

LOCAL AND REGIONAL  
GOVERNMENTS' REPORT  
TO THE 2023 HLPF  
**PAPER 1**

# HOUSING AND BASIC SERVICES FROM BELOW:

How local and regional governments are  
advancing the right to adequate housing



#SDG11  
#HLPF2023  
#Listen2Cities

## 2023 UCLG



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# 1. Background. Localizing SDG 11 to empower communities for sustainable transformation

The current context of multiple and intersecting local-global crises makes accelerating progress towards the urban Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) – SDG 11 – an even more difficult, yet necessary agenda. Most notably, these crises include the climate emergency, the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global cost of living and multiple armed conflicts, all of which contribute to deepening inequalities. Nevertheless, the past few years have also seen a re-energized global municipalist movement with ambitious commitments, alternative visions and bold strategies to spearhead efforts for more just and equal cities and territories.

In an increasingly urbanizing world, local and regional governments (LRGs) – with different degrees of autonomy and decentralized resources and responsibilities –

are the bedrock of achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG 11. LRGs play a pivotal role based on their deep understanding of challenges for SDG localization. They provide access to adequate housing and basic services; ground their planning strategies in feminism, accessibility and participation; reduce disaster risk; and protect natural and cultural heritage. Moreover, they serve as key nodes and drivers for advancing a rights-based approach, as well as building and strengthening multistakeholder and multilevel partnerships. The latter involves forming coalitions of actors across levels of government, civil society, local communities, the private sector and international organizations, aiming to leverage resources and capacities towards “Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.”

Table 1 List of cities, regions, LGAs, GTF networks and partners contributing to the papers

Paper	Contributors
<p><b>Paper 1.</b> Housing and basic services from below: How LRGs are advancing the right to adequate housing</p> <p>Drafted by Camila Cociña, Researcher, and Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Principal Researcher, at the International Institute for Environment and Development</p>	<p><b>LRGs:</b> Afadzato South District (Ghana), Barcelona (Spain), Bilbao (Spain), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Iztapalapa (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Montréal (Canada), Municipio B (Uruguay)</p> <p><b>GTF networks:</b> Euro-Latin American Cities Cooperation Alliance (AL-LAs), Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Mercociudades, UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Habitat International Coalition, World Blind Union</p>
<p><b>Paper 2.</b> Integrated and participatory urban planning: How LRGs enable equality through feminism, accessibility and proximity</p> <p>Drafted by Daniel Oviedo, Associate Professor at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL, with support from Julia Wesley, María José Arbeláez and Caren Levy, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL</p>	<p><b>LRGs and LGAs:</b> Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic (Dominican Republic), Lisbon (Portugal), New York (USA), Quilmes (Argentina), Santa Fe (Argentina), Villa Carlos Paz (Argentina), VNG International (the Netherlands)</p> <p><b>GTF networks:</b> C40, CEMR, Metropolis, UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> Entrepreneurship Territory Innovation (ETI) Chair at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, General Assembly of Partners – Older Persons, Global Disability Innovation Hub, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, World Blind Union, World Enabled</p>
<p><b>Paper 3.</b> Forefronting transformative action: How local and regional governments are crafting social and environmental justice and sustainability</p> <p>Drafted by Adriana Allen, Professor of Development Planning and Urban Sustainability, and Julia Wesley, Researcher, at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL</p>	<p><b>LRGs and LGAs:</b> Afadzato South District (Ghana), Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSII), Azambuja (Portugal), Bandar Lampung (Indonesia), Barcelona (Spain), Basse Area Council (the Gambia), Barcarena (Brazil), Bogotá (Colombia), Canelones (Uruguay), Commune Haho 1 (Togo), Esteban Echeverría (Argentina), Góis (Portugal), Granollers (Spain), Johannesburg (South Africa), Nancy (France), Peñatolén (Chile), Pombal (Portugal), Rosario (Argentina), Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Terrassa (Spain), Villa María (Argentina), Viña del Mar (Chile)</p> <p><b>GTF networks:</b> CEMR, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Latin American Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Governments Associations (FLACMA), UCLG, UCLG Africa</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> World Blind Union</p>
<p><b>Paper 4.</b> A cultural boost in the achievement of the SDGs: How LRGs are promoting cultural heritage and sustainable cities and territories</p> <p>Drafted by Marta Llobet, Agnès Ruiz, Sarah Vieux and Jordi Pascual, Secretariat of the UCLG Committee on Culture</p>	<p><b>LRGs:</b> Barcelona (Spain), Bogotá (Colombia), Buenos Aires (Argentina), California (USA), Dublin (Ireland), Durban (South Africa), Lisbon (Portugal), Malmö (Sweden), Mexico City (Mexico), Montevideo (Uruguay), Montréal (Canada), Morelia (Mexico), Pombal (Portugal), Saint-Louis (Senegal), San Antonio (USA), Taipei, València (Spain), Xi'an (People's Republic of China)</p> <p><b>GTF networks:</b> Global Parliament of Mayors, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Resilient Cities Network, UCLG, Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI)</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> World Blind Union, Serhan Ada, Sylvia Amann, Enrique Avogadro, Jordi Baltà, John Crowley, Beatriz García, Enrique Glockner, Antoine Guibert, Lucina Jiménez, Tita Larasati, Alfons Martinell, Marie-Odile Melançon, Justin O'Connor, Jose Oliveira Junior, Jainité Rueda, John Smithies, Magdalena Suárez, Alison Tickell</p>
<p><b>Paper 5.</b> Multilevel governance and finance: How LRGs advocate for balanced urban systems</p> <p>Drafted by Caren Levy, Professor of Transformative Urban Planning at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL</p>	<p><b>LRGs:</b> Basque Country (Spain)</p> <p><b>GTF networks:</b> Metropolis, UCLG</p> <p><b>Partners:</b> World Blind Union</p>

Source: own compilation

This paper, together with the other four papers included in the 7th [Towards the localization of the SDGs](#) report, produced by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF) in 2023, builds on extensive desk research. In particular, they draw on experiences and policies reported by cities, regions, local government associations (LGAs), GTF networks and partners via the GTF/United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2023 survey, several written consultation processes and interviews (see Table 1).

The five papers provide a complementary and integrated vision of the pathways LRGs are taking to achieve SDG 11 and closely related SDGs. In other words, they highlight trajectories for change, illustrated through innovative case studies, in which LRGs take an active role and forward-looking approach to promote more equitable and sustainable futures. LRGs do so through strategic decisions and concerted practices in collaboration with different urban stakeholders.\* The papers further outline enabling environments for those pathways as well as persistent challenges and deep inequalities that slow down and, in some cases, halt progress towards achieving SDG 11 and the full 2030 Agenda.

Each paper delves into a specific topic related to the localization of SDG 11:



[Paper 1](#) shows how LRGs, five years after the Municipalist Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City, are using a range of housing actions to recognize, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing and basic services. These actions accelerate progress towards **SDG target 11.1**.



[Paper 2](#) builds upon feminist approaches to the design and implementation of planning policies, as an entry point to foster accessibility, proximity and participation – crucial conditions for sustainable and inclusive communities – thereby working towards **SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7**.



[Paper 3](#) focuses on LRGs' role in pursuing environmental justice and integrated and circular approaches that address the overlapping crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and ecological overshoot, reflecting **SDG targets 11.5, 11.6, 11.7 and 11.b**.



[Paper 4](#) argues that while culture and heritage are hardly visible across the SDGs (and, indeed, should be addressed explicitly through a proposed SDG 18), they are fundamental dimensions of localizing sustainability agendas. This paper speaks particularly to achieving **SDG target 11.4**.

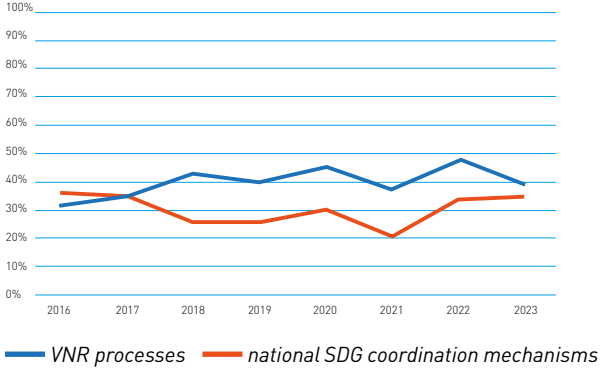


[Paper 5](#) outlines how, to achieve more balanced and equal urban and territorial systems, multilevel governance at all levels should be strengthened, based on the principle of subsidiarity and enhanced coherence of territorial and sectoral policies. National governments can open space for LRGs to work towards **SDG target 11.a** through genuine fiscal, administrative and political decentralization.

The next two pages present the highlights of the *Towards the localization of the SDGs* report, including the cities', regions' and associations' best practices mentioned in the five papers as well as the contribution of LRGs to the SDG 11 targets and the rest of the SDGs, as analyzed by the five papers.

# Highlights

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



Since 2018, LRGs and their associations have produced over 240 VLRs and 37 VSRs

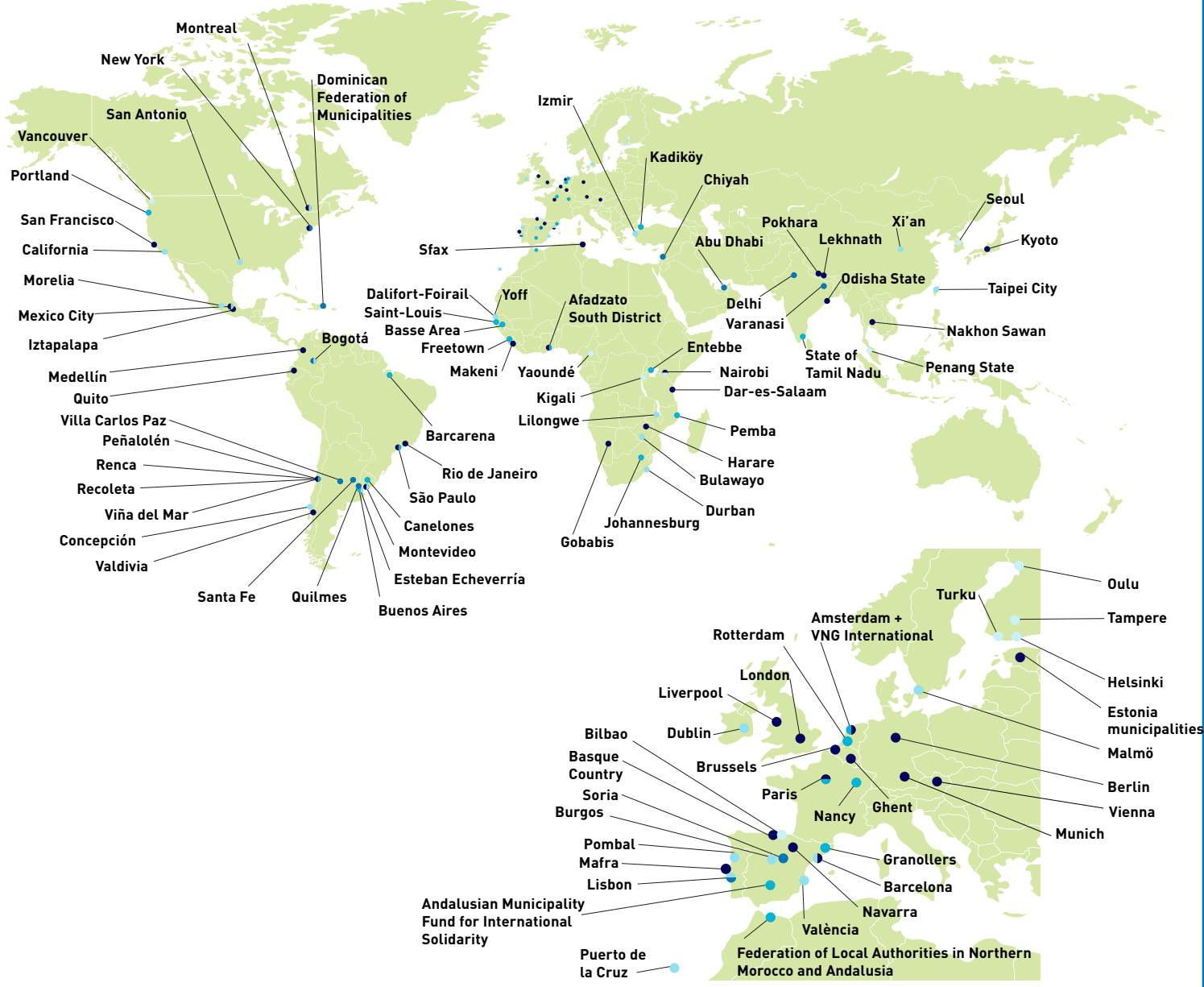


1.4 bn people  
170,000 LRGs

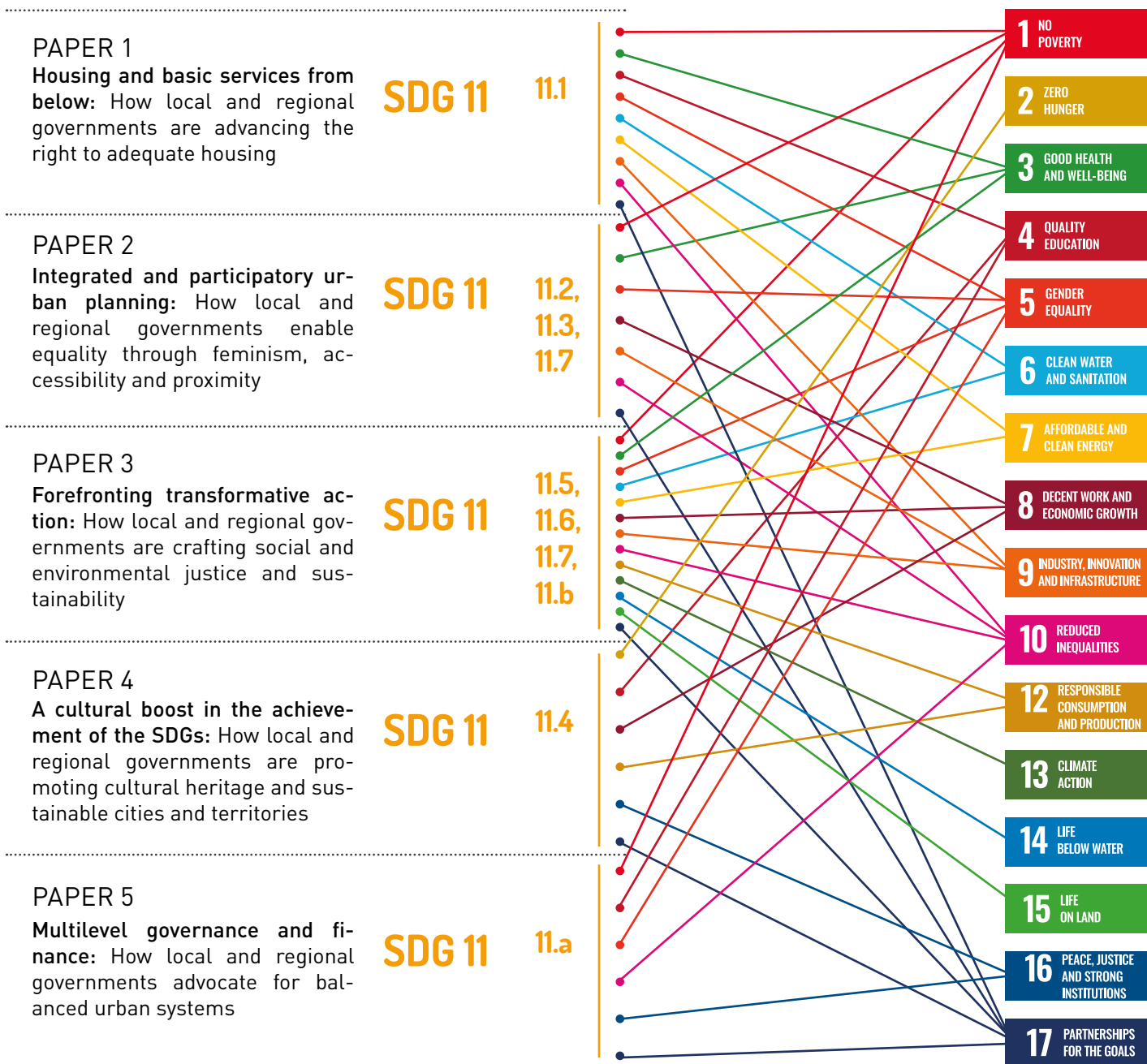


## Cities', regions' and associations' best practices mentioned in the five papers

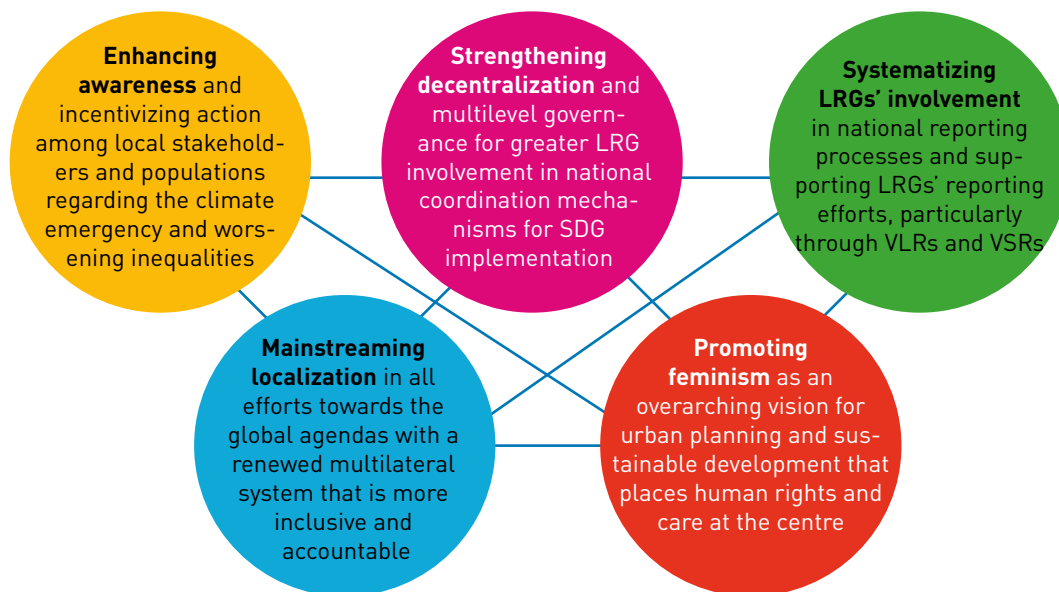
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## Contribution of LRGs to the SDG 11 targets and related SDGs, as analyzed by the five papers



## Ways forward for SDG localization



## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Local and regional governments: Expanding the range of housing actions

The current housing crisis is a human rights crisis,<sup>1</sup> which calls all actors to play an active role in addressing it from a rights-based perspective. This includes efforts to advance social justice, fight inequalities and discrimination and embrace commitments to tackle the climate emergency. Local and regional governments (LRGs), as proximity authorities at the front line of local challenges, are particularly crucial in such endeavours.

This paper looks at the range of initiatives that LRGs are mobilizing to advance the localization of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 11.1 (“By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums”). It does so by acknowledging the critical role of housing and basic service provision in enabling sustainable and equitable development. Housing and basic services are deeply intertwined. The right to adequate housing, as defined by the United Nations, includes the effective availability of basic services as one of its seven components, alongside security of tenure in all its forms, accessibility for all, localization and access to public services, habitability, affordability and cultural adequacy.<sup>2</sup> Authorities at all levels have a duty to respect and **recognize, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing as an indivisible entitlement** recognized by international commitments.

LRGs, in collaboration with other actors, have a critical role in such a duty. In 2018, through the Municipalist Declaration of Local Governments for the Right to Housing and the Right to the City, they manifested their political will to actively lead progress on the right to adequate housing.<sup>3</sup> In this declaration, LRGs recognized themselves as the “public officials who are most sensitive to the everyday needs of our citizens.” They called for more powers to better regulate the real estate market; more funds to improve public housing stocks; more tools to co-produce public-private community-driven alternative housing; urban planning that combines adequate housing with quality, inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods; and municipalist cooperation in residential strategies. Five years after this milestone declaration, this paper looks back on concrete actions that LRGs have taken to implement such a commitment, while also acknowledging the remaining challenges they face to realize the right to housing for all, leaving no one behind.

Since 2018, the world has gone through several changes. The COVID-19 pandemic, the exacerbated climate emergency and new scenarios of political and violent conflict have all disproportionately affected people living at the intersection of different forms of exclusion manifested across class, gender, ability, race, migration status, age and ethnicity. In this context, **dealing with all forms of systematic discrimination towards specific groups has become a key priority for all social policies – and housing is not the exception. LRGs have been crucial**



**in responding to these complex and compounding crises**, particularly when it comes to providing timely local responses at the front line of emergencies. These situations have made evident the need for multilevel governance, effective decentralization and coordination between national, regional and local actors (see Paper 4 on multilevel governance).

The complexities of ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, as well as upgrading informal settlements, require looking at the full range of initiatives that contribute to such a goal. A monolithic approach to “housing policy” – limited exclusively to national regulations, resources and programmes – might obscure the full spectrum of activities that are actually promoting the right to adequate housing across and through other policy areas and instruments. LRGs, in collaboration with other actors, are in a privileged position to advance locally led experiences that provide fruitful learning and action spaces, innovating and opening



broader possibilities to re-frame and diversify localized housing action.

This review, rather than examining a few cases in depth, offers a reflection on the wide range of initiatives, instruments, innovations and partnerships that LRGs are utilizing to advance SDG target 11.1. From a rights-based approach, the paper has clustered these experiences into three main LRG functions or pathways:

- First, authorities have a duty to respect and **recognize** the housing entitlements of people who have been systematically discriminated, as well as to acknowledge housing processes and knowledge beyond the realm of formal planning.
- A second pathway relates to local strategies to **protect** housing rights. LRGs are crucial for safeguarding housing rights by providing adequate market regulations, frameworks, incentives and proactive efforts against forced evictions and discrimination.
- Finally, LRGs are critical to **fulfilling** housing rights, by enabling and directly providing housing units, as well as supporting organized housing groups and co-producing initiatives for informal settlement upgrading.

Table 2 summarizes the kinds of experiences and instruments that this paper explores for each of these pathways.

Table 2 Summary of LRGs' pathways to SDG target 11.1 and kinds of experiences described

LRG PATHWAY TO SDG TARGET 11.1	KINDS OF EXPERIENCES & INSTRUMENTS
LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR THE <i>RESPECT</i> AND <i>RECOGNITION</i> OF HOUSING RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratizing data collection</li> <li>• Monitoring housing conditions and organizing housing demand</li> <li>• Monitoring housing rights violations</li> </ul>
LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR THE <i>PROTECTION</i> OF HOUSING RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responding to evictions and addressing exclusion and discrimination</li> <li>• Establishing and enforcing regulations of land and housing markets</li> <li>• Promoting more inclusive and responsive forms of land tenure</li> </ul>
LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR THE <i>FULFILMENT</i> OF HOUSING RIGHTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling direct provision of housing (public rent and private ownership)</li> <li>• Enabling different forms of community-led and co-produced housing and basic services – including informal settlement upgrading</li> </ul>

Source: own compilation

Below is a brief review of the interconnections between housing and basic services and other development areas, framing housing as an enabler of other SDGs. In Section 2, the multiple trends that sustain and deepen current housing inequalities are briefly discussed. Section 3 presents the main body of the paper, discussing efforts by LRGs – in collaboration with other actors – to advance the localization of SDG target 11.1. This section looks at a range of experiences from all regions that enable the recognition, protection and fulfilment of the right to adequate housing and basic services. Although not exhaustive, it gives an account of the diverse actions LRGs are leading. Section 4 reflects on the main challenges faced by LRGs to fully realize their potential as guarantors of housing rights. Finally, Section 5 provides a brief conclusion and synthesis of the paper, discussing LRGs' role in accelerating the localization and achievement of the SDGs.



## 2.2. Housing and basic services as enablers

Housing and basic services are recognized as ends and rights in themselves. However, substantive evidence has demonstrated that advancing the right to housing and basic services is also an enabler for other areas of sustainable and equitable development and just transitions.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, ensuring access to adequate housing and basic services enables achieving other SDGs in three key ways:

- First, it can **enable other socio-economic returns**, including economic returns due to the role of housing in supporting livelihoods, income-generating activities and increased disposable income. In turn, these returns have direct consequences for addressing poverty (SDG 1, target 1.4); inequalities (SDG 10); and time poverty, particularly for women (SDG 5, target 5.4). Improving housing conditions and basic services also impacts other social dimensions.

Comprehensively enhancing habitability and other housing aspects affects areas of wellbeing such as health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4).

- Second, it can **enable environmental sustainability** by allowing access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6, targets 6.1 and 6.2) and affordable and clean energy (SDG 7, target 7.1). It also can do so by contributing to more sustainable industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9, targets 9.a and 9.c), especially when addressing housing from a circularity perspective. Importantly, housing production can promote less carbon-intensive urbanization patterns and urban development models.
- And third, it can **enable more democratic governance** by strengthening institutions in their capacity to respond to citizens' needs and aspirations through the process of housing production and management (SDG 16), shifting power relationships that sustain gender inequalities (SDG 5) and strengthening participation around different goals (SDG targets 6.a and 6.b).

**In other words, advancing access to adequate housing and basic services is not only instrumental for acceler-**

**ating SDGs' localization but also is often a precondition for their achievement.**<sup>5</sup> Table 3 summarizes how the recognition, protection and fulfilment of the right to adequate housing and basic rights (SDG target 11.1) enable the advancement of other SDGs and are linked to other human rights frameworks.



Table 3 How do the recognition, protection and fulfilment of the right to adequate housing and basic rights (SDG target 11.1) enable the advancement of other SDGs?

ENABLING POWER OF LRG PATHWAY	PATHWAY 1: RESPECTING AND RECOGNIZING	PATHWAY 2: PROTECTING	PATHWAY 3: FULFILLING
<p><b>Enabling other socio-economic returns</b> (SDGs 1, 10, 5, 4, 3)</p> <p><i>Human rights frameworks:</i></p> <p>Right to education and training</p> <p>Right to health</p> <p>Right to work</p>	<p>By increasing visibility of housing needs and rights violations, housing initiatives can enhance the likelihood of responsive actions to tackle poverty and inequalities.</p>	<p>By providing frameworks that safeguard housing conditions in ways that allow livelihoods of low-income communities, as well as maintaining systems of social support, housing frameworks can promote and expand socio-economic benefits.</p>	<p>By improving conditions that lead to better education and health outcomes, as well as increasing availability of disposable income and supporting income-generating activities in the construction sector, housing projects can directly impact socio-economic conditions.</p>
<p><b>Enabling environmental sustainability</b> (SDGs 6, 7, 9)</p> <p><i>Human rights frameworks:</i></p> <p>Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment</p> <p>Right to water and sanitation</p>	<p>By documenting the exposure to environmental risks of those living in poor housing conditions and lacking basic services, as well as the potential environmental contribution of well-located and adequate housing responses, housing initiatives can be more strategically aligned with socially just climate actions.</p>	<p>By protecting residents from evictions and displacement, and by promoting spatial planning instruments that avoid continuous urban sprawl and unsustainable urban growth patterns, housing regulations can promote land uses that contribute to the decarbonization of cities.</p>	<p>By improving access to suitable housing conditions and adequate basic services, marginalized communities can enhance their capacity to adapt and respond to environmental shocks and trends. Sustainable housing initiatives in well-located areas can support mitigation efforts of cities and just transitions to more sustainable urban development.</p>
<p><b>Enabling more democratic governance</b> (SDGs 16, 5, 6)</p> <p><i>Human rights frameworks:</i></p> <p>Right to public participation</p> <p>Right to equality and non-discrimination</p>	<p>By improving and expanding reliable information about housing and basic needs, and by supporting community-led processes of knowledge production, housing initiatives can enable marginalized groups to improve their capacity to participate meaningfully in housing and wider urban development decision-making processes.</p>	<p>By protecting residents against evictions, displacement and other forms of housing discrimination, housing frameworks can nurture social support systems and trust between civil society and authorities, producing a more enabling environment for democratic governance.</p>	<p>By fulfilling the right to adequate housing through participatory and community-led processes, housing projects can support and strengthen representative structures of low-income groups, improving their capacity to engage in collaborative governance and enhancing delivery and accountability of government programmes.</p>

### 3. Trends: Setting the scene for current housing challenges

The *SDG 11 Synthesis Report 2023*, prepared for the 2023 High-Level Political Forum, identifies some clear messages when tracking the progress of SDG target 11.1. **Global progress has stagnated on upgrading and ensuring access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all. Overall, the number of people living in informal settlements is growing, the proportion of the urban population in inadequate housing continues to grow**, and children in informal settlements are particularly at risk of being marginalized, compromising their future. Importantly, secondary and intermediate cities are recording faster growth in populations living in informal settlements than primary cities. The report also recognizes that there are significant data gaps and acknowledges the importance of diversifying housing solutions to respond to all forms of housing inadequacy.<sup>6</sup>

What are the trends at the global level that explain this stagnation? And how are they reflected locally, by being either reversed or perpetuated? Certainly, the deepening of inequalities triggered by COVID-19,<sup>7</sup> alongside the increased incidence of forced displacement due to either armed conflicts or climate-fuelled disasters, has impacted housing inadequacy. Certain trends and dynamics have sustained and deepened the housing crisis, and they underlie millions of people's vulnerability to shocks that lead them to worsen their housing conditions when confronted with daily or extraordinary challenges. **This section discusses some of the processes that sustain existing housing inequalities around access to affordable land and housing, unequal access to basic services and the precarization of tenure security.**

A first important trend to acknowledge is the increasing **financialization and commodification** of land, basic services and housing markets at the global level, with direct implications for local residents, particularly in relation to affordability. The global real estate market is valued at more than double the global GDP, being "about US\$ 217 trillion, nearly 60 per cent of the value of all global assets, with residential real estate comprising 75 per cent of the total."<sup>8</sup> The local implications of the process of global financialization for housing rights are widely documented.<sup>9</sup> These include impacts in terms of housing and land affordability, the privatization of basic services (e.g. electricity, water, waste) and the promotion of profit-led urban development models, with implications in terms of exclusion, enclosure, forced displacement and urban expansion. As a reference, UN agencies estimate that two million people are forcibly evicted from their homes each year.<sup>10</sup> In Europe only, 6.7 million households were in arrears with mortgage or rent payments in 2021.<sup>11</sup> In terms of affordability, more than half of total households (55.4%) lack access to affordable housing in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, as do about 30% of households in West Asia, North Africa, Central Asia and South Asia.<sup>12</sup> In richer countries such as those part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, affordability is also an important issue particularly affecting certain groups such as migrants and people with disabilities.<sup>13</sup>

Second, and adding to these global trends, there are national **difficulties in establishing healthy financial, management and governance systems**, as well as multilevel structures with effective decentralization in terms of administrative, financial and political empowerment. In 2022, LRGs executed 24.1% of global public expenditure, brought in 25.7% of global public revenue and made 36.6% of global public investments.<sup>14</sup> Effective administrative, political and financial decentralization requires coordination and resource flows between different levels of government, which is essential to respond to housing needs locally. Countries also struggle to address inequalities across their regions and cities, with uneven capacities and resources between different urban forms (capitals, megacities, smaller and intermediate cities), between rural and urban areas and between more or less interconnected regions. Some countries have established national urban, housing or upgrading policies as instruments that provide common guidance and priorities to address these challenges. Acknowledging the growing complexity and diversity of housing demands, it is crucial for national governance systems to create the conditions for housing initiatives to be developed within appropriate and flexible institutional frameworks, allowing multistakeholder collaboration responsive to diverse needs and aspirations.

Third, and linked to the previous point, there are also important issues related to existing planning systems. Planning and regulatory frameworks tend to have **limited tools to engage with diverse processes of housing provision and city-making**, which take place within and beyond existing housing frameworks. This translates into inadequate mechanisms to engage with housing practices in informal settlements, into an emphasis on individual homeownership and, often, into the criminalization of broad portions of the population, with implications for persistent housing rights violations and forced eviction. These limitations are closely linked with challenges related to knowledge and data gaps, and the capacities within governments to assess and engage with different forms of knowledge that provide a full account of complex housing realities.

A fourth important trend relates to **limited regulations and incentives for the construction and development industry** to provide effective and sustainable answers to low-income households and households of other systematically discriminated groups. Difficulties persist in enabling the participation of small-scale businesses and innovations in the construction sector. This is linked to constraints in the construction sector around embracing principles of circularity across the entire housing cycle to promote sustainable and socially just transitions while dealing with challenges of adaptation, mitigation and decarbonization in the housing sector (see Paper 3 on resilient and ecological policies).

Finally, an overall trend that frames current challenges related to SDG target 11.1 is the general **crisis in care and social protection systems**, which became particularly acute in the context of COVID-19. Current calls for recog-

nizing the centrality of the care economy in the reproduction and sustainability of life respond to a historical trend of rendering invisible the crucial role of such systems.<sup>15</sup> The weakness of social protection is sometimes the product of the state’s withdrawal from its duties as a welfare provider (in countries with a longstanding welfare tradition). Other times, it is linked to weak state formation and institutional capacities, often related to limited resources and histories of colonization. This fragility of wider care systems highlights the role of housing and basic services as critical infrastructure to respond to social needs and

fulfil human rights. The failures of social protection systems have a disproportionate impact on women and other systematically marginalized populations, particularly in the context of conflict and forced migration, exposure to climate-related events and other forms of vulnerability. The lack of a wider social protection system puts the housing sector under particular pressure.

Figure 1 summarizes the trends, pathways and strategies led by LRGs to advance SDG target 11.1 and related goals.

Figure 1 Trends, pathways and strategies led by LRGs to advance SDG target 11.1 and related goals



Source: own compilation

## 4. Local pathways: Recognizing, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate housing and basic services

In the context of these challenging trends, this section discusses diverse efforts by LRGs and other local actors – including civil society groups, organized communities, the private sector and other scales of government – to advance the localization of SDG target 11.1. As explained above, rather than exploring a few cases in depth, the section presents a multiplicity of experiences that illustrate how LRGs are contributing and playing a role in the SDGs’ achievement. Although the list could include hundreds of similar experiences from other LRGs, it prioritizes giving a diverse account of LRGs’ strategies.

The sources of these experiences include published reports with documented initiatives, many of which are

part of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) GOLD VI Pathways to Equality Cases Repository,<sup>16</sup> and the “Cities for Adequate Housing” session at the latest UCLG World Congress.<sup>17</sup> The examples also draw upon a consultation with LRGs conducted by UCLG and its Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights in articulation with the UCLG Community of Practice on Housing. **This section presents experiences from several regions that are enabling the recognition, protection and fulfilment of the right to adequate housing and basic services and, consequently, enabling socio-economic returns, environmental sustainability and more democratic governance.**

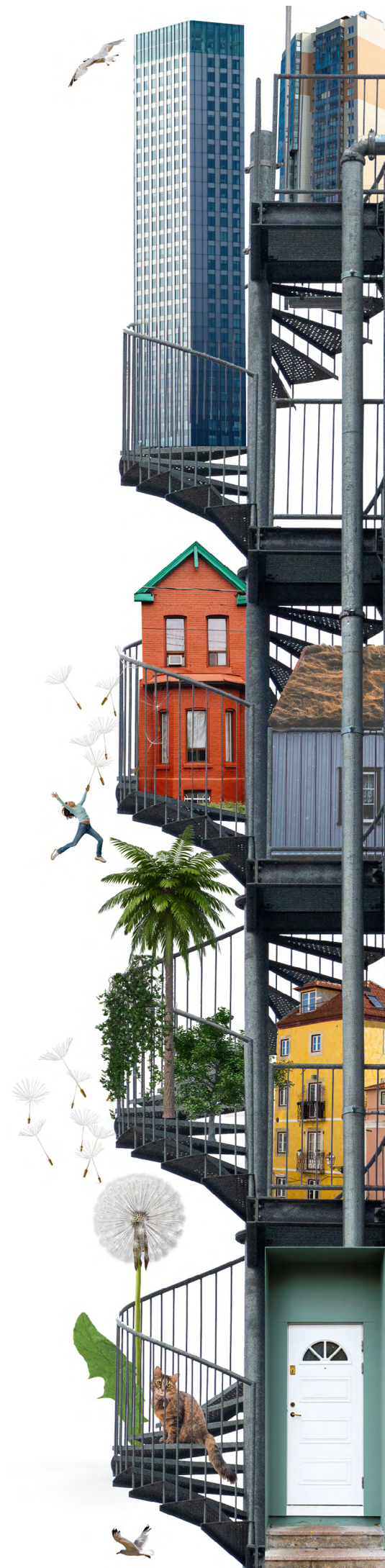
## 4.1. Pathway 1: Local strategies for the respect and recognition of housing rights

In order to advance towards SDG target 11.1 on ensuring access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services, as well as upgrading informal settlements, the first fundamental role of authorities at all levels is respecting and **recognizing** housing entitlements. LRGs, as authorities on the front line of local realities, inequalities and challenges, play a critical role in leading these efforts. This is particularly important to advance adequate housing in ways that acknowledge the realities of people who are systematically denied housing rights because of their class, gender, ability, race, migration status, age or ethnicity, and to give an account of housing processes that take place beyond the realm of formal planning.<sup>18</sup> **For LRGs, recognizing the right to adequate housing and basic services implies mobilizing active efforts to support and make visible diverse forms of existing housing knowledge and practices.** LRGs have been doing so in at least three ways: by democratizing data collection, monitoring housing conditions and organizing housing demand, and monitoring and stopping housing rights violations and forced evictions.

The first mechanism for LRGs to recognize and respect the right to housing and basic services is by **democratizing data collection**, supporting and acknowledging community-led mapping, knowledge production and enumeration efforts. There are several experiences in this direction, many of which have been led by organized grassroots organizations such as the local affiliates and federations of Slum Dwellers International (SDI)<sup>19</sup> or by members of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.<sup>20</sup> Community-led knowledge has been used to negotiate communities' right to stay in place, to access basic services and to have a say in the decisions made about their housing needs.

LRGs have a critical role in advancing instruments and governance structures that recognize and support such efforts. For example, in **Nairobi** (Kenya), the City County Government of Nairobi declared in 2017 the informal settlements of Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Kwa Reuben and Viwandani to be a "Special Planning Area." This declaration was based on evidence provided by a consortium that involved the Kenyan slum dwellers federation and its allies, drawing on knowledge collated through community-driven data enumeration and mapping exercises.<sup>21</sup> The Special Planning Area has offered a unique planning instrument to advance more inclusive housing and basic services, while also setting a precedent for institutionalizing more democratic housing knowledge. Likewise, in **Gobabis** (Namibia) and **Harare** (Zimbabwe), partnerships between municipalities and organized communities have led programmes to upgrade informal settlements. Community-driven enumeration and mapping initiatives led by SDI local affiliates have been the starting point for such programmes.<sup>22</sup>

A second important mechanism for recognizing housing rights is by establishing accountable, open and transparent structures within LRGs to **monitor housing conditions and organize housing demand**. In 2017, the Intendency of **Montevideo** (Uruguay) established the Observatory for Informal Urban Settlements (*Observatorio de Asentamientos*). The observatory aims to collect and organize up-to-date data, make these data publicly available, facilitate decision-making processes, increase communities' capacities to access and use data, and mobilize collective action for accessing housing and basic services. Similarly, **Barcelona** (Spain) has established a Metropolitan Housing Observatory (*Observatori Metropolità de l'Habitatge de Barcelona*), a supramunicipal mechanism focused on research and analysis of housing data. It aims to support the design and evaluation of public housing policies. In **Renca** (Chile),



the municipality has adopted an active role in coordinating groups that are organized for collective housing demands. The establishment of a Municipal Housing Board (*Mesa Comunal de Vivienda*) has allowed the municipality not only to establish an information channel with housing committees but also to collectively decide, through a participatory process, a series of criteria to give priority to the organized demand based on common parameters. In practice, this means that when land and resources become available for a housing project, housing committees do not compete but follow solidarity-oriented and collectively established criteria. Land and resources are thus assigned based on parameters such as social vulnerability within the committees and the organization's years of work.

A third mechanism that LRGs have utilized to respect and recognize the right to adequate housing and basic services has been setting up structures to **monitor and stop housing rights violations and forced evictions**. International networks have been crucial to these efforts. Habitat International Coalition's Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN), for example, monitors housing and land rights violations (i.e. forced eviction, destruction, dispossession and negative effects of housing and land privatization) in its global Violation Database.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, HIC-HLRN has established an Urgent Action System,<sup>24</sup> which works towards global solidarity to prevent and remedy large-scale forced evictions and related violations. It does so by developing legal arguments and drafting solidarity letters to local and national authorities.

Apart from these international efforts, LRGs are also monitoring and stopping housing violations. Some city governments have embraced notions such as "human rights in the city," "human rights city" or the "global human rights cities movement," which have materialized in the creation of human rights departments and action plans, as well as offices for non-discrimination or the protection of the social function of property.<sup>25</sup> For example, **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) has established an agreement with Seoul's Bar Association to prevent and monitor eviction-related violence.<sup>26</sup> In the context of the pandemic, several cities established COVID-19 eviction moratoria, as discussed further in the next pathway about "protection."

The efforts led by LRGs to recognize and respect the right to housing and basic services are the foundation stone of advancing SDG target 11.1. Importantly, they are also crucial to enable the advancement of other SDGs. Local knowledge is key to target actions that are more attuned to the local conditions and needs, especially for adaptation and mitigation measures. **Democratizing the ways in which housing knowledge is produced, monitored and nurtured can challenge asymmetries in decision-making and shift power inequities and gender disparities, as well as strengthen participation** (see Paper 2 on inclusive cities).

## 4.2 Pathway 2: Local strategies for the protection of housing rights

LRGs have been advancing SDG target 11.1 by putting in place adequate regulatory frameworks and instruments as well as incentives that **protect** marginalized groups from housing rights violations and discrimination. Given LRGs' proximity to local realities and experiences, they have a key role in supporting those seeking protection against housing rights violations. At the same time, LRGs have at their disposal a series of policy and planning mechanisms that enable them to interact with housing and land markets in order to protect people against systemic deprivations and exploitation in access to housing and basic services. LRGs have been expanding their capacity for local actions by bringing together spatial planning and legal expertise. As a result, **they have increased their role in protecting the right to adequate housing and basic services by expanding a human rights lens to regulate and intervene in planning processes**. There are at least three types of LRG responses promoting the protection of housing rights: responses against forced evictions and discrimination, regulations of land and housing markets, and regulations and frameworks to protect different forms of land tenure.

LRGs' housing responses during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated their ability to protect housing rights, particularly by **responding to evictions and addressing exclusion and discrimination** in access to housing. Several LRGs put in place regulations and initiatives that have recognized that protecting the housing rights of marginalized groups is key to responding to the pandemic's health and social impacts. As a result, there have been several examples of LRGs protecting housing rights by providing emergency housing – particularly targeting people experiencing homelessness and refugee populations – and combining housing and social responses targeting the most marginalized groups. For example, municipalities such as **São Paulo** (Brazil) and **Brussels** (Belgium) addressed homelessness during the pandemic by repurposing empty hotel rooms as emergency housing alternatives. In the case of Brussels, this has led the municipality to develop a "Housing First" approach, which is opening up mechanisms to institutionalize the response to homelessness. In São Paulo, the scheme started by sheltering 200 people in hotel rooms and expanded to 3,000 people. This initiative was combined with the municipal government offering financial aid to women who were survivors of domestic violence, which worsened during the pandemic.<sup>27</sup> In Brazil, as well as in various other countries (i.e. Argentina, Austria, Colombia, France, Germany, France, Spain, South Africa, the UK and the USA), local government initiatives were complemented by moratoria on evictions adopted by national governments and judicial authorities.<sup>28</sup> Temporary suspensions of evictions during the pandemic were also led by LRGs in cities such as **New York** and **San Francisco** (USA), **Montréal** (Canada) and **Vienna** (Austria).<sup>29</sup> Cities such as **Brussels** (Belgium) managed to extend such moratoria to winter times.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond responding to evictions, LRGs have protected housing rights by setting up and enforcing **regulations**

**of land and housing markets.** A core function of LRGs is to provide planning regulations. Several LRGs have been using inclusionary zoning mechanisms and urban planning ordinances to require a share of affordable housing in new developments. Cities such as **Barcelona** (Spain) and **Paris** (France) have set requirements for 30% of most new developments and renovations within the existing urban fabric to be reserved for affordable housing. In the case of **Munich** (Germany), the city has adopted a long-term land use policy (*Sozialgerechte Bodennutzung*) that requires planning projects to set aside a minimum of 30% of land for social housing and 10% for subsidized rental housing (60% on city land).<sup>31</sup>

Other cities have implemented regulatory and zoning frameworks to incentivize social mixture and affordable housing. In **Renca** (Chile), a new Municipal Regulatory Plan establishes incentives for constructability, height and density for new projects that demonstrate “diversity in housing prices” and include social housing.<sup>32</sup> **Mexico City** (Mexico) gives incentives, such as tax deductions, to developers that reserve 30% of units for affordable housing.<sup>33</sup>

Municipalities have also created programmes and mechanisms to protect the housing rights of marginalized groups within inner-city urban regeneration initiatives. For example, the **Municipio B** of Montevideo (Uruguay) introduced in 2021 a plan for urban transformation of the city centre, supporting the rehabilitation of historic buildings, introducing social rental schemes and supporting housing cooperatives in the city centre. Currently, 15% of the housing stock in the city centre accounts for cooperative housing. Additionally, in 2021, “the municipality introduced an agreement to transfer the property of part of the cooperative housing stock, which lay with the municipality, to the cooperatives.”<sup>34</sup>

Along the same line, some cities are developing strategies to prevent “green gentrification” in central areas (see Paper 3 on resilient and ecological policies). Some cities are also introducing incentives to promote converting vacant properties into social housing and discourage land speculation. In Estonia, municipalities can set an annual tax at a rate between 0.1% and 2.5% for land value taxation. In **Kyoto** (Japan), the municipality is advancing in introducing a tax on vacant property to promote its conversion into housing, with an initiative that could target up to 15,000 empty homes.<sup>35</sup> In **Esteban Echeverría** (Argentina), the municipality has drawn on state-level legislation (Buenos Aires’ provincial law on fair access to housing, *Ley 14449 de Acceso Justo al Hábitat*), to increase taxes on vacant housing units by up to 50% and channel the revenue into a public fund (*Fondo Fiduciario Público*), which reallocates the funds raised to investments in housing improvements across the municipalities that integrate it.

Intervening and regulating rent markets has been another key mechanism through which LRGs have advanced the protection of housing rights. For example, **Afadzato South** District Assembly (Ghana) has instituted a housing scheme that includes a series of mechanisms to en-

sure the protection of marginalized groups, particularly low-income groups, people living with disabilities and people in situations of abuse. One of the key components of the scheme includes ensuring that property owners adhere to rent control regulations and rent caps. This has been done through the strengthening of the Physical Planning Department, the creation of the Development Control Task Force and the involvement of the Traditional Councils. The initiative involved the engagement of various stakeholders, as well as education and sensitization efforts to ensure adherence to rent laws and regulations.

European cities, such as **Berlin** (Germany), **Paris** (France) and **Barcelona** (Spain), have been at the forefront of demands to introduce rent regulation legislation and effectively enforce existing tenant protections. They have introduced and promoted regulations that limit rent and rent increases while ensuring a reasonable rate of return to property owners. Meanwhile, in the USA, municipalities are using rent stabilization instruments, which introduce additional forms of tenant protection besides limiting rent increases. Tenants are entitled to receive certain services and have their leases renewed, and they may not be evicted except on certain legal grounds. Leases may be renewed for a term of one or two years, at the tenant’s choice. For example, the **New York City** (USA) Rent Guidelines Board sets rates for rent increases in stabilized apartments; on many occasions, rent is left the same (0% increase). Rent stabilization promotes affordability and security of tenure among tenants, while granting a wide margin of discretion to the municipal government.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, LRGs have been advancing the protection of housing rights by **promoting more inclusive and responsive forms of land tenure**. Expanding regulatory frameworks to recognize more contextual and complex forms of tenure arrangements has been a key step forward by many LRGs in enhancing security of tenure and providing protection against displacement, sometimes explicitly advancing “commoning” approaches to housing and basic services.<sup>37</sup> In relation to this, community land trusts (CLTs) have increasingly gained visibility among LRGs as an instrument to recognize more collective forms of land ownership and management. While they started in the USA, various CLT initiatives are spreading to European cities such as **Liverpool** (UK), **London** (UK), **Ghent** (Belgium), **Brussels** (Belgium) and **Amsterdam** (the Netherlands).<sup>38</sup> In Latin America, there have also been innovative applications focused on urban informal settlements and around issues of both housing and basic services, such as in **San Juan** (Puerto Rico) and more recently in **Rio de Janeiro** (Brazil).<sup>39</sup>

These are just some of the examples that illustrate the range of instruments that LRGs are applying to protect housing rights through the regulation of land and housing markets, as well as frameworks for collective forms of land tenure. These include zoning, quotas for affordable or social housing, tax extensions, land rights transfers, rent control and rent caps, land value capture mechanisms and public land registers.

### 4.3 Pathway 3: Local strategies for the fulfilment of housing rights

Finally, LRGs play a critical role in **fulfilling** the rights to housing and basic services by directly enabling housing provision. Of course, this depends on the historical role, governance structures and devolved powers and resources of each country. **In some countries, the competencies related to housing provision might or might not be available for LRGs. However, instruments for fulfilling housing rights go beyond directly constructing housing units.** This final pathway reviews instruments related to this function around two main kinds of actions. First, LRGs may enable the direct provision of housing units by building or recovering homes for either public rental proposes or private ownership. Second, LRG initiatives may enable different forms of community-led and co-produced housing and basic services, particularly in informal settlements.

The role of **enabling the direct provision of housing units** has historically been an important function of LRGs. This, however, can take multiple shapes, especially for LRGs that might not have competencies for the construction and management of social housing. The construction of public housing for social rental purposes has been an important mechanism in several cities, some of which have a long tradition in this regard, particularly in Europe. The city of **Vienna** (Austria) owns more than 200,000 housing units, with over 60% of the population living in subsidized housing. The city government manages housing stock as a mechanism to keep market prices down.<sup>40</sup> **Barcelona** (Spain) has increased the number of housing units managed by the municipality for social rental from 7,500 units in 2015 to 11,500 at the beginning of 2023. This is in line with actions by other Spanish cities, such as **Bilbao**. Along with the management of public housing stock, Bilbao has a municipal service to provide housing solutions to those who have been forcibly evicted from their homes, as well as for women survivors of gender-based violence, leveraging housing initiatives to enhance social inclusion.

Outside countries with longstanding traditions of LRGs managing public housing, there are a few experiences, although smaller in scale. Drawing on a national policy that provides individual subsidies to rent housing units from the private market, some Chilean municipalities have developed their own public rental stock. **Recoleta** was the first one to establish a municipal real estate office ("*inmobiliaria popular*"). It built 40 municipally managed rental housing units on municipal land, using national subsidies as loans for the construction, which are then repaid using available rental subsidies. Since then, other municipalities have developed more innovations to produce public housing stock. **Renca** is currently implementing a pilot public-private partnership between a national public company and the private sector, which will allow it to build a project with 112 rental housing units, including public facilities and offices on municipal land.

Importantly, LRGs have actively developed housing projects or targeted assistance for groups experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion. **Medellín** (Colombia) has expanded an existing housing as-

sistance programme to benefit 400 migrant and displaced families with three months of paid accommodation.<sup>41</sup> Similar responses also target basic service provision: in **Sfax** (Tunisia), authorities have developed multistakeholder cooperation projects to ensure migrants' access to basic services amidst COVID-19.<sup>42</sup> The Municipality of the Metropolitan District of **Quito** (Ecuador) is creating a plan to increase the offer of basic services to the population in a "state of human mobility."<sup>43</sup> In other cities, local authorities have partnered with civil society groups to produce co-housing projects for specific groups, such as older adults, with a strong gender component. These projects benefit, for example, older women organized in a feminist collective called "Women with History" (*Mujeres con Historia*) in the case of the **Municipio B** of Montevideo (Uruguay)<sup>44</sup> and an older LGBTQIA+ affirming urban community in the case of **London** (UK).<sup>45</sup> Additionally, several cities have focused on permanently fulfilling the right to housing for people experiencing homelessness, through one-to-one solutions from a "Housing First" approach, such as the case of **Navarra** (Spain) and its Housing Plan 2018–2028.

In many countries, direct provision of housing units involves supporting the construction of subsidized homes to give in private ownership. LRGs play active roles by developing their own projects, providing support for market solutions or enabling national programmes to be delivered in their territories. In **Montréal** (Canada), the city has expanded programmes to promote access to affordable properties through its residential acquisition support programme (*Programme d'appui à l'acquisition résidentielle*), with resources that respond to the changes in real estate market prices.

Other cities are developing instruments to promote rental units from the private sector, either through rent subsidies (e.g. in **Brussels**, Belgium)<sup>46</sup> or experiences such as those of the **Afadzato South** District Assembly (Ghana), which is facilitating the construction of affordable housing units for rent by private individuals, corporate bodies, estate developers and communities. In Chile, where the national government leads the subsidized housing programmes, many municipalities act as "sponsoring entities" (*entidades patrocinantes*) to manage, design and build housing projects with national subsidies. This figure has allowed municipalities to act instead of private developers in ways that respond more directly to the local organized demand and innovate in their responses. In **Viña del Mar** (Chile), for example, the municipal sponsoring entity is working on two projects, one of which (called Wenn Newen) is specially tailored for an Indigenous people's community, while the other one (in the Glorias Navales neighbourhood) emerged as a community demand from a participatory neighbourhood recovery programme. In **Iztapalapa** (Mexico), the local government has worked through the Reconstruction Housing Programme of the Mexico City Government, following the 2017 earthquake, with 5,500 housing units built since 2018.

Beyond the construction of new units, cities such as **Paris** (France) and **Mexico City** (Mexico) have experimented with instruments to transform vacant offices into affordable housing.<sup>47</sup> In the same line, organized communities in **São Paulo** (Brazil) are working through the federal social housing programme *Minha Casa Minha Vida – Entidades to*



retrofit vacant buildings in the city centre, for which the financial and legal support of the city prefecture has been essential.<sup>48</sup> Apart from supporting the implementation of national programmes, the municipality of São Paulo has now started its own housing initiative, called *Pode Entrar*. It includes partnerships with non-profit associations and self-management initiatives.<sup>49</sup> Initiatives like those led by Brazilian housing social movements have demonstrated that resources saved through self-management mechanisms can translate directly into higher quality housing, with housing units around 30% larger than the minimum required by the government.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to their participation in the direct provision of housing units, LRGs have a critical role in **enabling different forms of community-led and co-produced housing and basic services**, in informal settlements and beyond. Enabling access to basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity is one of the core functions of LRGs. Importantly, this means not only ensuring the availability of services but also guaranteeing that these are reliable, accessible for all (including for people with disabilities) and truly affordable.<sup>51</sup> Cities have a crucial role in ensuring that, even when privately supplied, electricity and water are actually delivered to all citizens. Some LRGs have competencies to facilitate direct basic services provision, and there is a general movement calling for the municipalization of services as a necessary step to ensure access to quality local public services.<sup>52</sup> In **Iztapalapa** (Mexico), beyond managing the existing network of drinking water, the municipality provides a permanent and universal supply of water free of charge through tanker trucks. In **Mafra** (Portugal), the regulatory entity for water and waste services provides collective sanitation for areas that are not yet covered, while investing in new collectors to reach 95% of covered areas. Meanwhile, in **Dar es Salaam** (Tanzania), organized communities from informal settlements – in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), city authorities and the city utility company, DAWASA – have co-produced simplified sewerage solutions, which have proved to be an effective and affordable solution for local communities.<sup>53</sup>

Informal settlement upgrading has been increasingly recognized as a fundamental collaborative strategy for improving the housing and basic services conditions of those living in informal settlements. In Latin America, following a long tradition of different upgrading programmes, there are several initiatives based on principles for collective upgrading that include civil society groups and authorities. These are promoted by networks such as Habitat International Coalition – Latin America, the Global Platform for the Right to the City, UCLG and the Civil Association for Equality and Justice ACIJ.<sup>54</sup> The initiatives have translated into many concrete plans and instruments throughout the years. To name just a few in which LRGs have played a critical role, Rocinha's Socio-Spatial Master Plan was developed based on demands from residents' associations, resulting in a formal engagement with the state government of **Rio de Janeiro** (Brazil). The government of **Montevideo** (Uruguay) has established a plan of Neighbourhood Boards (*Mesas Barriales*) that involve participatory spaces for exchange, assessment and action planning with communities from local neighbourhoods in prioritized areas of the city. An

Advisory Unit complements these boards, supporting land regularization and participatory habitat design in addition to advising communities on housing and land formalization.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, many of the most innovative upgrading responses have emerged from initiatives linked to SDI local groups, such as the abovementioned initiatives in **Gobabis** (Namibia) and **Harare** (Zimbabwe). In the city of **Makeni** (Sierra Leone), the local government is working to support continuous community participation to identify the best responses and partnerships needed for effective housing delivery in informal settlements.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, in Asia, there is a long tradition of informal settlement upgrading triggered by community-led efforts around collective savings and enumeration, many of which are linked to the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights. A notable city-wide example has taken place in the intermediate city of **Nakhon Sawan** (Thailand). Under the umbrella of the national programme Baan Mankong, Nakhon Sawan has managed to coordinate the efforts of city authorities and organized communities and develop 30 housing projects that provide secure, decent housing to 60% of the city's urban poor.<sup>56</sup> At the state level, **Odisha State** (India) passed in 2017 the Odisha Land Rights to Slum Dwellers Act, which focuses on regularizing individual and inheritable land rights to those already occupying land in informal settlements.<sup>57</sup>

Although the nature and scope of upgrading programmes change from place to place, LRGs play an important role in most of these programmes, often as facilitators or intermediaries of coordination across stakeholders at different levels. For example, in **Lekhath** and **Pokhara** (Nepal), municipal governments have acted as intermediaries and signed agreements with commercial banks and a local NGO, Lumanti, to provide loans for community-driven projects, with the first 133 houses built and the loans repaid on time.<sup>58</sup> In **Valdivia** (Chile), the municipality is playing a crucial role in leading a pilot project to develop a temporary collective solution for 120 families from *Las Mulatas* settlement who need immediate relocation. This settlement is located in an extraordinarily vulnerable place due to floods and high voltage exposure. As existing national instruments cannot respond with the urgency needed, the municipality is playing a crucial role in facilitating a temporary response that aims to lead to permanent solutions in the mid-term.



## 5. Towards local strategies for the right to housing: LRGs' challenges and needs

The range of experiences discussed in each of the three pathways demonstrates the scope of LRG action in relation to SDG target 11.1. However, **important challenges still need to be addressed to fully realize LRGs' potential as guarantors of housing rights**. This section discusses the necessary conditions for LRGs to fulfil that role. These challenges can be clustered into four key spheres: the enabling institutional environment, resources, capacities and citizen engagement.

### 5.1 Enabling institutional environment

The experiences discussed in this paper highlight several challenges related to the enabling institutional environment, both at the national level in terms of conditions and multilevel governance and at the local level in terms of the statutory mandate and institutional conditions within LRGs.

Some of the challenges relate to institutional difficulties in securing tenure. **Weak land registry systems, which are the foundation of advancing tenure security and adequate housing**, are a critical constraint. Likewise, legal uncertainties around incremental housing hinder the potential of initiatives that foster processes of self-management and self-help housing, particularly in countries where large parts of the population live in informal settlements.

For LRGs, **national legal and planning systems can enable housing solutions but also restrict innovative responses**. The solutions developed by LRGs are often constrained by legal frameworks and regulations set at the national level, which do not necessarily match local realities. This means that an important amount of energy and resources go into designing innovative ways to go around existing systems and find ad-hoc alternatives that work for local priorities. In a conversation for this report, a municipal officer reflected that "it would be great if we could do all these things just by using existing policy frameworks, but instead, we have to spend loads of time and resources inventing ways to come up with solutions that account for restrictive frameworks."

Related to the previous point, there are institutional challenges for LRGs to have **coordinated housing responses and regulations**. Beyond the core functions of LRGs, which in most cases include land planning, many local authorities have advanced in creating special offices, sections or platforms within their institutions to focus specifically on housing issues. This is partly due to the acknowledgement of the inadequacy of fragmented municipal structures, as well as a siloed sectorial organization at the national level, to develop housing programmes and regulations with a comprehensive and rights-based approach. In some countries, the development and implementation of national urban policies might help foster those coordinated actions.

Some institutional challenges relate to **adequate instruments to deal with emerging or changing urban development dynamics and demands**. These include growing forms of unsustainable and exclusionary urban expansion, for example, through the proliferation of gated communities or the unregulated and privately led urbanization of rural land; dynamics of overcrowded housing in city centres related to changing patterns of migration and displacement; a changing real estate market that makes it difficult to update and enforce market and rental housing regulations; or new demands for action to respond to longstanding forms of discrimination and exclusion and comply with accessibility standards. Usually, institutional times to respond to such dynamics are slower than the speed of urban processes, with challenging conditions for timely responses, particularly for those at the front line of territorial response, such as LRGs.

At the heart of all these challenges lies **the need for effective decentralization and multilevel governance and coordination** (see Paper 4 on multilevel governance). Decentralization, when effectively established by legal and administrative frameworks, allows LRGs to exercise their autonomy and responsibilities with appropriate allocated powers, resources and capacities. To respond to housing needs in ways that are attuned to local realities, effective decentralization is critical. As crucial as local autonomy is, it is equally essential to have appropriate coordination with different parts of the national government through effective multilevel governance, defined as "a decision-making system based on coordination mechanisms that allow the allocation of governmental competences and responsibilities both vertically and horizontally."<sup>59</sup> This also implies mechanisms for coordination between rural and urban areas, essential for balanced territorial development. Since 2018, some LRGs have been devolved more legal and fiscal powers to advance the right to adequate housing and basic services and to regulate the real estate market. Nevertheless, this remains one of the critical bottlenecks to ensure more grounded housing responses that rely on local partnerships, resources and capacities.

### 5.2 Resources

**Without the appropriate public resources, any effort of LRGs to localize SDG target 11.1 will fall short**. LRGs need the means to act, both in terms of adequate financial mechanisms and in terms of their capacity to leverage other resources such as land and resources emerging from engagement with local actors.

Although many LRGs are increasingly willing to enhance the right to adequate housing and basic services, they **often lack access to financial mechanisms to implement this**. This is due to a combination of factors: lack of effective redistributive mechanisms from the national to the local level and fiscal decentralization, limited capacity or competencies of LRGs to collect taxes, lack of public land and constraints for LRGs to increase their budgets through other financial mechanisms. Given the magnitude of investment required to respond to housing and basic services deficits, LRGs need robust, healthy and transparent financial structures.

LRGs also face **challenges related to leveraging diverse**

**local resources.** This includes having mechanisms to engage in diverse partnerships with local actors to access land and other resources. It also involves, importantly, engaging with and “valuing the diversity of the non-monetary, urban and territorial resources produced by everyday practices, and social networks, and the radical innovations taking place in territories”<sup>60</sup> and formally recognizing and supporting the contributions of organized housing groups.

Linked to the previous point, an important challenge is dealing with the **lack of a supportive legal and policy framework to financially support diverse forms of participatory and community-led housing**, such as CLTs, cooperatives and other forms of collective tenure. The lack of supportive frameworks compromises the availability and allocation of resources for these non-speculative housing initiatives, which can be instrumental for the development of housing alternatives in better-located land and with higher housing standards. These restrictions also affect LRGs’ capacity to support more innovative, participatory, democratic, co-produced and community-led approaches to the delivery of water and sanitation services.

Importantly, the international community has an important role to play in **channelling resources to local actors in ways that allow for more innovative and locally sound responses.** This includes support for more sustainable practices and materials, as well as the implementation of circularity principles in the housing sector, in line with SDG target 11.c (“Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials”).

### 5.3 Capacities

LRGs face important challenges related to their constant need **for renewed, strengthened and additional capacities, as a fundamental condition to enable more effective and diverse forms of housing delivery** and to mainstream human rights approaches in housing and basic service provision. The creation and renewal of local capacities is a central aspect of effective decentralization.

There is, first, the need to **expand the technical and legal know-how within LRGs** to work towards more sustainable and community-led processes – for example, to deal with innovative forms of CLTs or self-management, which often require an intensive case-by-case approach. This also applies to expanding LRGs’ know-how on the management of higher density and mixed land use projects and their possibility of offering more sustainable and affordable housing solutions for people living in poverty, while also proposing alternatives to carbon-intensive forms of urban development and land use.

Fundamental to sustaining these capacities, LRGs need to build opportunities for their staff to **constantly renew and diversify their skills, while also ensuring continuity and transfers of knowledge** within LRGs and across different government levels. Exchanges and peer-to-peer and horizontal training programmes can be instrumental in this regard, as well as appropriate partnerships with other actors from academia, civil society and the private

and public sectors.

Additionally, in the context of growing complexities linked to climate-related events, financialization of housing and increased migration, LRGs face important challenges related to their **capacities to recognize and document losses associated with displacement and relocation.** Although important efforts have been mobilized at local, national and international levels to monitor such violations, LRGs need to strengthen their capacity to access information about, and respond to, discriminatory housing practices based on gender, race, migration status, class, age, ability and ethnicity.

Finally, LRGs face challenges in **addressing data and knowledge gaps.** As discussed in this paper, several locally led efforts have advanced in democratizing data collection and knowledge production. However, there are still important gaps in the capacities to recognize, systematize, store and utilize these data effectively and transparently. This is fundamental for better and more grounded housing and basic service solutions, improved adaptation and mitigation responses, and a more healthy and just tax collection system.

### 5.4 Citizen engagement

Cutting across all previous points, LRGs face important challenges related to **enabling conditions for democratic and meaningful citizen engagement in the localization of housing goals.** Engagement efforts need to recognize social inequalities based on gender, age and disability; include civil society organizations, grassroots groups and private actors; and allow different interests to be negotiated in transparent and accountable ways.

Although **participatory mechanisms for housing production** have become increasingly mainstreamed in national and local policies, there are still important challenges to making them truly inclusive. On the one hand, this involves designing processes that allow decision-making to be shared by and transferred to those who will inhabit housing initiatives. LRGs face the challenge of supporting and creating the conditions for diverse civil society groups to meaningfully engage in housing-related decision-making. On the other hand, this entails having active mechanisms to reach out and involve marginalized groups that might be excluded from housing systems due to their gender, race, migration status, class, age, ability or other individual or collective characteristics such as tenure status (particularly, tenants). For example, involving people with disabilities in housing decision-making processes requires actively implementing accessibility measures.<sup>61</sup> This also requires strengthening civil society’s capabilities to participate, with access to adequate resources and information in formats that respond to diverse groups’ accessibility requirements.

Another challenge is enhancing the **availability of resources and technical, political and legal support for organized groups** that are advancing inclusive forms of access to housing and basic services. LRGs face challenges to play a meaningful role in supporting and creating the right conditions for community-led housing initiatives to flourish, in ways that contribute to sustainable and more equitable urban development and that complement other

forms of housing provision beyond those led by the public or private sector.

Many of the experiences discussed here demonstrate that **LRGs, as proximity governments, play a crucial role in mediating the relationship between citizens and other actors**, either with the private sector or the wide range of in-territory public services provided by different levels of government. A key challenge is ensuring national and other actors recognize LRGs as valid mediators. Importantly, LRGs need the competencies to facilitate exchanges and partnerships in ways that guarantee conditions for equitable and fair collaboration, navigating power asymmetries and prioritizing the needs of local residents.

## 6. Realizing LRGs' potential at the front line of the right to housing

Ensuring access to adequate housing and basic services for all, as well as the upgrading of informal settlements, is not only an imperative and a duty towards the realization of human rights. It is also a critical mechanism to foster other SDGs. Equitable access to adequate housing, when considering all its components in an integrated manner, is critical to enable socio-economic returns, environmental sustainability and more democratic governance. These aspects, in turn, promote more sustainable and just urban and territorial development. **In other words, ensuring the right to adequate housing and basic services through SDG target 11.1 is necessary to accelerate the implementation of most SDGs and, furthermore, is often a precondition for many SDGs' localization.** LRGs, as proximity governments at the front line of local needs, are key to realizing this potential in partnership with local groups.

This paper has shown the range of mechanisms that LRGs are mobilizing to respect and recognize, protect and fulfil the right to adequate housing and basic services. The experiences discussed allow us to expand the imagination of the role that LRGs can play. Additionally, **this variety of initiatives, mechanisms, programmes and collaborations demonstrates that realizing housing rights requires diverse responses at multiple levels and that, in fact, housing policies are implemented in several places and through several actors.** LRGs are not only crucial for delivering policies but also for demonstrating diverse ways of advancing adequate housing: monitoring, valuing, facilitating, partnering on, supporting, enabling and delivering housing are all LRG mechanisms for recognizing, protecting and fulfilling housing rights.

By bringing this wide spectrum of experiences together, this paper calls for an expanded imagination of housing policies. Some of the initiatives described by this report might escape from what are usually described as housing policies, programmes or projects. This is due to the limited understanding of housing that often dominates policy discussions, driven exclusively by questions about supply/demand and legal frameworks, obscuring other forms of local housing efforts – such as those led by

grassroots groups or by LRGs. LRGs remain invisible because housing systems do not engage with these initiatives as forms of actually *doing* housing. **The human rights lens used in this report, which engages with the full cycle of recognizing, protecting and fulfilling housing rights, sheds some light on this multiplicity as well as the crucial role of LRGs in this cycle.**

As important as LRGs are in advancing housing rights, they also face significant challenges. LRGs need active support from national governments and governance structures (and, indeed, from the international community) to allow them to fulfil their role. This is only possible if their devolved powers, capacities and resources allow them to meet their allocated responsibilities in autonomous, transparent, democratic and effective ways. Effective decentralization is not only essential to implement conventional housing programmes but also to allow innovations that are responsive to local realities. Furthermore, it can facilitate engaging and supporting diverse grassroots voices and responses that are, in practice and from the ground, providing answers to the housing crisis. In this context, international municipalist coordination, collaboration and advocacy are key to advancing an agenda that requires both local and global action.

By revealing the different ways in which LRGs are already advancing the right to adequate housing and basic services, this paper demonstrates the substantial and crucial role that LRGs can play in achieving SDG target 11.1. But even more importantly, **it shows how they are expanding housing as an infrastructure of care and wellbeing with broad implications, particularly for people facing intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion: women, informal settlement dwellers, racialized migrants, displaced populations, people with disabilities and people systematically excluded by societies.** To realize LRGs' potential for continuing, fostering, expanding and sustaining these efforts, cities and territories require support, political commitments and active responses from actors across all scales.



## 7. Advancing progressive municipalism: LRGs' pathways to advance the localization of the SDGs

The five papers have presented **initiatives from over 100 local and regional governments (LRGs)** throughout the world, while analyzing how these initiatives contribute to accelerating progress towards the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, and through it, the SDGs in general. These examples show how LRGs, in alliance with their communities, are contributing to the different dimensions of SDG 11 by focusing on fulfilling the right to adequate housing and basic services (SDG target 11.1); promoting feminist approaches to sustainable, inclusive and participatory planning (SDG targets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.7); pursuing environmental justice and integrated and circular approaches (SDG targets 11.5, 11.6, 11.7 and 11.b); protecting and safeguarding culture and heritage (SDG target 11.4); and promoting more balanced and equal urban and territorial systems (SDG target 11.a).

**Innovative LRG experiences, drawing upon engagement across networks of LRGs and with diverse public, civil society and private institutions, have become the cornerstone of progress towards sustainable, inclusive and just cities and territories.** LRGs' experiences further elicit why realizing SDG 11 requires a human rights-based approach that advances equality in full recognition of people's diversity, as well as a perspective that goes beyond urban boundaries and recognizes urban impacts at the regional, national and global levels. Rearticulating principles and practices based on a multilevel governance approach, which in itself serves as an enabling environment for SDG localization, becomes a pressing need.

Together, the papers propose different pathways – routes for transformative actions to advance and accelerate progress – towards SDG 11. However, as the assessment of trends in each paper demonstrates, the efforts that have been put into the implementation of SDG 11 to date remain insufficient to reverse the structural inequalities as well as social and environmental injustices exacerbated by multiple, intersecting crises.

**The papers advance policies and practices that could accelerate progress towards SDG 11 and propel urban transformation,** including:

- Policies that adopt an active approach to **acknowledge, protect and fulfil the right to housing and basic services**: These include policies that respond to evictions and address exclusion and discrimination by promoting and enforcing regulations of land and housing markets. They also support more inclusive and responsive forms of tenure security and universal access to basic services, including through the acknowledgement of and support for commoning practices.

- Policies that **foster urban planning to reduce fragmentation and segregation**: Mainstreaming an intersectional feminist approach to urban planning is key to foster more inclusive and equal cities. Emphasizing accessibility, proximity and care ensures that the exercise of rights and the use of public space are inclusive and accommodating for all, particularly structurally marginalized populations.

- Policies that emphasize the need to **prevent extractivist approaches to natural resources and the depletion of the public commons**: Such policies address the challenges of green gentrification and work towards rectifying historical deficits and their current manifestations in socio-spatial inequalities. Revitalizing and restoring urban ecological infrastructure through inclusive citizen engagement are crucial. The promotion of just re-naturing processes to ensure healthy cities and planet preservation hinges on the decoupling, restoring, localizing and commoning pathways. It also requires advocating for circular cities and regional initiatives to reduce pressure on natural resources.

- Policies that **acknowledge and resolutely act on cultural dimensions to accelerate SDG implementation**: Cultural rights-based actions, programmes and policies strongly influence the achievement of the SDGs. It is essential to link them with the promotion, protection and preservation of heritage, as well as cultural diversity, intersectional feminist perspectives and climate action. This approach should be at the core of effectively promoting local economic development, reimagining growth-oriented models and making a commitment to sustainable management of heritage sites and tourism attraction.

- Policies that seek to **advance effective multilevel governance**: Unbalanced and unequal urban systems require multilevel governance arrangements with respect for the principle of subsidiarity at the core. The redistribution of powers, responsibilities and resources, as well as enhanced democratic participation, transparency and accountability, can promote pluricentric and inclusive urban and territorial systems that leave no one and no territory behind.

The different papers also highlight four key cross-cutting elements that should be mainstreamed across LRG policies, practices and governance arrangements:

- **Addressing historical and contemporary structural inequalities from a feminist perspective**: This involves recognizing the diversity of entitlements, needs, experiences and capacities of people who disproportionately face discrimination and margin

alization, to ensure that no one and no place are left behind.

- **Strengthening meaningful, transparent and sustained citizen participation and inclusive engagement, while tackling deeply ingrained power asymmetries:** This entails informed and sustained citizen participation in decision-making processes and requires inclusive governance systems to co-create interventions with marginalized groups.

- **Developing institutional arrangements and regulatory frameworks that seek to decentralize powers, responsibilities and resources based on the subsidiarity principle:** Strengthened national, regional and local policy and planning can help to achieve balanced and equitable urban and territorial systems.

- **Adopting rights-based, intersectional and often explicitly feminist approaches to planning, policy and practice:** Such approaches expand the imagination of the roles LRGs can play, as well as their room for manoeuvre, in realizing SDG 11 to counter exclusion, marginalization and discrimination against people in light of their class, gender, age, ethnicity, race, religion, disabilities and sexual orientation. The advancement of concepts such as “human rights cities” has already manifested in the creation of human rights departments and offices for non-discrimination, in addition to the safeguarding of property’s social function.

Finally, the five papers evidenced the call for stronger urban and regional roles in localizing the SDGs. Concerted actions propel community-led and LRG-supported initiatives that promote inclusiveness, address inequalities and exclusion and co-create more just and sustainable urban and territorial futures. Change is not only a matter of resources but also of fundamentally reshaping relationships and roles or, in other words, a governance approach. Embracing the synergies between human rights, intersectional feminism and multilevel governance, a progressive municipalist movement may drive forward the localization of the SDGs.



## Notes

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