare Electricity/energy	SDG 1 (poverty) SDG 2 (food and nutrition) SDG 5 (gender equality) SDG 7 (energy) SDG 10 (reduced inequalities)
3.2 Neonatal and child mortality	Primary healthcare Environmental health Electricity/energy	SDG 1 (poverty) SDG 2 (food and nutrition) SDG 4 (quality education) SDG 5 (gender equality) SDG 7 (energy)
3.3 Infectious diseases	Water Sanitation Housing	SDG 2 (food and nutrition) SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production)
3.4 Noncommunicable diseases	Parks and recreation Urban planning and development Transport Energy	SDG 2 (food and nutrition) SDG 7 (energy) SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities)
3.5 Substance abuse	Safety and security	SDG 1 (poverty) SDG 4 (quality education) SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions)
3.6 Road traffic accidents	Urban planning and development Safety and security Transport and road infrastructure	SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities)
3.7 Sexual and reproductive health		SDG 4 (quality education) SDG 5 (gender equality)
3.8 Universal health coverage	Primary healthcare Vaccine provision	SDG 1 (poverty) SDG 10 (reduced inequalities)
3.9 Environmental health	Environmental management Waste management Sanitation Parks and recreation Energy	SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) SDG 7 (energy) SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) SDG 13 (climate action) SDG 14 (life below water) SDG 15 (life on land)

Source: authors

To address SDG target 3.1 on maternal mortality, LRG actions on energy poverty can help to reduce mortality by boosting the availability of food, medicines and vaccines, clean water (by powering water pumps, for example) and public information on health care and services. A reliable electricity supply powers essential, modern medical equipment and can aid care during nighttime.[17] It also provides medical staff with more comfortable living environments and may aid the retention of health workers. Moreover, local leaders and their networks are usually at the forefront of progress towards universal health coverage (target 3.8) and are uniquely positioned to transform universal and inclusive health coverage and promote health in our territories through a health-first approach. LRGs' proximity to

communities enables them to design and implement inclusive, people-centered health policies and address health holistically within their territories. Through an understanding of health as a local public good, the GTF and its partners commit to engaging in international advocacy and liaising with the World Health Organization to call for expanding primary health, increasing access to health services and reducing out-of-pocket payments. The GTF and its partners also call for support from national governments and international agencies in prioritizing measures that address gaps and inequities in service availability and barriers to access.[18]

This understanding of health as a public good and a human right requires enabling local and regional governments to co-create and implement health strategies, both with national governments and through inclusive international frameworks, while also enabling local communities to shape healthcare services and ensuring that cities are designed with a health-first approach (safe housing, accessible transportation and green public spaces).

It would neither be appropriate nor within the scope of this paper to be prescriptive about precisely what LRGs should do differently or more effectively in the complex domain of health and well-being. However, as a starting point, knowing what other LRGs are doing provides the knowledge platform on which peer-to-peer learning depends, and from which national and global patterns of progress and constraint can be gauged. It is to these LRG experiences and lessons that we now turn.

3.1.5 What are LRGs doing to improve health and well-being?

LRGs are advancing the localization of SDG 3 and the achievement of global health agendas through efforts in a wide range of domains. This section first presents examples of LRG actions and interventions that directly aim to address the targets of SDG 3. It then highlights how LRGs contribute to health outcomes indirectly through actions within non-health sectors (the conventional domains of LRGs), focusing on key competencies such as water, transport and solid-waste management. In doing so, the section highlights how actions in these non-health sectors — while primarily addressing priorities beyond those of SDG 3 — can advance (or, in their absence, delay) progress on SDG 3 targets. Lastly, we present several cases of LRG activities that utilize different, yet interconnecting, mechanisms of implementation, namely those of data and evidence, innovation, partnerships and resources. This section mainly draws on LRG responses to the annual GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey.

LRG ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE SDG 3 TARGETS

Across the world, LRGs are leading efforts to achieve SDG 3 via actions within the formal health sector. Examples of initiatives to improve access to primary-healthcare infrastructure and services (in line with SDG target 3.8) include **municipalities in Bolivia**, which have coordinated with the national government to improve key infrastructures and resources, including via the use of telemedicine and the rollout of mobile health units. In Ecuador, the **Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas** provincial government has sought to improve access to medical care among vulnerable income groups; likewise, the provincial government of **Manabí** has mobilized "health brigades" to improve access to primary care for its most vulnerable and displaced areas and populations.

In Colombia, **Bogotá** has improved access to health services for homeless populations. Meanwhile, in Indonesia the districts of **Kapuas** have constructed local hospitals and rehabilitated other care facilities. In Palestine, **Tulkarm** has sought to provide medical equipment and devices to the government hos-

pital. In Romania, **Tulcea** has initiated a project to oversee the construction of a nursing home and an assistance center for people with mobility impairments. In China, **Xi'an** has focused on expanding and reallocating healthcare facilities and improving transportation options to ensure residents enjoy better access to essential services.[19]

BOX 3.1.2

Digital transformations among LRGs in South-East Europe

Delchevo, in North Macedonia, has implemented a pilot project addressing "innovative, remote, digital elderly care," providing a proven model for other LRGs. By using simple, user-friendly devices to monitor vital health data, the system enables remote decision-making on medical diagnoses and aids the identification of appropriate interventions or therapies, thereby reducing the need for physical visits to health facilities and professionals. This human-centered solution prioritizes the well-being of citizens and demonstrates the transformative power of digital innovation in local governance. Moreover, the project provides a bridge between urban and rural areas and improves access to primary health care among vulnerable populations.

This project has been supported by the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns and the Centre for Public Administration Research or KDZ under the program Building Administrative Capacity in the Danube Region and Western Balkans, with funding from the Austrian Development Agency. Implementation support has been provided by the Regional Quality Management Centre of the Regional School for Public Administration and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe.

To improve outcomes related to maternal health, **Freetown** in Sierra Leone has supported the upgrading of the Greybush Public Health Unit, doubling delivery-room capacity and adding a new postnatal ward. The initiative, part of the city's Transform Freetown Agenda, was delivered in partnership with Catholic Relief Services, the District Health Management Team and the European Union, and it included key infrastructure upgrades to enhance service quality. Another example of LRG efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality (SDG targets 3.1 and 3.2) is provided by **Viana do Castelo**, Portugal, which promotes aquatic classes as part of a course that prepares expectant parents for childbirth and parenting.

To boost support to the health sector (SDG target 3.3), **Saint-Louis** in Senegal has actively increased the health budget and enhanced local health plans. In England, the **Local Government Association** has benefited from the 2013 transfer of public health functions from the UK's National Health Service to LRGs. This policy reform was a catalyst for LRG involvement in public health. It resulted in new local powers and released funds for creating and enforcing public health policies, providing or commissioning services, and communicating health information to communities.

Portugal has seen the implementation of a range of initiatives that reflect a holistic, multi-sectoral approach to the localization of SDG 3. **Baião** has a dedicated equestrian center that offers and promotes hippotherapy for children with autism. Hippotherapy is a horse-assisted therapeutic and education method that utilizes the natural movements of horses to promote psychological well-being and motor development (SDG targets 3.8 and 10.2). **Sabugal** has sought to improve access to healthcare and medicines for older adult populations by sending doctors to visit church parishes — a key intervention given the municipality's low population density and ageing population. **Seixal** is an example of a participating member of the WHO European Healthy Cities network that has actively localized the Healthy Cities agenda and supported other local authorities as a founding member of the Portuguese Network of Healthy Municipalities. It followed a co-creation methodology in developing its municipal health development plan for 2024–30, aided by the establishment of a transversal and multi-stakeholder health advisory council.

Internationally, **many LRGs have implemented socio-ecological approaches to health and well-being that extend beyond the health sector, undertaking or promoting interventions that support care, mental health, social well-being and physical activity for the prevention of noncommunicable diseases or NCDs** (SDG target 3.4). In Belgium, **Brussels**

and **Flanders** have introduced "caring neighborhoods" that enhance opportunities for social connections among community members. Meanwhile, **Kessel-Lo** has helped to disseminate information on local care and welfare providers as well as on supra-local and neighborhood initiatives that promote social and professional networking, exercise, and social inclusion and cohesion. The **Association of Municipalities of Bolivia** (AMB) operates various health prevention and promotion programs to boost awareness of health-related topics (such as disease prevention) and to encourage the uptake of healthier habits relating to nutrition, physical activity and mental health. In Luxembourg, the ***Syndicat des Villes et Communes Luxembourgeoises*** (SYVICOL) has invested in sports infrastructure and organizes events to support physical activity, while in Türkiye, **Sultanbeyli** offers free sports sessions for people of all ages.

BOX 3.1.3

Greater Amman as a healthy smoke-free city

Since 2018, **Greater Amman** in Jordan has partnered with Vital Strategies and Bloomberg Philanthropies to implement a healthy-city initiative for a smoke-free Amman, aimed at reducing smoking rates to improve public health. The program has combined strong tobacco-control policies, public awareness campaigns and smoking cessation services. Additionally, the municipality has designated smoke-free municipal buildings, parks and public spaces to ensure a healthier environment for all citizens. The initiative has contributed to broader efforts to reduce the burden of NCDs and aligns with the municipality's strategic plan for 2022–2026. The municipality has encouraged collaboration across different municipal departments; has engaged the Ministry of Health, civil society organizations and the private sector; and has successfully implemented compliance monitoring. Lessons learned include the importance of sustained law enforcement, public awareness and accessible services to facilitate the cessation of smoking habits.

Many of these socio-ecological approaches to health have relied on close collaboration between health and non-health sectors, and they demonstrate the interconnections between SDG 3 and multiple other SDGs. The following section goes on to provide specific examples of how non-health-sector actions and collaborations, rooted in typical LRG competencies, are helping to advance the global health agenda.

LRG HEALTH ACTIONS LINKING SDG 3, LRG COMPETENCIES AND OTHER SDGs

This section explores how LRGs implement health-related actions that align with SDG 3 by leveraging their competencies in areas such as water and sanitation, waste management, mobility, urban planning and social development, while also contributing to the achievement of other interconnected SDGs.

✱ Water and sanitation (SDGs 3, 6, 10, 11)

Many LRGs monitor water quality to ensure it meets regulations for the health and safety of their populations. To ensure compliance with legislation, **Lisbon** (Portugal) carefully and regularly monitors the quality of water in public spaces and municipally-owned or managed buildings as well as the quality of that used for irrigation or ornamental purposes. Similarly, in Nepal at least three municipalities in **Madhesh Province** have established small-scale water-quality testing laboratories to allow for regular testing to both raise awareness of the health risks posed by contaminated water (linked to the region's poor drainage infrastructure) and to improve water treatment. In Uruguay, **Intendencia de San José** has prioritized the reconstruction of pluvial drains — infrastructural systems to manage surface water and rainfall runoff — in urban and suburban areas of San José de Mayo.

For sanitation, in India the state government of **Tamil Nadu** has implemented the Urban Sanitation Support Programme, led by the Indian Institute for Human Settlements, to advance practices of sanitation management across urban LRGs. The approach has emphasized the critical roles of sanitation workers (including those involved in waste disposal and transportation) and has highlighted the often-overlooked contributions of women as sanitation providers.

✱ Solid-waste management (SDGs 3, 11, 12, 14)

The **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities** (APLA) has implemented an initiative to engage students in environmental clubs, school gardening projects, waste recycling efforts and community campaigns focused on environmental awareness. Activities have included tree planting, the installation of irrigation systems, cleaning initiatives and creative performances highlighting environmental responsibility. In Portugal, **Porto Santo** has pursued training activities for better waste management, alongside programs to reduce marine debris (via measures designed to improve monitoring), to promote cross-border cooperation and boost recycling of waterborne waste.

✱ Transport, mobility and road infrastructure (SDGs 3, 11)

LRGs have worked to develop transport infrastructures, including increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists through improved infrastructure (e.g. designated cycle lanes and street lighting). In Türkiye, **Niğde** has prioritized the development of healthy and modern transport infrastructures as part of the local government's 2025–2029 strategic plan. Efforts have encompassed the development of plans and projects aiming to improve transportation safety and reduce road traffic accidents (SDG target 3.6). In both **Quelimane** (Mozambique) and **Chipata** (Zambia) bicycles account for a significant share of the modal split of everyday passenger transport; Quelimane is the first city in the country to introduce bicycle taxis (*taxi-bicicletas*), thereby embedding physical activity within the urban mobility system.

Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) has planned for over 800 km of pedestrian routes and cycling lanes, while **Yaoundé** (Cameroon) is improving the quality of pedestrian routes across the city for improved safety. In Kenya, **Nairobi** allocated 20% of its 2018 road-construction budget to investment in walking- and cycling infrastructures. LRGs in Ghana and Senegal have made similar commitments to support safe, active travel. However, in some contexts, walking and cycling are likely a symptom of inadequate public transport facilities and inadequate land-use planning. Moreover, although physical activity and active transport may be important for preventing NCDs, high levels of air pollution in some places may reduce their protective benefits.

BOX 3.1.4

Buenos Aires' healthy mobility program

In Argentina, **Buenos Aires** has incorporated a healthy mobility program (the first of its kind in the country) into its sustainable mobility plan. The plan has put "people before cars" by encouraging active transport in the form of cycling and walking. Through public participation and awareness campaigns, the plan has contributed to a substantial reduction in car usage and an annual decrease of 5,600 tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

✱ Environmental management and urban green space (SDGs 3, 11)

In Portugal, **Lisbon** monitors air quality, maps priority areas for intervention, raises awareness around the need for individual and collective efforts to reduce air pollution, and implements measures to mitigate the negative effects of air and noise pollution. In South Korea, **Chungju** has been recognized by the WHO for efforts to promote climate resilience and urban health through ecological parks and carbon sinks that provide vital green spaces for physical activity and environmental protection. These initiatives, supported by educational programs and long-term budget planning, offer a replicable model for other cities seeking to address environmental health challenges.

✱ Social affairs and social development (SDGs 3, 6, 10, 11, 16)

In Colombia, **Bogotá** has made citizen well-being and health key priorities for the current administration, via the 2024–2027 district development plan entitled *Bogotá Camina Segura* (Bogotá Walks Safely). The fight against extreme forms of exclusion has been central, with targeted support (such as pay-per-day accommodations) for homeless citizens and those relying on temporary housing solutions. In Iran, **Maragheh** has promoted healthy community behaviors and outcomes by introducing municipal culture centers. These centers have been included within a local healthy and safe city plan that aims to prevent social harms (SDGs 3, 5, 16) and build safe public spaces (SDG target 11.7). Programs have targeted a range of age groups, including children and adolescents.

LRG MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR BETTER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

This section presents examples of good practice, encompassing four, interrelated dimensions of LRG action that go beyond individual projects or programs. These are the means of implementation that LRGs have already deployed, and will deploy in the future, to sustain the transformations needed to make progress on SDG 3. The four dimensions are: data and evidence, innovation, partnerships and resources.[20]

✱ Data and evidence for LRG action on health and well-being

Health data and information systems must be disaggregated to local scales (including city and intra-urban); interoperable between sectors; and geospatialized, enabling the mapping of health outcomes in relation to (built and natural) environmental features and governance interventions. Yet most health data and mapping exercises have remained biomedical in nature, primarily employing data captured within the health system rather than from other sectors that bear upon health and well-being (and which fall within LRG competencies), such as transportation, sanitation or housing.[21] As previously mentioned, these data usually remain at the national level, making it very difficult to reach the necessary disaggregation and granularity to make targeted interventions from a socio-spatial perspective.

In building interoperable and multi-scalar health monitoring and reporting systems, a key challenge is ensuring that systems of observation and communication are agile and responsive to emergent health problems and agendas. In Sierra Leone, **Freetown** offers an innovative example of a city government implementing a co-production approach (employing elements of citizen science) to build their knowledge base on local health and well-being (see Box 3.1.5).

BOX 3.1.5

Data development with communities in Freetown

Drawing on lessons learned from the 2014–16 outbreak of Ebola, Freetown City Council has established novel ways of working with communities in developing data and geographical mapping systems to support decision-making.

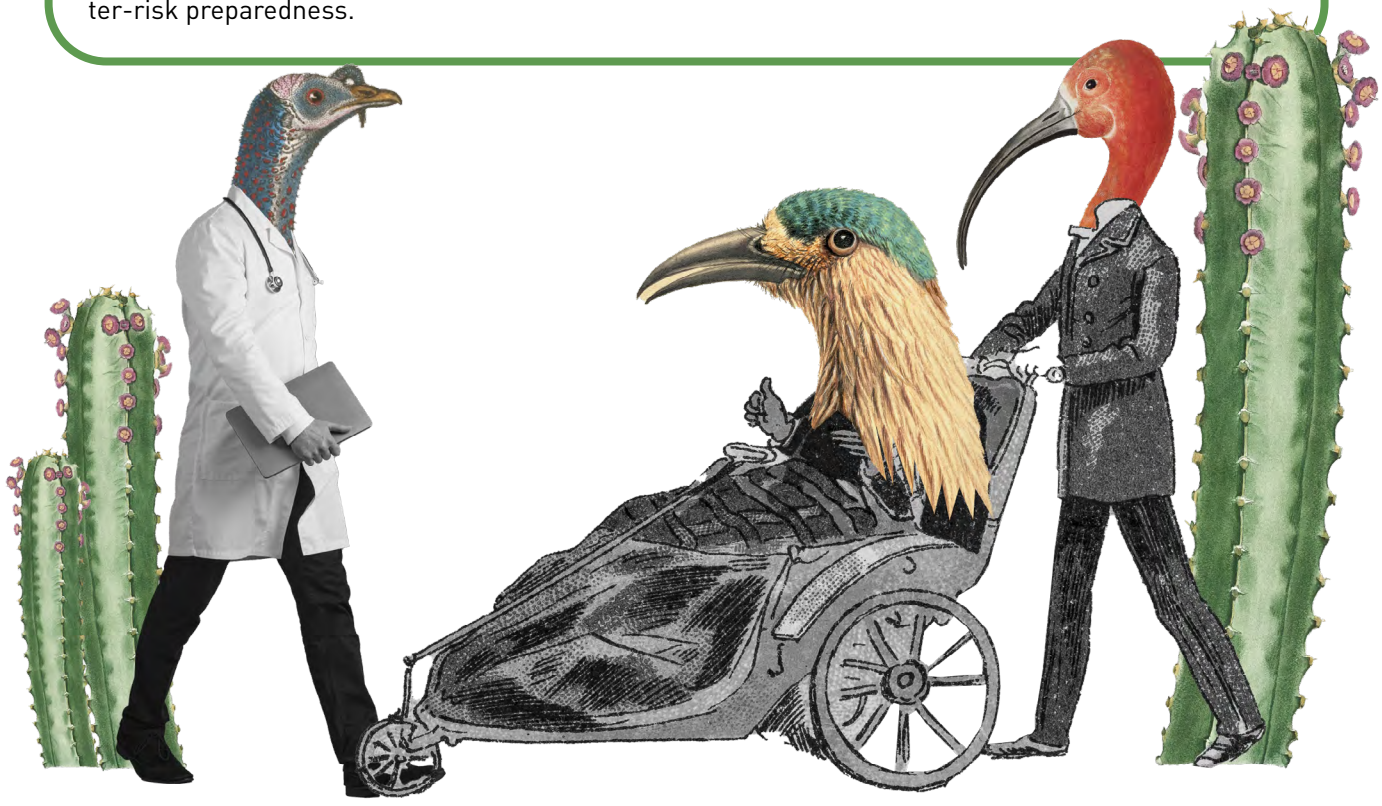
During the COVID-19 pandemic, local community organizations played a pivotal role in improving communication from the government to citizens (and vice versa) by developing, managing and disseminating official information and supporting contact-tracing efforts. These organizations also supported the Council in developing community settlement profiles that involved local mapping exercises, which were used to inform health response plans.

A trustful relationship was developed between elected councilors, community members and local traditional leaders. Communication mechanisms ranged from free, online messaging applications; advertising on billboards and posters; the use of local social media influencers; and door-to-door visits to keep the public informed about disease prevention, mitigation and other issues. Freetown now hosts effective systems of data collection and information dissemination that can be mobilized during future health emergencies and that enhance disaster-risk preparedness.

Freetown has built on these successes in preparing its climate action strategy for 2022–30. The strategy prioritizes disaster prevention, which includes developing risk- and hazard maps at the ward level. The Council is now developing city heat maps, having identified the various health problems exacerbated by extreme weather. These include diseases such as malaria, the health effects of air pollution and the health impacts of freshwater shortages.

Given a shortage of official data on heat levels, the Council mobilized residents to assist with data collection. Volunteers on motorbikes played an important role, using mobile thermometers to collect data on heat across the city. These data, and resulting maps, can be used to inform targeted interventions, such as tree planting (monitored through remote, tree canopy mapping), developing of green corridors, promoting passive cooling in buildings and improving shading in key public spaces, such as markets and pedestrian walkways.

Community perceptions on heat stress have played a role in informing local government decision-making, and the Council continues to engage citizens through public participation.



✱ Innovation for LRG action on health and well-being

As the level of government closest to communities and at the frontline of service provision, LRGs are well suited to innovate and develop their capacity to think, reflect and act strategically. In India, the **Karnataka** state government and **Bengaluru** municipal government show how multi-scalar governmental responses — and the initiation of new institutional mechanisms for strategic thought and action — are needed to address complex health problems that link a range of policies, regulations and stakeholders (see Box 3.1.6).

BOX 3.1.6

Karnataka and Bengaluru ban tobacco consumption in public areas

In line with the national Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act (which prohibits smoking of tobacco in public places), the state government of Karnataka issued a state-wide ban on the sale and consumption of tobacco and flavored hookah in all public places. Bengaluru, the state's capital, led the charge in implementing the ban.

As a member of the Partnership for Healthy Cities, Bengaluru has made significant strides towards becoming a smoke-free city by enforcing the national ban on public smoking through a mass media campaign and by assessing the level of compliance with no-smoking laws in public areas. Moreover, the municipal government launched a program to train police officers to better enforce the smoke-free laws and has encouraged citizens to report violations.

The municipal government of Bengaluru estimates that over 2,000 public establishments — like restaurants, bars and lodges — now have designated smoking zones. Furthermore, Bengaluru's focused efforts have reportedly demonstrated a nearly 27% reduction in public smoking. The city's efforts to address tobacco subsequently received an award from the Partnership for Healthy Cities.

While the city government still seeks to improve compliance, successes in implementation were achieved through: advocacy and public communication; collaborative efforts involving stakeholders at the local and state government levels; collaboration with the Smoke Free Bengaluru initiative; and support received from the Partnership for Healthy Cities.

While LRGs have led institutional innovations to better enforce national and state-level policies and regulations, they have also been at the forefront of developing innovative approaches to address health and well-being problems among specific target populations. In Colombia, **Bogotá** facilitated the alignment of different sectoral agendas to address the social inequalities that influence community health and well-being (see Box 3.1.7).

BOX 3.1.7

Bogotá's commitment to innovation to leave no one behind

Since launching its district development plan for 2024–2027, Bogotá has prioritized citizen well-being and health with a strong focus on vulnerable groups and on combatting severe forms of exclusion. Interventions have been designed to support people who are homeless or who rely on temporary housing solutions. That has involved developing a comprehensive strategy, based on needs assessment, to inform interventions. The city aims to improve access to health services, boost social assistance and devise mechanisms of inclusion to address long-standing inequalities.

Bogotá has also launched a program to support the nutrition of migrants and refugees, focusing on young children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers. The Nutritional Center for Migrant and Refugee Children was established in 2022 through a partnership between the District Secretary of Health and the District Secretary of Social Inclusion, with private-sector- and international support. Three main impacts were targeted:

- the prevention of, and treatment for, malnutrition among migrant and refugee children
- better access for migrant and refugee families to family-care services, including referral pathways
- enhanced access for migrant and refugee pregnant women (and nursing mothers) to maternal healthcare, and support in cases of harm.

By the end of 2023, the center had treated over 300 children, with over 20 children recovering from critical malnourishment. These advances reflect Bogotá's commitment to localizing SDG 3, improving access to health and promoting a more inclusive and resilient city for all its inhabitants.

✱ Partnerships for LRG action on health and well-being

Effective LRG responses to health and well-being challenges call for processes of capacity building that encompass a whole-of-society agenda surrounding participation. Aside from the importance of political leadership provided by "political champions," a different form of politics is also required — one which ensures that no one is left behind and that the right actors are connected and able to communicate with one another at the correct times.

That form of politics has called for the creation of multi-sector, multi-scalar and multi-interest platforms for participation, where the meaning of participation extends beyond the conventional sense of local community participation. In Portugal, the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP) offers a platform for such broad-based political participation (see Box 3.1.8).

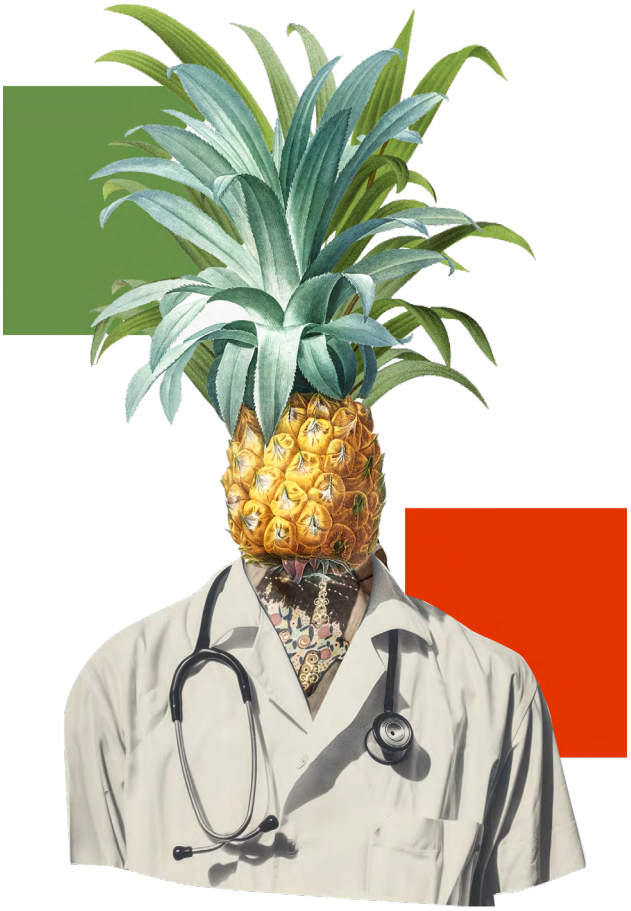
BOX 3.1.8

The National Association of Portuguese Municipalities' dialogues with the national government on the decentralization of health and social policies

The National Association of Portuguese Municipalities has provided a coordination mechanism working towards the localization and implementation of the SDGs across Portugal. The ANMP participates in key national bodies, including the National Council for Environment and Sustainable Development and the Committee for Monitoring and Assessing SDGs. ANMP participation in national dialogues affords opportunities to: keep LRGs informed of key decisions, allow for the monitoring of local action in line with national priorities, and represent municipalities within national processes and debates. Indeed, ANMP has entered into negotiations with the national government for the decentralization of various competencies — including those related to health (SDG 3) and social policies (SDG 10) — and has contributed to national-level dialogues by sharing stories of good local practice and by making these initiatives visible within wider public debates and processes.

Examples of partnerships for localized action on SDG 3 by LRGs across Portugal include **Mafra**, which, in collaboration with the Lisbon Psychiatric Hospital Center, has established *Mafra Espaço de Saúde Mental e Ocupacional* (MESMO), a specialized care unit focused on mental and occupational health. MESMO provides at-home assistance to boost adult access to specialized psychiatric services and to assist with the rehabilitation and social reintegration of people suffering from mental disorders. The municipality has also established a psychological support office to support the promotion of healthy psychological, emotional and social development of the population in the wake of COVID-19 (SDG target 3.4).

In Costa Rica (Box 3.1.9), innovation was born of a response to a critical challenge: the spread of COVID-19 within informal settlements. Recognizing the value of a coordinated response involving multiple scales and sectors of government, new types of planning and policy guidelines were formulated by a multi-stakeholder network that emphasized local community participation and co-responsibility to address the crisis. The importance of maintaining accurate and timely data and evidence on localized health and well-being challenges was reiterated. Moreover, the capacity to act nimbly and strategically when necessary called for, and was enabled by, the creation of new partnerships between LRGs and other actors within the broader governance system. This theme is explored in the following subsection.



BOX 3.1.9

Costa Rican municipalities' emergency management of COVID-19 in informal settlements

During the COVID-19 pandemic, local governments across Costa Rica could draw upon national guidelines for pandemic response within informal settlements. The guidelines enabled LRGs to develop and implement action plans in collaboration with communities, and to address complex local challenges, including insufficient access to official and updated information on disease prevention and mitigation; inadequate access to water services; overcrowded households and limited waste-management services; and deficiencies in sanitary facilities and infrastructures.

Four key elements underpinned the strategy for COVID-19 emergency management in informal settlements. First was the consolidation of a network involving several national ministries, including the ministry of health, local government associations, and other key bodies and institutions. This network was supported by universities, technical institutions, local municipal teams and community groups. Second was the development and implementation of an inter-institutional and multilevel plan of first response, which guided the development of local action plans. Third was the development of public policy guidelines through the preparation of a protocol for first response in informal settlements, including prevention, response and recovery procedures. The fourth element was the incorporation of local leadership and community participation by promoting the involvement and co-responsibility of civil society.

In cases of resource scarcity, local governments found they could prioritize actions based on available information while utilizing key networks to strategize effectively and seek ways to increase their capacity as required. Strengthening communication and coordination with community leaders was critical for supporting health emergency responses within informal settlements. Costa Rican local governments have come to realize that keeping geographic information and data systems up to date will provide an invaluable resource for informing future health emergencies.

✱ Resources for LRG action on health and well-being

In Ghana, **Accra** has indicated how LRGs can effectively secure and mobilize financial resources to support efforts to improve subnational health and well-being (see Box 3.1.10).

BOX 3.1.10

A more enabling fiscal environment for Accra to address air pollution and health

Accra has made significant strides in addressing air pollution as an underlying risk factor for health issues, including lower respiratory infections and ischemic heart disease. The challenge is urgent. In Ghana, air pollution is the second leading risk factor driving mortality and disability-adjusted life years across all age groups. Data from Ghana's Environment Protection Agency shows that Accra's average annual air pollution levels are about five times greater than the WHO's guideline for fine particulate matter.

In a relatively centralized governance context like Ghana, ensuring local government policies and actions align with those of the national government has been a critical challenge. Involving the Ministry of Finance in a national task team on climate pollutants — and providing clear national budget guidelines to LRGs — is one measure that has provided a more enabling fiscal environment for Accra to integrate health and climate-responsive initiatives into planning and implementation. When creating national enabling environments to address health challenges, LRGs must take a leading role in articulating their needs and designing appropriate reforms to institutional, legal, regulatory and fiscal systems.

From 2017 to 2019, Accra implemented the Urban Health and Short-lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Project with support from the national government, ICLEI, UN-Habitat and the WHO. Moreover, an air quality management plan was launched in 2018 in partnership with the national Environmental Protection Agency. This plan includes clear measures with accompanying indicators, timeframes, responsibilities and collaborations needed to comply with national ambient air quality standards.

In both **Accra** and **Dakar** (Senegal), funding support from international agencies has been essential for helping to introduce or upgrade monitoring capabilities for air pollution. Accra in particular has been successful in attracting international cooperation for a range of activities related to improving air quality management. This example emphasizes that LRGs must have appropriate technical capacities to budget, manage and spend funding strategically, transparently and in a timely fashion — and have access to support that enables them to do so.

Transparency and accountability in LRG spending may also be enhanced through participatory mechanisms, with multiple positive benefits for health. In Argentina, **Rosario** has implemented participatory budgeting to promote inclusion and focus government action on community needs, including those related to health. Participatory processes can improve health by: directly responding to immediate community health needs; promoting innovative partnership-based modes of working; encouraging resident empowerment and the collective ownership of interventions; and highlighting the spatial and socio-environmental determinants of health.

✱ Building the means of implementation for strategic LRG action on health and well-being

The examples presented in this section have at least two key implications. First, the targets and indicators of SDG 3 and other SDGs are important, but they do not necessarily cover the full range of actions that are required within integrated, holistic and strategic approaches to improving health and well-being.

Second, it follows that there are a range of entry points for thinking about how LRGs can and do influence health and well-being. These entry points may, at face value, have little to do with the formal health sector; they could be institutionally located within non-health domains like monitoring and evaluation, LRG leadership, financial management, institutional design or regulatory reform. Making decisive progress on improving health and well-being — and meeting the targets of SDG 3 — calls for determined action within this broader set of domains of LRG action.

3.1.6 Challenges, conclusions and recommendations

Local and regional governance, health, and sustainable development are interconnected in ways that fundamentally impact progress towards all SDGs, including SDG 3. If it was ever in doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed the central place of LRGs within overall systems of health and well-being.

While much remains to be done to achieve global targets on health and well-being, and to reduce stubborn health inequalities, this paper has shown that LRGs remain leaders in driving progress. That progress will depend not only on biomedical advances and improvements in health systems but also on initiatives that reach across sectors, levels of government and the diverse drivers of health. LRGs are the sphere of government best positioned to innovate and act on the social, spatial and environmental determinants of health within an integrated, holistic and multi-scalar approach. Consequently, enhancing LRG institutional capacities to deliver on health system functions and on health-impacting activities — like land-use planning, public transportation, water and sanitation, or energy provision — will be fundamental to making meaningful progress towards SDG 3.

The global regions where progress on SDG 3 is lagging to the greatest extent (particularly Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia) are also the regions where LRGs tend to have less capacity and fewer resources, where urbanization is proceeding rapidly and where localized inequalities are significant and expanding. While that reality presents immediate challenges, there are opportunities that arise from the fact that these regions still have major investments to make in settlement infrastructures and services. We can anticipate a health dividend from those investments. However, realizing that dividend means foregrounding the health-facing impacts of those investments and securing appropriate support to do so.

Looking ahead to 2030 and beyond, there are significant opportunities for strengthening LRG capacities in service of advancing health and well-being. Here we offer six key lessons and recommendations:

First, national governments and international organizations must **recognize LRGs as central to achieving SDG 3** and driving forward a broader development agenda around health and well-being through integrated and holistic strategies.

Second, LRGs across the world have already designed and pursued innovative, practical interventions relating to the key means of implementation for healthier places and communities. These include issues related to data and evidence, innovation, partnerships and resources. Support tools and processes (like the WHO's forthcoming Strategic Guide for Urban Health) can help identify areas of opportunity for LRGs and other key stakeholders to foster health and well-being. LRGs, national governments and international organizations must actively **engage with available support resources and processes and seek ways to incorporate their insights into plans and activities**.

Third, LRGs are often at the leading edge of delivering health-focused care and support services, and many basic service functions that LRGs perform are fundamental for creating healthier environments. National governments and international organizations must **acknowledge and support LRGs in their efforts to create healthy cities and territories by:** strengthening the core roles played by LRGs in the management of the key environmental drivers of health and well-being (including land-use planning, water and sanitation, transport, air pollution control and housing); supporting local health provision and access to primary healthcare; and supporting their capacities for strategic action.

Fourth, achieving SDG 3 and other health-related targets depends on local action and effective coordination between LRGs and other spheres of government. National governments and supranational organizations must act to **foster enabling institutional, regulatory and fiscal environments, and inclusive multilateral systems** that allow for active and consistent participation of LRGs as core decision-makers and innovators for health and well-being. This may be done by formally including LRGs in SDG strategies, adopting relevant legislation or regulations, developing appropriate procedural mechanisms, and so on.

Fifth, LRGs can and should learn from each other's activities. Spaces that are well-suited to facilitate such exchanges are networks such as UCLG and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, which encompasses all LRG networks, in partnership with international organizations like WHO as well as civil society organizations and research centers. These networks and institutions must take active steps towards **creating platforms that encourage the sharing, uptake and institutionalization of knowledge** that helps to build healthier and more sustainable places and communities.

Sixth, in writing this paper it has become clear how difficult it is to track progress towards better and more equitable health at the subnational level. National governments, LRGs and researchers must take active steps towards **building systems that allow for monitoring and reporting on the health impacts of local interventions, and towards developing appropriately disaggregated data systems**. This is a critical precondition for ensuring that health becomes a more visible and strategic aspect of core LRG activities and competencies.

3.2

Paper 2. The role of LRGs in advancing SDG 5: Feminist municipalism, care, equality and ending violence

3.2.1 Introduction

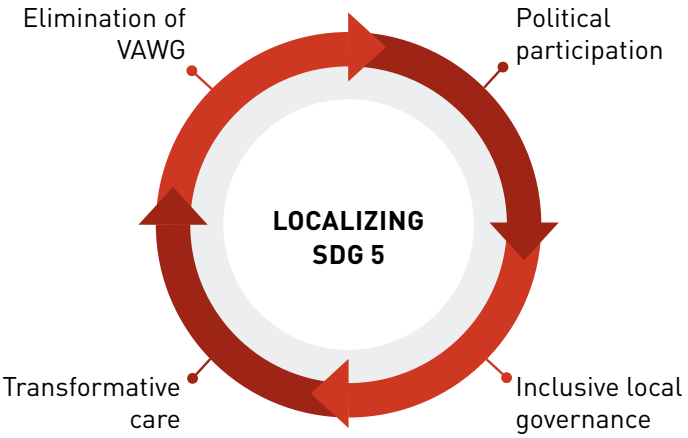
The implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) — Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls — is an essential global objective. However, success largely depends on actions taken at the local and regional levels of government. Since local and regional governments (LRGs) are the governance level closest to people's everyday lives, they are not just implementers. Instead, they are also active feminist actors, capable of redefining power structures and delivering transformative change. Their role is essential in shifting the center of gravity of gender-equality policies towards people, communities and care.

The Beijing Platform for Action, one of the most comprehensive global frameworks for gender equality, provides a blueprint that aligns closely with SDG 5, particularly through efforts in political participation, care work, economic empowerment and violence prevention. Moreover, gender equality cuts across many other SDGs, as a key axis of social, economic and environmental justice. LRGs actively contribute to achieving targets that explicitly or implicitly promote gender equality, such as:

- 3.7: Access to sexual and reproductive health-care services
- 4.5: Equal access to education
- 6.2: Access to sanitation and hygiene services
- 8.8: Safe and secure working conditions
- 11.2: Accessible, safe and affordable public transportation
- 11.7: Access to safe public spaces

This paper explores progress in SDG 5 localization, emphasizing trends, challenges and the key role of LRGs. It specifically analyzes four dimensions of achieving gender equality: women's political participation, the inclusive and participatory nature of local governance, the transformative role of care, and the elimination of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Graphic 3.2.1 SDG 5 localization dimensions

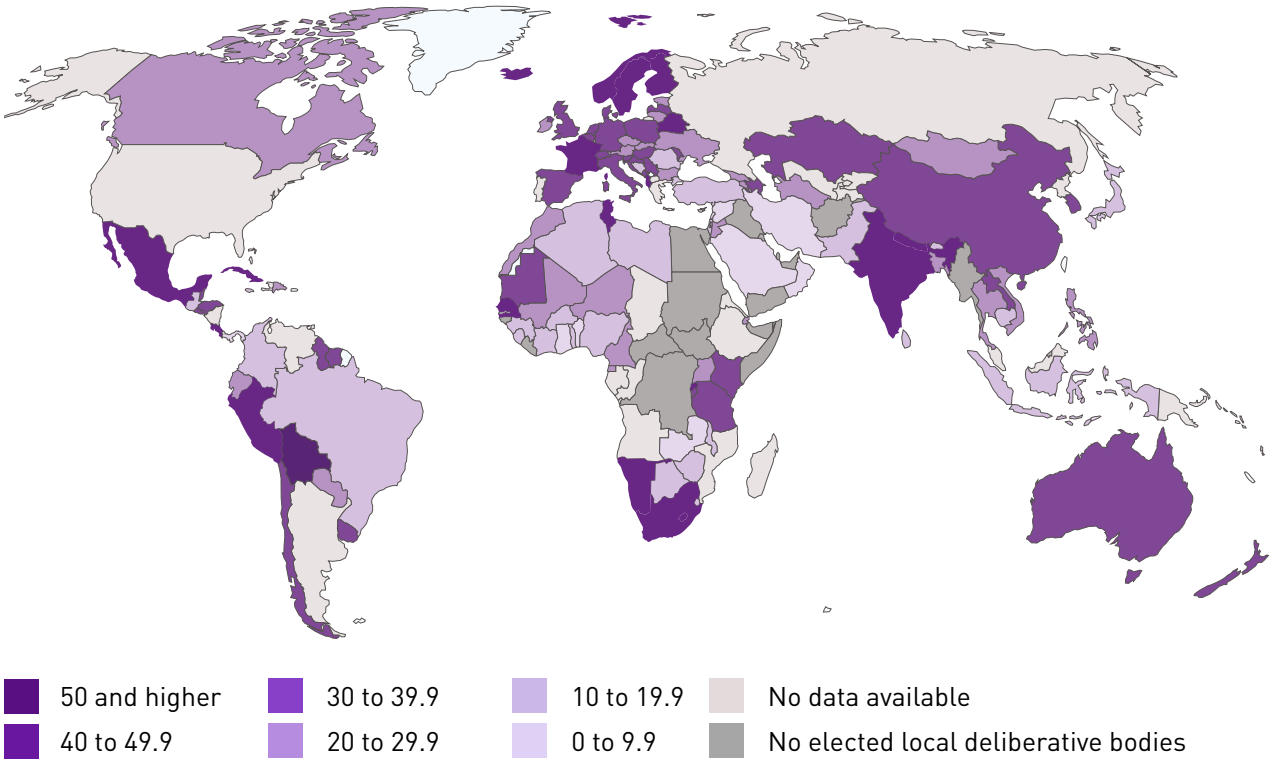


Source: authors

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

When compared to participation in national government, women's participation in LRGs (SDG 5.5) shows an encouraging trend. In 2024, women held 35.5% of seats in LRGs, significantly higher than the 27% in national parliaments. Although there is global variation (as low as 1% and as high as 67%), this suggests that **local governance structures offer a more accessible entry point for women in politics, which reflects a broader shift towards inclusive governance**. Various gender-equality initiatives advocate for intersectional local politics. They promote inclusivity that extends beyond the number of elected female officials and ensures that diverse groups of women — including young women, women with disabilities, and non-binary and transgender individuals — are represented in decision-making processes.

Map 3.2.1 Percentage of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (SDG indicator 5.5.1b)



Source: UN Women

Despite these positive trends, **political violence against women (SDG 5.2) remains a visible barrier**. Gender-based violence targeting women in politics (such as physical threats, online harassment and institutional discrimination) continues to undermine SDG5 progress. Addressing these challenges requires LRGs to strengthen legal protections, implement gender-sensitive policies and develop safe political environments that encourage women to participate in politics.

The Beijing Platform for Action underlines the necessity of women's full and equal participation in decision-making. LRGs play a fundamental role in institutionalizing gender parity by implementing quotas, gender-sensitive electoral policies, and capacity-building for candidates and elected officials. These measures align with the objective of advancing women in power- and decision-making structures, which ensures their sustained influence in governance. Beyond supporting women's participation, LRGs have the potential to act as bastions of democratic renewal and resistance to regressive, gender ideologies. Their ability to institutionalize feminist principles in governance can counteract national-level backsliding and patriarchal norms.

GENDER EQUALITY IN LOCAL POLICIES AND SERVICES

The institutionalization of gender equality is gaining traction at the local level, with many LRGs adopting gender-responsive policies and tools. These include:

- local women's offices that monitor gender policies and foster equality across different branches of governance
- gender-responsive budgeting (GRB), ensuring that local resources align with gender equality priorities
- urban planning that is centered on care services, to reduce and redistribute the load of women's care work
- integrating policies, public services and financing to address VAWG

However, one key challenge is still the dissemination and enforcement of these gender-sensitive strategies across all levels of governance. Many

LRGs continue to face difficulties in building a common understanding of SDG 5 and related targets among elected officials, and in challenging deep-rooted cultural norms and stereotypes about gender. **While gender equality policies exist on paper, translating them into concrete actions requires continuous advocacy, capacity-building and cultural transformation.**

The Beijing Platform for Action reinforces the importance of institutional mechanisms for gender equality and urges governments to integrate gender perspectives into all policy areas. An inclusive approach to local governance is illustrated through embedding gender equality in LRGs' political, economic and social initiatives, policies and strategies.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL CARE POLITICS

The role of care work and the care economy (SDG 5.4) is increasingly recognized as a foundational issue for local and regional governance. While some institutions, like UCLG, defend new, more comprehensive concepts of care — for example, as a guiding principle for more democratic, equitable, and resilient public policy — this report focuses on care as defined under SDG 5.4, which emphasizes care work and the care economy as sectors that play a key role in gender equality. Care work includes all activities that sustain people's physical, emotional and psychological well-being, and they include both paid and unpaid labor. Yet this essential labor has historically been undervalued, made invisible, and is disproportionately carried out by women and girls. Race, ethnicity, class, migration status, disability and age all intersect to shape how care work is distributed and valued. **A transformative approach to care sees it as a matter of service delivery, justice, redistribution and power; and the approach calls for structural changes across urban planning, labor policy, education and social protection systems, among others.**

Currently, LRGs are at the forefront of the design and implementation of transformative care policies that seek not only to better organize care services but also to leverage care as a leading concept in local and regional governance. These actions directly support the targets of the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly those related to women's economic empowerment, their political participation and the reduction of women's poverty. However, despite important progress, the care economy continues to be undervalued in many local contexts. To truly transform care, LRGs need stronger institutional recognition, financial investment and alignment with national and global strategies that center on care as a driver of equality and resilience.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSES

Women bear a disproportionate burden of climate change-related challenges, such as food insecurity, displacement and economic instability. Moreover, it is estimated that in the worst-case climate-change scenario, approximately 158 million women and girls may be pushed into poverty. In response, **LRGs are adopting gender-sensitive climate policies to ensure that women are not only protected but also empowered as key agents of change**. Supporting women as leaders in local climate action plans is one critical approach. Women, particularly those from grassroots movements, have extensive knowledge of sustainable practices and natural-resource management.

By ensuring their leadership in local decision-making, LRGs can create policies that reflect the lived realities of those most affected by climate change. Another essential strategy is to ensure women's participation in disaster-risk reduction and resource management. Capacity-building and training in climate resilience further strengthen women's abilities to adapt and lead in climate action. Training programs focused on sustainable agriculture, alternative livelihoods and green technologies equip women with the knowledge and tools needed to build climate-resilient communities. These initiatives also involve strengthening women's networks and cooperatives, in enabling them to access financial resources, advocate for policy changes and share best practices.

By recognizing women's roles in sustainability and resilience-building, these efforts strengthen SDG 5 localization and the Beijing Platform for Action.

TECHNOLOGY IN ADDRESSING GENDER EQUALITY

Technology (SDG 5.b) is an increasingly powerful tool for advancing gender equality at the local level. From improving access to care services to improving safety in public spaces, digital innovations offer opportunities to address structural inequalities. Mobile apps, such as SafetiPin, enable women to report unsafe areas and support LRGs in conducting safety audits (although not without risks). Digital systems help to more efficiently organize and monitor access to childcare, older-people care and health services. However, the digital divide — marked by digital-literacy gaps and unequal access to the Internet and devices — continues to exclude women, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.

Moreover, emerging technologies also present new risks for LRGs to address: discriminatory algorithms, data-privacy breaches and the erosion of local networks due to reduced face-to-face interaction. To address these gaps, **LRGs are investing in inclusive digital infrastructure, promoting feminist digital governance and implementing safeguards to ensure that technology empowers rather than excludes**. The challenge is not just adopting innovation but also shaping it around the principles of equality, care and community.

PARTICIPATION IN GLOBAL MOVEMENTS AND NETWORKS

LRGs are actively engaging in various global networks, each of which contribute to SDG 5 localization and the Beijing Platform for Action through different approaches and structures. These networks vary in scale, focus and composition, ranging from social movements to structured international platforms and philanthropic initiatives; they all foster knowledge exchange, mentorship and collective actions.

LRGs participate in initiatives driven by social movements and diverse stakeholders, often advocating for transformative, gender-sensitive policies. One important example is the Feminist Municipal Movement, facilitated by UCLG. This global movement brings together female and feminist mayors, governors and local leaders who seek to create a feminist approach to municipal, local and regional politics by addressing deep-rooted structural inequalities. These kinds of initiatives work toward the recognition of economic disparities, the reorganization of care services and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. They are proof that LRGs are not mere implementers of top-down agendas. Instead, they are trailblazers in the feminist transformation in governance. LRGs usually go beyond national mandates; they lead, innovate and push global agendas to recognize care and equality as cornerstones of resilient societies.

Beyond their roles in grassroots organizing, **LRGs are also key players in global platforms that bring together a diverse range of actors, like national governments, international organizations and research institutions**. These platforms tend to focus on specific areas of action through fostering collaboration and targeted interventions. For example, the Global Alliance for Care, which was recently established, is dedicated to addressing gender disparities in care work and the reorganization of the care economy. Twenty-nine LRGs participate in this initiative's mission to transform care policies and structures, ensuring equitable distribution of care responsibilities and adequate recognition of care work.

In addition to thematic global platforms, **LRGs also organize themselves into regional associations and networks to collectively advocate for gender-responsive policies and institutional reforms**. One example is the Cities for CEDAW initiative, which unites cities across the United States under a commitment to localize the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Through this network, LRGs adopt policies that align with the CEDAW framework to ensure that international gender-equality commitments are translated into actionable local strategies.

Another crucial space for LRG participation lies within philanthropic and multilateral initiatives. Here, **LRGs collaborate with international donors and private-sector actors to advance gender equality**. One prime example is Metropolis' Caring Cities initiative, led by **Johannesburg** (South Africa), which promotes inclusive, gender-sensitive urban policies. Another is the C40 Women4Climate Mentorship Programme, led by **Quezon City** (Philippines) and **Barcelona** (Spain). These initiatives provide cities with financial and technical support, enabling them to implement innovative gender-sensitive projects.

3.2.2 Women's political participation and SDG 5 localization

Localizing SDG 5 and achieving gender equality require a new type of leadership and a fundamental shift in governance structures. LRGs play a crucial role by promoting women's political participation and ensuring that governance reflects diverse perspectives. Women and LGBTQIA+ individuals often bring forward the voices of historically marginalized communities and contribute innovative solutions to policy challenges due to their active involvement in grassroots organizations, human rights movements or environmental activism. Greater representation of women in decision-making processes strengthens governance, improves policy outcomes and fosters a more inclusive society.

As stated before, women held 35.5% of the seats in elected, local deliberative bodies across 145 countries in 2024 — a small increase from 33.9% in 2020. However, significant challenges remain. In 2024, only three countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia and Iceland) reached full gender parity in LRGs. Meanwhile, in 12 countries severe underrepresentation remained; women held less than 10% of seats. Political violence against women and deeply embedded cultural norms continue to restrict women's participation in LRGs. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach: capacity-building for women leaders, engaging youth in governance, combating violence against women and promoting cultural norms that support gender equality.

It is crucial to recognize that many parts of the world are experiencing a backlash against women's rights, as evidenced by the rise of conservative movements that reinforce negative stereotypes of women in politics. In some cases, **LRGs serve as spaces of resistance against these regressive tendencies**. For example, the percentage of women in various levels of local government does not exceed 30% in Poland. Women occupy less than 10% of executive positions, such as mayor, village head and city president. In response to this underrepresentation, the project Girls to Politics collaborated with LRGs to train 418 women and girls to run for office. In 2024, 77 participants were successfully elected to positions in LRGs, including the president of the city of Gdynia. Additionally, a media campaign on women's political participation reached 9 million people, helping to raise awareness and challenge existing biases about women in leadership.

THE FEMINIST MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR CHANGE

The Feminist Municipal Movement seeks to create governance structures that prioritize gender equality in decision-making and institutionalize feminist principles within LRGs. Rather than focusing solely on increasing women's participation in politics, the movement emphasizes systemic transformation by promoting participatory, inclusive and transparent governance.

A key milestone in this movement was the creation of the UCLG Committee on Gender Equality in 2005, which was established to advocate for women's participation in local government and ensure the creation of gender-sensitive urban policies. Under the leadership of the mayor of **Paris**, the UCLG Committee on Gender Equality was transformed into the UCLG Standing Committee on Gender Equality in 2013. The mayor then led the organization to participate in UN Women's Generation Equality in 2021. As the COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep vulnerabilities and setbacks for women around the world, a coalition of local leaders from cities such as **Barcelona**, **Bogotá**, **Paris**, **Banjul**, and **Freetown** came together to affirm that the municipal movement is a feminist movement, united by a shared vision of equality, social justice and democracy. This marked a shift from simple inclusion toward deeper structural transformation.

The 2019 UCLG World Congress in Durban highlighted key feminist and municipalist principles focusing on intersectionality, care policies and collective leadership. The UCLG Pact for the Future adopted at the 2022 World Congress places care, sustainability and democracy at the heart of local governance, incorporating a feminist perspective into the vision for the future. Today, feminist municipalism remains a core strategy in UCLG's work, influencing policies on the care economy, intersectional justice and participatory governance. At key global milestones, feminist municipalism also centers the equality agenda on sustainability, financing for development and more.

The pillars of the Feminist Municipal Movement are:

- Institutional frameworks. LRGs are increasingly adopting feminist municipal principles to ensure gender equality in decision-making. This includes institutional frameworks that prioritize the political participation of women with an intersectional approach, recognizing diversity in gender, ethnicity, ability and sexual identity.

- Impactful female leaders. With the support of training and capacity-building, female leaders are driving transformative change by implementing inclusive policies and fostering greater political participation.

- Innovative agendas. The feminist municipal movement promotes innovative agendas, such as gender-responsive budgeting, participatory governance, and policies addressing care services and VAWG. These agendas align local actions with SDG 5 and the Beijing Platform for Action.

This is not a symbolic agenda — it is a political and structural shift that calls for redistribution of resources, power, and recognition, working toward a cultural shift by collaborating with boys and men, and it places life and sustainability at the center of public decision-making.

The priorities for the future that are included in this Call to Action are built upon long-term funding and support for the autonomy of LRGs so they can implement gender equality; support and empower grassroots initiatives; include feminist perspectives in budgeting, urban planning and social, public policies; and practice a form of intersectional, local and regional governance that includes marginalized groups.

ACHIEVING GENDER BALANCE IN DECISION-MAKING

One of the most effective ways to accelerate women's political participation in local governance is through policies and initiatives that ensure gender balance in decision-making. **Cuenca** (Spain) has implemented the Equal Opportunities Plan for Men and Women. This initiative integrates gender equality into public policies and includes specific actions aimed at reducing inequality and discrimination. The plan also provides training workshops and courses on gender equality, which equip public officials with the knowledge and tools needed to foster inclusive governance. Similarly, the **Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic** (SMOCR) has developed training sessions to help municipalities incorporate gender-sensitive perspectives into decision-making. These sessions include gender analysis workshops and promote adherence to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life to ensure that gender considerations are mainstreamed in local policies. **Quota systems have been implemented by various LRGs to guarantee a minimum level of female representation in LRG structures.** When these policies are implemented correctly and are monitored, they provide opportunities for women to enter politics and influence decision-making at all levels. For example, the states of **Andhra Pradesh** and **Kerala** (India) have increased the level of women's reservation to 50% from the mandatory 33.3% as per the national law.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS

Supporting women who decide to enter politics and ensuring they receive ongoing support after they are elected is crucial for long-term progress in SDG 5 localization. **Capacity-building programs and mentorship initiatives help prepare women for leadership roles and support them in navigating political challenges.** The **Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities** (RALGA) runs a capacity-building program that provides paid internships for women in local government. These types of programs offer women practical experience and create pathways for more of them to pursue careers in public service. Similarly, **Kumasi** (Ghana) and **Dortmund** (Germany) have partnered to establish a comprehensive support system for female representatives in local government. This initiative includes media campaigns that promote women's political participation, leadership training workshops and the organization of women's assemblies to strengthen female representatives' relationships with their local communities.

ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONALITY IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women from marginalized backgrounds face additional barriers when trying to enter and succeed in politics. **Intersectional approaches to gender equality recognize that factors such as race, disability and sexual identity can impact political access and participation.** The local government in **Arusha** (Tanzania) has developed a platform specifically for women with disabilities. This initiative provides training in political participation at the local level and has helped create over 40 groups of women entrepreneurs with disabilities. These groups have developed a database that facilitates access to government loans, which ensures that women with disabilities can engage more fully in both economic and political life.

COMBATING POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Political violence against women remains one of the most significant barriers to gender equality in governance. Women politicians frequently experience harassment, intimidation and threats of physical violence, which discourage them from participating in political life. Addressing this issue requires a combination of legal reforms, monitoring mechanisms and support systems to ensure that women can engage in politics without fear. **Efforts to combat political violence against women include the development of laws that criminalize harassment and gender-based political violence, the establishment of reporting mechanisms and the creation of safe spaces for women to seek support.** The City for All project in **Haifa** (Israel) is aimed at promoting gender equality in Israel's largest mixed city. One key way the project combats political violence is through Haifa's first Gender Equality Committee, led by female council members. This committee not only oversees the implementation of the Gender Equality Vision and Action Plan but also serves as a mechanism to advocate for women's rights and protections in political spaces. By prioritizing gender equality in governance, the project works to dismantle structural barriers that contribute to harassment, intimidation and exclusion of women from politics.

ENGAGING YOUTH AND CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS

Long-term change requires engaging young people in political processes and educating boys and men on gender equality. Youth-led initiatives help shape the future of political participation and ensure that future generations value diverse leadership in governance. **By creating opportunities for young people, LRGs play a critical role in fostering inclusive political cultures and challenging traditional gender norms.** In **Matão** (Brazil), the Youth Parliament serves as a platform for young people to actively participate in governance. Each year, young people are elected to propose improvements to their city, advocate for their rights and learn about civic responsibility. This initiative focuses on early political engagement and promotes gender equality by ensuring that both girls and boys have a voice in decision-making. In **Opatija** (Croatia), the Children's City Council provides an educational space where children can express their needs and concerns while learning about democratic governance. The initiative places a strong emphasis on childcare policies and works to adjust local care services to ensure equitable distribution, which reinforces the role of LRGs in promoting gender-sensitive governance. In **Sotouboua** (Togo), a municipal program also actively involves children in local decision-making processes: regular meetings with the mayor and public officials, advocacy training sessions and public budgeting workshops. These capacity-building efforts not only empower children but also educate municipal employees on children's rights, which ensures that youth perspectives are incorporated into governance structures.

CHANGING CULTURAL NORMS THROUGH MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Media campaigns and community-driven initiatives are instrumental in challenging gender stereotypes and reshaping societal perceptions of women in leadership. **By highlighting women as effective political leaders and advocating for inclusive governance, LRGs are fostering long-term cultural change.** These campaigns engage men, boys and traditional leaders, therefore expanding support for women in politics and reinforcing their visibility in decision-making spaces. In Palestine, the **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities** (APLA) launched a campaign to raise awareness surrounding gender issues in LRGs. The campaign focused on increasing the inclusion of marginalized groups in governance and normalizing the presence of gender perspectives throughout municipal decision-making. Through public media, workshops and direct engagement with policymakers, the communications campaign actively contributed to a shift in perceptions of women in political life, ensuring they are seen as important actors in local governance rather than just peripheral participants. In Namibia, the GenderLinks project took a similar approach to increasing women's representation in the participating LRGs, such as **Arandis**, **Keetmanshoop** and **Outjo**.

A key element of this initiative was a nationwide media campaign that promoted women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. By showcasing success stories of women in local politics and disseminating information on gender-responsive policies, the campaign encouraged more women to enter electoral politics and also shifted public attitudes toward gender equality in governance. In **Medellín** (Colombia), feminist organizations have effectively used media campaigns to advocate for gender equality in politics. The *Estamos Listas* (We are ready) movement, which was founded in 2016, launched a series of media strategies to increase women's representation in local government. Through digital activism, public debates and social media outreach, the campaign mobilized voters and challenged traditional perceptions of political leadership. The movement's success was evident in the 2019 municipal elections; they secured a seat in Medellín's city council, which marked a historic achievement for feminist political participation.

By adopting such strategies, LRGs introduce gender equality into governance structures and public discourse. Media campaigns create visibility for women in politics and generate momentum for cultural transformation. All of the above makes gender-inclusive leadership a recognized and celebrated norm in society.

WOMEN, LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Women play a critical role in climate action at the local level. **Many women-led initiatives focus on sustainable urban planning, food security and transportation; they integrate gender-sensitive perspectives into climate-adaptation strategies.** LRGs support and recognize the importance of women's leadership in climate resilience efforts. In Kenya, the **Mandera** Municipality Afforestation Program is a transformative initiative that addresses climate resilience and socio-economic challenges. At its core, the program empowers women and youth, who make up a significant portion of the program. The 1,300 participants in the program receive monthly stipends for their active role in tree planting, maintenance and water management. By combining systematic afforestation with critical water infrastructure — such as underground- and elevated storage tanks that are replenished by water bowsers — the initiative ensures sustainable tree growth in a water-scarce environment. Beyond environmental benefits, the program tackles poverty and unemployment by providing stable income opportunities, particularly for women. This strengthens household stability and community resilience. The Water Harvesting program in **Mexico City** aims to improve water access in economically challenged and water-scarce areas by equipping households with rainwater harvesting systems. By October 2023, a total of 62,700 systems had been implemented, making Mexico City a global leader in rainwater harvesting infrastructure. Notably, 65% of beneficiaries are women, which highlights the program's gender-sensitive approach. Evaluations show that the program decreases time spent on securing water. This not only mitigates the burden of water collection — particularly for women, who often bear this responsibility — but also enhances household resilience and sustainability in the face of water scarcity.

3.2.3 Inclusive and participatory local governance

A critical strategy in gender-equality localization in LRGs is the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and governance arrangements, such as urban planning and gender-responsive budgeting. These tools address the specific needs of women and girls and promote their direct participation in governance processes. By incorporating a gender perspective into planning, budgeting and overall governance, LRGs create inclusive policies that redistribute resources equitably and enhance women's agency in shaping their communities.

Gender-responsive budgeting ensures that financial planning and resource allocation reflect gender considerations at every stage of the budgetary process (Box 3.2.1). Rather than creating separate budgets for women, this system evaluates how public expenditures impact different gender groups to ensure that financial resources are directed toward closing gender gaps. This approach strengthens participatory governance by requiring the involvement of women's organizations, civil society and marginalized communities in identifying priority areas for investment. To make financial planning a key mechanism for social transformation, the regional government of **Andalusia** (Spain) has developed a participatory methodology to assess budget programs and identify those with the highest potential for driving gender equality. Reflecting a growing institutional commitment to gender equity, the share of the gender budget in **Kerala** (India) has significantly increased, from 11.5% in 2017–18 to 20.9% in 2022–23. The government has focused on: integrating unpaid care work into the gender-responsive budgeting framework, strengthening institutional mechanisms and developing gender-disaggregated data to guide policy decisions.

BOX 3.2.1

Key steps for implementing gender-responsive Budgeting, based on UNFPA's Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice: a Training Manual

Framework development

- Establish a political commitment to localizing SDG 5 in the form of gender-responsive local budgeting.
- Create a framework or policy that outlines the goals and objectives of implementing GRB.

Data collection and analysis

- Collect gender-disaggregated data to understand how women and girls are affected by budget allocations.
- Analyze existing budgets to identify gender disparities and assess the impact of spending on gender equality.

Capacity-building and stakeholder engagement

- Train government officials, finance teams and relevant stakeholders on GRB principles and methodologies.
- Engage with elected officials, community groups, women's rights initiatives and civil society organizations to gather diverse perspectives and insights.

Budget planning and integration

- Integrate gender analysis into the budget planning process to ensure that gender considerations are factored into all budget proposals.
- Develop specific budget lines aimed at addressing gender inequalities and gender priorities, such as care services, capacity-building for young women, climate-change oriented policies, etc.

Implementation and monitoring

- Implement the GRB framework and allocate resources accordingly.
- Establish participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of GRB initiatives and track progress over time.

Reporting and feedback

- Foster a feedback loop that allows for community input and suggestions for improvement in future budgeting cycles.

While this tool ensures that financial resources support gender equality, urban planning with a gender perspective plays a crucial role in creating inclusive, safe and accessible cities and territories. Women and men experience urban spaces differently due to social roles, mobility patterns and safety concerns, which is why LRGs have begun to reshape public spaces to reflect the diverse needs of all residents. The Greater Amman Municipality (Jordan) works on gender and urban mobility issues. Tarsus (Türkiye) has launched initiatives aimed at enhancing women's empowerment by providing training on self-confidence and health, and facilitating employment opportunities. A key element of this strategy has been supporting women's economic independence and financial inclusion through the establishment of a low-cost marketplace where rural women can sell local produce.

Umeå (Sweden) offers another example of long-term gender-sensitive urban planning. In recent years, the city has shifted its focus to teenage girls through an "inclusion through exclusion" approach, engaging diverse groups of young women in discussions about urban safety and accessibility. By consulting directly with these communities, Umeå has developed public spaces that respond to their lived experiences, ensuring that urban planning reflects the needs of all genders. In Paraguay, municipalities such as Santa Rosa del Aguaray, Fernando de la Mora, San Juan Nepomuceno, Mariscal Estigarribia and Ciudad del Este have also recognized the importance of inclusive planning by integrating the perspectives of children into urban development projects.

These approaches illustrate how **participatory governance mechanisms can lead to structural change and acknowledge the needs and lived experiences of women and different population groups**. By involving women and girls in planning and budgeting decisions, LRGs are not only addressing immediate social inequalities but also laying the groundwork for long-term political engagement for gender equality. Tools of participatory democracy, such as participatory budgeting and participatory planning, not only address gender inequalities but also respond to the broader crisis of representative democracy.

3.2.4 Transformative care politics: Going beyond organizing and integrating care services

In recent years — especially in the aftermath of COVID-19 — diverse initiatives have been reshaping the landscape of care work and the care economy at the local level. These efforts aim to recognize the gender inequalities embedded in care work and to address the disproportionate burden of daily care tasks shouldered by women and girls. LRGs play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by: implementing initiatives aimed at reducing women's care workload, redistributing care responsibilities, remunerating care workers and reorganizing public, care-providing services to ensure accessibility and sustainability (Box 3.2.2).

BOX 3.2.2

Towards resilient and equitable care systems: A 6R framework on LRG action, based on the UN Women's Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Care Work

Recognize: Acknowledging care as a universal right that is essential for communities

- The value of women's care work, both paid and unpaid, must be acknowledged.
- Recognize care work as a key component of LRGs' sustainable development.

Reduce: Minimizing the disproportionate burden on women and girls

- Reduce the unpaid-care workload that disproportionately falls on women and girls.
- LRGs are the driving force behind the implementation of care systems.
- Challenge discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes through education, media and advocacy campaigns.

Redistribute: Sharing care responsibilities equitably

- Shift care responsibilities equitably between women and men within households, communities, the workplace and LRGs.
- Strengthen LRG engagement in the provision of high-quality, accessible and affordable public services, ensuring a fair distribution of responsibilities.

Reward: Ensuring decent work and social protection for care workers

- Guarantee equal pay for work of equal value and guarantee access to comprehensive social protection.
- Support worker training, professionalization and freedom of association for all care workers, including migrants.

Represent: Advocating for care workers and care policies

- Ensure care workers and caregivers have a voice in decision-making spaces.
- Center LRGs' policies around care.
- Support women's leadership in care-related sectors and promote participatory governance models.

Resist (Resilience): Building care systems that withstand global crises

- Adapt care systems to climate change, environmental degradation, conflicts, pandemics and economic shocks.
- Integrate resilience-building measures into care policies to ensure long-term sustainability.

However, care initiatives should not stop at simply organizing or coordinating care services. Instead, **LRGs have the potential to transform local and regional governance by placing care at the center of public life**. Transformative care politics creates more just, equal, democratic and sustainable cities and territories. The following characteristics are inherent to transformative care politics:

• **Feminist**: Care settings — both public and private — often reflect power imbalances and gender-based violence. LRGs can prevent abuse and ensure care work is never imposed on women, thereby promoting dignity and safety for all caregivers and recipients.

• **Rooted in the right to care**: This includes both giving and receiving care. Policies must support women's autonomy and agency in choosing to care while ensuring a fair redistribution of responsibilities. Care recipients, including older people and persons with disabilities, must be treated as active decision-makers.

• **Intersectional**: Care systems must address overlapping inequalities. Gender, race, migration status and disability all shape care dynamics. Policies must protect and empower those most affected, including unpaid, migrant and racialized care workers.

• **Structural**: Transforming care means integrating it into broader urban, economic and social planning. LRGs need long-term strategies that tackle the root causes of inequality — not just short-term fixes.

• **Youth-oriented**: Care cannot remain gendered. Boys and LGBTQIA+ youth must be engaged in care responsibilities and gender education. Girls must be protected from excessive burden and empowered to co-design future care systems.

FEMINIST AND INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON CARE WORK AND THE CARE ECONOMY

One key aspect of an intersectional perspective on care is **the coordination of care services within local territories to ensure they are accessible to diverse — and particularly marginalized — groups**. Care systems should be locally embedded, designed to respond effectively to the specific needs of both caregivers and care recipients. The Subdirection of Gender and Diversity in **Santiago de Chile** (Chile) leads the project Caring and Living Together in Diversity and Safety in Territories. The project has created a map providing information about care-related spaces, services and initiatives. Incorporating care into local and regional governance also involves strengthening the right to housing — particularly for women and girls experiencing gender-based violence. Social and economic factors often push women who choose to leave abusive relationships into homelessness. In response, the city of **Toronto**'s (Canada) Housing 2020–2030 Action Plan prioritizes access to public housing for women and girls, with a specific focus on survivors of domestic violence. The plan pledges that a minimum of 25% of the 40,000 new affordable rental- and supportive homes will be allocated to women.

Equally important is direct support for caregivers themselves. **Respite care programs and social centers offering care services provide women with the opportunity to rest, pursue employment, continue their education or engage in self-care.** Furthermore, paid caregivers — including domestic workers and migrant care professionals — often face systemic inequalities. Some LRGs register care workers to make sure they receive proper capacity-building and are protected by labor law. **Wales** (UK) published a guide for councils on international recruitment for adult social care. This ensures that LRGs know the procedures and that care workers are not exploited. The intersectional lens of care enables LRGs to shape policies that address the specific needs of migrant and refugee women, who form the backbone of care work in many countries. Globally, it is estimated that 28.8% of migrant women are employed in the care economy. Cities have begun addressing the need to fully involve migrant care workers in local governance. For example, **Athens** (Greece) prioritizes women's entrepreneurship in its Local Integration Strategy, aiming to support migrant women's economic empowerment. **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) offers training programs for migrant women, enabling them to seek employment in the technology sector. LRGs should ensure that care policies recognize and respond to the challenges migrant women face. These policies should guarantee fair wages, legal protections and access to social security benefits.

LRGs have also been developing and repurposing both soft and hard care infrastructure. Ensuring that both new and existing facilities meet the needs of caregivers and care recipients is crucial to building an inclusive care economy. **Valladolid** (Spain) has taken an innovative approach by launching *SAD Tecnológico* (Technological home assistance service), which enhances quality of life for older people through in-home-care technologies. Some LRGs are also experimenting with moving care services directly into residents' homes, thereby making care more accessible while reducing caregivers' logistical burdens.

LRGs also play a crucial role in fostering age-friendly environments that accommodate both children and older citizens, both of which are groups that often require care. The WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities includes over 750 cities and LRGs, and it shares best practices for delivering care services to older populations. The **Kanagawa Prefectural Government** (Japan) is implementing the concept of ME-BYO (My Excellent-By-Old Age), which focuses not only on disease prevention but also on maintaining a high quality of life for older adults. **Salalah** (Oman) has been developing comprehensive support for older people, including psychological assistance, caregiver training and awareness campaigns. Cities such as **Šabac** (Serbia) and **Dong-gu** (Republic of Korea) are also working to strengthen intergenerational relationships and promote the active participation of older citizens in local community life.

Similarly, the Network for Child-Friendly Cities promotes local policies aimed at improving children's well-being while reducing and redistributing care burdens traditionally placed on women. In Belize, the Sustainable and Child-Friendly Municipalities initiative has successfully localized the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by engaging nine municipalities (such as **Belize**, **Belmopan** and **Viejo del Carmen**), civil society and children themselves in designing child-centered policies. **Batumi** (Georgia) created a permanent youth council that serves as a consultative body for the mayor on youth-related matters. In the United Arab Emirates, local municipalities developed care activities for children through dedicated governmental entities, like the Early Childhood Authority in **Abu Dhabi** and the Child Friendly Office in **Sharjah**.

Ensuring autonomy for people with disabilities (PWD) is another key aspect of a feminist and intersectional care system. Accessible infrastructure, transportation and services empower PWD to participate fully in society by reducing their dependence on caregivers — many of whom are women. In Palestine, **APLA** has launched projects to strengthen LRGs' capacities to support disability rights. **Lisbon** (Portugal) has pioneered gender-sensitive and intersectional approaches to urban mobility through incorporating the perspectives of women and PWD into transport planning to improve accessibility and safety. **Bontang** (Indonesia) uses geospatial-based data to identify and coordinate support for PWD. **Međimurje County** (Croatia), **Zala County** (Hungary) and the **Subcarpathian Voivodeship** (Poland) are implementing pilot initiatives to promote accessible tourism.

Measuring the impact of care policies is key to demonstrating their effectiveness and advocating for continued investment. Collecting gender-disaggregated data and tracking outcomes help cities assess how local policies improve the lives of caregivers and those receiving care. This approach also builds a compelling narrative around care work's significance in promoting SDG 5. **El Alto** (Bolivia) evaluated its care systems with a focus on three vulnerable populations: children, senior citizens and PWD. One conclusion was that care systems should be included in a long-term LRG strategy. Otherwise, they lack coordination and financing on a more systemic level.

CARE-ORIENTED POLICIES LEADING STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Local and regional governance centered around care can drive structural change across long-term strategies, urban planning and the local economy. In Vietnam, **Thai Nguyen**'s Dynamic City Integrated Development Project invests in critical urban infrastructure — including care facilities — and incorporates user satisfaction surveys, particularly from women who rely on childcare services.

Another transformative, urban approach to care is **the 15-minute city concept, which envisions neighborhoods where essential services — including work, healthcare, education, shopping, and leisure — are all within a 15-minute walk or bike ride**. By fostering walkability, cycling infrastructure, public transport and mixed-use development, cities such as **Paris** (France), **Portland** (USA), **Melbourne** (Australia) and **Milan** (Italy) have successfully promoted sustainability, social cohesion and gender-equitable urban spaces. This model reduces the burden on caregivers by ensuring that essential services are easily accessible.

Legal and institutional frameworks at the LRG level (SDG 5.c) must be established to ensure that care systems are comprehensive, sustainable and effective. Cooperation between national governments and LRGs ensures that policies, responsibilities and funding structures are clearly defined. **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) has adopted and implemented care blocks based on **Bogotá**'s model. This consists of: providing care services within a 20-minute walking radius, integrating early childhood development centers into local markets and offering education and training programs for caregivers. In Kenya, **Tharaka Nithi province** developed a similar initiative. In Vietnam, one of the fastest-aging countries in the world, a civil-society-led pilot project introduced the Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs, which are community centers where older adults receive support and engage in activities with the help of various social groups. The success of this initiative led

to its replication across the country. In Hanoi alone, around 94 clubs currently operate, providing care and support for older people while connecting them with local volunteers.

Strengthening local governance structures is equally vital in ensuring that care systems function efficiently. LRGs require investment in training, resources and leadership to manage care services effectively. In parallel to the National Care System of **Montevideo** (Uruguay), the Municipal Development Plan 2020–2025 has further prioritized care by collaborating with feminist groups and community networks to provide support for children, older people and PWD. This initiative recognizes the fundamental role of care in ensuring the right to the city and promotes co-responsibility in caregiving.

Institutionalization and financing are essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of care policies. The *Sistema Distrital de Cuidado* (The city's care system) in **Bogotá** (Colombia) represents a significant step toward formalizing care services. In 2023, the Bogotá Council unanimously approved an agreement to secure the system's long-term financing and expansion. The system's framework ensures continuity of care services, prevents policy regression and integrates the system into the city's broader planning strategies. With sixteen Care Blocks and two Care Buses serving over 332,000 women, Bogotá has positioned itself as a leader in institutionalizing care, thereby setting a precedent for other cities aiming to recognize and support care work.

The care economy — which represents 9% of global GDP — should be integrated into long-term development strategies and understood as a collective responsibility. LRGs are addressing the care burden disproportionately placed on women and other marginalized communities by investing in inclusive care systems through which they can empower women and girls to fully participate in public life and contribute to a more equitable future. By prioritizing care, redistributing responsibilities and investing in infrastructure and services, LRGs are leading the way in creating more equitable, inclusive and resilient communities.

3.2.5 Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls

VAWG (SDGs 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) is a systemic issue that affects physical, emotional, economic and social well-being. VAWG occurs in multiple spaces: homes, public areas and institutions. This makes it a complex challenge that requires coordinated and localized responses. LRGs play a crucial role in both the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence due to their proximity to communities, their capacity to implement policies at the grassroots level and their ability to mobilize local resources and institutions.

One of the key responsibilities of LRGs is to ensure that survivors of VAWG receive comprehensive, integrated support. This means going beyond emergency assistance to provide sustained services, including medical care, legal aid, psychological counseling, safe housing and economic empowerment programs. LRGs coordinate efforts among social protection services, law enforcement, civil society organizations and health institutions to guarantee that survivors are not left to navigate support systems on their own. The Quito Declaration (2023) demonstrates a growing commitment from cities across the world to make gender-based-violence prevention a local and global priority.

Gender-based violence often results in financial instability, housing insecurity and social isolation. **Beyond responding to immediate needs, LRGs also play a fundamental role in ensuring long-term, social and economic reintegration for survivors.** They are able to regain their independence through measures such as stable housing options, access to education and professional development, employment assistance, and psychological and social support networks. In **Skopje** (North Macedonia), safe housing and psychosocial support services have expanded due to gender-responsive budgeting. This highlights how LRGs can allocate resources strategically to prevent reoccurrence of gender-based violence. Capacity-building is extremely important in addressing VAWG at the local level. In cooperation with international partners, **Banjul** (the Gambia) organized capacity-building and a seminar on crucial issues for LRG representatives: VAWG at the local level, tools to prevent female genital mutilation, addressing and eliminating forced- and early marriages, and combating sexual violence in the context of armed conflicts. **Ngazidja** (the Comoros), together with the **National Association of Mayors of the Comoros** (ANMC), focuses on preventing and eliminating early marriages of girls by working with local communities and implementing the existing legal system. Cooperation between LRGs and local communities, including local traditional leaders, is also crucial in addressing female genital mutilation. In Nigeria, where over 21 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation, the LRGs of **Odukpani** and **Yakurr** have worked with women's organizations to stop the practice and provide alternative income for cutters.

Creating safe public spaces is another key priority in preventing violence. **Gender-sensitive urban planning, including through safety audits (Box 3.2.3), can reduce risks and improve women's and girls' mobility, their access to public resources and their participation in community life. London** (UK) has a Women's Night Safety Charter and prepared a toolkit to make nighttime in the city safer for women, while **Sydney** (Australia) incorporates gender perspectives into transportation planning. Both cities demonstrate how LRGs can take proactive steps to make cities safer. **Dhaka** (Bangladesh) has also led infrastructure improvements focused on accessibility, security and mobility for women, PWD and youth, which shows that inclusive urban development can significantly improve public safety. LRGs in areas affected by armed conflict prioritize safe public spaces. In Ukraine, the **Rubizhne** municipality adopted the program Safe City and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls, and **Mykolaiv** is testing the Her City toolkit, a guide for involving girls in urban planning.

BOX 3.2.3

Gender-sensitive urban-safety audits

A gender-sensitive urban-safety audit is a participatory tool that helps LRGs assess and improve urban safety by incorporating the perspectives and experiences of diverse community members, especially that of women, girls and marginalized groups. Key steps for conducting urban safety audits are:

1. Preparation and stakeholder engagement

- Form a multi-sectoral team including urban planners, law enforcement, civil society groups and grassroots women's organizations.
- Define the audit's scope, considering factors like public spaces, transport and access to services.

2. Data collection

- Conduct safety walks with girls and women to identify unsafe areas.
- Use surveys, interviews and focus groups to document lived experiences.
- Collect data about participants' ages, socio-economic backgrounds and disability levels.
- Collect spatial and crime data to complement qualitative insights.

3. Analysis and mapping

- Identify key risk factors, such as poor lighting, lack of visibility or unsafe infrastructure.
- Examine how gender, age, disability and socio-economic status influence urban safety.
- Develop safety maps that highlight high-risk areas and priority interventions.

4. Action planning and policy recommendations

- Develop short- and long-term solutions, such as improved lighting, better public transport and community policing.
- Integrate findings into urban planning, budget allocation and policy frameworks.
- Promote participatory governance by ensuring community participation in decision-making.

5. Implementation and monitoring

- Assign responsibilities to relevant departments in LRGs.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to track progress and adjust strategies.
- Institutionalize gender-sensitive audits as a regular practice in urban governance.

Technological and social innovations have become powerful tools for addressing VAWG. The SafetiPin mobile application operates in 65 cities and is actively used by LRGs like **Johor Bahru** (Malaysia), **Quezon City** (Philippines) and **Chennai** (India). It enables LRGs to conduct safety audits of public spaces by collecting data on lighting, visibility, security and walkability. **Jaipur** (India) integrates the data provided by the app's users into their Smart Cities Integrated Command and Control Centres to improve safety.

This crowdsourced information allows governments and urban planners to implement targeted interventions that enhance safety. Meanwhile, **Île-de-France** (France) has leveraged technology in its campaign against harassment on public transit. There is a 24/7 alert hotline, increased visibility of call boxes and an "on-demand" bus stop system that allows women to disembark closer to their final destinations after dark. These examples highlight how LRGs can use digital tools and data-driven approaches to improve women's safety in urban environments. Education and awareness-raising efforts, particularly those aimed at boys and men, are critical in preventing violence in the long term. LRGs can take a leadership role in shifting harmful social norms by implementing community-based programs that promote gender equality, respect and non-violent behaviors. **Cobija** (Bolivia)

has engaged community leaders in capacity-building programs to enhance their ability to prevent and respond to VAWG. In Pichincha province (Ecuador), the local government organized an educational program for men called Schools of Masculinities and Human Rights. These types of initiatives contribute to cultural change by starting a dialogue and promoting collective responsibility in addressing gender-based violence at the community level.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that eliminating gender-based violence is not just about punishment but also about prevention and systemic change. This aligns with the efforts of LRGs to implement gender-sensitive policies, engage communities in decision-making and strengthen local institutions. Their work ensures that laws protecting women and girls from violence are not just declarations but are actively enforced and monitored.

Furthermore, economic empowerment is a critical aspect of the Beijing Platform for Action's Women and the Economy objective. Many LRGs have developed programs that provide education, vocational training and financial support for survivors of violence because they recognize that economic security is key to preventing revictimization. Similarly, the Beijing Platform for Action's focus on the rights of girls and young women is reflected in LRGs' efforts to invest in safe public spaces, adapt educational programs and challenge harmful cultural norms that limit girls' opportunities.

3.2.6 Conclusions and recommendations

The following lessons learned and conclusions can be drawn from this paper:

Political participation: Shifting cultural norms and supporting young women. Women's political participation at the local level has increased, yet significant barriers remain, particularly for young women, women from marginalized communities and those facing political violence. The key lesson is that achieving gender e quality in governance requires more than quotas or representation targets. It necessitates broader, cultural and institutional change. Education plays a crucial role in this transformation, as early engagement with democratic processes fosters leadership skills among young women. Additionally, addressing deeply rooted gender norms through civic education, media representation and awareness campaigns can help dismantle stereotypes that discourage women from participating in politics. Lastly, combating political violence against women — both on- and offline — is critical to ensuring that women's leadership is not only encouraged but also protected and sustained.

Participatory governance: Addressing the crisis of representative democracy. When grounded in feminist and intersectional principles, participatory governance plays a vital role in localizing SDG 5 on gender equality. A key approach is GRB, which ensures that public financial planning addresses the needs of all genders and reduces structural inequalities. By evaluating the impact of all public expenditures on different gender groups, GRB helps redistribute resources equitably and empowers marginalized communities to participate in decision-making. To be effective, GRB requires comprehensive data collection (including gender-disaggregated data) and the capacity to analyze and act on this information. Training public officials and engaging stakeholders, particularly women's organizations and civil society, ensures that resources are allocated where they are most needed.

Alongside GRB, gender-sensitive urban planning is crucial for creating inclusive, safe and accessible cities. In recognizing that women and men experience urban spaces differently, gender-sensitive urban planning ensures that public spaces cater to the diverse needs of all residents. Through allowing women to shape the spaces they live in, this approach fosters greater civic and political partic-

ipation among women. These strategies make participatory governance a powerful tool for long-term transformation by fostering gender equality and empowering women at the local and regional levels.

Care: A core pillar of governance for all. Recognizing care as a fundamental part of governance is a crucial lesson for LRGs and societies. Care should not be seen as just a "women's issue." Instead it must be understood as a central policy concern that benefits entire LRGs. When care is integrated into urban planning, economic policies and social services, it enhances well-being, strengthens local economies, and reduces gender inequalities and inequalities in general. Investments in accessible, integrated care services allow women to participate more fully in the workforce and public life, while also ensuring that children, older people and PWD — alongside the rest of the population who also require care — receive adequate support. Moreover, recognizing and valuing paid and unpaid care work contributes to building more resilient and inclusive communities. For care policies to be truly transformative, LRGs should adopt a rights-based approach that acknowledges everyone as both potential caregivers and care recipients. That approach makes care a collective responsibility rather than an individual burden.

Violence against women and girls: The urgency of localized, multi-sectoral responses. VAWG remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations and requires urgent, coordinated action at the local level. One key takeaway is that preventing and addressing gender-based violence demands a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach. LRGs should integrate safety into urban planning, ensuring that public spaces are designed to prevent violence and promote inclusion. Education and community-based programs that engage men and boys in changing harmful gender norms are also essential. Furthermore, LRGs must strengthen survivor-centered services, providing accessible shelters, legal aid, psychological support and financial resources to ensure that survivors can rebuild their lives. Policies against violence must not remain abstract commitments. Instead, they should be embedded in local governance structures, with clear mechanisms for monitoring, accountability and enforcement.

Collectively, these conclusions highlight the interconnected nature of SDG 5 localization. LRGs that embrace a holistic, intersectional approach to gender equality will not only advance SDG 5 but will also build stronger communities for all. Based on the above conclusions, several recommendations involving multiple stakeholders can be made at various levels.

Institutionalize gender equality in local governance. Recognize the critical role of LRGs in dismantling structural, gender inequalities by:

- Establishing inclusive, well-resourced institutional frameworks that enable women's transformative participation in local decision-making.
- Ensuring gender parity in governance through quotas, gender-responsive budgeting, leadership and capacity-building.
- Recognizing and addressing the intersecting inequalities that shape women's lives — those across income, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and geography — through territorialized, data-informed policies.

Foster inclusive participation and intersectional representation. Expand consultation and participatory mechanisms to guarantee that women — especially those from marginalized and grassroots communities — co-create local policies by:

- Opening up permanent, accessible spaces for dialogue and social participation.
- Valuing lived experiences as political knowledge to ensure that diverse voices are reflected in public decisions and institutional cultures.

Embed feminist transformation in local leadership. Promote and finance feminist leadership as a driver for gender-just transitions and inclusive care-centered cities and territories by:

- Supporting women's political leadership at all levels, particularly in crisis recovery and climate responses.
- Creating economic opportunities for women and youth through employment quotas, support for entrepreneurship and collaboration with local stakeholders.
- Rebuilding cities and public services that support an equality-based, spatial and temporal organization of care, work and family life — including transport, lighting, recreation and safety.

Advance the care agenda through the 6R framework. Build caring cities through public, intersectional care systems anchored in the 6Rs (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Represent, Reward, Resist) by:

- Expanding services like childcare, older people care and support for PWD, as well as hous-

ing, employment opportunities, transport, water and sanitation, and education.

• Supporting those who care through employment programs, rest and leisure initiatives, and campaigns for co-responsibility in households and communities.

Prevent and respond to all Forms of violence against women and girls. Mainstream a zero-tolerance approach to VAWG in all local policies and administrations by:

• Running prevention campaigns, especially against normalized aggressions like street harassment and institutional gender stereotyping, and also against violence towards female political leaders.

• Creating coordinated, multisectoral systems for protection, support and reparation for victims that are backed by adequate local resources.

Strengthen youth engagement and gender diversity in politics. Empower young women, non-binary and trans individuals to be political actors today, not just future leaders, by:

• Institutionalizing youth participation mechanisms and intergenerational leadership programs.

• Engaging boys and men in efforts to transform cultural norms and promote gender equality.

Promote global-local solidarity and multilevel governance. Facilitate the exchange of feminist practices across LRGs and engage in multilateral processes by:

• Deepening partnerships with national governments across sectors and territories to foster a stronger institutional environment that addresses care, VAWG, climate, housing and economic justice through an intersectional lens.

• Advocating for feminist municipalism in international forums and ensuring LRG voices are represented in global, normative processes.

Integrate gender into global multilateral processes and agendas. Ensure LRGs are recognized and utilized as key actors in:

• Beijing+30 and CSW69: Localizing the Beijing Platform with inclusive strategies.

• FFD4 and 2025 HLPF: Positioning care and equality as pillars of development financing and review processes.

• Second World Summit for Social Development (2025): Driving the renewal of a social contract grounded in care, equality and rights.

Invest in technological and social innovations for gender equality. Use innovation to close gender gaps in access, safety and service delivery by:

• Promoting equitable access to digital tools and infrastructure.

• Developing feminist, digital governance frameworks and local innovations that respond to territorial realities, especially in informal and rural settings.

3.3

Paper 3. Advancing decent work and economic development for all: Challenges and opportunities for LRGs in the localization of SDG 8

3.3.1 Introduction

Unemployment, poor and unfair working conditions, and uneven economic growth are persistent global challenges falling under Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) that undermine social stability, human rights and well-being. The deficit of decent work opportunities does not only perpetuate poverty (SDG 1). It also exacerbates inequality (SDG 10) in all its forms, weakens social cohesion and limits the potential for sustainability. Within this context, SDG 8 is key to tackling these challenges. It seeks to ensure that economic growth is inclusive and sustainable (and therefore based on full and productive employment and decent work) to enable dignified, working and living standards for all. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work — with gender equality a cross-cutting objective — includes job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.[1] It is a broad concept that encompasses all dimensions of work. Local and regional governments (LRGs) can play a critical role in the localization of SDG 8, along with other interconnected SDGs, in their territories and local communities.

Typically, central governments set overall national policy directions. They establish strategic, socio-economic and regulatory frameworks; set industrial relations systems and practices; and define ways to finance and deliver infrastructure and attract investment. Important as they are, national-level policies and programs cannot by themselves fully embrace the diversity, specificities and asks of local communities and territories. LRGs are best placed to do so and therefore play an essential role in localizing SDG context. They are the government entities closest to communities and are well-positioned to address specific challenges and implement targeted solutions that better suit regional and local needs. In this sense, they can play a unique, twofold role: as public authorities, they can shape and implement territorial public policies and drive inclusive, local economic development (LED) in their territories and communities; as employers of LRG staff (the workforce that makes up the bulk of public service employment worldwide), they can ensure decent work in their workplaces, particularly by engaging in constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with LRG workers' unions.[2]

For instance, LRGs can develop and implement active labor market policies to generate decent work opportunities in specific sectors and areas of their territories; promote formalization for vulnerable workers in the informal economy; support small enterprises (SMEs); provide local infrastructure development; enable equitable access to quality, local public services; and deliver and promote social equity through enhancing social security and collective bargaining.

This paper is a joint collaboration between the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) — facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) — and Public Services International (PSI).[3] Its goal is to contribute to the discussion on localizing SDG 8 within the framework of the 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). It reviews and showcases LRG strategies and good practices worldwide, drawing conclusions and issuing recommendations to further advance SDG 8. The paper accounts for the two key dimensions of LRGs' agency in localizing SDG 8: as public authorities that formulate and implement policy frameworks and programs to support the achievement of SDG 8 in the territories and communities under their jurisdictions; and as employers who have to uphold the principles of SDG 8 and promote decent work within their workplaces. Indeed, many challenges across the world must be addressed in order to achieve the full realization of SDG 8. Localization, under the aegis of LRGs, has immense potential and is fundamental to addressing such deficits.

The paper is mostly based on the results of desk research and is complemented by the analysis of responses and feedback from two surveys on LRGs' SDG 8 implementation.[4] The desk research largely includes documents from international organizations and academic literature, as well as both UCLG and PSI resources. Between February and April 2025, the two surveys of members and affiliates were carried out by UCLG (with 165 responses) and PSI (with 114 responses, of which 28 were complete) respectively.

Following the introduction, sections 2, 3 and 4 present the different sets of SDG 8 targets. Section 2 includes targets related to growth (also with reference to productivity and financing) and employment. Section 3 relates to the set of targets on labor rights and working conditions. Section 4 is about social dialogue, which is a means to discuss and negotiate labor-related issues, included in SDG 8.3. Section 5 presents key conclusions and policy recommendations to enhance the role and effectiveness of the different actors involved in localizing SDG 8 in service of the 2030 Agenda.

3.3.2 Economic growth and employment

Under SDG 8, economic growth is not an end in itself, but a means to achieving socio-economic inclusion and generating opportunities for dignified lives. There are still major challenges in achieving the SDG 8 targets. However, the many good practices showcased in this section demonstrate that there are also enormous opportunities for triggering change at the local level.

CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The assumption that economic growth (SDG 8.1) will automatically lead to widespread benefits through job creation, wage increases, fewer inequalities and better access to public services for all has been widely challenged. Indeed, productivity gains (SDG 8.2) have not been equitably distributed among and within countries. Even though global net wealth per adult has grown around 3.2% per year since 1995, the poorest half of the world's population currently owns just 2% of global wealth, whereas the richest half owns 98%.[5] Economic growth alone does not necessarily reduce poverty and inequalities. Inequitable growth distribution has resulted in wealth concentration in some territories (and by particular groups) and created pockets of poverty in others.[6]

Urban inequalities vary across cities and regions, and they are shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, socio-cultural and ecological forces, all embedded within specific historical contexts. These inequalities are sustained not only through market dynamics but also through the configuration of social and political relationships, interactions and institutional arrangements operating across multiple scales. For instance, territorial inequalities are particularly notable in South African cities like Johannesburg (with a Gini coefficient above 60), Latin American cities like Belo Horizonte and US cities like Los Angeles (both with a Gini coefficient over 50).[7] Territorial inequalities between urban and rural areas also manifest themselves in the disparity of access to vital public services and infrastructures. For example, Montcada i Reixac (Spain) features an abundance of infrastructures that serve the nearby metropolis of Barcelona. By contrast, rural underinvestment leads to public service desertification, which Golubac (Serbia) and Morsø (Denmark) are currently experiencing.[8] While globalization was initially seen as an equalizing force, it has instead increased macroeconomic instability and deepened income and wealth disparities. As capital moves from one place to another, countries and territories seek to attract enterprises offering advantages, such as tax breaks, cheap labor, access to resources at low cost and relaxed environmental legislation. These conditions have encouraged several waves of production shifts and employment delocalization from one place to another.[9] This model of globalization does not serve social progress and hardly leads to advancements in SDG 8. Besides, many enterprises are now engaged in long, multi-layered, global, subcontracting chains where the risk of human and labor rights violations is higher, including the occurrence of child and forced labor.[10] **LRGs can be acutely affected by these economic and employment imbalances, as these adversely impact and deplete their communities' well-being and resources.**

Furthermore, urbanization and spatial concentration tend to reinforce pre-existing social and economic inequalities by disproportionately favoring already advantaged groups and widening disparities not only along class lines but also across dimensions of gender, race, ethnicity and age. Additionally, deindustrialization, cheap-import competition and social dumping in strategic industries (jointly with the general shift toward a service economy) have led many decent jobs available in urban and local communities to disappear or become precarious and underpaid even if they add value to the community. **These patterns have also impoverished LRGs and deprived neighborhoods of vital public services, such as access to water, sanitation, education, healthcare, waste management and employment opportunities, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and social exclusion.[11]**

The power of quality public services to trigger inclusive, sustainable growth has been broadly ascertained.[12] However, neoliberal and austerity-driven policies have led to widespread privatization of public services or their lack of development where they are most needed; and profit is prioritized over equitable access, quality, and decent work creation. Private service operators prioritize services in areas and for communities that are financially affluent, often neglecting those that are less lucrative or marginalized. The case of private bus services in the UK is a clear example.[13] Tourism — the only industry explicitly referenced in SDG 8 (SDG 8.9) — and other sectors are increasingly shaped by neoliberal policies, financialization and unlimited consumption models that prioritize economic growth for some over the preservation of natural resources and the well-being of local populations. Although mass, commodified tourism contributes to around 10% of global GDP,[14] it often creates economic inequalities: profits that benefit corporations over local dealers and service providers.[15]

Following this analysis, **there is a need for a paradigm shift in economic development that prioritizes equity, sustainability and human well-being**. This does not mean rejecting economic growth, but rather calling for a different form of it, one that is inclusive, socially just and environmentally sustainable. In part through the generation of decent employment opportunities, this necessary form of growth actively contributes to reducing existing inequalities and avoids creating new forms of exclusion. This includes making sure that the private sector truly integrates social and environmental responsibilities into all operations and supply chains, respects and upholds human and labor rights, and refrains from profiteering from vital services and public goods, undermining public provision through privatization.

Alarming levels of unemployment and underemployment (SDGs 8.3, 8.6 and 8.b) **illustrate the need to support alternatives to the current model of economic growth**. According to the ILO, in addition to 186 million unemployed people in 2024, 137 million were part of the potential labor force (mainly discouraged workers), and around 79 million workers faced obligations (such as unpaid care) that hinder them from taking up employment. Moreover, 240 million workers are in working poverty, living on less than 2.15 USD per person per day.[16]

Employment opportunities have become outpaced by an expanding global population, urbanization, labor market deregulation, neoliberal and austerity policies, and the transformation of the economy (including the destruction of manufacturing, the assignment of low value to essential public service jobs like health and care, and the impact of digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI) on jobs that can be easily destroyed). A large number of workers in different sectors have no other option but to accept precarious forms of employment. This situation has led to an increase in non-standard forms of employment, such as informal and casual work, zero-hour contracts, triangular employment relationships through temporary work agencies and/or subcontracting companies, and bogus self-employment promoted by the platform economy. Youth unemployment (SDGs 8.6 and 8.b) was at 13% globally in 2023. The percentage of young people not in education, employment or training in the same year was 20%.[17] Informal workers (SDG 8.3) remain a significant part of the labor force: 58.2% globally in 2024. While they are concentrated in developing countries, their presence has also grown in developed nations.[18]

The digital and green transitions, including the rise of unregulated AI, also have relevant implications for SDG 8. Digital innovations are reshaping the economy and the world of work. **These digital advancements can support SDG 8 targets related to productivity and job safety. However, they also risk widening the technological divide; they destroy replaceable jobs, and they undermine labor rights (e.g. through worker surveillance). These advancements also sharpen psychosocial risks at work if they are not backed by worker-led policies of fair transitions towards digital economies.**[19] Besides, the rise of high-tech employment often comes at the cost of traditional, manual jobs. This calls for proactive policies to mitigate the social costs of lay-offs and displacement and to ensure socially just transitions into other decent employment opportunities. This is especially relevant in the case of older and low-skilled workers, who face greater challenges in adapting to new technologies and (re)entering the labor market.[20]

The green transition is vital for decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation (SDG 8.4), and thus for ensuring planetary sustainability. Yet, like digital transformation, the green transition does not inherently address economic disparities or the woes of precarious work. For example, while transitioning to a more sustainable economy presents opportunities for job creation in renewable energy and sustainable industries, it might also lead to job losses in traditional sectors, which again need to be addressed adequately through public policies that ensures just transitions for displaced workers and communities.[21]

LOCAL APPROACHES TO INCLUSIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DECENT JOB CREATION

Although economic growth is a key contributor to improving livelihoods, its benefits have been unevenly distributed to a significant extent, and decent work deficits are a global problem. The following subsection touches on viable policy pathways fostered by LRGs and unions that can offer solutions to global social crises through SDG 8 localization.

✱ Local economic development (LED)

LED is one key strategy that lies within the power and capacities of LRGs to respond to challenges in SGD 8 implementation. It promotes endogenous growth by addressing specific local problems such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, skill shortages and lack of investment. At the same time, it creates a virtuous circle of short supply chains whereby local wealth and income remain (and are reinvested) in the territories. LED is a collaborative effort driven by LRGs in dialogue and partnership with businesses, worker organizations and civil society, to enhance local economies through inclusive growth. With the right policy mix adapted to specific community needs, LED can trigger innovation, generate decent work, strengthen social partnerships and build long-term resilience in communities.

The final declaration of the VI World Forum on Local Economic Development[22] (Seville, Spain, April 2025) reaffirms the crucial role of LRGs in tackling global challenges through inclusive and sustainable economic strategies tailored to local contexts. It underscores the role of public services and decent work within an integrated approach that includes a triple transition (ecological, digital and social), innovative financing, caring economies and strong partnerships.

Social value procurement, also known as "community wealth building" in some instances, is an important form of LED, as are territorial pacts for employment.[23] LRGs like **London** (UK) foster social value procurement, which means evaluating not only the price-to-quality ratios in the public procurement of goods or services but also taking into consideration their broader social, economic and environmental impacts. It leverages public purchasing power to generate value that benefits society as a whole, including decent job creation. In 2021, **Milan** (Italy) signed a memorandum of understanding to safeguard work quality in municipal procurement contracts negotiated with major Italian trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL). This agreement prioritizes quality over lowest-cost tenders; ensures job continuity and stability (minimum four-year contracts); protects workers' rights during contract transitions; places limits on subcontracting; mandates the application of collective agreements to all workers involved in the procurement contracts; and establishes a public registry of companies that exercise unfair labor practices.

Many LRGs already promote LED at the intersection of economic growth and decent work. For instance, the provincial government of **Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas** (Ecuador) supports local entrepreneurs and rural agricultural producers' associations by promoting agro-productive chains and small and micro enterprises. The goal is to improve their living conditions and generate decent employment. Similarly, **Lincoln** (Argentina) promotes regional products, provides business services to bring them to market, helps entrepreneurs build a brand and provides technology to generate payments with prepaid social cards. By using these cards, public workers contribute to stimulating the commercialization of local products.

Mafra (Portugal) created projects to promote the integration of unemployed people and people with disabilities into active life through the Professional Insertion Office, a support structure for job search — including for youth — that cooperates closely with the local employment center in **Loures**. **Ponte de Sor** (Portugal) has also worked to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market, by creating a specific program for their training and employment. In Germany, the **Berlin** Employment Agency partners with local businesses, trade unions and schools to support youth in the transition from education to employment.

Some LRGs promote formalization and support the livelihoods and rights of informal workers in their communities, including by enabling ways to access social protection, fair wages and decent working conditions. The Brazilian central government, in collaboration with municipalities like **Vitoria** and **Guarulhos**, introduced the Individual Microentrepreneur Program, simplifying business registration for self-employed informal workers. The program included a single, low-cost tax that covers social security and health services, and facilitates administrative proceedings, access to banking services and

retirement benefits. In India, cities like Delhi have worked with the self-employed women worker organization SEWA to provide legal recognition of and support for informal workers, providing street vendors and domestic workers with identity documents.

Local government associations (LGAs) can also be actors in LED promotion. For example, the **Association of Netherlands Municipalities** (VNG) assists its members in formulating economic policies that correspond to the objectives of SDG 8, encouraging local job creation, fostering inclusive labor markets and enhancing a business-friendly environment. Through decentralized cooperation (i.e. international cooperation and partnerships among LRGs), the VNG has also supported the implementation of reforms aimed at strengthening local governance and fostering integrated, inclusive and sustainable regional development in Algeria.

LED programs can also provide for the basic needs of their communities, such as promoting food sovereignty. **Amman** (Jordan) advanced urban food sustainability by integrating green economy principles into local food systems. The project is part of the municipality's broader strategy to enhance food security, reduce food waste and support climate-resilient urban development. Through partnerships with local and international organizations, the municipality supported projects that have created economic opportunities for women, youth and marginalized groups.

✱ Social and solidarity economy (SSE)

SSE encompasses a wide range of organizations such as associations and cooperatives of self-employed informal workers that aim to increase their bargaining power in order to obtain better prices for their products and services and gain access to forms of social protection. SSE organizations often prioritize social and environmental goals, with a focus on cooperation, solidarity, social inclusion and participation.[24] **Some LRGs have increasingly worked closely with SSE organizations to alleviate poverty and foster formalization, in order to counterbalance the pressures of competitive markets that often favor profits over social and solidarity values.**

Belo Horizonte (Brazil) implemented a social program focused on the food value chain and the promotion of cooperatives. The Popular Restaurants employed cooperative members to provide affordable meals for low-income populations. The Expanded Public Works Programme initiative in South Africa was implemented across four sectors and three spheres of governance (national, provincial and local). It provides poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed, such as socially useful activities in public works, waste management and community services. LRGs in different territories across the world — such as the Provincial Government of **Zamora Chinchipe** (Ecuador) — have also supported job creation by involving local communities in ecotourism and cultural tourism.

However, in some countries (such as Italy and the UK), contracting out labor-intensive public services such as waste collection and domiciliary care to the SSE has in some cases proven to be a way to circumvent the application of branch collective agreements and to get services delivered at a cheaper rate. This is the case especially when unscrupulous employers use SSE schemes to access public tenders while exploiting vulnerable workforce such as migrant, undocumented and women workers. When employed under such circumstances, these types of workers may also lack the qualifications and skills needed to deliver quality services to the community.[25] In such cases, close oversight and collaboration among trade unions, LRGs and the labor inspectorate (as well as the presence of sound, effective legislation) are key. Likewise, when LRG employers that contract out external services make progressive voluntary commitments to fair labor relations, it can make a real difference. One example is the case of UNISON's Ethical Care Councils Charter.[26]

✱ The care sector and caring economies

Care workers are critical to the reproduction of our societies, yet they are too often invisible, undervalued, underpaid and in precarious working conditions. Poor working conditions and the lack of rights and a voice at work make it impossible for care workers to deliver the quality care that communities need. The commercialization of care has prioritized profit over people. Vulnerable human beings (older people, children, people with disabilities or other groups) are treated as revenue sources, and essential workers are seen as disposable costs.[27]

LRGs and trade unions have vastly contributed to defending the rights of care givers and receivers. They acknowledge that caregiving activities and services (childcare, elder care, healthcare, care for people with disabilities, social service work, education and education support services) are not only vital for thriving, just and inclusive communities but also for efficient economies.[28]

In **Trieste** (Italy), the municipality transformed the mental health care system into a holistic care service by prioritizing early interventions; transferring patients to community mental health centers and minimizing reliance on psychiatric hospitals. This approach preserved patients' rights and dignity. **California** (USA) launched a 1.7 billion USD initiative to develop the care workforce, with a focus on expanding the number of care providers especially in underserviced regions.

In 2020, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) launched the nationwide "Fix long-term care" campaign to take profit out of long-term elder care. They demanded that the Canadian government take over; invest in long-term elder-care homes; and set a national service quality standard and safe, decent working conditions for staff across all Canadian provinces. The campaign contributed to the 2021 decision by the government of **Saskatchewan** to invest 80 million CAD in long-term care, starting with municipalizing two facilities through substantial public investment; plan 82 renewal projects; and plan 13 new public elder-care homes in rural and remote areas of the province.

The Secretary of Women's Affairs in **Bogotá** (Colombia) introduced Latin America's first citywide care system aimed at addressing the care gaps that unequally impact women. The municipality also launched the "Care Blocks" program, where (under a proximity-based approach) women caregivers can access free support services, including childcare, skills training and mental health counselling. This initiative also creates jobs by hiring professionals to provide the services. Since 2015, the municipality of **Recoleta** (Chile) has focused on creating local public services in areas with the greatest need, where 14% of the population lives in poverty. After a participatory consultation process, Recoleta launched Chile's first popular pharmacy, allowing the local government to directly purchase and provide affordable medicines, and a social security scheme for low-income residents. By 2020, residents saved up to 70% on medication costs. Inspired by this model, 80 municipalities across Chile have since opened their own popular pharmacies, which are now organized under a national association.[29]

The **Kapuas district** (Indonesia) has adopted an integrated approach to healthcare. It focuses on expanding job opportunities and training programs for healthcare workers (including doctors, nurses, midwives and community health workers) in hospitals, community health centers and mobile health units. The district also prioritizes the procurement of medical equipment and infrastructure, supporting the growth of local suppliers and service providers. Ensuring fair wages, benefits and safe working conditions for healthcare personnel is a key commitment, alongside strengthening social protection programs, particularly for those in remote and underserved areas. Additionally, community-based health initiatives are supported to create job opportunities and foster self-reliance. To sustain these efforts, the district has allocated a substantial healthcare budget of 515.5 billion IDR.

LRGs can create jobs within their own territories and institutions by promoting active labor market policies, including those that facilitate professional transitions, vocational training, re-skilling and the return to the labor market for the mid- and long term unemployed. The *Menn i Helse* ("Men in Health") program was started in 2010 by the city of **Trondheim** (Norway) and subsequently became a national project. It functioned with support from and in cooperation with the **Norwegian Local and Regional Government Association**, the Norwegian Directorate for Health, LRGs and the Norwegian Union of Municipal Workers (*Fagforbundet*). The program encouraged men who need support entering or reentering the job market — including those transitioning to new industries after a debilitating workplace injury — to train and get jobs in healthcare and social care. The project helped to overcome gender stereotypes around employment in healthcare and boosted the employment of men in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Of the over 1,400 men that were trained during two years, 90% gained permanent employment in healthcare and the care sector; they were satisfied with their jobs and were living independently with dignity. Following this successful pilot, 140 Norwegian municipalities adopted this program in 2022, and it has since expanded to Swedish peer municipalities. **Such initiatives prove the success of local tripartite cooperation among LRGs, their workers' unions and national institutions in promoting active labor market policies and creating decent jobs in territories, while improving access to quality public service**

provision in a critical sector with labor shortages. As employers, LRGs are pivotal for up-skilling their workforce and dignifying unskilled work. As noted earlier in this paper, they can best do so by entering into constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with their workers' unions.

✱ Enhancing equitable access to local quality public services through direct provision, re-municipalization and in-sourcing

In addition to the SSE, LED, social value procurement and active labor market policies to foster decent work creation, there are other paramount ways to ensure decent work in the communities all while providing equitable access to local public service provision. They are: directly providing public services through the establishment of new, needed public services ("municipalization"); restoring LRG control, management and ownership of previously privatized services ("remunicipalization"); and the in-sourcing of jobs that may be informal and precarious (hence not decent) under direct, LRG employment with decent working conditions (including social dialogue). **These options offer significant benefits in terms of service quality, expanded and more affordable access, long-term cost-effectiveness, public accountability and decent work creation.**[30]

Successful examples of remunicipalization include waste management in **Oslo** (Norway), **Zanzibar** (Tanzania) and **Alexandria** and **Cairo** (Egypt); hospitals in several Australian localities; services within the disaster-risk reduction and management policy in **Lanuza** (Philippines); energy in **Plymouth** (UK) and **Hamburg** (Germany); water in **Paris**, **Bordeaux** and **Rennes** (France) and **Terrassa** (Spain); and IT in **Thomasville** (USA) and **Birmingham** (UK).[31]

Other LRGs have decided to combat inequalities, advance SDG 8 and foster inclusive LED by privileging direct provision and therefore not tendering out when they have the capacity to provide services themselves. In 2023, the Autonomous Canberra Territory (Australia) introduced an Insourcing Framework as part of the government's commitment to promote the well-being of the community by providing more secure employment for workers through the Secure Employment Framework. The Insourcing Framework mandates that any service, good or task the government needs to provide must be considered for in-house delivery first; it will only be tendered out if it can be proven that the government cannot deliver it properly or efficiently. The framework was developed by the LRG in consultation with Australian public service unions. Similarly, in March 2025 the government of the Australian state of New South Wales introduced legislation to ban public-private partnerships for the management of acute hospitals, including by future governments.

Quality public services in public hands — with adequate numbers of skilled staff in decent working conditions, with labor rights and occupational safety and health — are a key equalizing factor for communities.

✱ Funding local initiatives

One of the major obstacles LRGs face in providing equitable access to quality local public services for workers, inhabitants and communities is the over-dependence on intergovernmental transfers from central governments and the devolution of competences without adequate financial powers. Indeed, LRGs usually lack the resources to provide the level, coverage and quality of services that the population needs. Very often, as in the case of the Philippines, LRGs face the additional obstacle of caps on their ability to hire adequate numbers of staff for their services.[32] Local public and social financing mechanisms centered on people offer ways for local communities to fund their own development, ensuring resources stay within the territory and directly benefit all residents. **Many LRGs have municipal funds and local public banks to fund key infrastructures, and these models are being revived and revamped.**[33] Besides, LRGs are developing and testing diverse financing mechanisms to foster local development, including social impact bonds, impact investments, microfinance and crowdfunding platforms, local investment pools, local currencies, cross-subsidies, cooperative financial institutions and tax share donations.[34]

Local currencies can also promote the local economy and support local businesses and consumers by protecting them from fluctuations in the currency exchange and stock markets and by securing price and income stability in communities. The *chiemgauer* is a currency in Chiemgau (Germany) that circulates alongside the euro and is intended to encourage spending within the local community. The Bristol Pound was a local currency in Bristol (UK) used to promote spending within the city and support local businesses. In 2020 it was replaced by Bristol Pay, a new community-focused digital payment system. Barcelona (Spain) launched a pilot project for a social currency translated as "Citizen's Economic Resource." It is a digital currency designed to complement the euro and is accepted by various local businesses and institutions within the city. The *léman* is the local currency used to foster local development in the canton of Geneva (Switzerland). Six municipalities of the canton (Carouge, le Grand-Saconnex, Plan-Les-Ouates, Onex, Vevey, Meyrin) also use it for their own transactions. The currency exchange desk is at the Town Hall and citizens can pay a part of their taxes in *lémans*.

In Germany, it is common for municipalities to support public services through cross-financing, especially when income generated from user fees is insufficient. In **Munich**, the public energy provider Stadtwerke München–SWM uses surplus funds from its electricity operations, which constantly generate revenue, to cover the deficits of the local public transport company through cross-subsidization. The transport company faced growing financial shortfalls in covering rural, remote and sparsely populated areas.

Abrantes (Portugal) has two local financing programs that seek to support the creation of qualified jobs in companies in the Tagus Valley Technological Park and provide rent support for companies located in the historic center. **Bologna** (Italy) partners with cooperative banks to provide low-interest loans for cooperatives. New York (USA), which is currently creating its own public bank,[35] issued a social impact bond to finance job training programs for at-risk youth. In order to revitalize neighborhoods, Chicago's (USA) Community Loan Fund offered loans and grants to local real estate developers for projects that include community centers and commercial spaces. The Bank of North Dakota (USA) is a publicly owned bank which supports local priorities via state-level projects.

3.3.3 Labor rights and working conditions

Global decent work deficits remain a major challenge for workers, households and communities worldwide. Despite some fluctuating improvements in some target indicators, global unemployment, working poverty, gender inequality, informality and the rate of accidents and deaths at work remain major obstacles to the realization of SDG 8. The deterioration of compliance with fundamental labor rights at work is even more alarming. At the same time, the labor income share continues to decline compared to capital remuneration, which deepens and widens existing inequalities.[36] The global decent work deficits affect workers both in the private and public sectors.

DEFICITS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF LABOR RIGHTS AND ADEQUATE WORKING CONDITIONS

Target 8.8 aims to **protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers**. Per the international labor rights and jurisprudence of the ILO, five rights are defined as fundamental, which means they amount to human rights and must be upheld by countries and respected by businesses, regardless of whether states have ratified the corresponding ILO conventions. The five rights are freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (SDG indicator 8.8.2); the abolition of child labor (SDG 8.7); the elimination of forced and compulsory labor (SDG 8.7); the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (SDGs 8.5 and 8.8); and a safe and healthy working environment (SDG 8.8).

According to the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) Global Rights Index 2024,[37] freedom of speech and assembly is constrained in 43% of countries across the world; trade union registration is hindered in 74%; the right to strike is constrained in 87%; workers are denied the right to establish or join a trade union in 75%; and collective bargaining is constrained in 79%.[38] Furthermore, public employees face obstacles and limitations on their right to organize in at least 50 countries.[39] These limitations and violations of workers' rights also occur at a local level.

With respect to child labor, UNICEF notes that in 2020 there were approximately 160 million children in work activities across the world. They are often engaged in hazardous activities, and their schooling is affected by the time they spend working. This situation compromises their future.[40] According to the ILO, in 2021 approximately 27.6 million people were subjected to forced labor globally. Workers endure different forms of forced labor, such as having their passports or other documents confiscated by their employer, becoming trapped in an unending debt situation or being physically confined in buildings or farms.[41] **Child labor and forced labor are present in global supply chains, especially where there are multiple layers of subcontracting and significant informality and lack of rights at work, including the lack of union representation.**

Furthermore, nondiscrimination and pay equity between women and men remains unachieved. **Women are exposed to precarious employment conditions in more than 90% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 89% of countries in Southern Asia and almost 75% of those in Latin America.[42]** This perpetuates income inequality between genders. This is also generally the case for LRG workers. Women make up the majority of LRG staff, and they remain relegated to low-paid, feminized and horizontally-segregated professions, such as primary education, care, social services, health services, tourism and janitorial services.[43] Discrimination also occurs with regard to age, nationality, disability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and other features. **Migrant workers — especially when young and undocumented — are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, as they must often accept precarious working conditions to survive in receiving countries.[44]**

Finally, 2.78 million workers still lose their lives each year due to occupational accidents and work-related illnesses, and 374 million workers experience non-fatal occupational accidents. Globally, lost workdays account for nearly 4% of the world's GDP, with some countries seeing this figure rise to 6% or more.[45]

Poor working conditions, informality and the lack of decent work opportunities trap a significant number of workers worldwide in a poverty cycle and perpetuate inequalities, including at a local level.[46] The global rise in non-standard forms of work and of a new global class of precarious workers[47] — including through the widespread use of unregulated platform-economy technologies for labor market intermediation, both in the public and private sectors — has translated into the rise of new challenges that stand in the way of SDG 8 realization. These challenges usually include poor working conditions

(largely due to lack of access to union representation and collective bargaining rights) and therefore low wages, income insecurity, excessive working hours, limited or no social security, health risks and wage theft.[48]

The surge in digital labor platforms that has given birth to the so-called "sharing economy" can bring benefits, such as: facilitating exchanges and services at the neighborhood or city level, promoting human and social relations, and supporting the circular economy.[49] However, when un- or poorly regulated, the platform economy, digital and algorithmic technologies, and AI have worsened working conditions. The effects of which are precariousness, excessive workload, worker surveillance, erratic working time and schedules, and the presence of dominant companies that sidestep labor regulations, refuse to accept their role and responsibilities as employers, and deny workers legal recognition as employees.[50] Workers must therefore constantly be on the lookout for new jobs (often with different companies in parallel), and they are hired as self-employed or one-person microenterprises.[51] This situation allows some digital labor platform companies to avoid their employment and social security obligations.[52]

A lack of social protection is also a major cause of poverty, especially (although not exclusively) for informal and casual workers. Numerous workers and small-scale entrepreneurs do not have access to adequate healthcare, paid leave, unemployment benefits or compensation/coverage for ill health, accidents or pension. This leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and health emergencies and forces them to pay out-of-pocket for their own social security. According to the ILO, over 4 billion people globally lack any form of social protection and many more have inadequate coverage.[53]

Additionally, wage theft is a major labor issue that affects millions of workers worldwide, across various industries. Its true scale is difficult to measure due to underreporting, but available data highlight its severity.[54] During the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 12 billion USD in wages were withheld from garment workers in the Global South as brands canceled orders and refused to compensate workers for completed work.[55] In the construction industry, particularly among migrant workers, common violations include unpaid overtime, unauthorized deductions and misreported hours. Migrant workers from countries like India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China and Indonesia often face unpaid wages and illegal recruitment fees, usually due to weak law enforcement, low worker awareness, denial of trade union rights and high informal employment rates.[56]

LOCALIZING LABOR RIGHTS: IMPLEMENTATION AND DECENT WORK CREATION

Within this complex and challenging landscape, LRGs can play a critical, progressive and transformative role by fostering an enabling environment for the implementation of SDG 8 in both the territories and workplaces that fall under their jurisdictions.

Cities such as **Bologna** (Italy) offer funding and workspaces for cooperatives and social enterprises that prioritize decent work conditions. In the spirit of social value procurement, **London** (UK) requires contractors to pay living wages and respect workers' rights as part of procurement agreements. Furthermore, in the UK, many councils signed UNISON's Ethical Care Charter, which entails a commitment to ban zero-hour contracts and ensure the recruitment and retention of a more stable workforce through more sustainable pay, conditions and training levels in care services.[57] **Oakland** (USA) had a community benefits agreement that included requirements for living wages and limitations on the use of temporary workers. In **Niğde** (Türkiye), Niğde Gastronomy House and Niğde Modern Bread Production Facility prioritized women for employment.

✱ Legal and policy instruments

Legal and policy instruments are essential for protecting labor rights because they ensure enforceable standards. They provide accountability mechanisms, which allow workers to seek legal compensation if their rights are violated. Without legal protection, workers would be vulnerable to voluntary, inconsistent and unfair treatment by employers. International frameworks, such as ILO conventions, help set global standards.

To date, the ILO has 191 legally binding conventions that can be used as legal instruments in regions or municipalities of any country that ratified those conventions. The eight fundamental ILO conventions cover: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. With respect to these, if a country is an ILO member, these conventions apply throughout the territory regardless of whether the country's central government has ratified them. LRGs — along with central governments when and where appropriate — can surpass their international commitments and enforce more ambitious policies and regulations to address specific labor issues in a given territory, in order to accelerate SDG 8 implementation. Similarly, ILO recommendations, such as Recommendation 204 on the formalization of informal workers, can be used as instruments for policy formulation. However, they are non-binding. **LRGs can position themselves as legal guardians of workers' rights as well as guarantors of decent work and labor rights in the territories and workplaces they oversee, thus making a major, concrete contribution to localizing SDG 8.**

For example, the Decent and Dignified Work Policy of **Bogotá** (Colombia) promotes workers' rights and is a key mechanism for reducing social segregation. In terms of wage theft, in 2010 **Miami-Dade County** became the first LRG in the USA to pass a county-wide Wage Theft Ordinance. The **state of New York** established the Office of Labor Policy & Standards to focus on enforcing wage laws. The city also launched a Wage Theft Task Force in 2022, bringing together city, state, and federal agencies to investigate violations. New York also uses anonymous hotlines to encourage workers to report violations without fear of retaliation. The law allows workers to file complaints with the county, which can investigate and order full repayment of stolen wages, plus damages.

In 2021, **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) introduced an electronic wage-payment system for construction workers on city projects. Employers must register and pay wages through the system, ensuring transparency and reducing opportunities for wage theft. **Barcelona** (Spain) works with trade unions and NGOs to provide legal aid and financial support for workers affected by wage theft. The city also funds so-called labor rights defense points, where workers (especially migrants) can seek free legal consultations.

In the context of growing displacement and the pressing need for safe and regular migration pathways, LRGs have become crucial in ensuring that migrants and refugees can access services, develop skills and contribute meaningfully to local economies. The Welcome Center in **Milan** (Italy) is a single point of access to city services dedicated to migrants and refugees, and it accompanies and promotes their path to inclusion. The **Kampala** Capital City Authority (Uganda) supports urban refugees by facilitating their access to healthcare, work permits, vocational training and microfinance. **Freetown** (Liberia) integrated migrants into its urban development policies by ensuring they have access to skills training, healthcare and affordable housing. The Integration Center for Foreigners Northern Regional Directorate established by **Balti** (Moldova) in 2017 serves as a local information desk and provides integration services for migrants in the municipality. The center has signed agreements with the Law Center of Advocates and its territorial representatives function as support units in legal counselling, information and training.

✱ Rights and working conditions of public service employees

By upholding the labor rights of LRG service workers and ensuring decent working conditions (including by negotiating with their employees' unions), LRGs can directly realize SDG 8 in their workplaces.

Sweden provides numerous cases related to shortening working hours and/or increasing salaries. The social services office in **Hjällbo** is participating in a national project on shortened working hours, where employees work six hours a day while earning the same salary. In **Värmdö**, difficulties in both retaining and recruiting social workers have led the local government to try a four-day workweek. In **Botkyrka**, the Swedish Union for Professionals (*Akademikerförbundet SSR*) worked with the municipality to address the issue of social workers resigning due to challenging labor conditions in the profession. As a result of social dialogue, the municipality increased the wages of social workers and case managers by 2,000 SEK per month, covering about 260 workers.

LRGs also step up when national regulations and protections for workers fall short and implementation systems default. Despite the absence of a universal healthcare coverage scheme in Armenia, the municipality of **Yerevan** provides a health insurance package for its workers through municipal procurement with insurance companies. In the USA, several LRGs have raised the minimum wage of the municipal workforce, such as **Atlanta**, **Jersey City**, **New Orleans**, **North Miami Beach** and **Tallahassee**. Some also passed paid family- or parental-leave policies and more generous annual sick leave than was mandated by federal and state regulations. **Tallinn** (Estonia) applied digital instruments to conduct risk assessments of occupational safety and health for their remote workplaces. In Flanders (Belgium), the **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (VVSG) organized a bootcamp in 2024 to help members address long-term employee absences, which are often caused by burnout and third-party violence. Over five days, ten LRGs collaborated with experts to develop reintegration policies. The bootcamp covered vision development, action planning, supervisor training and stakeholder role definition. Participants applied their learnings, such as in **Bruges**, where interview guides were created for supervisors to support sick employees' return to work.

3.3.4 Social dialogue

Social dialogue is a participatory approach to discussing and defining labor-related issues. It requires the involvement of workers' and employers' organizations (in the case of bipartite dialogue) and also public authorities (in the case of tripartite dialogue). It includes collective bargaining, which is a fair way to define working conditions (including pay) and a fundamental labor right covered by ILO Convention 98. Social dialogue encompasses all types of negotiations, consultations or exchanges of information between (or among) representatives of governments, employers and workers (so-called "social partners") on issues of common interest relating to economic, employment and social policy. At a European level, the European Commission promotes social dialogue by supporting the work of 44 cross-industry social dialogue committees, including that of the LRG sector.[58] The Nordic countries also have a longstanding practice of so-called "local tripartite cooperation." This localized social dialogue practice seeks to foster collaboration to create a culture of cooperation that promotes finding the most effective and appropriate local solutions to specific challenges facing municipalities.[59]

Social dialogue is a system of regulations of industrial relations[60] and is different from societal dialogue, which can include a wider range of actors, such as civic groups, grassroots organizations, associations, cooperatives, academia and NGOs active in local communities. The latter form of dialogue is more about meaningful societal consultation and democratic involvement. It largely remains outside the scope of industrial relations, although in some cases it can help shape public policies that have a labor dimension (e.g. formalization, pathways to transition from education and vocational training into employment, the integration of migrant workers, etc.).

Social dialogue is a cornerstone not only of SDG 8 but also of good governance.[61] Nonetheless, the comprehensive, practical adoption of social dialogue still faces many challenges, even when it exists in law. Plus, its implementation at a territorial level can be difficult. Challenges are compounded when

the legal framework restricts social dialogue: limitations on freedom of association or collective bargaining, for example.[62]

While social dialogue and societal dialogue are important at all levels of government, integrated policies and planning are grounded at the local level, where there are more opportunities for establishing synergies among actors in the public sector, private sector and civil society, therefore advancing SDG 8. While social dialogue at an LRG level is not embraced and practiced worldwide, there are good practices at a local, national and European level, which evidence its potential for SDG 8 implementation and provide inspiration for scaling-up.[63]

In **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), both the municipal and provincial governments have implemented initiatives to foster dialogue with unions, businesses and civil society organizations to develop policies that promote decent employment. The municipal Economic and Social Council serves as an institutional space where government representatives and social partners collaborate to design public policies aimed at economic and social development, including job creation. Additionally, the city has introduced job training programs in collaboration with social partners to enhance employability and align with the demands of the labor market. The Provincial Commission on Agricultural Labor brings together government officials and social partners to establish fair working conditions in rural areas. Furthermore, advisory councils have been created in different regions of the province — again with social partners — to design and implement employment policies tailored to regional needs.

In **Bislig** (the Philippines), the local government and the Bislig City Employees Association have established a Collective Negotiation Agreement, which includes the creation of a joint Labor-Management Consultative Council. This council holds regular meetings to promote fair, constructive and balanced labor-management relations. It reviews and approves programs aimed at improving productivity and offers guidance to the mayor and relevant local officials on employment conditions outlined in the Agreement. All costs related to the council's operations are fully covered by the employer.

The **Kempen** region (Belgium) offers an example of how social dialogue can serve as a vital response mechanism during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Welfare Care Kempen (WCK) is an intermunicipal consortium that delivers public welfare and care services; it brings together 27 municipal Public Centres for Social Welfare. A tradition of trust-based social dialogue between WCK's management and trade unions proved instrumental in maintaining the resilience of essential services during the Covid pandemic. The works council at WCK, where workplace and governance matters are regularly addressed with staff representatives, enabled both management and unions to swiftly develop a shared response strategy that redeployed staff rapidly with their consent and prioritized the most vulnerable in the community.

In Belgium's **Walloon Region**, the LRG social partners have undertaken a number of initiatives related to digital skills training, including organizing a range of dedicated and regular workshops and conferences. Since digitalization has further increased the need for reskilling and upskilling workers to adapt to technological changes, the LRG social partners have recognized the impact of new ways of working and using AI, specifically the evolution of AI and its potential impact on workers and citizens. This emphasizes the importance of continuous training so that workers can adapt to new technologies and access higher value-added professions. Concern about the potential displacement of workers by artificial intelligence has led to discussions between LRG employers and trade unions over data protection, digital service accessibility and personal data storage; employers and workers may have differing views on these matters. Social dialogue at a local level is helping social partners discuss complex issues and seek shared solutions, therefore ensuring support for and ownership of the ways forward.

Responding to rising third-party violence and harassment in the LRG sector is an important challenge related to occupational safety and health. At the level of EU social dialogue in the LRG sector, in 2010, EU social partners — the European Public Service Trade Unions (EPSU) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) — agreed to join and adhere to the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines negotiated across particularly exposed public and pri-

vate sectors (hospitality and food catering, national administrations, etc.); this was also an initiative to localize the implementation of ILO Convention 190. To facilitate and promote local implementation of the Guidelines, the EU LRG social partners launched a two-year EU-funded project (2021-2022) called "Local, Social, Digital," which focused on good practices developed in LRG public service workplaces. This included cases from LRGs in Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands and the United Kingdom.[64] For instance, in France, local statutory joint occupational safety and health committees have contributed to the prevention of workplace third-party violence and harassment, while playing a consultative role in addressing occurrences. Good practices include a pilot program on Compulsory Prior Mediation in 40 French departments and prevention initiatives with clear protocols for handling threats in small municipalities. In the **Occitanie** regional administration, a policy on third-party violence and harassment outlines protection measures, reporting procedures and support systems, including a trained reporting unit.[65] The agreement was recently renegotiated and re-signed by the EU LRG social partners (EPSU and CEMR) in 2025.[66]

When it comes to SDG 8 localization, territorial employment pacts have also proven to be powerful instruments that support local, tripartite, social and societal dialogue and active labor market policies for decent work creation. In 1997, territorial employment pacts were first introduced in Italy — more precisely in the "third Italy" area comprising the central regions and Emilia Romagna —in response to high unemployment. Given their success, they were elevated to the EU level, where more than 80 partnerships were created; each one received technical support to develop a strategic approach and action plan.[67] The experience gained from these pacts contributed to the European Employment Strategy and influenced pilot initiatives like "Acting Locally" and "Preparatory Measures for a Local Commitment to Employment."[68]

The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS), in collaboration with the ministry in charge of local government and the four largest national trade unions, supports programs in municipalities focused on local tripartite cooperation. The Norwegian Municipal Workers' Union, *Fagforbundet*, played a central role. Over half of Norway's municipalities participated, addressing issues like sick leave reduction, full-time work and innovation. Evaluations were positive, with reduced sick leave saving nearly 38 million EUR. Tripartite cooperation lowered municipal operating costs by 2–3.5% in general and helped prevent privatization in three Norwegian municipalities.

One case of constructive societal dialogue involves street vendors and domestic workers, who constitute a significant portion of the informal economy in many countries. **São Paulo** (Brazil) offers good practices for both types of workers. First, the municipal government established Permanent Street-Vending Commissions to institutionalize dialogue among street vendors, authorities and civil society, paving the way to formalization. This not only provided the vendors with immediate benefits but also created conditions for them to endure changes in administration that led to restrictive regulations and permit revocations. In response, vendors formed the Forum of Street Vendors of the City of São Paulo. The forum sparked new legislation that defined street vending parameters, outlined permit criteria, and re-established the commissions and a citywide municipal council to oversee implementation. This initiative underscores the important role that progressive LRGs play in creating sustainable programs that can resist eventual setbacks. Second, in 2017, the Union of Domestic Workers of São Paulo (STDMSP), a municipal-level union reached a milestone when it signed a collective agreement with the Union of Domestic Employers of the state of São Paulo (SEDESP). This agreement, which was renegotiated in 2021, regulates employment relationships in order to improve working conditions by establishing a minimum wage above the national level and ensuring weekly rest periods. The meetings, consultations and negotiations proved instrumental in formulating demands and finding common ground, which demonstrates the effectiveness of collective bargaining. While LRGs were not formally involved in the negotiation of this bilateral agreement, the role of the state of São Paulo was nonetheless fundamental. It facilitated dialogue between the two local social partners, keeping the political space open to progressive social negotiations at a time when the national-level landscape was unfavorable. This highlights the crucial agency and political soft power LRGs can wield to support the implementation of SDG 8, even by indirect means.[69]

3.3.5 Conclusions and recommendations

The persistent global challenges of unemployment, precarious working conditions, decent work deficit and uneven economic growth underscore both the critical relevance of SDG 8 and the fact that the road to achieving economic growth with decent work is long. That is why this SDG must be urgently localized, with LRGs exercising critical agency as public policy makers, public service providers and employers. Economic growth alone cannot meaningfully advance SDG 8, unless it is inclusive, equitable and rooted in decent work. The failures of top-down, extractive and profit-first economic models highlight the need for transformative approaches that are both place-based and people- and worker-centered. Furthermore, national policies and legal frameworks often neglect the "decent work" aspect of SDG 8 and/or fail to embrace and address the complexities of labor and social issues in territories, local communities and workplaces.

Because of their proximity to communities, direct responsibility for public service provision and jurisdiction over important workplaces, LRGs are uniquely positioned to accelerate and meaningfully localize SDG 8. Through levers that include LED, decent work creation policies, territorial social dialogue, collective bargaining with their employees' unions and engagement in societal dialogue with local community actors, LRGs can promote formalization, champion social justice, develop care-centered territories and promote rights-based public employment strategies', hence pioneering innovative, forward-thinking, ambitious and progressive approaches that can pave the way for other LRGs and levels of government. To effectively address SDG 8-related challenges and provide context-relevant solutions, LRGs can also complement and compensate for the failures and ideological hostility of other levels of government.

These efforts succeed best when rooted in social dialogue, cross-sector collaboration and a clear commitment to labor rights, equity and climate action. The paper also emphasizes the potential of local public service workers and their unions as co-creators of sustainable, resilient economies and inclusive development strategies. To meaningfully advance the 2030 Agenda, the localization of SDG 8 must be elevated as both a political priority and a practical strategy, supported through adequate resources, legal frameworks and multilevel governance coordination.

To achieve inclusive and sustainable development, these recommendations call on all spheres of governance and institutional actors to shift the economic focus from narrow, GDP growth metrics to a holistic agenda centered on human well-being, human and labor rights, care, equitable access to local quality public services and multidimensional, inclusive prosperity. Additionally, the following set of recommendations structured by stakeholder group aims to provide concrete policy actions tailored to their distinct roles and capacities.

For international organizations (United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, the Organisation for Economic Development and Co-Operation or OECD, ILO, etc.):

- Place SDG localization, and in particular SDG 8 localization, at the center of the priorities of the multilateral system. Acknowledge LRGs, their associations and trade unions as key social partners and agents, decision-makers and critical partners to international organizations and national governments in their policy dialogues and monitoring mechanisms, including those led by the ILO, the United Nations Development Program and the OECD. LRGs must be treated as policymakers, not just policy implementers, and their workers and unions must be treated as service provision experts.

- In international financial institutions and development agencies and funds, mandate localization funding — specifically earmarked to support LRG-led and union-backed decent work and local economic development strategies — and mandate technical support frameworks.

- Continue strengthening the adoption, implementation and monitoring of international legal frameworks (especially ILO Conventions and UN human rights instruments) by supporting Member States in building institutional capacity at all levels and providing targeted guidance to LRGs and social partners to effectively apply these standards in local contexts.

For national governments:

- Adopt binding frameworks for multilevel governance, mandating the inclusion of LRGs in the design, implementation and monitoring of all SDG 8-related strategies (including employment and entrepreneurship programs for youth, migrants, and informal workers).

- Remove legal and political obstacles to freedom of association and collective bargaining and create an enabling environment that encourages social and societal dialogues at the LRG level.

- Ensure legal domestication of ILO conventions at all levels of governance. National governments must not only ratify but also resource the

implementation of ILO conventions in coordination with LRGs and labor unions.

• Adopt frameworks for social value procurement nationwide and for in-house first policies to create decent work on LRG premises.

• Encourage and build the capacity of LRGs to build a practice and culture of social dialogue and collective bargaining with their staff unions.

• Support the co-creation of territorial employment pacts with LRGs, unions and employers that are focused on local industrial policy, green and digital transitions, and the care economy — ensuring regional resilience and reducing inequalities across territories.

• Involve LRGs in institutionalizing national-local social dialogue platforms — supported by ministries of labor, local government, planning and local development — with an explicit mandate to monitor and improve public sector labor conditions, address informal work and expand decent jobs at the territorial level.

For LRGs and their associations:

• Reorient economic policy objectives toward human well-being and multidimensional development to lead locally grounded transformations that prioritize decent work, sustainability, equality and care.

• Address territorial inequalities through progressive, local redistribution policies, leveraging tools and approaches such as local economic development, the social and solidarity economy, care-centered public policies and inclusive financial innovation. Special attention should be paid to women, youth, migrants, informal workers and persons with disabilities.

• Ensure dignified employment within the public sector, guaranteeing labor rights, fair wages, occupational safety and health, and access to social protection. Expand and strengthen direct public service provision by LRGs, promoting municipalization, remunicipalization and insourcing of public service jobs, whenever possible.

• Engage in constructive social dialogue and collective bargaining with unions representing LRG service workers, also keeping in mind that quality local public service provision goes hand in hand with decent work opportunities for those service providers.

• Actively engage local actors — trade unions, cooperatives, grassroots organizations, civil society and the private sector — in societal dialogue to co-create sustainable employment strategies and inclusive economic models.

• Implement digital and green transitions that are just and equitable, both ensuring reskilling and protection for workers affected by economic transformation and promoting universal access to new opportunities.

• Champion multilevel governance, engaging proactively with national and international actors not only to access funding and partnerships but also to shape policy agendas, frameworks and regulatory environments that affect local economic conditions and labor conditions.

For unions of public service workers:

• Champion the full spectrum of the Decent Work Agenda, including the promotion of labor rights, social protection, safe and healthy working conditions, and inclusive access to employment opportunities.

• Strengthen strategic partnerships with LRGs at local, regional, national and continental levels, engaging in regular social dialogue and co-developing policies that foster sustainable local economies and inclusive labor markets.

• Proactively reach out to non-unionized and informal workers, particularly those in precarious or underserved sectors, to organize them and expand the protective reach of trade union representation and to empower collective voice.

• Act as bridges between workers and governance processes, facilitating inclusive participation in local development planning and monitoring, particularly for marginalized groups including youth, migrants and women.

• Engage actively in digital transformation processes, both to defend workers' rights in evolving labor markets and to innovate organizing strategies — using digital platforms to train, mobilize and represent workers.

• Participate in international and regional trade-union networks, bringing global labor innovations and solidarity to the local level, and exchanging good practices in areas such as collective bargaining, platform work regulation and just transition strategies.

3.4

Paper 4. Localizing SDG 14 and the 2025 UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels

3.4.1 Introduction

The ocean is fundamental to life on Earth. It covers 75% of the planet's surface, holds 97% of its water and accounts for 99% of the Earth's living space by volume.[1] Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, Life Below Water, which is under assessment at this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), is crucial for local and regional governments (LRGs). They play a key role in protecting maritime, coastal and freshwater ecosystems as well as in regulating pollution and promoting sustainable blue economies that support local livelihoods and climate resilience.

Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, two UN Ocean Conferences have taken place (UNOC1 in 2017 and UNOC2 in 2022). Ten years after the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) and the Paris Agreement, UNOC3 will be held in June 2025 in Nice, France. The cohosts will be the governments of France and Costa Rica. UNOC was created to bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and the scientific community, philanthropic organizations, Indigenous Peoples and local communities to discuss the implementation of SDG 14. Yet, as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean recognized,[2] **SDG 14 remains one of the least funded SDGs, while there is an urgent need for accelerated ocean action due to still-very-fragmented, global ocean governance**. To help bridge this gap, access could be expanded to dedicated funding streams, such as the Global Environment Facility's Blue Economy Financing Project or the Green Climate Fund's ocean resilience programs.

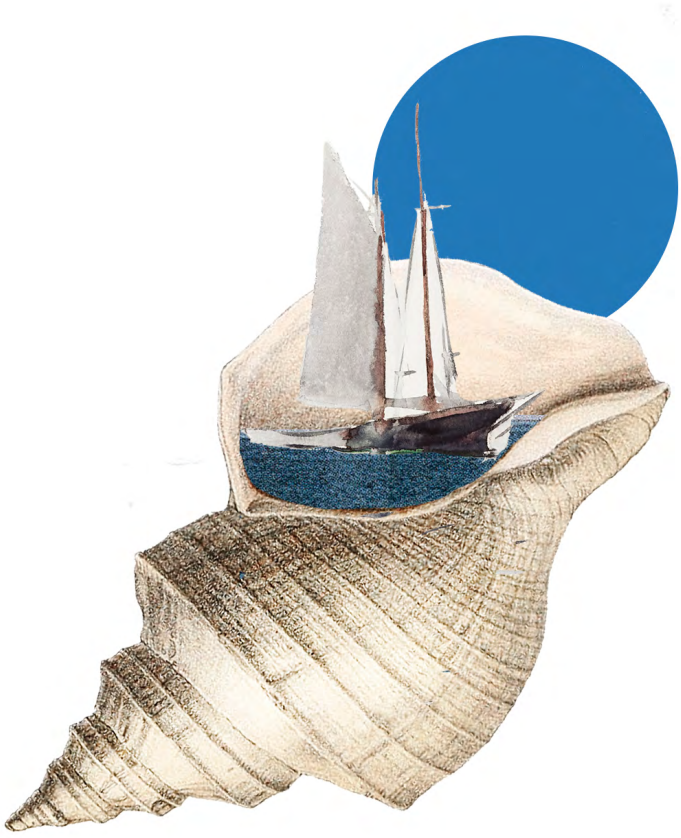
The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 states that "efforts to address significant challenges from eutrophication, worsening acidification, declining fish stocks, rising temperatures and widespread pollution remain uneven."[3] The 2024 SDG dashboards by region and income group show that SDG 14 faces either significant or major challenges across all regions, with positive trends stagnating or declining particularly in low-income countries and small island developing states (SIDS). Key actions are needed, such as "implementing sustainable fishing practices, expanding marine protected areas to safeguard key biodiversity areas, increasing capacities to monitor ocean health and addressing the pollution that is choking waterways."

Climate change amplifies these pressures. Millions of people are increasingly affected by both chronic and acute climate-related hazards, whether related to temperature (e.g. heatwaves, permafrost thawing), wind (e.g. hurricanes, storms, tornados), water (e.g. sea level rise, precipitation variability, droughts) or solid mass (e.g. coastal erosion, soil degradation or erosion, landslides).[4] As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows, 6% of touristic beaches in Galicia (Spain) are at risk of coastal flooding. Floods cost 60–70 million USD on average in the Lower Mekong River Basin, and hurricanes Irma and Maria (2017) caused 741 million USD in tourism-revenue loss in the Caribbean.[5]

As key governance actors that are closest to the affected populations, LRGs are at the forefront of these challenges. **Cities and coastal regions are already taking action to protect communities, infrastructure and ecosystems from climate-related ocean threats.** However, their role is still insufficiently recognized in global ocean governance and financing mechanisms. Ensuring a resilient and sustainable ocean future requires stronger multilevel governance, in which LRGs play a strategic role in designing and implementing effective policies. Human and non-human rights to healthy, clean and sustainable, coastal, marine and freshwater environments must be fully recognized at local, national, regional and global levels.

Based on that assessment and those recommendations, the overarching theme of UNOC3 will be "Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean." There will be ten so-called "Ocean Action Panels" related to pollution, climate change, biodiversity, fisheries, the blue economy, knowledge, cooperation, finance, and coastal and marine ecosystem-based management. To ensure real impact, these discussions must fully integrate the leadership, expertise and initiatives of LRGs, which are already pioneering solutions for sustainable ocean governance and adaptation, as recognized by the UN Secretary-General's background note for UNOC 2025.[6] Indeed, national figures do not always reflect local initiatives, and efforts to enhance data collection and monitoring at the local level must be prioritized in these discussions. The upcoming 2025 UN Ocean Decade mid-term review presents a strategic opportunity to showcase LRG contributions and advocate for enhanced local-level ocean monitoring and financing.

This paper shall assess the state of SDG 14 localization and provide political recommendations for accelerating coastal and ocean action, with LRGs playing a critical role.



3.4.2 Methodological approach

Co-constructing narratives that engage with stories that give meaning and security to people in transformational situations could improve the communication of SDG 14, its targets and its connections to other SDGs. The ten UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels should therefore be articulated through the ocean-based SDG model developed by David Obura.[7] This model assesses the sustainability of human-nature interactions and offers clear decision-making guidance by looking at the interactions among SDG 14 and the rest of the SDGs. It analyzes the state and changes of the ocean as a form of commons, the direct and indirect benefits arising from our sustainable interaction with it (Society and Economy) and the means of implementation that are necessary to achieve balance among the 2030 Agenda's environmental, social and economic goals (Governance).

It is crucial to approach SDG 14 as a goal that addresses the ocean as a form of global commons,[8] and this approach may be assessed through governance frameworks. That is why the means of implementation also build on and are complemented by the eight principles for commons governance proposed by Elinor Ostrom.[9] Among others, they include community engagement, monitoring and transparency, and sustainable financing. For instance, Ostrom's principle of community engagement is reflected in the locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) approach, which empowers coastal communities to regulate and benefit from sustainable ocean use.

To assess the state of SDG 14 localization, this paper aligns the UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels with the above SDG narrative. The SDG 14 targets are localized and articulated with other SDGs and principles as follows:

Table 3.4.1 Achieving SDG 14 localization

SDG targets	Interrelated SDGs	UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels	Ocean dimensions (Obura 2020)
14.1 14.2 14.5		b. and d. Addressing marine pollution of all kinds and marine- and coastal-ecosystem conservation and management	**The ocean as a form of commons** Ocean health and coastal-asset health, impacted by climate interactions, generate ecosystem services...
14.3 14.2 14.5		e. Leveraging ocean-climate-biodiversity interlinkages	
14.4 14.6 14.b		a. Fostering sustainable fisheries management and small-scale fisheries support	**Societies and economies** ... that support income and jobs across multiple economic sectors, through extraction and use of resources; provide infrastructure for innovation, potential energy solutions and growing coastal communities and cities; contribute to reducing poverty and hunger, improving health, strengthening gender and social equity...
14.7		f. Advancing sustainable ocean-based economies, sustainable maritime transport and coastal community resilience, leaving no one behind	
14.b		g. Promoting sustainable food from the ocean to eradicate poverty and ensure food security.	
14.2		c. Promoting and supporting all forms of cooperation, especially at the regional and subregional levels	**Means of implementation** ... through governance mechanisms, institutional and stakeholder investment and participation, and which are informed by awareness and knowledge.
14.a		h. Increasing ocean-related scientific cooperation, knowledge, capacity building, marine technology, and education to strengthen the science-policy interface for ocean health	
14.c		i. Enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the UNCLOS.	
		j. Mobilizing finance for ocean actions in support of SDG14	

Source: authors

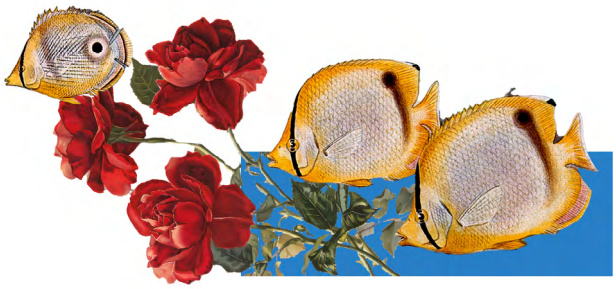
3.4.3 Assessing the state of the ocean: From global to local processes

In 2009, a report entitled An Assessment of Assessments was published under the auspices of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme and the IOC-UNESCO. One of its recommendations was to "develop integrated ecosystem assessments that can inform on the state of systems rather than just individual sectors or ecosystem components and which include social and economic aspects."[10] The reason was that the blue economy includes non-market benefits provided by freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems (e.g. natural river systems, lakes, wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs), such as provisioning services (e.g. seafood), regulating services (e.g. coral reefs and mangroves as flood protection barriers or carbon sinks), cultural services (e.g. recreational use of freshwater ecosystems) and supporting services (e.g. mangroves supporting fish nurseries).[11]

More than a decade later, the European Commission published another Seascape Assessment[12] to analyze global ocean information and scenarios produced over the last five years (2018–2023) by existing organizations and processes. This updated assessment once again highlighted the persistent fragmentation of ocean-related information, which prevents decision-makers and stakeholders from developing a coherent, system-based approach to ocean management. As a result, land-ocean interactions remain inadequately integrated into governance frameworks, particularly at the local and regional levels.

As stated in the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024,[13] **the continued lack of a unified ocean knowledge system limits the ability of LRGs to implement sustainable solutions effectively**. One of the few examples of stakeholder engagement in ocean assessment is the Ocean Health Index+, which allows independent groups to measure ocean health in their regions, countries, states and communities. This localized approach enables decision-makers to explore the variables influencing ocean health at smaller scales, where policy and management decisions have the most immediate impact.

Regarding global trends in coastal and marine environments, the Global Resources Outlook 2024[14] highlights the three-pronged planetary crisis of



climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution — which are issues central to the UNOC3 Ocean Action Panels. G7 and G20 policy-makers (the latter having recently created the Oceans 20 group[15]) refer to this report. This underscores the necessity of **involving governance actors at all levels, particularly LRGs, as they are already at the forefront of adaptation and mitigation efforts**.

Navigating the complexities of human-ocean interactions requires collaborative approaches that address challenges such as species migration; coastal erosion; sea level rise; and coastal, marine and inland pollution. These issues demand coordinated action through a territorial approach among LRGs, scientific institutions, businesses, policymakers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous leaders.[16] In particular, LRGs play a critical role in ensuring that policies and adaptation strategies respond to the realities of coastal communities.

Although data generation and knowledge sharing have increased,[17] further reinforcement is required to enhance both the accuracy and accessibility of ocean-related information. This data is not only produced by scientific research but also by an increasing number of citizen-driven initiatives that promote participatory governance and resource management. Initiatives focused on marine plastics, beach cleanups, education and awareness-raising have demonstrated the power of grassroots engagement. By scaling up local initiatives through networking and partnerships, their impact can be amplified globally.

However, while local actions are crucial, they cannot address large-scale challenges such as ocean warming, sea level rise, acidification and deoxygenation on their own. **In this context of policy- and competency fragmentation, LRGs are taking ownership of SDG 14 localization, which is currently off-track.**

Thus, it is crucial to analyze shifts in local-level approaches to SDG 14 implementation to enhance national and global coordination. This will enable the mainstreaming of best practices and ensure that local innovations are effectively integrated into broader frameworks. A structured assessment of these locally led transformations is essential to achieving sustainable management of ocean- and coastal-ecosystem management.

3.4.4 Global SDG 14 implementation trends: Responses and actions at local and regional levels

This section provides a broad framing of SDG 14, recognizing that its targets and indicators do not always directly align with the competencies of LRGs. Drawing on global and regional data, this section assesses the current state of SDG 14 implementation, identifies key trends and examines how LRGs are both impacted by and contributing to progress. This section also highlights key LRG-led initiatives aimed at preserving marine ecosystems, reducing pollution, maximizing ecosystem services, promoting sustainable marine resource management, and fostering equitable and inclusive ocean governance.

THE OCEAN AS A FORM OF COMMONS: OCEAN HEALTH AND COASTAL-ASSET HEALTH IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

✱ Addressing marine pollution and coastal ecosystem conservation (targets 14.1, 14.2 and 14.5)

Coastal areas encompass transitional aquatic systems (SDG 15) at the convergence of freshwater (SDG 6) and seawater, including river mouths, coastal lagoons, salt marshes and mangroves. These ecosystems provide essential services such as natural protection against sea level rise and extreme weather events (SDG 13). However, only 16% of the world's coastal regions remain ecologically intact, while 48% are heavily impacted by human activities. Additionally, in 84% of countries, more than half of coastal areas have experienced significant degradation.[18]

The increasing intensity of human activities continues to exert pressure on aquatic ecosystems, affecting future generations. Ocean acidification continues to increase; it has risen by 30% compared to pre-industrial levels and impacts marine biodiversity and regional climate patterns. When combined with ocean warming and deoxygenation, these factors push marine ecosystems to critical thresholds.[19]

Climate-induced changes in rainfall patterns may result in extreme flooding, carrying plastics, nutrients and pollutants across vast distances. All this will affect coastal and marine ecosystems (e.g. sand dunes, wetlands, beaches, intertidal flats, mangroves, seagrass beds, kelp forests, coral reefs), which in turn will affect coastal and island communities and threaten food security in those that are particularly reliant on small-scale fishing.

Given the rapid acceleration of climate-related pressures, **coastal infrastructures and urban areas face risks that may unfold far sooner than originally projected**.[20] To respond to these cumulative threats, **an ecosystem-based approach (target 14.2) must integrate ecological, social and economic considerations into marine and coastal governance**, and it must align with principles outlined in the Convention on Biological Diversity — from watersheds through coastal areas, to offshore marine waters. These integrated approaches include many activities, such as the protection of coastal and marine areas (target 14.5). A key example is the Baltic Sea Challenge, launched by the mayors of **Turku** and **Helsinki** (Finland) in 2007. This initiative fosters inter-city cooperation in water conservation. Similarly, the **Espoo** Baltic Sea Action Plan (2024–2028) (Finland) applies an ecosystem-based approach across 42 targeted measures, addressing challenges such as eutrophication, biodiversity loss and marine pollution. Another noteworthy initiative is **Istanbul**'s (Türkiye) urban water management plan (2018–2024), which integrates water supply, rainwater collection, river management and wastewater treatment into a comprehensive governance framework. Through the VaLEUr-Gabès project, the **Metropolitan Area of Barcelona** (Spain) reinforces **Gabès**' (Tunisia) capacities on water management in a context of climate crisis — specifically targeting municipal rainwater planning to face the challenges of a semi-desert climate, the chemical industry, and scarce marine and coastal resources.

Over the past 30 years, coastal oxygen dead zones have increased tenfold due to excessive nutrient runoff.[21] To counteract these challenges, LRGs are implementing ecosystem-based management strategies that integrate freshwater- and marine conservation efforts.

For example, various LRGs have launched The Sea Starts Here awareness campaigns to emphasize upstream pollution prevention, such as **San José** and **Desamparados** (Costa Rica); **Chiclana** and the district of Sarrià-Sant Gervasi in **Barcelona** (Spain); and **Collioure**, **Villerville**, **Saint-Malo** and **Rouen** (France). In **Yala** (Thailand), local policymakers have institutionalized community participation in waste management. Relevant training on integrated solid waste management was given to residents and community leaders.

These examples underscore the pivotal role of LRGs in mitigating coastal and marine pollution, integrating conservation initiatives and broader urban planning strategies, and ensuring community engagement in environmental stewardship. Ultimately, achieving SDG 14 requires reinforcing local, regional and national cooperation; fostering innovative solutions and scaling up best practices to align local efforts with global sustainability goals.

Ecosystems are among the first to suffer from anthropogenic inflows of excess nutrients and pollutants, including nitrogen and phosphorus from chemical fertilizers[22] as well as plastic waste. These issues are particularly pronounced in rapidly growing coastal cities (SDG 11). Each year, over 8 million tons of plastic enter the ocean; 81% of this pollution originates in Asia, followed by Africa (8%), Latin America (5.5%), North America (4.5%), and Europe and Oceania (less than 1%).[23] Additionally, around 80% of the 270 billion m^3 of municipal wastewater produced annually is discharged untreated, which further exacerbates coastal and marine pollution.[24]

To combat these challenges, coastal cities are actively implementing measures to regulate plastic waste and nutrient runoff, expand wastewater collection networks and establish water treatment plants. In **Melbourne** (Australia), an innovative project has developed new technologies to recover energy, water and valuable nutrients from wastewater. These are scalable alternatives to traditional wastewater treatment systems. In **Jinja** (Uganda), Cities Alliance and the LRG, in partnership with a social enterprise, are piloting a digital waste management approach. This initiative equips grassroots recyclers and waste agents with training, technical resources and financial tools, including a waste insure wallet system that allows them to redeem points for cash, school fees and microinsurance. A digital platform will link 9,000 households, 3,000 waste pickers and 300 waste agents to a formal plastics-recycling value chain. Their goals are to collect over 1,200 metric tons of waste — equivalent to over 10 million plastic water bottles — and reduce CO_2 emissions by more than 2,450 tons.

In **Panama City** (Panama) plastics recovered from beach and river cleaning are converted into raw materials for fabricating urban furniture installed in municipal parks. In **Kisii County** (Kenya), aquaculture effluents rich in nutrients are reused to irrigate kitchen gardens across the county. In Gijón (Spain), oyster waste is being analyzed for subsequent use as fertilizer. **Salvador** (Brazil) supports innovative businesses such as Gbcycle, a start-up that uses a biorefinery with a microalgae-based process to eliminate and transform pollutants into high-added-value biomass and bioproducts to prevent waste and pollutants from entering the city's coast and ocean.[25] In **Mombasa** (Kenya), the Urban Resilience Programme has integrated climate-responsive planning with wastewater- and solid-waste-management strategies into informal settlements prone to flooding and marine pollution. Co-financed by the national government and international donors, the initiative created local composting stations, supported youth-led waste cooperatives and introduced a nature-based stormwater system using bioswales and wetlands. These interventions reduce pollution loads entering the Indian Ocean and build community capacity, reinforcing the role of LRGs in bridging the gap between service delivery and environmental protection.

Often, restoration efforts are combined with coastal, marine and freshwater plans;[26] instruments such as marine protected areas (MPAs); and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). **Because MPAs are unevenly distributed, there is a strong need to build coherent MPA networks at subnational, national, regional and global levels**. Indigenous Peoples live on many of the islands where nations have designated large, remote MPAs. This requires fair, diverse and equitable representation and inclusion in the decision-making process, including in monitoring.[27] Interestingly, at a larger scale, the currently developing concept of maritime transport blue corridors[28] can help connect relevant areas like MPAs or OECMs to Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs). This facilitates the safe movement of species to all their essential habitats and functional areas. **Durban**'s (South Africa) Green Corridors initiative demonstrates how LRGs can reduce marine pollution at source while restoring freshwater-marine linkages. By working with community groups to clean river catchments, remove invasive species and rehabilitate degraded land along watercourses flowing into the Indian Ocean, the city improves water quality, biodiversity and local climate resilience. This integrated model directly advances SDG 14.1 by intercepting land-based pollution and supports urban nature-based solutions aligned with SDGs 6 and 11.

Until now, OECMs have been under-utilized, despite the framework recognizing that conservation outcomes are possible outside protected areas. The people that govern those natural resources should be valued, respected and supported. Doing so could promote a new conservation model that fosters inclusive approaches and the equitable governance of land, forests, freshwater and the ocean, to achieve long-term conservation as well as social, economic and cultural well-being.[29]

Community-based and co-management approaches between LRGs and communities are key strategies for marine conservation and sustainable management. LMMAs have spread throughout SIDS in the

South Pacific. In Fiji, about 60 LMMAs involving 130 communities and their local/traditional authorities have been officially declared. They designate reefs or include grass areas and mangroves. In their initial planning for an LMMA, LRGs and communities typically prioritize the need to generate greater local income and see a restored environment.[30]

✱ Ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus (targets 14.2, 14.3 and 14.5)

Biodiversity is one the best indicators of climate change (SDG 13). In one of its recent reports, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services states that "the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and nature's decline, combined with the magnitude of the multiple interconnected global crises, including climate change and pollution, seriously and irreversibly threaten human well-being and life on Earth, decreasing quality of life and leading to substantial economic costs." As mentioned earlier, "there is a serious risk of crossing several irreversible biophysical tipping points, including die-off of low latitude coral reefs, die-back of the Amazon rainforest and loss of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets, with possible cascading negative impacts across linked, social and ecological systems."[31] While significant progress has been made over recent years towards safeguarding key biodiversity areas in North America and Europe, progress has stagnated overall — especially in Asia, Oceania and North Africa. Marine protected areas now cover 8.2% of coastal waters and the ocean, of which only 1.4% are international waters. In the Canadian Arctic, areas of particular ecological importance (such as **Tuvaijuittuq**), are now protected through the participation of LRGs and Inuit populations, whose role in marine Arctic ecosystems is expected to become even more critical as Arctic sea ice continues to decline at a rapid pace.

Through its Resilient Coastal Program, **Durban** (South Africa) exemplifies the power of local action in advancing SDG 14. **Da Nang**, a rapidly growing coastal city in Vietnam, has embedded climate- and biodiversity considerations into its urban planning by developing a comprehensive Resilience Strategy under the 100 Resilient Cities initiative. This strategy includes coastal wetlands protection, mangrove replanting and flood-sensitive zoning regulations. In partnership with academia and civil society, the city developed decision-making tools to integrate coastal ecosystem health and infrastructure development plans. This approach demonstrates the practical value of the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus for fast-growing coastal cities.

In coastal and marine environments, the most important stressors identified to date are chemical contamination, marine litter (target 14.1), plastics, nutrient- and organic enrichment (eutrophication/deoxygenation), climate change consequences (global warming, acidification — target 14.3 — and sea level rise), damage to seabed habitats (abrasion and extraction of non-living resources), introduction of non-indigenous (invasive) species and overexploitation of fish and shellfish stocks (target 14.6), including the effects of underwater noise.[32] Among these stressors, climate change is a major global threat to coastal and marine habitats, consequently changing the distribution of species that can survive and reproduce there.

Therefore, **there is a strong need for transformative change to shift our relationships with nature**. This calls for greater attention to the visions and practices of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and underrepresented groups. The synergetic coexistence of humans and nature within coastal ecosystems is a central tenet of the Satoyama Initiative, as applied in the Beibu Gulf in the northwest of the South China Sea, in China's **Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region**. This initiative aims to develop an interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder participatory approach to create an OECM-like community-based conservation mechanism in a rich fishing area, which is home to endangered, threatened and protected[33] species, such as the white dolphin, horseshoe crab and mangroves. Apart from biodiversity outcomes, this kind of LRG-community-based management contributes to disaster risk reduction and the well-being of local communities, including health, economy, culture and education among others. ICLEI's Climate Neutral and Smart Cities Community of Practice includes 15 leading LRGs from Asia-Pacific to co-develop climate solutions through targeted strategies in circular economy, energy transition, sustainable urban planning, resilient mobility systems and innovative finance mechanisms.

In its "Map of solutions," the Sea'ties project, which is led by the Ocean & Climate Platform, identifies more than one hundred local adaptation initiatives to address sea level rise and related risks (erosion, submersion, salinization) in cities as diverse as **Southend-on-Sea** (UK), **Vlissigen** (The Netherlands), **Saint Louis** (Senegal), **San Diego** (USA), **Aichi** (Japan) and **Guayaquil** (Ecuador). These initiatives range from the development of nature-based solutions to accommodation- or protection measures, retreat management, capacity building, knowledge sharing and integrated coastal zone management plans, including climate change adaptation. Among these initiatives, one significant example is the Declaration of Mayors of 29 coastal municipalities of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, who agree to cooperate on coordinated and integrated management of their respective coastal areas. They have created a network of coastal municipalities focused on protecting their

coastal environment and resources, which strengthens the capacity of LRGs and civil society to adapt to climate change. Another example is Sustainable and Resilient Coastal Cities, a network among cities along the North Sea and the English Channel, which includes seven coastal cities in four countries.

Coastal "blue carbon" ecosystems (e.g. mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrass beds) are known for their efficient CO_2 sequestration. These coastal habitats also serve as crucial breeding grounds, nurseries and feeding areas for a diversity of marine life. Zanzibar's Blue Economy Strategy (2022–2027), which was developed through participatory processes with coastal communities, focuses on integrating biodiversity conservation, small-scale fisheries, aquaculture and tourism. LRGs, in conjunction with the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association and international partners, have supported community-led mangrove restoration and introduced seaweed farming for women's cooperatives. These initiatives link ecological protection with livelihood generation. By integrating coastal-resource governance and economic opportunity, this approach aligns closely with SDG 14's call for inclusive and sustainable marine use and showcases a replicable model for other small-island and coastal LRGs.

The variety of these local initiatives on coastal-ecosystem preservation and restoration simultaneously offers opportunities for nature-based approaches to climate-change mitigation and the protection of biodiversity and the ocean. Because freshwater and seawater are intrinsically linked through the global water cycle, water security should be considered a critical element for resilient blue economy sectors.[34] In Brazil, the state of **Pará** and the civil society organization *Rare do Brasil* are jointly implementing the *Pesca para Sempre* (Fish Forever) program to promote sustainable management of fishery resources and biodiversity conservation. The program strengthens community participation, particularly within marine extractive reserves and the coastal zones of Pará, where Indigenous populations engage in artisanal fishing. **Barranquilla** (Colombia) has begun works to recover the Mallorquin Swamp, a coastal lagoon on the western bank of the mouth of the Magdalena River, as it enters the Caribbean Sea. The project aims to restore mangroves and build an ecopark, which is part of the municipality's broader strategy to support migrants from Venezuela who have recently settled in informal communities around the lagoon. The Smith Cove Blue Carbon Pilot Project in the Port of **Seattle** (USA) is investigating how aquaculture and vegetation within port waters can effectively capture and store carbon.

A growing number of LRGs are localizing SDG 14 targets and indicators, often through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), climate strategies and coastal plans that align with national SDG frameworks. In Japan, **Yokohama** includes coastal conservation and blue economy indicators in its VLR, linking local SDG 14 actions to the city's marine biodiversity targets and port-sustainability strategies. **Niterói** (Brazil) has embedded SDG 14 goals into its Municipal Climate Adaptation Plan, tracking coastal ecosystem resilience, flood mitigation from mangroves and urban beach restoration outcomes. This data is being used to inform its next climate budget cycle and is shared through Brazil's National SDG Commission.

SOCIETAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABLE NATURE USE

✱ Sustainable aquatic food systems (targets 14.4, 14.6, 14.7 and 14.b)

Sustainable management of the ocean and coastal areas provides both direct and indirect benefits, often referred to as ecosystem services, for societies and economies. Aquatic food plays a critical role in the livelihoods, food security and nutrition of over 600 million people globally, especially in developing countries that are vulnerable to climate change and humanitarian emergencies.[35] Aquatic food sources depend on fisheries (including lakes and rivers) and aquaculture (fresh- and marine waters).

Over the 25 years following the endorsement of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, capture-fishery production remained relatively stable, while aquaculture production grew by 250%.[36] This growth helped meet the rising demand for aquatic food, especially fish feed. Fisheries contribute to increasing global incomes and expanding trade. In SIDS, fisheries' contribution to GDP showed promising growth, from 0.46% in 2019 to 0.51% in 2021.[37] In the Pacific SIDS, which are heavily reliant on fisheries, this contribution rose from 1.54% in 2019 to 1.63% in 2021.

At the same time, various legal-, policy- and institutional frameworks — particularly in North Africa and West Asia — are beginning to recognize and protect access rights for small-scale fisheries, which often face competition from larger corporations.[38] Despite economic growth, fishery sustainability is declining globally. While international efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing have become stronger, it is estimated that one in every five fish comes from IUU fishing, which is often tied to labor- and human rights abuses.

International agreements and measures focus primarily on regulating large-scale aquaculture, industrial fisheries and IUU fishing. However, small-scale fisheries — which employ more than 90% of the world's fishers (half of whom are women) — are central to socio-economic development in local communities. There is a need to enhance aquaculture governance and expand legal, institutional and policy frameworks, particularly at the local level. FAO initiatives, such as the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the 2014 Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, have acknowledged the roles that LRGs and communities play in developing effective co-management strategies.

Some case examples of co-management approaches are:

• In Costa Rica's Gulf of Nicoya, municipal governments have supported small-scale fisheries by integrating mangrove conservation into local fisheries management. Under the leadership of local fishers' associations and supported by the Ministry of Environment and the municipality of **Paquera**, seasonal closures and restoration of degraded mangrove forests were introduced to boost fish nursery areas. Simultaneously, communities piloted responsible-fishing agreements, combining gear restrictions with habitat protection. This co-management model led to improved catch volumes and incomes over a three-year cycle, while safeguarding key coastal ecosystems — a direct demonstration of how nature-positive strategies enhance aquatic food production.

• In **eastern Indonesia**, co-management strategies led by LRGs and supported by traditional councils have aided sustainability by implementing area closures to manage coral reef fisheries.

• In the Philippines, the Local Government Code and the amended Fisheries Code Provision reserve a 15-km zone of municipal waters for the artisanal fisherfolk under the jurisdiction of coastal municipalities. This focuses on the significance of local autonomy, socio-economic conditions (especially of local communities and municipal fisherfolk), environmental sustainability and food security. In the province of **Palawan**, a grouper-livelihood program promoted sustainable, grouper aquaculture as an alternative to overfishing. With NGO support, LRGs provide hatchery-reared fingerlings for local fishermen to grow them to market size.

• To counter the decline of sea cucumber stocks in Madagascar, an LMMA that incorporates aquaculture as a conservation strategy was established in the **Velondriake** region. It represents one of the most extensive community-led marine-conservation networks in the Western Indian Ocean. Local fishing communities co-manage designated no-take zones, seasonal fishing closures and mangrove restoration projects. Supported by NGOs and national frameworks, these areas have recorded significant increases in fish biomass and coral recovery. The success of Velondriake has led to the replication of the model in 14 coastal districts. This exemplifies how LRGs and communities can partner to deliver both conservation outcomes and local economic benefits.

• In the **Lake Victoria Basin** in Uganda, LRGs have partnered with fisher cooperatives and youth-led enterprises to support the development of sustainable cage aquaculture, especially for tilapia. Faced with overfishing and declining wild stocks, the **Kalangala** District's local government provided regulatory backing, training and access to floating cage infrastructure. This initiative created alternative income streams for local fishers, reduced pressure on capture fisheries and promoted ecosystem recovery in overexploited nearshore zones. It also implemented gender-sensitive practices by targeting women and youth as direct beneficiaries of start-up support and marketing schemes. This initiative illustrates how LRGs can shape inclusive, aquatic food systems.

• **Iloilo** (Philippines) has become a national leader in promoting a localized, inclusive blue economy by simultaneously protecting marine ecosystems and supporting artisanal fishers. The city revitalized degraded mangrove forests, introduced regulated no-take zones and partnered with local cooperatives to develop eco-tourism ventures. Women and youth play leading roles in conservation tourism, contributing to income diversification, ocean literacy and ecosystem restoration. This integrated approach advances SDG 14.b and demonstrates how coastal cities can unlock blue economic potential for marginalized groups.

These co-management models are legally legitimate under decentralized governance structures, which ensures local autonomy and legal recourse in the case of conflicts. Partner agencies, such as NGOs and research organizations, have played a key role in facilitating these efforts through funding, training and ensuring local government engagement.[39]

✱ Sustainable ocean-based economies: Leaving no one behind (target 14.7)

The ocean and blue economy can be powerful drivers of local and regional development. In SIDS, fisheries are crucial to the economy, representing 8% of GDP in Comoros (2017) and 1% in the Seychelles (2019).[40] The second progress report (2024) from the High Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy highlights growing commitments for equitable and inclusive ocean economies,[41] extending beyond ocean-based industries to include freshwater-based ecosystems.[42]

The ocean not only connects ecosystems but also people, driving economic activity and trade throughout ocean-based and land-based economies, while linking cultures and ecosystems in a unique and balanced way. In 2017, 2.4 billion people lived in areas within 100 km of the coast. The consequences of ecosystem degradation are not shared equally. The severity of its impact varies depending on factors like gender and socioeconomic status, often placing the greatest burden on vulnerable communities. Those with fewer resources and opportunities face disproportionate hardships, while the actions of more economically privileged groups often contribute to the environmental damage they endure.

The ocean economy encompasses traditional activities like maritime transport and aquaculture, as well as emerging sectors like renewable energy, food processing and high-tech marine products. **The sustainable development of the ocean economy can offer increased prosperity, jobs and well-being — provided there is an equitable distribution of benefits for current and future generations.**

Coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples are the historical stewards of the ocean. They play a crucial role in finding practical solutions by bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and scientific research and innovation.[43] Coastal cities are hubs for trade, industry and commerce. For example, coordinated planning across blue economy city sectors is a key objective in **Mombasa** (Kenya). The county government established a new Blue Economy Unit in order to effectively frame the blue economy sector through blue economy value addition, manufacturing, tourism, transport and logistics, and blue economy training, especially for the local youth population. A Mombasa Blue Economy Plan is under development. In Chile, **Valdivia** coordinates with rural communes and the Indigenous Mapuche communities to manage river-ocean ecosystems. This integrated territorial-planning process includes upstream pollution controls, estuarine habitat conservation and zoning rules for aquaculture development. With technical support from national agencies, coastal district councils in Mauritius have led participatory mapping of marine resource use and facilitated blue entrepreneurship incubators focusing on women and youth. The roadmap explicitly includes artisanal fisheries, coastal tourism and ocean farming as key pillars for equitable development. These efforts are supported by a decentralized Blue Economy Fund that provides seed capital for community-led marine innovations, which enhances local ownership and sustainability.

Beira (Mozambique) is vulnerable to storm surges and coastal erosion, so the city's approach integrates coastal resilience and blue economy strategies. With support from the World Bank and the African Development Bank, the city launched the Beira Master Plan for Urban Resilience, which aligns port infrastructure upgrades with ecosystem restoration in mangrove and dune systems. Local small and middle-sized enterprises are receiving support to engage in low-impact aquaculture and ecotourism around rehabilitated coastal wetlands. This integrated planning approach not only protects critical infrastructure but also creates local economic opportunities that prioritize long-term environmental health.

LRGs that are engaged in ocean-based economies (such as maritime transport, fisheries, aquaculture and tourism) are actively working to reduce carbon emissions and transition to renewable energy sources to ensure sustainability. Ports are a focal point: globally, 50% of trade (by value) moves by sea, and ports contribute to local economies.[44] In a notable transatlantic collaboration, the **Halifax** Port Authority (Canada) and **Hamburg** Port Authority (Germany), together with their corresponding governments, are working to decarbonize the shipping corridor between the two cities. This effort includes the promotion of green hydrogen technology, regulatory measures, financial incentives, safety protocols and strong community engagement.

Complementing these shifts, **many LRGs and their communities are embracing circular-economy principles, focusing on reducing waste, reusing resources and recycling materials**. The Resilient Cities Network's Urban Ocean cities program and its Circularity Assessment Protocol help decision-makers identify opportunities to reduce waste leakage into the environment and promote circular materials management. Since 2019, the program has supported 12 cities globally; such as **Can Tho** (Vietnam), in advancing river-waste management and recycling

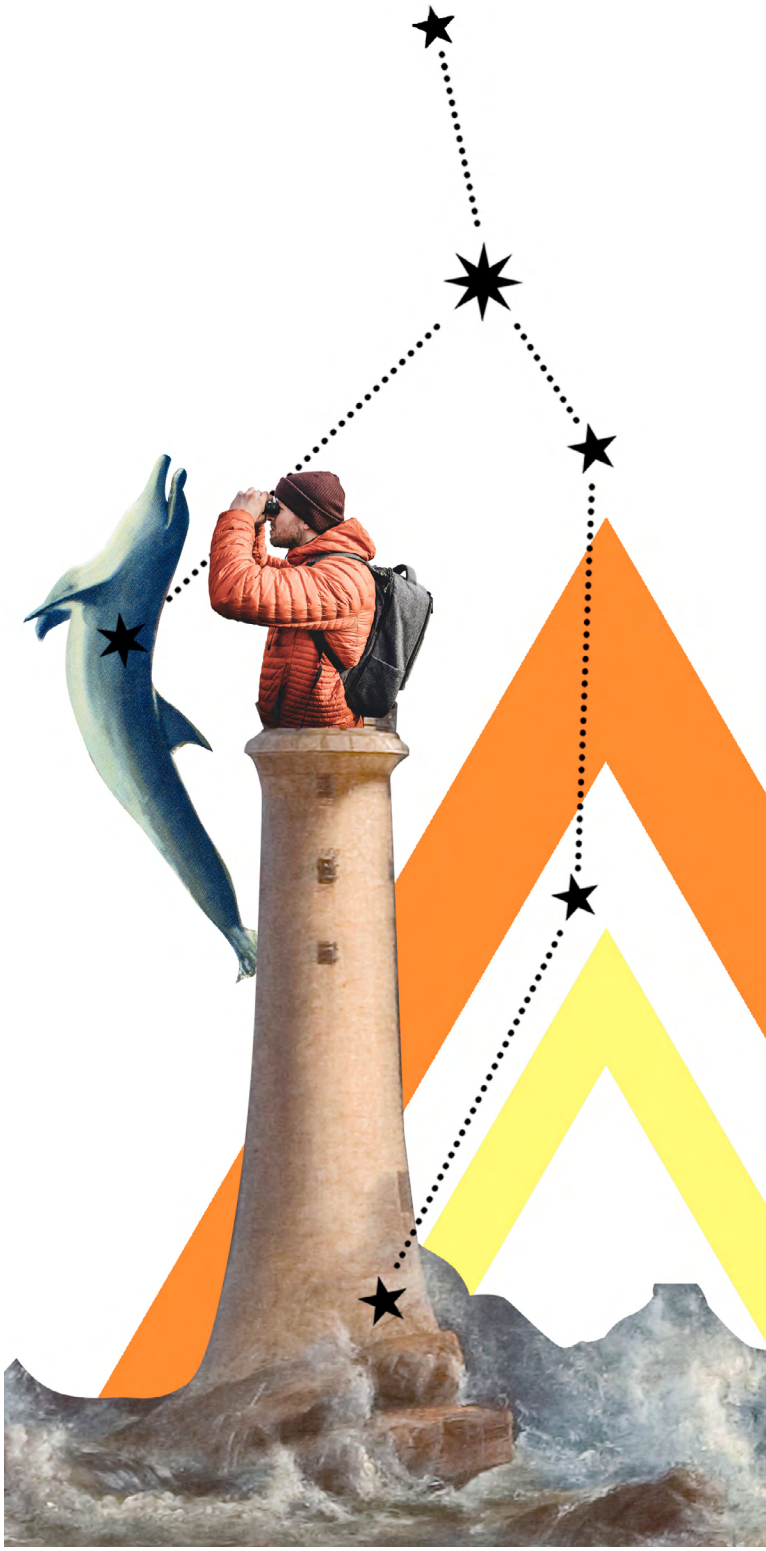
facilities; **Chennai** (India), in developing near-zero-waste neighborhoods; **Melaka** (Malaysia), in improving river- and coastal-area cleaning and the city's recycling infrastructure; **Semarang** (Indonesia), in piloting an adaptive and inclusive waste-management model; and **Panama City** (Panama), in enhancing the recovery of recyclable material.

Particularly as climate impacts intensify, **LRGs are central to resilient urban planning and the delivery of equitable public services**. In **Miami-Dade County** (USA), the Connect 2 Protect initiative addresses the dual challenges of aging infrastructure and a failing septic system. By extending sanitary sewer services to residents that depend on septic tanks, the county is safeguarding public health and helping preserve critical ecosystems like Biscayne Bay. The program incorporates sensor technology that tracks stormwater- and wastewater flows. Miami-Dade's broader adaptation strategies are inspired by approaches used in the Florida Keys — such as elevating buildings on pilings and raising land levels using artificial fill — and demonstrate how cities are learning to live with water while maintaining essential public services.

In coastal regions, LRGs play a vital role in integrating conservation and economic development, ensuring that marine resources support livelihoods while preserving biodiversity. The municipality of **Santa Rosa**, in the Jambelí Archipelago (Ecuador), has launched a mangrove reforestation project aimed at combating coastal erosion, enhancing biodiversity and supporting sustainable livelihoods. Backed by local conservation ordinance and strong community participation, the initiative strengthens fisheries and supports ecotourism through planting 2,000 red mangrove seedlings across 4 hectares.

In **California** (USA), the state's Ocean Protection Council provides strategic direction and funding to initiatives such as the California Fisheries Fund, a revolving loan fund managed by California FarmaLink. It supports sustainable fisheries and strengthens port communities, especially where traditional financing is unavailable. Over five years, the state of **Chiapas** (Mexico) has also contributed to sustainable fisheries by providing 500 small fishing boats, over 4,061 fishing gear kits and marketing support. The initiative has benefited more than 28,706 fishers, through an investment of 1.1 million USD.

Because development at sea occurs in a three-dimensional, globally shared environment, it requires new forms of governance. Innovative models now combine renewable energy with sustainable marine use. For example, offshore wind is paired with low-trophic aquaculture to deliver clean energy, nutrient-rich seafood and ecosystem services, such as carbon capture.[45] In **Copenhagen** (Denmark), the Middelgrunden offshore wind farm is a prime example. It was developed by Københavns Energi (owned by the Copenhagen municipality) and the private cooperative Middelgrunden Vind (owned by 8,000 citizens). The farm includes 20 turbines that generate 100,000 MWh of electricity annually. It has also become a tourist attraction and offers in-person tours, visits to turbine foundations, climbing experiences, lectures and virtual excursions. This demonstrates how wind-energy infrastructure can also deliver educational and economic co-benefits.



GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENTS: MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

✱ Multilevel governance, finance and integration of action

Ocean governance frameworks at global, regional and national levels are still largely shaped by sector-based policies. This results in institutional fragmentation and limited coordination in addressing the complex dynamics of coastal and marine socio-ecosystems. **The road toward greater coherence lies in aligning policy frameworks across multiple SDGs, particularly SDGs 16 (peace and strong institutions), 10 (no inequalities), 5 (gender equality), 1 (no poverty), 17 (partnerships) and 4 (awareness and knowledge).**

Equally critical is the need for vertical coherence across levels of government, from national policy objectives to local implementation. This requires alignment not only in strategy but also in regulatory instruments, budget allocations and institutional roles. Implementation is shaped by local realities and capacities, and it must account for dynamic feedback loops among levels of governance.[46]

Territorial approaches to marine and coastal governance enable collaboration across jurisdictions, sectors and knowledge systems. Across the world, more LRGs are adopting ecosystem-based management (EBM) approaches — including Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) — to guide the sustainable use of marine resources. **EBM, ICZM and MSP frameworks are increasingly integrated into climate-change-adaptation planning, especially as urbanization and population growth put additional pressure on coastal ecosystems.**

LRGs are key in delivering services that directly affect coastal and marine health, such as waste management, sewage treatment and biodiversity protection. For example, long-degraded coastal environments in **Elefsina** (Greece) have improved in recent decades through the implementation of environmental regulations, modern infrastructure and a reduction in polluting industrial activity.[47]

In politically or economically unstable contexts, maintaining continuity of effort is especially crucial. **In many low-income countries and SIDS, coastal management initiatives remain fragmented and project-based.** In East Asia, the PNLG Network exemplifies effective collaboration among coastal cities. Member cities engage in regular policy-learning exchanges, joint workshops and exchange visits that have led to the adoption of integrated coastal zone management frameworks. In France, the French Basque-Country Urban Community designed and deployed a local strategy of coastal-risks management on the Basque shoreline to both preserve its attractiveness and safeguard man-made assets and populations. The local strategy has allowed the eight coastal cities to assess erosion and marine submersion risks up to 2043, as well as to compare different management scenarios. As an effective decision-making tool, this local strategy seeks to formalize management options to combat or adapt to the receding coastline by 2043. These coordinated actions help address transboundary marine pollution and expand marine protected areas, while also building institutional capacity. This model shows that sustained intermunicipal cooperation not only enhances local implementation but also strengthens advocacy for international funding and policy support.

Local stewardship will only succeed if perceived as fair and not detrimental to people's quality of life.[48] This underscores **the need to nest local initiatives within larger regional, national and international frameworks** and to connect them to long-term funding mechanisms (such as the UNEP Regional Seas Programme) or Large Marine Ecosystems frameworks, which are both supported by the Global Environment Facility.

Australia's Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority provides a leading example of multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance. Local coastal management plans developed by **Queensland** municipalities are integrated into national policies and international research networks. Through participatory planning — engaging traditional owners, scientists and local businesses — the Reef regime has implemented ecosystem-based management strategies that safeguard both marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Innovative financing mechanisms, including environmental bonds and public-private partnerships, further support sustainable management and demonstrate how coherent policy action across different government layers can deliver long-term benefits.

The costs of coordinated inaction have been starkly illustrated by the OECD, which quantified the estimated economic value of blue ecosystems and the projected consequences of their degradation (Table 3.4.2).

Table 3.4.2 Estimated value and consequences of inaction on blue ecosystems

Ecosystems	Estimated value of ecosystem services	Status and projections	Examples of consequences of action or inaction
Rivers, streams, lakes, aquifers, inland wetlands (freshwater)	58 trillion USD per annum or 60% of GDP	One third of global freshwater biodiversity has already been lost and further loss is projected by 2050	19% of global GDP comes from watersheds with high-to-very-high physical water risk
Peatlands (freshwater)	17.5 trillion USD for 2011	15% of the world's peatlands are currently drained and degraded	Degradation at current rates will consume 41% of the remaining CO_2 emissions budget to keep global warming within +1.5 ºC
Mangroves (coastal)	2.7 trillion USD for 2011	7.6% of mangrove cover was lost or degraded between 1996 and 2016	Without mangroves, global flood damage would cost an additional 65 billion USD and 15 million more people would be at risk of floods each year

Source: OECD, based on several sources[49]

The Seychelles' blue bond- and debt-for-nature swap initiatives have received global recognition for integrating local community stewardship and national marine conservation goals. Although this initiative is directed at the national level, proceeds are reinvested into marine protected areas that are co-managed by coastal communities. The initiative has supported sustainable fisheries, expanded protected zones and facilitated small-scale blue-enterprise development. It exemplifies how innovative finance can be channeled to local levels to deliver on SDG 14.5 and create sustainable coastal livelihoods aligned with SDG 8 and SDG 17.

At the same time, loss- and damage mechanisms must meaningfully include LRGs, especially in SIDS and vulnerable coastal areas. **While calculating monetary loss is vital for accessing climate finance, calculating non-economic loss — such as cultural heritage, displacement and traditional knowledge — requires direct community engagement and should inform how reparations are determined.** Instruments like the Loss and Damage Finance Facility must reflect both economic and sociocultural dimensions of loss.

✱ Building trust and institutional arrangements to support long-term multi-stakeholder cooperation (target 14.2)

The first half of the 21st century presents interrelated challenges, from pandemics to armed conflicts and from biodiversity collapse to the mounting impacts of climate change. These challenges cannot be addressed by single disciplines or sectors. Collaborative approaches among national governments, LRGs, businesses, policy advisors, NGOs and local communities are needed to address issues such as shifting species distributions, coastal erosion, sea level rise and marine pollution.[50]

Trust is one of the most essential enablers of such cooperation, and it is one of the most difficult to build and sustain. It thrives most effectively in smaller-scale place-based settings, which means that **LRGs have a unique advantage in creating institutional arrangements that cultivate long-term, multi-stakeholder trust**. According to Ostrom, successful cooperation is shaped by well-defined boundaries, locally adapted rules, inclusive decision-making, effective community-led monitoring and graduated sanctions for violations. In this view, trust is not only interpersonal but also deeply institutional.

A case in point is the municipality of Texel (the Netherlands), where the local and provincial governments are on the board of the Duinen van Texel National Park. Participatory processes and science-policy dialogues are used to integrate diverse forms of knowledge into adaptive planning. For example, adjustments to municipal zoning regulations reflect dynamic changes in coastal geomorphology, which enables more responsive beach-nourishment strategies. Local knowledge and expertise is taken seriously — not just consulted, but embedded into formal planning mechanisms.

The **Basque Country** (Spain) has pioneered a model of building trust through multi-stakeholder advisory panels in coastal management. Local councils, fishing-community representatives, environmental NGOs, academic institutions and private-sector actors convene regularly to co-develop adaptive management plans and resolve conflicts over resource use. These transparent and inclusive forums have not only accelerated the implementation of innovative policies but also fostered a deep sense of collective ownership and mutual trust. These elements are key to ensuring lasting coastal resilience in politically and socially dynamic contexts.

The aforementioned examples illustrate that institutional trust cannot be imposed top-down. It must be built over time through shared processes, participatory governance and recognition of diverse actors and knowledge systems. LRGs are well-positioned to lead this shift, given their proximity to communities and their ability to tailor institutional arrangements to specific socio-ecological realities.

✱ Strengthening the science-policy interface with useful knowledge (target 14.2, 14.a)

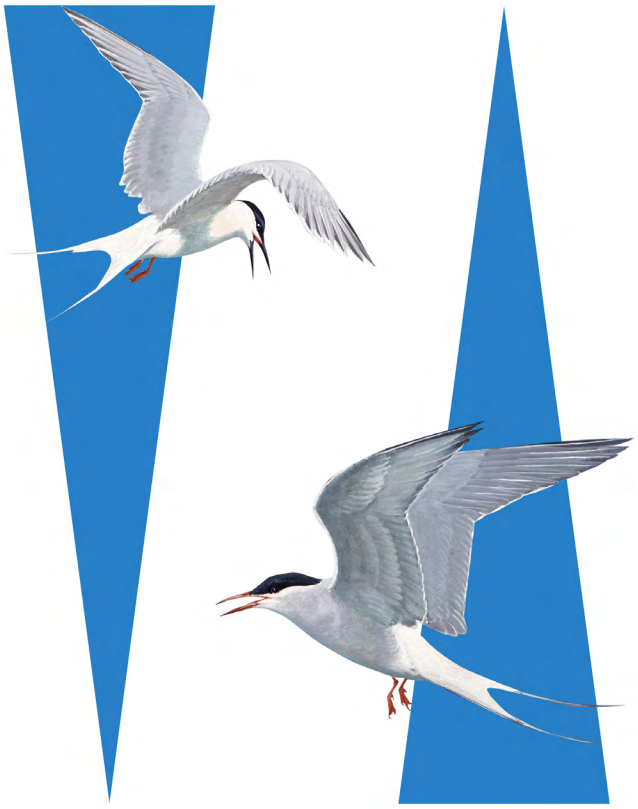
Strengthening the science-policy interface is paramount to the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. The successful implementation of adaptive and ecosystem-based management approaches depends on bringing together governance (SDG 16) and diverse knowledge systems (SDG 4). The press statement for the 2024 Ocean Decade Conference in Barcelona emphasized that advancing ocean science, improving long-term observation systems and integrating technological innovations is crucial.

LRGs are stepping up to bridge data- and governance gaps at the coastal interface through the use of spatial tools, community science and digital platforms to generate decision-ready insights. For example, **Cape Town** (South Africa) has developed a Coastal Risk Viewer to integrate spatial data on sea level rise, flood risk and coastal erosion into planning processes. The tool is updated with local inputs and enables targeted climate-adaptation investments in coastal neighborhoods. In Indonesia, the **Jakarta Bay** monitoring program combines municipal data with community-led water-quality testing to assess impacts of land-based pollution. The city's partnership with local universities has improved data credibility and supported more sustainable shoreline-infrastructure planning. In Mozambique, coastal municipalities, such as **Inhambane** and **Pemba**, are implementing marine-spatial-planning processes in tandem with mangrove restoration and sustainable-fisheries programs, including technical support from the Blue Action Fund, to enhance municipal staff capacity in GIS and biodiversity monitoring. Yet, in general, persistent gaps in funding and capacity remain, with ocean science infrastructure and expertise unevenly distributed across countries and regions.[51]

Closing this gap requires integrating scientific knowledge and local and Indigenous knowledge — lived experiences and policy implementation. Co-produced knowledge strengthens participatory governance, encourages shared ownership and fosters more effective and inclusive management.

The **Texel** example in the Netherlands demonstrates the benefits of such an approach. The municipality facilitated participatory planning sessions, in which disciplinary experts and local knowledge holders collaborated to envision the future of southwest Texel's coastal systems. The process respected the lived experiences of residents, which ensured relevant outcomes and built trust in decision-making.

Concepts that are traditionally rooted in economic frameworks, such as "ecosystem services" and "natural capital," are now being broadened through social- and environmental-justice lenses to include ideas like "blue growth" and "blue justice."[52] These emerging narratives help bridge the perceived divide between nature and culture and honor Indigenous cosmologies that see humans as part of — rather than apart from — nature. In Chile, the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' traditional ecological knowledge in the governance of Indigenous Marine and Coastal Areas has allowed them to be recognized as an OECM.



3.4.5 Conclusion and recommendations

SDG 14 is deeply interconnected within the broader 2030 Agenda. It offers a clear, integrative entry point for cross-sectoral action and serves as a narrative roadmap for addressing overlapping global goals. Per the UNOC, to truly "accelerate action and mobilize all actions to conserve and sustainably use the ocean," the full leadership potential of LRGs, SMEs, civil society and other local actors must be recognized and leveraged. Based on the examples and analysis presented, the following key recommendations emerge:

• **Understanding coastal and marine resources as vital assets.** Territorial planning must embrace the ocean, not turn away from it. Policies that tackle poverty (SDG 1), inequalities (SDG 10) and climate change (SDG 13) should integrate sustainable use of marine resources (SDG 14) and support sectors like small-scale fisheries, aquaculture and sustainable tourism (SDG 8). Nature-based solutions should be mainstreamed into coastal and marine planning to enhance climate change resilience.

• **Recognizing the role of LRGs in bridging the gap between local action and global agendas.** LRGs are vital in translating global goals into local action. Their proximity to communities allows for context-specific solutions and inclusive governance. Global governance frameworks should make space for the voice and role of LRGs and ensure they are equipped with adequate resources, capacities and political space to lead.

• **Strengthening multilevel governance and institutional coordination.** Integrated, multi-level governance frameworks are essential to aligning national, regional and local efforts for sustainable coastal- and marine-resource management. Prioritizing cross-sectoral collaboration — especially across water, fisheries, agriculture and coastal planning — can reduce policy fragmentation and foster synergies. Empowering local governments and communities through decentralized decision-making ensures context-sensitive, equitable and effective implementation.

• **Mobilizing finance.** Tailored financing mechanisms must be developed to support locally led, gender-responsive and nature-positive solutions. Local and regional governments need access to funding that aligns with their realities — leveraging public and private investment to strengthen coastal resilience. Blue finance tools, blended finance models and long-term funding frameworks can help move beyond short-term, donor-driven project cycles and enable sustainable, context-specific action.

• **Addressing the fisheries-conservation-agriculture-water nexus.** A nexus approach to fisheries, agriculture (SDG 2), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and coastal- and marine-ecosystem management can help LRGs navigate trade-offs and enhance synergies. This approach supports circular resource flows and the efficient reuse of water and materials. Applying the OECD's "whole of water" perspective fosters a comprehensive understanding of the blue economy's dependence on and impact across freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. Integrating circular economy principles (SDG 12) into local policies can improve resource efficiency and reduce waste.

• **Fostering alternative livelihoods.** Urbanization, climate change and development transitions are reshaping coastal economies and placing pressure on traditional livelihoods. Inclusive policy interventions are needed to support the creation of green and blue jobs — especially for women and youth — and to promote sustainable alternatives where Indigenous practices are at risk of being replaced. Investing in local, climate-resilient employment opportunities is essential to ensuring just transitions and equitable development.

• **Building trust and ownership through citizen literacy, science and engagement.** Fostering public engagement — with a strong emphasis on children and youth — is critical, through enabling communities to contribute to marine monitoring, conservation and planning. LRGs should support these efforts by investing in partnerships with research institutions, providing tools and platforms to amplify community-generated data, and integrating this data into coastal management and local policy. This approach can enhance public understanding and ownership, as well as accelerate the application of research into actionable, community-driven solutions.

• **Encouraging local voluntary commitments.** LRGs and coastal communities are already driving impactful actions that contribute to SDG 14. These efforts should be made more visible, through support for LRGs in submitting measurable voluntary commitments that are aligned with national targets. Whether focused on restoring mangroves, reducing pollution or enhancing community resilience to climate change, these commitments foster synergies and promote mutual learning across scales.

• **Involving the private sector.** Public-private partnerships are crucial for scaling local solutions and making them inclusive and sustainable. LRGs should engage private-sector actors and co-create partnerships to turn their negative impacts into positive ones and align their interests with the SDGs and those of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This approach can help foster shared value and drive progress toward SDGs 8 and 9.

• **Leveraging technological and financial innovation.** Investing in coastal- and marine-monitoring infrastructure, alongside innovative financing mechanisms, is essential for enhancing data collection, improving planning and supporting community-led conservation. Systems thinking and integrated approaches — backed by data, technology and inclusive finance — are crucial for scaling up coastal resilience and achieving SDG 14. Public-private partnerships, sustainable investment strategies and blue finance models can help local governments access new funding avenues and integrate sustainability into financial systems.

4.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations (LGAs) are marching together towards more sustainable development. Through impactful actions and policies, horizontal collaboration and vertical cooperation, they are advancing 2030 Agenda localization despite the current polycrises the world faces.

Now is the time to make up for the sluggish progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); local and regional levels are stepping up to co-lead a renewed multilateral coalition that places the sustainability of life in all its dimensions and the well-being of every human being at the center. **The role of LRGs as leaders of territorial sustainable development is here to stay.** We call on all other levels of government, multilateral organizations, the private sector, civil society and academia as a whole to recognize their key functions in achieving an inclusive and sustainable future, and we call on them to work together to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The following pages highlight the main conclusions that can be drawn from this report — including the most pressing challenges that persist in SDG localization — and subsequently presents recommendations containing compelling ways forward.

4.1
Local progress is global progress

Despite some national governments' rejection of the 2030 Agenda, LRGs and their associations continue to recognize it as a guiding framework for achieving a better future for all and the planet, which is why they localize it in local governance, policies and within their communities. Among the over 170 GTF/UCLG 2025 Survey respondents, 90% have made significant progress on the design of SDG-aligned local plans or strategies. Moreover, 82% have made considerable progress in spreading knowledge and raising awareness of the SDGs within their organizations; 66% have raised awareness on SDG localization among their staffers, members, populations and local stakeholders.

LRG-led SDG localization innovations and reporting efforts are sustained and consistent. A myriad of local actions around the globe demonstrate the steadfast commitment of LRGs and their associations to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

In particular, **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are now stable, reporting and policy mechanisms that blossom in all world regions**. The 363 VLRs and 45 VSRs published in 2025 (as well as the two VSRs currently being drafted) do not merely demonstrate the ability of these processes to unite and synthesize the sum of local efforts and experiences around the SDGs. They also proved key in connecting the subnational level with national government and in opening spaces for dialogue and collaboration on sustainable development. VLRs and VSRs are increasingly considered in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and in multilateral fora, such as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). These mechanisms advance the inclusion of local and regional perspectives in national reporting exercises and advocate for more comprehensive and multilateral approaches to the 2030 Agenda.

Informal recognition of the importance of SDG-aligned action of LRGs and LGAs at the national and international levels has increased due to their constant commitment to and advocacy for the localization of the 2030 Agenda. However, this report finds that LRGs are not consistently or sufficiently consulted in the production of VNRs or in the drafting and implementation of national strategies.

Regarding the localization of the specific SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF, **LRGs prove to be a leading force in the progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda**. In fact, through integrated approaches and holistic solutions, they transform commitments into concrete actions and interventions that contribute to individual targets or multiple SDGs. Bottom-up initiatives are powerful drivers of sustainable development. They create healthier and more livable places and communities, foster gender equality, ensure inclusive economic development and decent working conditions, and preserve marine ecosystems.

- On SDG 3, **LRGs are promoting universal and comprehensive healthcare systems that foster the well-being of all people — regardless of their legal status — without compromising the planet.** Additionally, **LRGs use their competencies** over a considerable number of socio-environmental determinants of health **to move beyond a narrow approach to health and instead consider the broader scope of care and well-being**.

- On SDG 5, **LRGs are leading the way on gender equality by shifting cultural norms and fostering women's political participation and leadership**. They actively promote policies to reduce violence against women and girls, to redistribute the care burden that overwhelmingly falls on women and to dismantle structural gender ine-

qualities that persist in our societies.

• On SDG 8, **LRGs are working to promote inclusive and equitable economic growth that reduces inequalities while preserving the environment**. The promotion of decent working conditions and overall labor rights remains a priority for LRGs in collaboration with key stakeholders, such as public workers' unions.

• On SDG 14, **LRGs are actively preserving marine ecosystems and recognizing coastal and marine resources as vital assets**. Despite the current fragmentation and silos that hamper achieving this SDG, LRGs are planning our cities and coastal communities so that we can minimize our impact on marine ecosystems while enjoying ecosystem benefits, through protecting biodiversity, reducing harmful waste and water pollution, and fostering sustainable blue economies.

Overall, it is well known that LRGs suffer the most direct consequences of global phenomena like climate change, economic inequalities, health crises and geopolitical tensions (including wars and conflicts) right in their territories. Despite the scale of the challenge, LRGs do not shy away from action guided by the principles of equality, justice and human rights. Their proximity to the needs and aspirations of the population puts them in the best position to provide solutions to complex issues. Whether working within the framework of national policies or pushing beyond (sometimes even challenging those frameworks), they act swiftly and innovate in a context-sensitive manner to ensure their communities can live dignified and resilient lives.

Localizing the 2030 Agenda is an exercise that LRGs and LGAs cannot do alone. As democratic representatives of their communities, LRGs understand the value of collaboration and thus strive to engage a diverse set of partners. The inspiring experiences collected in this report illustrate how they are forging strong democratic relationships with civil society and partnerships with the private sector and academia (while pursuing mutually beneficial, multilevel strategies for cooperation) with the aim of building a stronger multilateral system. **In doing so, they are not only accelerating progress toward the SDGs but also expanding the democratic basis of governance by bringing diverse voices and actors into decision-making processes.**

4.2
Persistent challenges

Despite the significant progress made at the local level in the past ten years, we are five years from the critical end date of the 2030 Agenda and remain far from on track to achieving the SDGs at all levels. Beyond regional disparities and particularities, all the objectives under review at the 2025 HLPF are in line with this trend.

All levels of government are experiencing critical challenges to progress, including due to global phenomena such as climate change, democratic backsliding and the political instability that is afflicting multilateral spaces and creating insecurity.

As this report has vastly shown, the local level, in particular, faces several obstacles that disrupt LRG action towards the localization of the SDGs:

- **Institutional fragmentation and national governments' uneven recognition of local action for sustainable development.** Despite the progress made in recent years, LRGs and their consistent effort to localize the SDGs still face uneven degrees of recognition across government levels and world regions. More concretely, 19 of the 35 countries (54%) that submitted a VNR at the 2025 HLPF demonstrated limited or no meaningful engagement of LRGs in the review process. In many cases, LRGs did not participate at all or only did so sporadically. Additionally, 63% of reporting countries have yet to fully integrate LRGs into their national coordination frameworks, relying instead on irregular consultations or one-off meetings. This uneven progress across regions underscores a persistent gap. To close it, there is a pressing need to establish formal, consistent and transparent mechanisms that facilitate collaboration among national governments, LRGs and civil society actors. At the same time, emerging trends of recentralization and privatization in some countries (affecting areas such as health, care, education, public services, services to the communities and taxation) further threaten the space and autonomy of LRGs, weakening their ability to deliver basic services and implement the 2030 Agenda effectively.

- **Chronic lack of funding.** LRG action is often tied to unstable and unreliable financial transfers, making it extremely challenging to develop plans and interventions in the medium and long term. This is critical especially in the context of SDG localization, since advancing the 2030 Agenda requires holistic approaches and a long-term vision. While the commitments made at the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development represent a major step forward, they now need to be swiftly and effectively translated into concrete, accessible and predictable financing mechanisms for LRGs, without which their role as key drivers of sustainable development will remain constrained.

• **Lack of disaggregated data for the local level.** The absence of locally disaggregated datasets and structured reporting mechanisms at the national level that include local perspectives is often an obstacle to the monitoring of the progress made by LRGs towards the 2030 Agenda. Perhaps more importantly, the lack of national-government-led action in this regard jeopardizes the creation of data-informed policies at all levels; preexisting evidence could be leveraged to develop more impactful and successful interventions at the local level. Without robust, localized, and disaggregated data — broken down by gender, age, income, disability, geography, ethnicity and other relevant markers — it becomes impossible to fully capture intersecting inequalities or to design interventions that truly leave no one behind. A similar challenge is the lack of recognition of a broader ecosystem of knowledge actors, including civil society organizations, grassroots movements, academic institutions and local communities, whose data, lived experiences and knowledge systems can enrich and complement official sources.

• **Tokenistic collaboration with, and involvement of, LRGs.** LRGs risk being involved in tokenistic collaboration proposals in national and international processes. On such occasions, LRGs are often mere implementers of national policies and treated as stakeholders without decision-making authority. This limited role overlooks the fact that LRGs are not only essential governance actors but also policy innovators, capable of designing and leading transformative initiatives that respond directly to local needs and realities, and it jeopardizes the achievement of the SDGs.

In order for LRGs to continue their efforts to achieve truly sustainable and inclusive development, these challenges need to be addressed in the framework of a collective and committed effort. The following section outlines propositions directed towards LRGs and LGAs themselves, national authorities and the multilateral system.

4.3 Recommendations for moving forward

SDG localization is fundamental to global achievement of the 2030 Agenda. LRGs will continue to localize the SDGs in a holistic and context-dependent manner, in pursuit of human and environmental well-being and inequality reduction. Sustainable development happens primarily on the ground in local communities, and thus LRGs embrace their role as initiators of action and democratic participation to create a better future for all.

In order for LRGs to continue their efforts in achieving truly sustainable and inclusive development, the aforementioned challenges need to be addressed within the framework of a collective and committed effort. The following recommendations are for national authorities and the multilateral system so that they may strengthen their support for local efforts:

- **National and international organizations must recognize the leading role of LRGs in sustainable development and the need for LRG-led localization of the 2030 Agenda.** As of 2025, such recognition is lamentably still uneven and susceptible to political transformations. The outcomes of this report highlight a global, municipalist commitment and real action towards localization, and they therefore call for true, national and international recognition of the unique and impactful role of LRGs.

- **National authorities should reform their financing and funding schemes so that long-term, stable financial flows are a reality for LRGs, allowing them to plan for sustainable development and act accordingly.** Moreover, national governments, international organizations and multilateral and bilateral banks should strive to redesign global financial flows and existing financial instruments with local realities in mind.

- **A collective effort must be made to produce, monitor and evaluate disaggregated data related to sustainable development at the local level.** National governments and international organizations need to redouble their efforts to support LRGs in their ability to systematically collect and analyze local data, and they should also increase the availability of disaggregated datasets for all domains covered by the 2030 Agenda. Finally, they should recognize other institutions' efforts in data generation and strive towards generating public, free and universally accessible data.

- **Empowering LRGs through decentralization is key to creating cohesive national strategies that consider the local dimension.** LRGs and their associations must be comprehensively involved in national and international coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs and other global agendas. Their expertise and knowledge of territorial dynamics can greatly advance national action for the 2030 Agenda by facilitating the adaptation of objectives to benefit all populations, the consideration of a vast array of perspectives and the scaling up of innovations made at the local level to address specific issues. These processes should go hand in hand with formal and institutional reforms to redistribute powers, resources and competencies according to the subsidiarity principle. Promoting more decentralized systems of governance means fostering active democratic participation in decision-making processes and the development of equality-based local communities.

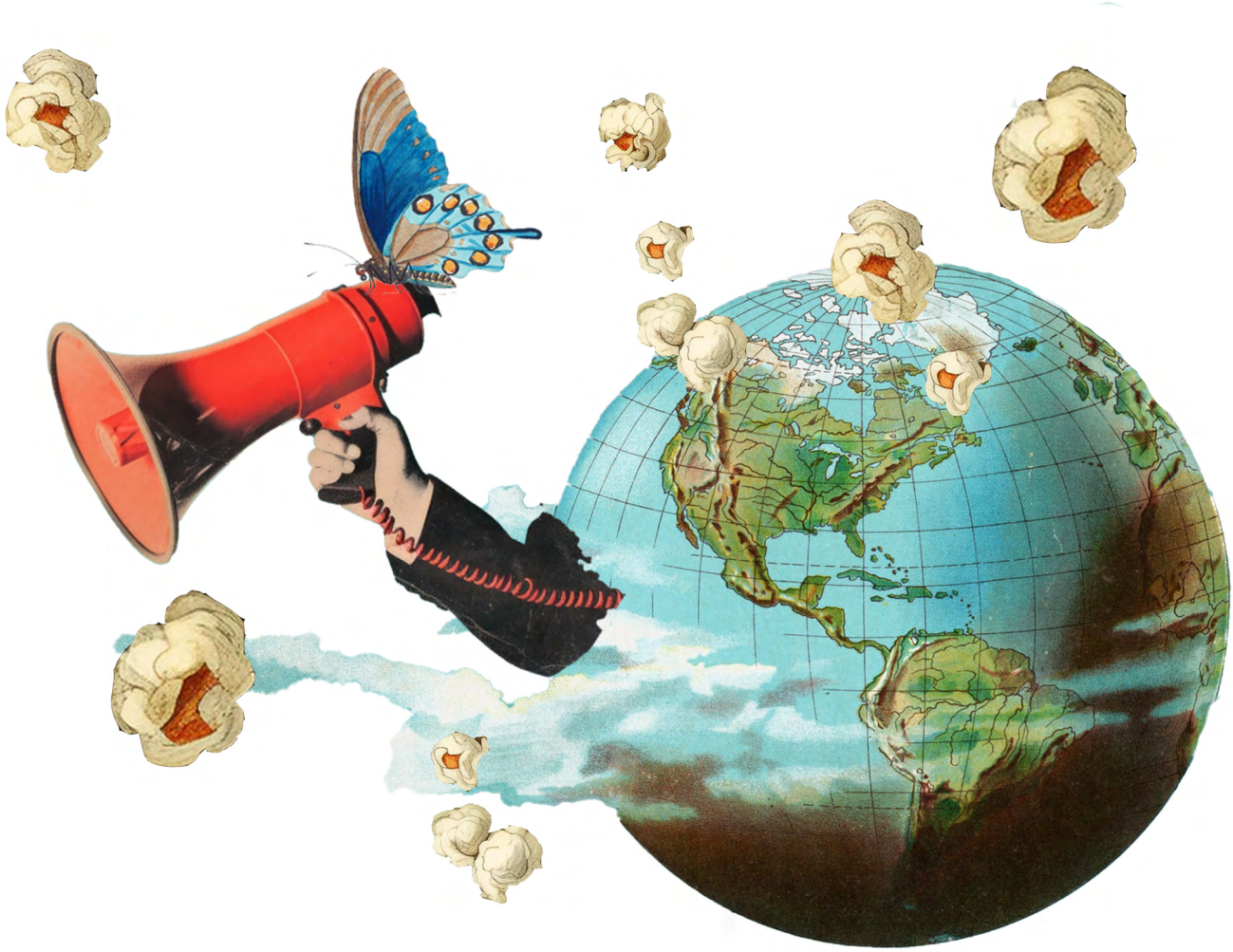
• **Joining efforts in national and subnational voluntary reporting processes is essential for the advancement of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.** National governments must not only recognize the dedication of LRGs in producing VLRs and VSRs but also systematically integrate these efforts into VNRs. LRG voices should be incorporated as valuable sources of localized knowledge at all stages of VNR processes; for instance, LRGs can form part of the national reporting committee, be regularly consulted throughout the process (individually or through their associations) or co-draft parts of the report.

• **Recent global developments prove that we need to rethink our multilateral system in order to achieve our shared objectives for the prosperity of all people and the planet.** The organized constituency of LRGs acknowledges the UN Secretary-General's efforts to design a new framework for collaboration and cooperation that redefines global financial and multilateral structures to ensure that the well-being of all local communities and the environment are put at the center. This new, networked, multilateral system should ensure the representation of our communities and afford LRGs the central role they deserve in international processes because they are the decision-making bodies that are closest to the population.

• **Promote innovative governance approaches that place people and the environment at the center,** moving beyond dominant, profit-driven paradigms. These models should emphasize collective well-being, long-term sustainability, and democratic participation, ensuring that decision-making processes are inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of both communities and ecosystems.

Building on our participation in the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on LRGs and in light of the UN Pact for the Future, our constituency is committed to continuing our work in localizing the SDGs at the local, national and international level and to making sure that we are adequately represented in decision-making bodies.

With the second World Summit for Social Development and other multilateral commitments on the horizon, it is now more important than ever to operationalize the UN Pact for the Future into a shared, global social agenda driven by local public service provision that guarantees universal access for all populations; the promotion of cities and territories that care; and the true respect, protection and fulfillment of all human rights. In order for the world to get back on track in achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, all relevant actors must recognize their shared responsibility, embrace the principle of subsidiarity so as to empower others and join forces to achieve a better, more prosperous future.



NOTES

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