

## TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Belgium is a federal monarchy with three tiers of subnational government. The country is divided into 6 federated entities, 10 provinces and 581 municipalities.<sup>1</sup>



Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Review (VNR).<sup>2</sup>

## 1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The federal **Long-term Vision for Sustainable Development** for 2050 that was adopted in 2013, as well as the **regional strategies** (Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels-Capital, German-speaking Community), are aligned with the SDGs. In addition, a first **National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)** was approved in 2017. It focuses on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Belgium and aims to create the basis for a coherent approach to sustainable development policies.

## 1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Three institutions are key in the preparation, adoption, implementation and improvement of sustainable development policies: the **Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD)** which is in charge of the planning and monitoring part of the process, a **task force within the Federal Planning Bureau** which reports on the current situation and makes policy evaluations and forecasts, and the **Federal Council for Sustainable Development**, an advisory stakeholders' council. Directly linked to the 2030 Agenda, the **Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development (IMCSD)**, composed of federal, regional and community ministers responsible for sustainable development and development cooperation, is the central coordination mechanism for dialogue between the various federal and federated authorities implementing the SDGs in Belgium.

- ▶ In Wallonia, an independent sustainable development advisory unit was set up in 2013 within the Walloon administration.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ In Flanders, a cross-cutting working group on sustainable development is guiding the translation of the SDGs into goals relevant for Flemish policy and to further their implementation.
- ▶ In the Brussels-Capital Region, it is the Minister for Environment and Energy who, historically, and in the absence of a regional coordinating body for sustainable development, follows the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- ▶ For the German-speaking Community, the Minister-President is responsible for the sustainability theme.

## 1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

In order to prepare the 2017 VNR, a **political steering committee** was set up which was chaired by the Prime Minister and received support from representatives of the various federal and federated entities directly involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The **Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable Development** had the responsibility of collecting data relating to the implementation within Belgium, while the federal **Foreign Ministry** collected data regarding external action. The **Inter-Federal Statistical Institute** collected statistical data. Civil society involvement was ensured at different stages of the reporting process.

1. See: [https://www.sng-wofi.org/reports/SNGWOFI\\_2019\\_report\\_country\\_profiles\\_DEC2019\\_UPDATES.pdf](https://www.sng-wofi.org/reports/SNGWOFI_2019_report_country_profiles_DEC2019_UPDATES.pdf)

2. See: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15721Belgium\\_Rev.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15721Belgium_Rev.pdf) (2017)

3. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

## 1.3 MONITORING

The **Inter-Federal Statistical Institute** is responsible for the systematic monitoring of the progress made in achieving the SDGs, and has set up a specific **working group** to that end.

## 2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

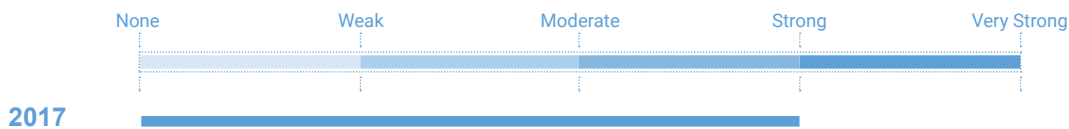
The local government association **VVSG** was asked by the regional Flemish government to deliver written inputs for the VNR 2017, on the local integration of the SDGs. However, this information is not clearly reflected in the report. Over the previous years, localizing the SDGs really picked up in Flanders, resulting in growing attention for local governments by the regional and federal governments. For example, VVSG was recognized in 2018 as 'SDG voice', an initiative of the federal government. The city of **Ghent** was 'SDG voice' in 2017 and the city of **Harelbeke** in 2020. More fundamentally, there are structural consultation mechanisms between VVSG and the Flemish government on the SDGs.<sup>4</sup> VVSG is indeed represented in the **Flemish Council for Sustainable Development** as well as involved on an ad hoc basis.

One in five Flemish municipalities has already signed up to the **Global Goals, Local Focus Declaration**, thereby acknowledging the importance of the SDGs and the need to develop local actions in support thereof. Pilot projects have been launched in 20 municipalities aiming to fully integrate the SDGs in overall policy and long-term plans by the end of 2018.

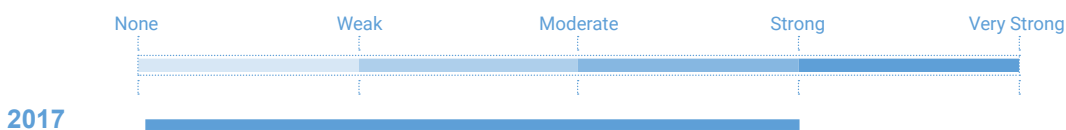
Regions also are represented in the **Federal Council for Sustainable Development**.

### 2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

#### ► In the VNR process



#### ► In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation



Comments: VVSG mentioned a puntual participation (GTF Survey 2021).

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNR and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

### 2.2 VNR REFERENCES

The 2017 VNR mentions the contribution of local governments,<sup>5</sup> and contains some examples.

### 2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

► The poverty reduction strategy of the **Walloon region** includes a series of measures aimed at the provision of access to housing as well as improvements in terms of housing quality and energy efficiency. Also, by way of promoting sustainable mobility for all citizens, the Walloon government set up a plan which encompasses a whole series of actions aimed at improving the conditions of cycling and significantly increasing its use in the region by 2020. Among the many initiatives already launched are funding to ten pilot municipalities, awareness-raising with workers and improvements to the cycling infrastructure. Municipalities themselves are equally drafting all-encompassing mobility plans, focusing on soft mobility and incorporating measures benefiting vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists.

► The **Flemish** instrument for urban renewal (an annual call for projects) supports cities in developing urban projects with particular attention to environmental sustainability and/or climate neutrality, mobility, spatial quality and core compaction, family and child-friendliness, green-blue features, as well as balance between private and public spaces. Projects such as the reconversion of a disaffected railway site in **Leuven** into housing units, social services and public spaces combine ecological concerns with social viability and are linked to community development and cooperation initiatives between public, private and civil society actors.

4. Answer of VVSG to the GTF Survey in 2021.

5. A paragraph mentions them as follows: "As front-line authorities rooted in local practice, they embody a bottom-up approach in the search for solutions to global problems, and they endeavor to offer adequate public services accessible to all citizens. In this effort, they are supported by specialized associations such as the Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie, Brulocalis and the Vereniging voor Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten" (see VNR, 2017, p. 6).

► Cities such as **Ghent**, **Brussels** or **Antwerp** are establishing and/or enlarging pedestrian areas as well as low emission zones, in deliberate efforts to reduce their adverse per capita environmental impact.

► Belgian local governments are also promoting the role of technology and innovation in sustainable urban development through targeted 'smart city' approaches rolled out at the different levels. Examples include the Flemish iMinds/imec Smart Cities Programme, the Smart City Wallonia Conference, the smart city e-platform at Brussels level, or the Smart Cities Community established by the Belgian technology industry sector organization (Agoria). To many urban challenges, the Smart Flanders program offers solutions such as reducing congestion, sustainably distributing goods to and from downtown, improving air quality, promoting health, ensuring optimum parking policies, and eliminating barriers for disadvantaged groups. The City of Things test bed in **Antwerp** is being used as an interoperability lab. Concrete examples include the low-emission zone in Antwerp, which is facilitated by a public authorities' data-sharing platform, or the Flemish Institute for Logistics, which has launched a project to investigate whether the Internet of Things can help to organize freight transport logistics in a city in a smarter way from both a traditional economic as from a more holistic sustainability perspective.

► The municipality of **Harelbeke** fully embraced the momentum of local elections in 2018 and the subsequent development of the multi-annual strategic plans for 2020-2025 to move towards a more sustainable local policy aligned with the SDGs. Harelbeke has created broad support for the SDGs within the local administration, council and with external stakeholders such as citizens, private sector and schools. For example, a participatory analysis of the municipality was developed around the five P's of sustainable development (people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership). Moreover, in the run-up to the local elections, the civil advisory boards of the municipality wrote a manifesto aimed at the politicians, structuring their demands on the five P's. Furthermore, new multi-annual strategic plans integrate the SDGs with the municipality's sustainability priorities (e.g. mobility, smart cities and housing for the elderly); and Harelbeke is also using the SDG framework to communicate about a city-to-city link with Eenhana (Botswana), and to revise this particular programme.<sup>6</sup>

► The Beninese city of Dogbo and the Belgium city of **Roeselare** agreed on a partnership in the area of birth registration. Birth registration is key to gain a legal identity and ensure access to basic rights and services. The two cities were twinned in 2010 and work closely on projects ranging from water schemes to cultural exchanges. Because of the birth registration project, all the children born in the city of Dogbo had their births registered, compared with only 40% in 2010. This received an award from PLATFORMA, the European network of local government associations, in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

► The many **city alliances for poverty reduction and social action** – for example between Flemish municipalities and their counterparts in Guatemala and Nicaragua, or between the Brussels and Walloon municipalities and their counterparts in Benin, Senegal, the DRC or Morocco – show the active and direct contribution Belgian local authorities are making towards poverty eradication, inter alia when it comes to issues related to land registration, local administration or microcredit schemes.

► SDG monitoring and reporting is now an important area of work for the local government association **VVSG**. It developed a local SDG indicators' set in 2018, and supported the creation of an online SDG monitor by Idea Consult. This tool gives an overview of the current state of affairs in Flemish municipalities for a fixed set of about 65 indicators. Also, each municipality is given a score based on the concept of best and worst performers.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, VVSG created a working group with about 15 municipalities on SDG monitoring and reporting. Within this group, the association shares lessons learned from international examples, and exchanges information on practices and indicators. This will result in an inspirational guide for all Flemish local governments. In the context of this working group, VVSG has also looked into the federal and Flemish SDG indicators to see where there is a match with local indicators. Besides, the week of the Sustainable Municipality was held for the third time in 2020.<sup>9</sup> This format allowed for raising awareness on the SDGs among local governments through the designation of local heroes for global goals. These are citizens, organizations, schools, businesses, etc. who in their daily life or work contribute to sustainability. In 2020, the focus was on COVID-19 heroes. 92 (out of 300) local governments participated.<sup>10</sup>

## 2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

The city of **Ghent** produced three VLRs, in 2020, 2021, and 2022, with follow-up reports planned in the coming years.<sup>11</sup> The region of **Wallonia** also published VLRs in 2017, 2019, and 2021.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Since 2017, **VVSG** receives funding from both the federal and the Flemish government to support municipalities in localizing the SDGs.

6. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

7. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

8. See: [www.sdgmonitor.be](http://www.sdgmonitor.be)

9. See: [www.duurzamegemeente.be](http://www.duurzamegemeente.be)

10. Answer of VVSG to the GTF Survey in 2021.

11. See: [https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ghent\\_2020.pdf](https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ghent_2020.pdf);

[https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ghent\\_2021.pdf](https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ghent_2021.pdf);

[https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/field-document/ghent\\_2022.pdf](https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/field-document/ghent_2022.pdf)

12. See: [https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Wallonia%20\(2017\).pdf](https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Wallonia%20(2017).pdf);

[https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/wallonia\\_2019.pdf](https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/wallonia_2019.pdf);

[https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/field-document/wallonia\\_2021.pdf](https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/field-document/wallonia_2021.pdf)

### 3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

**General comments:** Belgium appointed a [national focal point for the implementation of the Sendai Framework](#) in 2016. The subsequently established Belgian Sendai implementation platform draws on expertise of all interested Belgian authorities to assess existing initiatives, crisis-response structures, coordination protocols and civil protection responsibilities. Making the paradigm shift from crisis response to risk management should pave the way to a national disaster risk reduction security strategy.

#### 3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

No reference.

#### 3.2 COVID 19

**VVSG** has been part of multiple national working groups / task forces related to COVID-19 measures, for example on care, local economy, vulnerable groups, vaccinations, youth, childcare, etc. The association is currently trying to involve local governments in national decisions regarding European recovery funds. It also provides information to members through a dedicated webpage and webinars.<sup>13</sup>

### 4. SDG INDICATORS<sup>14</sup>

|   |       |                      |
|---|-------|----------------------|
| 5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments   |       | 39.0 (2018)          |
| 6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)  | Urban | -                    |
|   | Rural | -                    |
| 6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)  | Urban | -                    |
|   | Rural | -                    |
| 11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%)  |       | -                    |
| 11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%)   |       | 100 (2015, Brussels) |
| 11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted)  |       | 12.7 (2016)          |
| 11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%) |       | -                    |

13. Answer of VVSG to the GTF Survey in 2021.

14. The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage>. More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: <https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/bel>